



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • Feb. 13, 2018



Gameday: Kings vs. Hurricanes

by Michael Smith [@MSmithCanes](#) / CarolinaHurricanes.com

12:00 AM

Last one of the homestand - but there are three more coming up later this week!

This is the gameday hub, where you can find all the latest news and information you need to know for tonight's homestand finale featuring the Los Angeles Kings and Carolina Hurricanes. Make Hurricanes.com a regular stop throughout the day, as we update this hub with notes, videos, photos and more as puck drop draws near.

The Hurricanes will be on the ice at PNC Arena at 10:30 a.m. for their morning skate, and we'll be rinkside to bring you the latest.

Last updated: 12:00 a.m.

KINGS VISIT CANES IN HOMESTAND FINALE

12:00 a.m.

Two weeks and seven games later, the final game of the Carolina Hurricanes' season-long, eight-game homestand is upon them, as the Los Angeles Kings stop in for their first and only visit of the season.

The Hurricanes have posted a 4-2-1 record in this stretch, with Tuesday night's cross-conference tilt a chance for the team to earn 11 of a possible 16 points on the homestand. The Canes have earned points in three straight games (2-0-1) and recorded back-to-back wins over the weekend.

On Friday, the Canes bested the Vancouver Canucks 4-1, and they followed it up the next night with a 3-1 victory over the Colorado Avalanche.

"I liked the effort from everyone. I thought everybody contributed," head coach Bill Peters said after the win over Colorado on Saturday. "I thought it was a complete effort."

The win vaulted the Hurricanes back into a wild card spot in the Eastern Conference, where the team sits a point ahead of both Columbus and the New York Islanders and a point behind the New Jersey Devils for the first wild card spot.

"We've got to do it right each and every night. We know how to play," Peters said. "When we're committed to doing in the right way, we get positive results."

While the sun sets on the Hurricanes' homestand, the Kings are just ramping up on a seven-game road swing that began over the weekend with a pair of games in Florida; the Kings topped the Panthers 3-1 on Friday before falling 4-3 to the Lightning. Los Angeles, which owns a plus-26 goal differential, comes into this game just a point out of a wild card spot in the Western Conference.

It was Dec. 9 in Los Angeles when the Kings and Canes met for the first time this season. The Canes fell down 2-0 in the second period but scored twice in a span of 4:35 in the last 10 minutes of regulation to force overtime, where the Kings snagged the extra point with 20 seconds left in 3-on-3 action.

CANESPR NOTES: Phil Di Giuseppe played in his 100th career game on Saturday night. [Brett Pesce](#) is slated to play in his 200th career game tonight. ... The Canes are 6-3-1-1 against the Kings at PNC Arena since the building opened in 1999.

CLICKS AND CLIPPINGS

Articles

- [Recap: McGinn, Canes Top Avalanche](#)

Audio

- [CanesCast, Ep. 29 feat. Derek Ryan](#)

Videos

- [In the Room: Bill Peters, Feb. 12](#)
- [Question of the Day: Winter Sport](#)
- [Highlights: CAR 3, COL 1](#)
- [Postgame Quotes: Feb. 10 vs. COL](#)

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Hurricanes control their own fate

Andrew Schnittker, Sports Editor

Feb 11, 2018

With 26 games to play, the Carolina Hurricanes find themselves in unfamiliar territory. Saturday night's 3-1 win over the Colorado Avalanche vaulted the Canes into the Eastern Conference's final wild card spot, with their 61 standings points one ahead of the Columbus Blue Jackets and New York Islanders*.

While Carolina has found itself in playoff position at different points this season, this is the first time the team has been in that spot this late in the year since the 2010-11 season. With under a third of the regular-season schedule left to play, Carolina is in a good spot — but staying there is another story.

The team has made its way into that spot before during this year, but ended up quickly falling back out.

So, what do the Canes need to do to ensure they play more than 82 games this year? On paper, it's relatively simple: win divisional games. The Metropolitan Division is going to get five playoff teams, its customary top three and both Eastern Conference Wild Card spots.

That leaves five spots for eight teams. The Washington Capitals are in. They lead the division with 70 points in the standings, and are nine points clear of the Islanders on the outside of the playoff picture. The Pittsburgh Penguins will also likely make it. They sit second with 66 points, and while they have played more games than a number of teams, they are the two-time defending Stanley Cup Champions and have a talented core led by forwards Sidney Crosby and Evgeni Malkin.

So, that leaves six teams fighting for three spots, the Hurricanes, Islanders, Blue Jackets, Philadelphia Flyers and New York Rangers. For the purpose of this exercise, we're going to say the Rangers miss. While it's foolish to count out a team with Henrik Lundqvist in net, the Rangers currently sit last in the division with 59 points, and general manager Jeff Gorton recently sent a letter to fans hinting that the team is looking at blowing up its roster.

Down to five teams for three spots. The Blue Jackets would appear to be a likely playoff team as well. Columbus is right outside the playoff picture with 60 points and struggles to score, but has a Vezina-caliber goalie in Sergei Bobrovsky. Goaltending counts the most this time of year, which should propel Columbus into the postseason.

Four teams for two spots. That leaves the Canes, the Devils right ahead of them at 62 points* (albeit with two fewer games played), the Islanders right behind them at 60 and the Flyers two points ahead at 63 (with one fewer game played)*. In order to make the playoffs, the Canes need to finish better than two of those teams, and they control their ability to do that.

The Canes have yet to play a single game this year against the Devils, with the four-game season series (two at home, two away) coming up. The Canes have played one game against the Flyers (an overtime loss at home on Feb. 6) and have one game at PNC Arena and two games in Philadelphia remaining. The team has split one home and one away game with the Islanders this year, with one of each left.

Next weekend will be a big one for the Canes, with three games in four nights Thursday to Sunday, with two (home and away) with the Devils and one at home against the Islanders.

That's nine crucial games remaining on the schedule that will go a long way towards determining the team's playoff fate. Carolina will need more of the same from both of its last two games, with balanced scoring throughout the lineup, good special teams play and strong goaltending from both Cam Ward and Scott Darling.

The door to the postseason is open for the Carolina Hurricanes. With so many head-to-head games left against fellow wild card competitors, the team controls its fate. The Canes themselves are the ones who control whether or not they will be able to end the NHL's longest active playoff drought.



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Hurricanes pick up steam, face Kings next

RALEIGH, N.C. -- Maybe this is the time the Carolina Hurricanes put together an extended stretch of good results.

by [STATS](#)

10h ago • 2 min read Update 10h ago

RALEIGH, N.C. -- Maybe this is the time the [Carolina Hurricanes](#) put together an extended stretch of good results.

That's what they're aiming for Tuesday night in a matchup against the [Los Angeles Kings](#) at PNC Arena.

"I'd rather be playing well and building toward something," Carolina coach Bill Peters said. "This last three-game stretch has been good. I liked a lot of parts of our game in all three of those."

The Hurricanes have made another upturn by winning their past two games and securing points in three in a row. They sit 4-2-1 on the homestand.

"Everything was clicking," Hurricanes goalie Cam Ward said. "Every day I think everybody is looking at the standings. You have to take care of business right now. You can't wait until 10 games are left or something."

Left winger Brock McGinn was the latest big contributor, with two goals in Saturday night's 3-1 victory over Colorado.

"We just want to build going on forward," McGinn said.

This will mark the close of an eight-game home stretch for the Hurricanes, who've moved into position for the second wild-card spot in the Eastern Conference.

The game against the Kings provides a chance for the Hurricanes to produce just their third four-game points streak of the season.

"Just keep playing hard, keep playing for each other," said left winger Jeff Skinner, who notched his first goal in seven games Saturday night. "Everyone has been contributing.

"That's something we're going to need."

Los Angeles has scored at least three goals in its last four games since being shut out at Nashville. Carolina has allowed a total of seven goals in its last four games.

The Kings will be without forward Dustin Brown, who was suspended for one game by the [NHL](#) for kneeing Tampa Bay's Mikhail Sergachev on Saturday night when LA lost 4-3.

Brown is tied for third on the team with 16 goals, and he logs the second-most ice time among Los Angeles forwards with more than 19 minutes per game.

The Kings played Saturday without center Trevor Lewis, who returned to the West Coast after he sustained an undisclosed injury Friday night. Coach John Stevens said it's hoped that Lewis can be back with the team this week.

Los Angeles split two games in Florida, with a three-game winning streak snapped at Tampa Bay, before taking two days off. This visit to Carolina is the third stop of a seven-game road swing.

Los Angeles registered a season-high 47 shots on goal in their most recent game.

"We've got to carry that over," Kings captain Anze Kopitar said, referring to the team's strong third period at Tampa Bay.

Kings defenseman Drew Doughty said "you've got to remember the good things that you did," but that doesn't guarantee a strong showing in the next game.

The Kings defeated the Hurricanes 3-2 in overtime on Dec. 9 at home. Los Angeles managed only 21 shots in that game, a total that matches the fewest shots allowed by Carolina this season.



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SB NATION CANES COUNTRY

Carolina Hurricanes vs. Los Angeles Kings: Game Preview and Storm Advisory

The Canes take on the Los Angeles Kings with a two game win streak on the line.

By [Andrew Ahr@andrew_ahr](#) Feb 13, 2018, 8:14am EST

Carolina Hurricanes (26-21-8) vs. Los Angeles Kings (30-20-5)

Tuesday, February 13, 2018 - 7:00 p.m. ET
PNC Arena - Raleigh, NC

TV: Fox Sports Carolinas

Radio: 99.9 The Fan

Opposition coverage: [Jewels From the Crown](#)

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The [Carolina Hurricanes](#) wrap up the two game season series against the [Los Angeles Kings](#) tonight as they finish their eight-game homestand and attempt to keep up in the unforgiving playoff race.

Vital Statistics

Category	Hurricanes	Kings
Record	26-21-9	30-20-5
Points	61	65
Division Rank	5 Metro	T4 Pacific
Conference Rank	8 EC	T9 WC
Last 10 Games	5-4-1	6-4-0
Streak	Won 2	Lost 1
Goals/Game	2.64	2.85
Goals Against/Game	2.91	2.42
Shots/Game	34.1	30.8

Category	Hurricanes	Kings
Shots Against/Game	29.1	31.2
Faceoff %	53.1	49.2
Power Play % (Rank)	18.8 (20)	19.0 (19)
Penalty Kill % (Rank)	80.1 (17)	84.6 (2)
ES Corsi For %	53.67	50.47
ES PDO	98.2	101.2
PIM/Game	6:24	10:15

Goaltender #1

Category	Cam Ward	Jonathan Quick
Record	16-7-3	21-19-2
Save %	.912	.921
GAA	2.59	2.46

Goaltender #2

Category	Scott Darling	Darcy Kuemper
Record	10-14-6	9-1-3
Save %	.894	.937
GAA	2.99	1.93

Game Notes

- The Hurricanes trail all-time with a 31-34-11 record, including a 19-13-6 record on home ice against the Kings.



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- Tonight marks the second and final matchup between the sides this season. Their first came on December 9th, a game the Hurricanes lost in overtime.
- The teams split the two game series last season with each side winning once in regulation.
- The Canes fought back from a two goal deficit in the third period during an otherwise underwhelming west coast road trip in December to force overtime.
- Knock on wood: The Canes have been perfect on the penalty kill in seven games since January 30th, going 17-for-17 in that time. They rank first in the NHL since January 23, only allowing one shorthanded goal.
- The Canes have earned a 4-2-1 record in the first seven matchups of their season-high eight game homestand.
- The Olympics pose a huge opportunity for NHL ex-pats [Brian Gionta](#) and [James Wisniewski](#), who may sign with an NHL team following the Games. [[AP News](#)]
- The Hurricanes are set to host a Cool School Field Trip as part of the Readvolution campaign. Eleven Wake County schools will attend practice on Wednesday. [[Hurricanes](#)]
- The best young forecheckers in hockey are turning to stick checks as opposed to physical play in the constantly evolving NHL. [[The Athletic](#) (\$)]
- Scott Darling has been rocking a new mask recently. Here's a closer look and some background. [[DAVEArt Facebook](#)]
- What Winter Olympic sport would Hurricanes players most want to compete in? (Since they're not allowed to compete in the sport they play professionally, of course.) [[Hurricanes](#)]

Storm Advisory

- Head coach Bill Peters was on Sirius XM yesterday making an appearance on Stellick and Simmer's Morning Show, where he talked about, among other things, why [Scott Darling](#)'s struggles aren't entirely his fault. [[Sirius XM](#)]

TODAY'S LINKS

<https://www.nhl.com/hurricanes/news/gameday-preview-los-angeles-kings-vs-carolina-hurricanes/c-295905366>
http://www.technicianonline.com/sports/article_1cbc7f1a-0fa8-11e8-9648-17614e9f118e.html
<https://www.cbssports.com/nhl/news/hurricanes-pick-up-steam-face-kings-next/>
<https://www.canescountry.com/2018/2/13/17006880/carolina-hurricanes-los-angeles-kings-game-preview-statistics-links-notes>

SportScan

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

1098030 Los Angeles Kings

Short-handed Kings looking for someone to step up

By KEVIN BAXTER

FEB 12, 2018 | 3:30 PM

The Kings skate into Carolina on Tuesday missing two of their top forwards, a situation coach John Stevens is calling more an opportunity than a problem.

Gone are right wing Dustin Brown and center Trevor Lewis, the first serving a one-game suspension for rough play and the second a victim of

a rough play that will keep him sidelined indefinitely. And those absences, Stevens said, leave him with 35 minutes of ice time to fill against the Hurricanes.

"We're not going to take all these minutes and give them to one guy, but there is opportunity there for lots of different people that are, quite honestly, waiting for those opportunities," Stevens said after the team's brisk 50-minute practice Monday. "There are guys that have had those opportunities at lower levels or different times. Most of the time you're pleasantly surprised because guys are anxious for that opportunity and want to make the best of it."

Stevens said he's considering several options for the game Tuesday, including breaking up the fourth line of Jonny Brodzinski, Andy Andreoff and Nick Shore, which combined for three goals in two games last weekend in Florida. In practice Monday, Brodzinski centered a line with Adrian Kempe and Tanner Pearson.



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Brown, third on the team in points (38) and goals (16) and fourth in assists (22), will sit out Tuesday for kneeling Tampa Bay defenseman Mikhail Sergachev in the second period Saturday during a 4-3 loss. Not surprisingly, Stevens and Brown — who three weeks ago was fined \$10,000 for cross-checking Pittsburgh's Justin Schultz — disagreed with the suspension.

"I always respect the league's decision but I don't agree with it," Stevens said. "I thought [Brown] was totally planted and leaning with the shoulder."

Added Brown: "I saw it differently than they did. They thought I stuck my knee out. I felt like I was going through and he just sidestepped me. So I hit him in the knee, yeah. But it's the result of him making a move laterally."

Lewis returned to Southern California over the weekend to be examined by the team's medical personnel after Florida's Jared McCann drove him into boards headfirst on Friday. McCann wasn't penalized for the play and Stevens had no update on Lewis, who was still undergoing tests.

The Kings nearly lost another forward Monday when Tyler Toffoli took a stick to the face and left the ice bleeding from the mouth. He later returned and finished practice.

UP NEXT

KINGS AT CAROLINA HURRICANES

When: Tuesday, 4 p.m. PST.

On the air: TV: FS West; Radio: 790.

Update: Carolina comes into this one with momentum, riding a two-game winning streak and a 5-2-1 record in its last eight. Seven of those games were at PNC Arena, where the Hurricanes are concluding an eight-game homestand. The Kings will be playing the third game of a seasonlong seven-game trip. Carolina has been particularly tough defensively during the homestand, holding opponents to one or fewer goals in regulation five times in seven games.

LA Times: LOADED: 02.13.2018

1098031 Los Angeles Kings

STEVENS ON BROWN'S SUSPENSION, LEWIS' STATUS, BRODZINSKI'S GOAL SCORING; PRACTICE QUOTES

JOSH COOPER

FEBRUARY 12, 2018

The Kings practiced for about 50 minutes Monday in Raleigh, N.C. following an off day Sunday.

Coach John Stevens addressed several topics including what he thought of the NHL's decision to suspend forward Dustin Brown one game, forward Trevor Lewis' status and not having both Lewis and Brown in the lineup for Tuesday's game at the Carolina Hurricanes.

Lewis was injured Friday at the Florida Panthers and returned to Los Angeles on Saturday. His shoulder and back area slammed into the boards after a check from Jared McCann.

On how the lines have to be shaken up because of Brown's suspension and Lewis' injury:

Big change on the right side, so we've like our guys down the middle and the left side in terms of how they work and function together and a lot of times the lines are pairs but I think our guys have had the ability to move

around a little bit. We've had guys that have the ability play wing and center, which I think has helped us. (Mitchell) has been one guy that's been really versatile for us — plays wing and center. Michael (Amadio's) done it. (Gaborik) has played left and right. We have options but I honestly believe it's an opportunity because if you look the other night in Tampa Bay some of those kids took a really good advantage of an opportunity to maybe play a little bit more with what was going on and (Lewis) going out and (Brown) getting kicked out and really made the most of it. I think a lot of times you're pleasantly surprised with opportunities when it's taken the right way and we're going to need that. Carolina plays a good team game and they roll four lines, they play with a lot of pace and we're going to have to do the same.

On Brown's suspension:

I always respect the league's decision but I don't agree with it. Like when I looked at it I thought he was totally planted and leaning with the shoulder. I didn't go through it frame-by-frame like they probably did. I'm sure there's a lot of things they take into account but just based on the fact that he didn't really veer his leg one way or the other. I thought he was trying to use his shoulder and the way he (inaudible) but again we're going to respect the decision. I think the league does a good job of that stuff being very thorough and we'll take the suspension, he'll sit out the game and we'll get back to work.

On Lewis' availability for Tuesday's game at Carolina:

Not available, nope.

On how without Brown and Lewis it's a 'Next Man Up' type situation:

We just have to figure out the right side to be honest with you and I think the right side has been in flux for us a lot. We've moved guys around, a lot of times it has been the right side but a guy like (Kopitar) you can move people in and out of there, you can move him around, (Kopitar) is like Drew, it doesn't matter who you put with him, he makes them better. Tyler's played with (Shore), (Kempe) and (Kopitar) as well. (Brodzinski) actually he has the ability to move around and like I said, I think you have options on right wing with Amadio, with Gaborik, with Mitchell so I think even Lafallo could play the right if you needed him to so we're going to take the day to think about it, but again I think middle-left looks like it has some continuity there and it just may be a matter of rolling the right side until we figure out what works, but we'll put guys in to give them the opportunity.

On the possibility of a recall:

We could. (Brown) is out for one game. We have an extra body here, we have an extra defenseman. We also have the option of dressing 11 forwards and seven defensemen and that's something we've considered as well so we do have an option in terms of a roster spot and cap space but the fact that (Brown) is out for one game, we think we have the people here that can put a lineup together to give us a chance to win until (Brown) comes back.

On Lewis' status:

The only thing I can tell you is that he's seeing our doctors and I think he's getting further tests done today just to be really thorough with the examination and then we should have a better idea. He's pretty stiff and sore right now. He feels good, is that cognitively, is that the right term? [Reporter: Yep] but his body is pretty stiff and sore. We'll get a really good evaluation from our people today and then should have a better idea of where he's at.

McCann hit on Trevor Lewis: pic.twitter.com/sm584LNncV

— Cats On The Prowl (@CatsOntheprowl) February 10, 2018

On the recent play of Jonny Brodzinski:

The line (he was on) was really good. I thought they were very disruptive on the forecheck and they really worked hard to get on top of pucks and then when they had pucks they were thinking about shooting pucks and going to the net. And I look at that group, even the goal they scored on



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the rush, I mean there was no question the middle guy was going to go to the net and he was going to arrive at the net and it kind of opened up space, and I think when guys are predictable to each other because they're thinking that way, it makes you faster and it creates openings and they've taken advantage of it so their team game has been real good. It has been good to see. I think we as a staff are really starting to trust him and we think he can score. He has good speed and quickness. He's got a great shot and he has a really quick release. He has scored at every level he's been at and was a 20-goal scorer every year in college, which is hard to do so we're happy to see him create some offense for us.

On if it's hard to break apart the Brodzinski's line with Nick Shore and Andy Andreoff because of recent success:

We thought about it but they may end up playing a little bit, but maybe we'll move them around as well. (Brodzinski) had some good shifts with (Kopitar) last (game) and he has played with Kempe before, so I think if he's playing the game he needs to play. I don't think he needs to stay where he was. We can move him around. He just needs to keep playing the same. He needs to think about getting in on the forecheck. He needs to think about shooting the puck, he needs to think about getting to scoring areas but at the same time be a responsible guy and he has been that. I think at the beginning of the year Jonny was trying hard to do all the right things but he was maybe playing, I don't think safe's the right word but cautious? But we want him to be the player that he is and we want him to play with confidence, have the courage to make plays at the right times on the ice and play a real, good solid team game and I think his game has really progressed. He's a lot less hesitant, a lot more 'just let the game react' to what he's seeing and be the player that we think he should be.

On playing a strong period without Brown and Lewis in the third period at Tampa and if that bodes well for the next game:

Playing without key guys is not unique to us. There are teams around the league that have done it all year and we've been without Jeff Carter for all but six games and (Clifford) was out long-term at the start of the year and (Martinez) has been out a couple of times. (Muzzin) has been out ... we need contributions from everybody and when guys are out we need to make sure that everybody that's in can really help us and that 30 minutes is assumed by different people. We're not going to sit here and take all these minutes and give them to one guy, but there is opportunity there for lots of different people that are quite honestly, you're waiting for those opportunities. There are guys that have had those opportunities at lower levels or different times. Look at (Lewis). He's earned some power play minutes this year and done a good job in terms of being a net-front guy, now somebody else is going to get that opportunity. Most of the time you're pleasantly surprised because guys are anxious for that opportunity and want to make the best of it

On Tyler Toffoli's struggles:

I actually thought there was a stretch of games here lately where he's had a lot of chances, he just needs to start finishing those chances. I think sometimes you score and get chances or don't score and you start thinking of it a little bit too much but I do like the fact that he has been getting chances. I think the key with an offensive player, and Tyler is not just an offensive player, he's a good well-rounded player. We use him on killing penalties (last game), which he has done lots of with guys being out (Lewis) being out and (Brown) being out. He's a good penalty killer. He plays the game the right way. He gets the puck in areas where you can take advantage, I'd just like to see him bury some chances.

On trying to get more production out of Tanner Pearson:

Tanner too, to me as well – his game is coming. He's a real worker and he's on top of pucks. When you see him physically involved in puck battles, it usually leads to good things in his game. I actually think his game is trending in the right direction but I think both of those kids ... I think they need to focus on the process of playing the game the right way and their skillsets will take over. I think they've done that especially as of late but there's no question if they just bear down a little bit around the

net, production out of those two guys would be a big help to the hockey team.

LA Kings Insider: LOADED: 02.13.2018

1098041 New Jersey Devils

Devils place Cory Schneider on IR, recall Nick Lappin | What it means

By Chris Ryan

The Devils placed goalie Cory Schneider on injured reserve on Monday with a groin injury, retroactive to Jan. 23.

The team also recalled forward Nick Lappin from Binghamton in the AHL, and he will join the team in Philadelphia for Tuesday's game against the Flyers.

Schneider suffered the groin injury on in a 3-2 loss to the Boston Bruins on Jan. 23, where he exited the game after the second period.

The goalie skated once during his rehab process, but coach John Hynes said on Sunday that he would be out another week while continuing treatment.

The team said Schneider is expected to start skating next week.

Good wasn't good enough vs. Bruins

With Schneider out for at least the next four games, where the Devils play the Flyers, the Carolina Hurricanes twice, and the Tampa Bay Lightning, goaltending duties will again fall to Keith Kinkaid and Eddie Lack.

Kinkaid has gone 3-3-0 since Schneider's injury, but he lost his last three starts. Lack is 0-1-0 after making his first start in Sunday's 4-3 loss to the Bruins.

Hynes said the Devils were open to starting Lack again on Tuesday after his performance on Sunday, so the two goalies will likely split the workload in some fashion this week.

With Lappin recalled, the Devils now have 14 forwards on the roster. John Quenneville missed Sunday's game with an undisclosed injury, so the Devils have an extra healthy body on hand to play if need be. Lappin was recalled for two games in December, where he scored one goal.

Star Ledger LOADED: 02.13.2018

1098042 New Jersey Devils

Devils fall vs. Bruins: 6 observations | Why good wasn't good enough

By Chris Ryan

Even an assertive and effective performance wasn't enough to buy the Devils a win.

Despite dominating 5-on-5 play and out-chancing the Boston Bruins considerably, the Devils were ultimately doomed by a couple of early mistakes and late bad bounces in a 5-3 loss on Sunday at the Prudential Center.



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The Devils were credited 38 shot attempts to just 27 for the Bruins, and overall, the Devils out-attempted the Bruins thanks to seven Devils power plays. But special teams failures also played a big role in the Devils' fourth straight loss.

Didn't get what they deserved

The Devils had the same result in two games over the weekend, but both came in drastically different ways. The Devils were outplayed — and it showed on the scoreboard — in a 6-1 loss to the Columbus Blue Jackets on Saturday. But they put together a much sharper performance on Sunday, where they out-chanced the Bruins all night. They had a 38-27 shot attempt advantage but it wasn't enough.

NHL: Boston Bruins at New Jersey Devils

"We played well enough to win. I thought we were the better team tonight," Devils forward Taylor Hall said. "Three just bad bounces. When you're in losing streaks and you're losing, it just seems so hard to win sometimes. That was a good effort by us tonight. We deserved that game."

Special teams come up short

The one area where the Devils did fall short was special teams. The team's power play went 0-for-7, while also coughing up two shorthanded goals. The Bruins did enter the night with the NHL's fourth-best penalty kill at 83.1 percent, and they were tied for the league lead for fewest power-play goals allowed at 26.

The Devils also let the Bruins convert on one of their four power plays, giving Boston a 3-2 lead in the second period.

Taylor Hall, Anton Khudobin, Charlie McAvoy

"Special teams was a difference in the game," Devils coach John Hynes said. "That's one piece in the game that has to be better. We've had top 10 special teams all year long, and I think we've got to take this one and build off it. We really have to build off the effort, the intensity level that we played with, how the guys responded."

"We've got to tweak some of the things on special teams, but like I said, the special teams have been key for us all year long."

Star Ledger LOADED: 02.13.2018

1098043 New Jersey Devils

What Devils saw on controversial goal allowed to Bruins

By Chris Ryan NJ Advance Media for NJ.com

Eddie Lack thought he made the save.

The Devils goalie made every effort to stop a shorthanded wraparound shot by Boston Bruins forward Tim Schaller in the closing seconds of the first period on Sunday.

But as Lack sprawled out to cover the puck on the goal line, an official signaled goal. Video review showed no conclusive evidence either way, which meant the shot with three seconds left in the frame stood as called.

"My stick was there, my blocker was there, my glove was over it," Lack said. "But I mean, if the ref says it was in, it was in. He didn't say anything and the third guy yelled, and all of a sudden it seemed he changed his opinion. It's just one of those plays. I was hoping it wouldn't be a goal when they looked at it."

An official behind the net waited a few seconds before pointing down to the ice, signaling goal with Lack still on top of the puck. The referees quickly huddled and went to review the call.

The on-ice explanation given by the officials said the goal was confirmed by video review, but the NHL clarified the ruling, saying the call was upheld -- meaning there was no conclusive evidence to overturn it.

"I haven't seen anything that says it was even in," Lack said. "I guess I just have to trust the ref that he saw that it was in. I haven't seen that it was in on any replay and I didn't feel that it was in."

The late first-period goal gave the Bruins a 2-1 lead going into intermission. While the Devils tied the game 31 seconds into the second period, the Bruins went on to grab a 5-3 victory at the Prudential Center in Newark.

Devils fall to Bruins

If the call on ice had originally been no goal, it likely would have stood as called. With that being the case, there wasn't much the Devils could do, and coach John Hynes said the call "is what it is."

"There's no conclusive evidence that the puck ever crossed the line," Hynes said. "It was a quick call on the ice. I would say that's a disappointing ruling."

Devils forward Taylor Hall was right behind the net when the shot went into Lack's stick at the left post, but even from his angle, he couldn't tell for sure either way.

"I think the ref called it a goal on the ice whatever he saw, I saw the puck was awfully close," Hall said. "I'm not sure if it was in or not. I didn't see it completely in, but that's not for me to say."

Star Ledger LOADED: 02.13.2018

1098044 New Jersey Devils

Devils place Cory Schneider on injured reserve as they look to end skid against Flyers

Andrew Gross, Feb. 12, 2018

Taylor Hall has repeatedly said through this now-prolonged slump that the Devils are "close" to playing at their best. That was certainly the sentiment after the latest loss, when special teams' failings overshadowed an otherwise superior five-on-five performance.

But close is not going to get the Devils into the playoffs for the first time since 2012. Victories, in bunches, like the beginning of the season, are necessary.

And the Devils will have to continue to seek those elusive wins without No. 1 goalie Cory Schneider (groin/hip) for the immediate future. Schneider will miss his ninth straight game on Tuesday night against the Flyers at Wells Fargo Center in Philadelphia (Faceoff: 7 p.m.; Television: MSG Plus 2; Radio: digital WFAN.com, One Jersey Network) and was placed on injured reserve on Monday retroactive to Jan. 23.

The Devils did not practice on Monday but indicated Schneider is expected to resume skating next week.

Devils coach John Hynes sounded inclined to start Eddie Lack for the second straight game after the 30-year-old Swede made 22 saves in Sunday night's 5-3 loss to the Bruins at Prudential Center, Lack's first start for the team after being acquired from the Flames for defenseman Dalton Prout on Dec. 30 and being recalled from Binghamton (AHL) on Feb. 4.



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"I think we've got to take this one and build off of this one," Hynes said Sunday. "Build off of the intensity and energy level we played at. We're excited to build off of this and there's a new game on Tuesday."

The Devils (27-20-8) allowed two shorthanded goals and a power-goal to the Bruins as they dropped their fourth straight in regulation and are now in a 3-8-0 slide. The Devils have yet to lose five straight in regulation this season.

It has left them in fourth place in the Metropolitan Division, holding the first wild-card position in the Eastern Conference.

The third-place Flyers (28-19-9), who have won four straight, are three points ahead and have won two of the three games against the Devils this season, including 3-1 at Philadelphia on Jan. 20 though the Devils won the most recent game, 4-3, at Prudential Center on Feb. 1.

The Devils are also just one point ahead of the fifth-place Hurricanes, who host the Kings on Tuesday night, and two points ahead of the Blue Jackets, who beat the Devils 6-1 at Columbus on Saturday, and the Islanders. The last-place Rangers are just three points back.

"It's a situation we're in right now," defenseman Mirco Mueller said. "I think we played really hard [Sunday]. We're excited to come back after a disappointing loss. We've just got to stay positive, really, just focus on the next game. There's a lot of important games coming up."

BRIEFS: Forward Nick Lappin was recalled from Binghamton with Schneider being placed on IR. The 25-year-old Lappin has one goal in two games for the Devils this season and compiled four goals and three assists in 43 games as a rookie last season. ...The NHL changed the scoring on Kyle Palmieri's third-period goal in Saturday night's 6-1 loss at Columbus, awarding assists to defenseman Will Butcher and Hall. That gives Hall at least one point – and nine goals and 12 assists total – over the last 14 games he's played since Jan. 2. Hall missed three games with an injured right thumb prior to the All-Star break so the NHL does not recognize this as a 14-game point streak, but back to back seven-game point streaks for Hall.

Bergen Record LOADED: 02.13.2018

1098045 New York Islanders

Islanders' Mathew Barzal understands why he was benched late in loss to Flames

By Brian Heyman

The Islanders allowed the go-ahead goal with 1:05 left against Calgary on Sunday night, so now they had to press six-on-five for the tying score. Goalie Jaroslav Halak was on the bench, but so was the creative kid who already had proved to be a playmaker with the puck on his stick.

Coach Doug Weight had his reasons for turning rookie sensation Mathew Barzal into a Barclays Center spectator. But the tying score never came, and the Flames emerged with a 3-2 win.

So how did the 20-year-old second-line center react to sitting? With maturity and accountability.

"I'll own up to it," Barzal told Newsday after practice Monday at Northwell Health Ice Center. "I didn't have a great game. I didn't deserve to be out there late in the game. He made a good coaching move. I've got to hold myself accountable. I'm not going to sit here and pout and be upset that I wasn't out there. I know I've got to play better."

Barzal also lost a little power-play time in the third period. He said the issue "was just more engaging in battles and whatnot. I was playing a little bit soft, not soft, but slow. A big part of my game is just playing down

low and battles and winning that kind of stuff. So I wasn't doing that [Sunday]."

It's just that the prime Calder Trophy contender has become such a threat. Barzal has 16 goals and leads all NHL rookies in assists with 43 and points with 59. He's second in assists and third in points on the Islanders and had five assists in his previous game.

But sitting him wasn't about having a teachable moment, according to Weight.

"It's who's going to score for us," he said. "So he just threw the puck away three times on the last power play, and we had meetings between periods showing him what's going on and what we have to exploit."

Newsday LOADED: LOADED: 02.13.2018

1098046 New York Islanders

Big week ahead for Isles as they play all Metropolitan Division games

By Brian Heyman

The Islanders are facing a three-game stretch this week that could impact the fate of their uneven season.

"I think this week is do-or-die for us," Casey Cizikas said Monday at Northwell Health Ice Center. "We'd either be in a really good position or we can be in a tough position where we're kind of looking from the other side in. We want to make sure that we're putting pressure on other teams to keep up with us and we're not chasing them. So this week is massive."

The Islanders will face Columbus at Barclays Center on Tuesday, host the Rangers on Thursday and play at Carolina on Friday in three Metropolitan Division games.

Said Mathew Barzal, "The biggest games of the year, I think."

Carolina currently holds the Eastern Conference's second wild card with 61 points. The Islanders (27-24-6) and Columbus have 60, one more than the Rangers. The Devils hold the first wild card with 62.

"I think every game now right up until the last game of the season is key," John Tavares said. "It came down to that for us last year, missing by a point."

The Islanders have not won consecutive games since Jan. 15. So how do they get on a consistent run in the final 25 games?

"Play a full 60 minutes," Cizikas said. "We play good for spurts in games and then we kind of fall asleep."

In each of the last four games, they've allowed the tying or winning goal in the last five minutes of regulation, going 1-2-1.

"A couple of them, they got good bounces," Barzal said. "But at the end of the day, it's unacceptable."

Newsday LOADED: LOADED: 02.13.2018

1098102 Websites

The Athletic / With Dubnyk off, color analyst/beer leaguer Mike Greenlay called into action for Wild

By Michael Russo 12 hours ago



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Former professional-turned-beer-league goalie Mike Greenlay brought his gear to Xcel Energy Center on Monday thinking he'd just suit up and play a bunch of former pros, like Wild assistant GM Andrew Brunette and assistant coach Darby Hendrickson, and other amateurs during a 2 p.m. skate.

Instead, Greenlay was thrust into duty for Wild practice because coach Bruce Boudreau gave Devan Dubnyk and many of the Wild's other 30-somethings practice off.

For the first 15 minutes of practice, the Wild had only one goalie, Alex Stalock.

Finally, Greenlay, the Wild's TV color analyst on Fox Sports North, sprinted onto the ice in the middle of the skate.

"Bruce said, 'Don't take too long,' so I ran and got my gear on," said Greenlay, 49. "The 2-on-2 and 3-on-3 (small area) part of practice was kind of fun, but the first drills were 2-on-1s, 3-on-1s. I mean, tough warmup drill for a goalie. Man, those guys shoot hard."

Greenlay played hockey at Lake Superior State and was part of their 1988 national championship team. He also went to the Memorial Cup final with WHL Saskatoon and won a Turner Cup in 1994 for the Atlanta Knights of the now-defunct IHL.

Stalock was impressed by his counterpart.

"I thought he was good. He kept his team in the game in the (small area) scrimmage," Stalock said. "I was worried when he didn't show up initially. I thought he was at (Jared and Danielle Spurgeon's) wine and whiskey event a little too late last night."

Stalock said one day when he retires, there's no chance he'll continue to play goalie like Greenlay does.

"My gear will be burned when I'm done," Stalock said. "I'd rather play out when I'm done. You see that with a lot of goalies. I played out a lot when I was a kid. I played forward. I don't know how much I scored, but I was just all over the place and had fun, and I'll want to do that again when I retire. The last time I played out was bantam, which you don't see anymore. Squirts I was every other game, which was cool. And you don't see that anymore either. Peeweese, here and there. Bantams it was just once, and then no more once I made varsity in high school."

"I do miss playing out."

Speaking of Stalock, with three games left on the homestand and Dubnyk slated to start Tuesday against the Rangers, Boudreau didn't commit to starting Stalock the rest of the week.

He just said, "We're thinking about it."

The reason?

Dubnyk was named the NHL's Third Star of the Week on Monday and is "starting to get into a groove. It's not like he's been overtaxed. We've played nine games in the last 29 days. As much as Alex's numbers are fabulous at home, it's tough to sit there and not play Duby."

Dubnyk went 2-0-1 with a 1.96 goals-against average and .950 save percentage last week for the Wild. He's coming off a 44-save shutout against Chicago.

"Last game was very reminiscent of the way he played the first 40 games last year," Boudreau said. "If we get that kind of goaltending, we're going to be in good stead."

If the Wild get a point against the Rangers, they'll extend their franchise-record home point streak to 13 games, which will be the longest home point streak in the NHL this season.

Dubnyk is 7-0-2 in his past nine at home since Dec. 29 with a 1.87 goals-against average and .941 save percentage. He's 14-2-4 with a 2.11 goals-against average and .933 save percentage in 21 starts at home

this season and is 18-4-3 with a 2.42 goals-against average, .926 save percentage and four shutouts in 27 games (26 starts) since Nov. 9.

Rangers a formidable opponent

The Rangers have won two in a row, including one in Winnipeg, since President Glen Sather and GM Jeff Gorton released a transparent letter to fans forewarning them of impending rebuilding with the trade deadline approaching Feb. 26.

The Rangers are only two points out of a playoff spot in the East, so Boudreau wants his team to be ready for a battle in the first of two meetings between the two clubs in 11 days.

"They open up about they're selling and then all of a sudden the players get defiant and then the other teams might say, 'OK, they're just out here now just for a skate,' and they get beat because the Rangers are a good team," Boudreau said. ...

As part of the optional practice, veterans Matt Cullen, Mikko Koivu, Eric Staal, Ryan Suter and Spurgeon got the practice off.

The Athletic LOADED: 02.13.2018

1098103 Websites

The Athletic / Top rentals at the trade deadline: Hope your team needs a winger

By Craig Custance 12 hours ago

It seemed odd. As the speculation started spreading about the needs and wants of the contending teams before the coming trade deadline, a common theme emerged: A lot of teams were looking for increased scoring on the wing.

And boy, did that run counter to how previous trade deadlines have gone. The trade deadline is typically a time of trying to find help down the middle and build out the defense. Just look at the high prices paid last year for Martin Hanzal and Kevin Shattenkirk.

So what gives? One Eastern Conference assistant GM gave a pretty simple explanation. At the trade deadline, it's about finding a way to upgrade your team and this year's crop of pure rentals offers that opportunity best on the wing. The best defensemen available have term remaining on their contracts (as we'll cover later this week), so teams looking at rental players have been looking elsewhere.

"There's not a lot of defense and centers in play," he said. "It's, 'Can you upgrade? How do I get better?' I may need a center but there are none."

This list of pure rentals available at the deadline shows that well. At this point, it was a stretch to get to a Top 15. Maybe that will change as the trade deadline gets closer and more teams enter the sellers category. But four out of the top five rentals available are on the wing.

"It's supply and demand," said the executive.

1. Evander Kane, F, Sabres — A team acquiring Kane would be getting a player motivated to capitalize on the big stage that comes with a potential playoff run. Kane started the season on fire, playing at nearly a point-per-game pace through December. That production has slowed lately with just three goals and four points in 2018. Still, his track record is established enough that teams know what they're getting. "He's still a hell of a player," said one NHL scout. "It's his contract year. He wants to cash in big. He's not going to mess that up." That seems to be the prevailing thought with eight to 10 teams already showing interest in the Sabres winger as of Monday.



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2. Rick Nash, F, Rangers – He's a well-respected player in the game, with the big debate centering around how close he is to peak Rick Nash. "Peak Rick Nash may have only been one season," said an Eastern Conference executive. "That's the thing about his career. He always leaves you wanting more." That perspective may just be a product of his declining goal total contrasted with his big contract. When you examine Nash the player, he's still a guy who helps in every situation. His reach makes him an effective penalty killer. He can still upgrade the power play. Slotted in the right spot, he could be a difference-maker at even strength. "Could he be the (Phil) Kessel for a team this year where you have other guys driving the bus?" asked the exec. "Now all of a sudden, your matchups are easier. There's less pressure. You're playing against the weaker forwards. You take advantage of your abilities."

3. Mike Green, D, Red Wings – Green might have his flaws defensively, but he's the only defenseman on this list who has the ability to be a game-changer. He doesn't have the huge shot he used to have in Washington, but he's a skilled passer who can help the transition game. Ideally, he's on your third pair, but he's consistently played top four minutes for the Red Wings. "He's still a skilled guy, who is offensively talented and can make a difference on anyone's power play," said an NHL scout. "He has to be put in the right role. For me, the question is, 'Is he happy if he's not playing top four minutes?'" The Lightning are a natural fit, but they might prefer to take a run at Ryan McDonagh first. One NHL source suggested that the Lightning might be interested in beefing up a potential deal with Detroit that would go beyond Green, with Tampa scouts (including the GM) regulars in Detroit for recent games.

4. Michael Grabner, F, Rangers – The Anaheim Ducks are an interesting team to watch on this front. They're in good shape down the middle and could use additional speed, which Grabner provides in excess. The problem with the Ducks is that we don't know if that's a playoff team or not. If Anaheim can solidify its case before the deadline, the expectation around the league is that GM Bob Murray will be aggressive. "They need a winger," said one GM of the Ducks. "The problem right now is no one feels overly confident about their team. That's where Bob is."

5. Patrick Maroon, F, Oilers – The Oilers aren't against re-signing Maroon, but with Connor McDavid's contract kicking in next season, Edmonton has to be careful where it commits money. There have been talks but, for Maroon to stay, he's probably going to have to leave significant money on the table compared to what he could get in unrestricted free agency. The Oilers are getting trade calls on him and it doesn't hurt that he has a proven playoff track record. He was good for the Oilers last spring with eight points in 13 games. In 2015, he scored seven goals during a playoff run with the Ducks.

6. Mark Letestu, C, Oilers – The Pittsburgh Penguins are going to be attached to any available center that might fit under the salary cap in Pittsburgh, with GM Jim Rutherford known for his trade deadline aggressiveness. One source on Monday said he suspected that the Penguins had cooled on Letestu, but these things have a way of being very fluid this time of year. Another source indicated that there's "serious interest" on the overall trade market for Letestu. He's a versatile player, which is valuable this time of year. "If he could skate better, he'd be a top six guy," said an NHL scout. "He's great in the shootout, he's a great utility. One of those guys that can do everything." Five teams have shown serious interest in Letestu, in large part because of that versatility.

7. Jack Johnson, D, Blue Jackets – The Athletic's Pierre LeBrun reported that the Blue Jackets felt they could get a late-first round pick for Johnson, whose play has gotten a little bit better since his name hit the spotlight. "He still has a hard-hitting, heavy game," said a scout. "He moves the puck well."

8. Ian Cole, D, Penguins – Cole is exactly the kind of player contending teams like to add at the trade deadline. He's insurance on defense and he has a couple Stanley Cup rings on his resume. It appears things have stabilized on this front in Pittsburgh and one source said he'd be surprised if Cole is moved but his name has been in the rumor mill all season. "A change of scenery would only help him," said another NHL source. "He plays hard. His hockey sense is OK. He knows what it takes

to win, what it feels like. If you look around the league at the 5, 6, 7 defensemen on every team, Ian Cole is as good if not better."

9. Thomas Vanek, F, Canucks – Vanek is becoming the modern day Lee Stempniak, dealt at the trade deadline for a second or third round pick to teams that missed out on the player they wanted just a little bit more. Like he was in Detroit last season, Vanek has been productive for the Canucks. He has 38 points in 56 games and remains an elite offensive talent. One turnoff for contenders is that his skill set doesn't always translate as effectively when the games get harder down the stretch. He scored just twice in 20 games for the Panthers after they acquired him from Detroit last season.

10. Tomas Plekanec, C, Canadiens – The smart bet is probably on Plekanec getting a deal done in Montreal, but the Canadiens can certainly use the leverage of the trade deadline as a way to get a contract to their advantage. If an extension doesn't get done, there will be trade interest. "He's actually played really well this year for how old he is," said one backhanded complimenting NHL scout of the 35-year-old. "He has lots of miles on that body. He is good on the draw and is a leader in that room."

11. Petr Mrazek, G, Red Wings (RFA) – Mrazek isn't your traditional rental in that he's an unrestricted free agent after this season. But the expectation here is that the Red Wings won't make a qualifying offer to him (because of the \$4 million price tag), so he will essentially be unrestricted after this year. The goalie market is a weird one. It's soft until it isn't. "I would say overall, it's pretty quiet," said one GM of the current goalie market. "It's such a high-profile demanding position but there hasn't been a ton of (trades)." Mrazek has been a little better this season compared to last, but teams will still be doing some projecting here. In six January games, he had a .940 save percentage. The rest of the season has hovered around .900.

12. Erik Gudbranson, D, Canucks – This might be another example of a team using the trade deadline as a pressure point to try and get a long-term contract done. Depending on what that deal looks like, it has the potential to become an overpayment with the league's evolution towards faster, more offensive defensemen. But as it stands now, there are still people who are in search of size and an edge on defense for a playoff run. Even so, they'll have to keep expectations in check here. "He's not a top four for me," said one NHL scout.

13. Matt Cullen, F, Wild – I mean, if he's traded, I think we all know where that's going to be — a reunion with Sidney Crosby and the Penguins. It's hard to see Cullen playing anywhere besides Pittsburgh or Minnesota. If that's the case, another potential depth center on the move could be Arizona's Brad Richardson. He's strong in the faceoff circle (52.6 percent) and won a Cup with the Kings. "Those are the kind of deals that get done because the price isn't going to be too high," said one NHL source. "The problem is that everything here now is speed, speed, speed. And Brad Richardson is not speed, speed, speed."

The Athletic LOADED: 02.13.2018

1098104 Websites

The Athletic / How hockey's best young forecheckers use stick checks instead of physical play

By Justin Bourne 15 hours ago

One thing I'm always looking for when I watch hockey is trends. I always want to know how the game is changing, which teams rely on what attributes, just ... any sort of pattern I can find. One, I think observations like that make for interesting "trend" articles, but two, I try to be ahead of



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the game. If I'm going to talk about the sport for a living, I'd at least like to do it intelligently.

One of those trends I've noticed is just how differently forwards check these days compared to a decade ago, and what an advantage it can be for those who do it well. And boy, some young players are doing it well. Years ago forwards would scream in on the forecheck and smash into the defender and hope to separate them from the puck. That's how you knew who the best forecheckers were, right? They were the guys who rattled the glass the most.

Today though, it's all about refined stick work. The real model here is a guy like Marian Hossa who was so good at getting underneath opponent's sticks and nabbing the puck like a fox stealing an egg from a nest. And like so many musicians today, some players have reached back to a successful style of a previous generation and co-opted it.

Consider how good Auston Matthews is at winning pucks out of battles ... yet he averages 0.2 hits per game. Among players who've played 20 games in the NHL this season, that's 626th out of 641. But somehow he's just outside the league's top 30 in takeaways. I mean, remember this in his first period of hockey in the NHL?

Think how good a forechecker Connor Brown is — he's 632nd in hits. No one in the league has more takeaways than Connor McDavid, and he's 589th in the league in hits per game, averaging a whopping 0.3 per night. Hell, Zach Hyman may throw the body a bit more than those guys, but he's still outside the top-200 players in hits per game, and he's about to make nine million dollars over four years while playing on the top line literally just because he can get the puck back. And it's not like any of those guys I just mentioned aren't getting big minutes every night.

Players today are more focused on being hard on their stick, getting underneath their opponent's stick, and pestering the puck free. Truly it's a skill, and one that can be learned. It's a matter of timing — ideally, you don't go for the stick lift till you're close enough to still have strong leverage on your stick so that as your opponent's comes back down, you're able to muscle the puck free, like winning a faceoff. You have to be like a cobra, waiting to strike the second you feel you're in range.

I'd also like to clarify: this obviously isn't a new skill. Players have been doing it since the game was invented, I know that. But only recently have players been using it as nearly their sole means of puck recovery. Defenders used to worry about getting smoked when they went back on pucks. Now their focus is on getting their body between the puck and their opponent, knowing that the new goal is rarely to inflict pain.

All you have to do is look at the highlights from just Sunday night in the NHL (stick-tap to @TopherScottCU for highlighting these) to see how guys are going about it.

He's not one of the young guys, but here's Henrik Zetterberg picking Matt Niskanen's pocket:

How about Reid Boucher saying "Thanks, I'll have that" to Dan Hamhuis:

And in St. Louis, Dominic Simon with the heist on Alex Pietrangelo:

Again, that was just one night! Feel free to note in those four clips that the defencemen are Erik Karlsson, Niskanen, Hamhuis and Pietrangelo — we're talking players who are somewhere between legit and awesome. When it's done right, there's almost no way to prevent it.

And when I say young guys are eating off this, no single is player is having a feast like Aleksander Barkov in Florida. My god, it's been an absolute clinic all year. When we refer to a player "tilting the ice" in terms of possession numbers, it's skills like this that do that. Here's a chunk of a paragraph from a great profile in Sports Illustrated on Barkov:

"His 5-on-5 shot differential (54.57%) ranks second on the Panthers behind winger Evgeni Dadonov (barely) and no player has generated more raw scoring chances, according to Natural Stat Trick. This despite taking only 41.41 % of his faceoffs in the offensive zone, the sixth-lowest rate league-wide among forwards with at least 700 5-on-5 minutes."

So yeah, his stick strength and elite timing are doing a decent job tilting the ice. Watch this video below to get a sense of why "Barkov" and "Selke" are starting to be said in the same sentence so often.

Imagine if you went back to 1970s hockey players and said there's a 6-foot-3, 215 pound Finn who's 551st in the league with 0.4 hits per game but is an elite forechecker. You know how quick they'd scoff, call him soft, and throw out some Euro joke? Yet here we are in 2018 talking about the 22-year-old potentially being the best defensive forward in the NHL ... because of his stick-checking.

In terms of looking for trends, I think this would be a great attribute to scout for. Junior hockey doesn't always have the most reliable advanced statistics, but if you can find a kid with a great stick, you've probably found a kid who spends a lot of time in the offensive zone.

I always have a laugh when you see a player in pursuit of the puck with their stick in the air, like they're leading the charge into some Braveheart-esque battle, because it's just so utterly useless. Players who do that burn energy running into a guy who's moved the puck successfully because there was no stick around to impede them, and then they have to get started skating again. It might look like hard work, but it lacks purpose. And so, the game continues to evolve, and "good sticks" on puck pursuit are the new go-to. It's always great to work harder, but the real advantages come from working smarter.

The Athletic LOADED: 02.13.2018

1098105 Websites

The Athletic / Tomas Plekanec hopes to finish his career with the Canadiens on his own terms

Arpon Basu 16 hours ago

Tomas Plekanec left for a road trip Monday, one of hundreds he has taken with the only NHL team he has ever known.

The Canadiens play in Denver on Wednesday, in Arizona on Thursday and their first-ever game in Las Vegas on Saturday. Assuming Plekanec plays all three games — he has only missed 16 games over his past 12 seasons, so it's a pretty safe bet — he will pass Maurice Richard and move into seventh place in franchise history with 979 games played in a Canadiens uniform.

It is a heavy milestone because of who he is passing on the list. He knows it and, frankly, it makes him slightly uncomfortable. Because that's just who Plekanec is, humble almost to a fault, but intensely proud. So even if passing The Rocket on the games played list makes him a bit squeamish, his longevity playing in one of the most intensely passionate markets in the NHL is still a badge of honour for Plekanec.

"I'm always happy about it because it wasn't really because of the one general manager that liked me or one coach that liked me," Plekanec told The Athletic. "It was, I don't know how many general managers we went through here over 13 years or how many coaches. A lot of guys keep asking me and we always have a good laugh about it; I've had so many coaches and GMs around.

"That's what makes it, for me, more special, I would say, that you're not a guy that one GM likes you and he keeps you because he likes you. It's always changed and it seems like that always kind of stays the same. That's probably what's a little bit different about it. Especially with how hard it is to play in Montreal for many other players. I find it more, I wouldn't say challenging, but sometimes when you have bad days or bad stretches and you need that extra kick in the ass, you get it here. You don't get it probably in Arizona, with all due respect, or any other U.S. city which is quieter probably than here. It just keeps you on the edge, which



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can be tiring, but more so it pushes you and keeps you going as hard as you can every night.”

That love of playing in Montreal is what makes the coming weeks so awkward. Plekanec is aware of that as well. He is in the final year of a two-year, \$12 million contract, one that gives him no control over a potential trade. Barring injury, Plekanec could pass Andrei Markov and move into sixth on the Canadiens games played list on March 13 at home to the Dallas Stars. On April 1 at home to the New Jersey Devils he would play his 1,000th game.

“There’s no doubt he deserves that,” Claude Julien said. “He’s been such a loyal player, he’s done everything that’s always been asked of him. That’s just his personality. When you know the guy, you’re not surprised at hearing how loyal and everything else he is with the organization and his teammates. He’s a leader, not a real vocal leader, but one who leads by example. He’s not a yeller, but every once in a while he speaks, and guys listen to him. Everything he’s done for this organization throughout all the years, no doubt everybody would like to see that happen.”

The possibility exists, however, that he will play both of those milestone games wearing a different uniform. With the Feb. 26 trade deadline approaching, that possibility is one Plekanec is trying not to think about. But it’s there, and it’s becoming harder and harder to ignore as the deadline approaches.

“I’ve heard guys bring that up or mention that, and it’s just brutal,” captain Max Pacioretty said, shaking his head as the uncomfortable question is asked. “I mean, you spend your whole career here you obviously want something like that to happen in this environment.”

Even though his contract is up, Plekanec hopes his time in Montreal extends past this season. But the reality of the situation is that he has a certain value as a shutdown centre in a trade market that is devoid of centres in general, let alone centres who are as effective in that role as Plekanec is.

No Canadiens forward has been on the ice for fewer goals against per 60 minutes of ice time at 5-on-5 than Plekanec, who regularly faces top opposition and starts more of his shifts in the defensive zone than any other forward on the team. For any team that will be facing a top offensive player over and over again, which is basically every playoff team, having someone like Plekanec on your roster to neutralize that threat is very valuable, regardless of his underwhelming offensive numbers.

“He’s a student of the game; he thinks the game really well,” said Carey Price, Plekanec’s longest-standing teammate and a direct beneficiary of his defensive play. “He’s got a hockey I.Q. that you can’t really teach; it’s kind of old school, in a way. A lot of guys focus on skills or whatnot in today’s game, but you can tell that they don’t think the game as well as an older guy like Pleky.

“He’s not playing the easiest of roles out there. He’s playing against top-tier NHL lines every single night, and he winds up playing them usually starting in the defensive zone every single faceoff, you know? So when you have to start off in your own end against the best lines on every team, that’s not an enviable position.”

Given how well he’s able to do that, the potential return for Plekanec for a team that is looking to stockpile prospects is impossible for general manager Marc Bergevin to ignore, despite the sentimental significance of the milestones he could hit after the trade deadline. That is the business side of it, and Plekanec understands it. But he doesn’t have to like it.

“There’s nothing I can do about it,” Plekanec said. “I mean, all I can do is play and see if Marc and Claude want to keep me around for another year, or they don’t and they send me away. That’s as much as I can do. I always said I want to stay here. I like to play for Montreal, that’s my home, so I don’t really want to leave. But it’s out of my hands, really.”

As much as Plekanec wants to stay in Montreal, being traded to a playoff team would give him the possibility of having his name engraved on the Stanley Cup. It is the ultimate goal for any player, but Plekanec wants to

do that with the Canadiens. And as dire as everything looks right now, as distant as that possibility seems to any objective observer, Plekanec feels he could have that chance in Montreal before his career ends. It might seem delusional, but it is the best evidence of his blind loyalty to this organization.

“You look at the teams around the league right now, the non-playoff teams last year and the top playoff teams, it kind of switches, like right away with few little changes,” he said. “The same thing can happen here. I really believe that. If I didn’t, then it would be pretty simple and I’d leave. One, two little changes, with Pricey and Webby around and some good young guys around here, it can all of a sudden become completely different and all the negativity that’s around here right now can turn into positivity. That’s why I believe in that.”

Of course, as a free agent, Plekanec could always sign with Montreal on July 1 even if he were to be traded. But it’s hard not to get the impression that would be difficult for him to do. Once that link is broken, it’s hard to rebuild it.

“I don’t even want to leave, so for me it doesn’t even make sense to talk about it,” he said. “When that happens, if anything happens, then you have other possibilities and you move on and you think about the next step, of what can happen, after that. But now, I’m here, I want to be here, I never said anything else besides I want to be here. I think Marc knows that, Claude knows that, and if they want to keep me around, that’s going to be really up to them.”

Photo credit: Eric Bolte, USA TODAY Sports

Plekanec knows in order to come back and play the role he would play at age 35 he could not command a \$6 million annual salary. He’s not going to come out and say that – that wouldn’t be a very bright way to go into a negotiation – but he came pretty close.

“Obviously you’re not going to get the same salary,” he said. “But my thinking was never to play for money first. I never really think about money first, because if I would do that I would have left Montreal way before that.

“Honestly, I don’t play for money. When I decide where I’m going to play, money is like in third, fourth, fifth place, whatever. First thing is if I like the team, if I like the city, if my family likes it, all those little things. Obviously you need to make money for a living, but it’s more at the beginning stage of your career. But then you realize money’s not everything.”

Plekanec is clearly coming to the end stage of his career. It is not over, he’s still effective at what he does, but the end is visible. With Jaromir Jagr going back to Kladno to play for Plekanec’s hometown team, he admits that would be an enticing way to extend his career once his NHL days were over. Not next season or maybe even the season after that, but at some point.

“I would probably still like to play with him one more time,” Plekanec admitted. “I mean, he’s probably going to play for another couple of years there, I’m guessing. I really believe that he will. But I want to play here as much as I can, as long as I feel I can still play. And after I’m done, I want to stay in hockey. I don’t want to say necessarily coaching, but I would like to, that’s something I would probably like to do. So you want to stay within the best hockey possible. You don’t want to leave the NHL and kind of lose that touch with the best environment that you can possibly have. So to go and play there for two or three years, I’m not sure that would be ideal for turning into that.”

Coach Plekanec is an intriguing thought. He has always credited Julien and Doug Jarvis for turning him into the two-way player he eventually became when he first arrived in North America and played for them with the Hamilton Bulldogs. And Julien believes Plekanec is a similar coaching prospect to Jarvis.

“I think he’d be one of those smart coaches,” Julien said. “He’s one of those guys that reminds me of Doug Jarvis. Doug is not a big talker, but he’s a real smart hockey guy. He sees the game well, he’s a good teacher. I think a guy like Pleky would resemble a guy like him that would



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definitely see the game the right way, would be able to help a young player out. No doubt he'd be a good coach."

But that time is not right now, not as far as Plekanec is concerned. He doesn't want his time playing in Montreal to end, not like this, not when he's so close to a significant milestone. But that is out of his hands. And that is what will make the next two weeks so agonizing for a player who has given everything he has to this franchise, and who is hoping to get a little something back by allowing him to stay and finish his career here.

The Athletic LOADED: 02.13.2018

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The Athletic / 'People are going to love this guy': Chay Genoway gets chance to shine for Canada at Olympics

By Eric Duhatschek 12 hours ago

Jonathan Toews will tell you: In a perfect world, he would have liked to have gone to Pyeongchang, South Korea to play for Canada in the 2018 Winter Olympics and try to defend the gold medals he helped win in Vancouver (2010) and then again in Sochi (2014). But since that wasn't happening, he became reconciled to the silver lining — that one of his best friends in hockey, Chay Genoway, got to go instead. Genoway and Toews were roommates together for two years at Shattuck St. Mary's prep school in Minnesota and then reunited later for a year at the University of North Dakota. Toews played two years at UND — 2005-06 and 2006-07 — and then headed off to start his pro career with the Chicago Blackhawks.

You might remember how that turned out: Stanley Cup championships in 2010, 2013 and 2015, plus those two Olympic gold medals. Even though he was only 29 at the time, Toews was included in the list of the NHL's top 100 players of all time when the list was released last year. Genoway was for two years the captain at UND and upon graduation, signed as an undrafted free agent with the Minnesota Wild. But after two years of playing for Houston and another two with Hershey of the AHL, Genoway left to play in the KHL, where Team Canada found him last year and invited him to start playing their tryout tournaments. Genoway left such a favorable impression that he was ultimately chosen to play for Canada in the Olympics, which weirdly allows him to follow in Toews' footsteps.

Genoway, according to Toews, is a player the Canadian hockey-watching public is going to like, once they get a chance to see him in Pyeongchang, where Canada opens round-robin play Thursday in a Group A game against Switzerland.

"Everyone was looking forward to seeing what the rosters look like for each country and it's especially fun for me to see a really close friend make it," Toews said. "He's really been on the cusp of having a chance to play in the NHL and in my opinion, is very deserving of that and has been for a long time. So, it's nice for a guy like that to get some exposure, someone who's always positive, always enthusiastic.

"He's sincerely and genuinely modest about who he is. He's just a fun guy to be around. He was a leader on our team back in the day, one of the guys I looked up to. His older brother Colby and Zach Parise were playing at North Dakota at the same time, so he was learning stuff from them and seemed to be a step ahead. He's just an all-around hard worker."

The two years he spent at Shattuck were pivotal in his evolution as a player, said Genoway.

"Coming out of Manitoba and being around people like Jonathan Toews and Kyle Okposo really elevated things for me," he said. "Then I went to North Dakota and to be with guys like Toews again, and (TJ) Oshie, and

guys like that. It's a pretty special place and the culture there — hard work, blue collar. Playing in that kind of atmosphere and that crowd, it feels a bit like an NHL crowd."

Genoway describes Toews, "as one of my closest friends and as a friend, he's very happy that if they're not going to be there, that I have a chance to go. He's expressed that to me — and I'll take whatever advice I can get from him. I don't think there's anyone better to give you a perspective on this experience we're going into. He's a special guy. There's a reason he's thought of as one of the best leaders in the game."

Assistant coach Dave King came across Genoway two years ago when he played two trial events for Canada in the 2016-17 season — the Deutschland Cup and the Spengler Cup. King came away with rave reviews for Genoway.

"Oh my gosh, people are going to love this guy," said King. "He's only 5-7 or 5-8, just a little guy, but he has blazing speed and I swear his heart is as big as his body. He just plays balls out all the time. He's really, really fast. He can really pass the puck. He turns the puck up quickly on the breakout, and he defends well, too. He just gets his nose in there and gets on the right side of the big guys and does the job. He's a really effective player, a great kid, an unbelievable young man — and man, is he fun to watch."

Toews entered the NHL season with 717 NHL games on his resume while Genoway had just one. He is, on some levels, the Moonlight Graham of the NHL (the fictional baseball player in Field of Dreams, who had one game of major league experience). It was a whole movie about one game being better than none. And Genoway supports that notion — that one NHL game is better than none, though he remembers the call-up — on Easter weekend 2012, the last game the Wild played before signing Parise and Ryan Suter in the off-season — as one long blurred moment.

"I think absolutely that one game was worth everything," said Genoway. "It was everything you could ever dream of. I have lots of friends in the hockey world that didn't get that chance — and that's too bad. I think there's a lot of players who deserve that chance. But I was lucky enough to get one and it was the most special thing.

"I was so nervous and anxious and excited that it almost felt like it was a dream. I didn't even know what happened until after. It was fun to watch the video after because I couldn't have told you one play that happened. I remember vividly though that it was a late call the night before, and I had to fly out early the next morning to play that game. It was Easter weekend. My family wasn't able to make it, but they were all together to watch the game on TV. I remember getting a chance to step out of the locker room and make a few phone calls from the stands. That was probably the most special moment for sure."

Genoway began his KHL career in 2014-15 with Riga, which made last week's Team Canada training camp in Latvia something of a homecoming for him. In all, three players on the Canadian defence — Genoway, Mat Robinson, and Karl Stollery — have all played for Riga, with Stollery there this year.

"We're all similar small defencemen, who came to Riga in our first year and used it as a jumping off point to Russia," said Genoway. "It helped us get into the KHL lifestyle a little bit. You're staying outside of Russia. You're in Europe, but you're in the Russian league and you learn what it's like — and it's an awesome organization in Riga. People are great. It's a very affordable city — and you get a bit of a feel for old Europe, just the buildings. It's a new, fun experience to see the history of a place like this.

"We were in their practice rink. The games were in their game rink. It was nice to have some familiarity and show the guys some good cuisine. It was a bit nostalgic for sure."

At 31, Genoway is happy, making a living playing in the KHL, though there was a culture shock in the beginning.

"You need to be very open to new things and different cultures when you come to the KHL, that's the best way to explain it," said Genoway. "The more you experience it, the more it just becomes the norm. The first year



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you're here, you fight it a little bit. It's just so different from the way we do things in North America. The Russian way is different and obviously, they've had a lot of success with that, but they are old school in the way they do things — a lot of them the same as they were in the 1980s. Some guys are bringing families over here. They're the true warriors, but it's fun."

After leaving Riga, Genoway went on to play for Moscow Spartak, Jokerit Helsinki and now Lada Togliatti, which he joined this year, to reunite with his first coach in Riga. Like a lot of his teammates, Genoway set his primary goal for this year to make the Olympic team, in the absence of NHLers. At what point, in this journey, did it go from being a pipe dream to something that could be a reality? Many people felt there might be an 11th hour solution and leave Canada's KHLers out in the cold.

"Even two years ago, when I first got a chance to play for Hockey Canada at the Deutschland Cup, there were rumors going around that the NHL might not go to the Olympics, but we kind of sloughed it off at first," said Genoway. "Then, it became clear it might happen. This summer, I got a call to play in the tournament in Sochi. But not until that call came Jan. 9, I wasn't sure if this was going to happen for me. I thought maybe the NHL would figure something out. Or, for a while, there was talk that us KHL guys might be kept from going if the Russians couldn't go. That was a story for a while.

"So, you're going through the season playing for your club team, but you're also thinking about this as a possibility. It was definitely extra motivation. And when you finally get the call, my reaction was — I'm not even sure I can tell you. A lot of emotion. Goosebumps. A real whirlwind. I don't think any of us are going to downplay the feeling of being on this team. This was something we never thought of as a possibility. Now, we get to play in the coolest sporting event in the world in front of our country. It's one of those things, it's tough to find words in the English language to express your feelings about it all. But I think people can imagine how we're feeling."

For his part, Toews is surprised that Genoway hasn't had a longer NHL look — and believes the Olympics might raise awareness around the league that maybe here's a late bloomer worth looking at for next season.

"I think he's poised to have a great tournament and hopefully that exposure will get him a look with some NHL team," said Toews. "I get that a lot of teams want to look to their young guys, but the way the games is going right now, with his size and speed and skill, there's no doubt he can play in the NHL. But a lot of guys miss that opportunity in their early twenties if they're not a top pick or at the top of the depth chart for teams. It just goes to show how many great players are out there that maybe don't get drafted high, don't have the size, don't have the name, or maybe no one gives them a chance.

"I'll never say never about him."

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The Athletic / Brandon Crombeen reflects on his transition from NHL player to local businessman

By Sean Fitz-Gerald 15 hours ago

It was just after 10 a.m., and the hand that once punched Milan Lucic, Kevin Bieksa and dozens more was holding an espresso in a trendy Toronto coffee shop. It was a large hand, connected to a trim man who was wearing a collared shirt under a fitted blue sweater.

As recently as three years ago, the man was known as B.J. Crombeen, a hard-working forward with a few goals and more than a few penalty minutes on his NHL resumé. He played in Dallas, St. Louis, Tampa Bay and Arizona.

He works a few blocks from the coffee shop, near midtown. He is now known as Brandon Crombeen, vice-president, private capital markets with Greybrook Realty Partners. He does not spend much time talking about his old job while doing his new job.

"I kind of try to put that behind me, move on from it," he said with a smile. "Obviously, if it comes up, I'm happy to talk about it, but I'd rather try to be known for what I'm doing today, and trying to do that very well, rather than say, 'oh, well, he's an old hockey player and he's hanging his hat on that.'"

Crombeen is not old. He is 32, and he could probably still be playing somewhere. He was invited to an NHL training camp after his final season, in 2015. There were talks about a two-way contract. He also received interest from in Europe.

His interest, at that point, was in moving on.

Crombeen began working on his transition out of hockey long before he was out of hockey. It was not that he disliked the game. He loved it. He also recognized it would not last forever and that, even after a player retires at 30, that player still has many years of life left to fill with ... something.

The challenges in making that transition are easy to overlook. Jeff O'Neill, the one-time Toronto Maple Leafs winger, moved into an on-air role with TSN in retirement following some initial uncertainty.

"I got lucky," he said in an interview last year. "But for other guys? I don't know. You get an ego, right? It's the bright lights; you're playing in front of f—ing 20,000 people."

Crombeen nodded. Making it to the NHL requires a singular focus, he said: Players can be asked to move away from home at 15, change cities and lose contact with friends. It can be jarring when it ends.

"If you were a firefighter, and you'd worked and done everything like that, and one day someone comes in and says: 'You can do anything in the world, but you can't be a firefighter,'" Crombeen said. "All your skills — everything you've done — has been geared toward that career.

"It's a daunting task. And it can get very overwhelming."

Crombeen lives in the city with his wife and three children. He coaches minor hockey. He seems like a professionally ascendant, thirtysomething working parent.

Except, in this case, that ascendant professional also played 445 regular-season games in the NHL. He finished with 34 goals and 850 penalty minutes over eight seasons.

Some of his former teammates are still in the game. Crombeen skated on a line with Alexander Steen in St. Louis, where he recorded a hat-trick in 2008 — scoring all three goals, including the winner, against Nashville.

He said he does not have any memorabilia on display in his office. At home, he said his past career is remembered largely with a few jerseys hanging in a closet. Echoes of the game, though, can be found in the career he has chosen in retirement.

"I said, 'I want something that's a fast-paced environment, I want something that's competitive, where you're kind of measured on a daily basis,'" Crombeen said. "Because that's been my whole livelihood for the last 10 years — competing and knowing where I stand in line, and trying to move my way up."

His father, Mike, had also played in the NHL, with 475 regular season games split between Cleveland, St. Louis and Hartford. He emphasized the need for a post-hockey plan, and made a habit of asking his son about what he had in mind.



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Crombeen said he took courses at York University when he played junior hockey, in Barrie. He took correspondence courses when he moved to the United States. He eventually earned a degree in finance from the University of Phoenix, which is based online.

That was only part of his plan. Finance is a broad field, and Crombeen had to find out which path he wanted to follow. He estimated he shadowed a half-dozen professionals, and asked questions of dozens more. He worked as an intern and, ultimately, spent about five years with Greybrook before he joined the firm full-time.

He said the company would send deals it was working on — 300-page documents — and offer him a chance to review the paperwork, ask questions and offer input. It was a largely academic exercise, and he devoured the information.

Crombeen wrote a first-person piece for The Players' Tribune when he announced his retirement two years ago. It was equal parts memoir and handbook, offering current players a step-by-step guide to navigating the part of their careers that most try to avoid: The end.

"That's the hard part," said Crombeen. "You're 20 years old, you're doing great, you're staying in five-star hotels, you're traveling on a private plane, and you're saying, 'read a book when you're on a plane.' It's not the easiest thing to do."

That planning made it easier for Crombeen to adjust to civilian life. He will still visit friends when they come through town, or make a stop at Air Canada Centre. He will still golf with his hockey friends and hang out with them in the summer.

"There's a lot things that are still intertwined and tied to hockey," he said. "But on the day-to-day, it's really a former life."

The Athletic LOADED: 02.13.2018

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The Athletic / Q&A with Garth Snow: State of the Islanders, his approach to the trade deadline, becoming GM, and more

By Arthur Staple 22 hours ago

Garth Snow has been the Islanders general manager since July 18, 2006, the day he retired after a 13-year NHL career. His team currently sits outside the Eastern Conference playoff picture—if the Islanders miss the postseason, this will be their eighth trip to the draft lottery in Snow's 12 seasons as GM.

Snow sat down with The Athletic to discuss a variety of Islander topics, including his plans for the Feb. 26 trade deadline.

Staple: Where are you at with your team?

Snow: Right now, we're not in a playoff spot. Obviously, we've got to play better. There's been strengths to our team's game, there's been weaknesses and where we are today could change tomorrow or the next day. We're just trying to win games and whether it's a game or a practice, just get better each day and work on things that need improvement.

Staple: You've had some injuries, some call-ups. How much do you want to try to improve the team from outside and how difficult is that to do in today's environment?

Snow: When you have injuries, there's opportunities for guys from Bridgeport to get called up and have an expanded role. We've got two first-round picks and two second-round picks. I don't think we're inclined to be throwing those assets around for rentals. If it's a player with term, more than just a one-year experience, we would take a hard look at using

those assets to improve our club. But I don't think we're in a position to be spending draft picks on rentals.

Staple: Do you get the sense the league needs a couple more weeks before teams decide what they're going to do?

Snow: I don't think the standings will change too much in the next two weeks. As for prices, you pay a premium to get quality players in this league, that's just the way it is. Every team's situation is different. From our perspective, from the conversations we've had with other teams, I don't imagine we'll be too active coming to the deadline. That can always change, so we'll see.

Staple: Is there a scenario in which you'd become a seller and try to get more assets for your expiring contracts?

Snow: My first year doing this, Ken Morrow told me, "Your team will dictate what path you take at the deadline." Those words ring true every year. Your team will tell you with the way they play, the position in the standings, what approach you'll take to the trade deadline. This year is no different.

Staple: What do you think of the job Doug Weight and his coaching staff have done so far?

Snow: I think they're doing great. Doug put a staff together that has a tremendous amount of experience, guys who took different paths to the NHL and had success as players and coaches. I know they work tirelessly to get our team to the next level and I know with the experience they have that we're going to have success.

Staple: And what do you feel about your own job status?

Snow: I've been doing this for 12 years. From Charles (Wang) to Scott (Malkin) and Jon (Ledecky), I've always had support privately and publicly. I've never given it a thought until you ask that question.

Staple: How has the job changed over 12 years?

Snow: The game's gotten faster. Coming out of the 2004-2005 work stoppage, we thought the game was fast then. It's just gotten faster and younger since. You see players in the league who 10-15 years ago would have definitely been in the AHL. It's a younger league, a faster league and that's the biggest difference I see as a manager in how you try to build a team.

Staple: The Ryan Smyth deal at the 2007 deadline, could you make a deal like that today, one that comes together so quickly?

Snow: That started innocently just with a conversation at the GM meetings the week prior to the deadline. That led to a couple phone calls—I know Edmonton was trying to re-sign him at the time—and then there was an 11-hour call to just be prepared. It was a surprise to us. That's why you never know at the deadline. The conversations you have leading up to a deadline, or throughout the year, you never know where they're going to lead. It obviously takes two teams to make a deal but you always have to be ready.

Staple: Where do things stand with Josh Ho-Sang?

Snow: Josh is a young player with a ton of potential. He's at a place where he needs to be to develop into the player he wants to be and we want him to be. There's no doubting his offensive potential, he's just got to work on the details—being in the right position on the ice when he doesn't have the puck, making the right decision in different areas of the ice. Those are things as a young player coming out of junior, everyone has different timelines. We want nothing but success for Josh and he's made great strides since he's been in Bridgeport.

Staple: How much interaction do you personally have with him? Do you leave that to your AHL coaches or do you try to get involved with him?

Snow: I don't see discontent there. I think there was sensationalism in that article you're referring to. When Brent Thompson refers to a young player as a "baby," he's not saying it in a demeaning way. He's saying he's a young kid. People that report have a responsibility to understand



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what the intention of a comment like that is. Tommer probably has to be a little more careful in how he says things, but I never saw it as a demeaning comment by any means.

Staple: Does the fact that he's not up with the Islanders show that he's still in your future plans?

Snow: One hundred percent. The process he's going through is learning lessons at the AHL level that will make him a high-caliber player for us five years from now, seven years from now. We don't want him going up and down. The next time he's called up, he'll be here to stay. That's what we want.

Staple: Has anything throughout the season changed with John Tavares?

Snow: There's always communication and I've been on the record, John's been on the record too as saying we're going to keep those conversations private.

Staple: How do you feel he's handled his decision and all the attention surrounding it?

Snow: He's handled it the way we would expect John Tavares to handle it: like a pro.

Staple: You have some other pending free agents (Josh Bailey, Thomas Hickey, Jaroslav Halak). Any progress on those fronts?

Snow: Those talks remain private, too.

Staple: Going back to when you started this job, what were you going to do if you didn't get it?

Snow: I had two years left on my contract, so I was anticipating to play. I'd had pretty significant hip surgery and I was rehabbing to get to a point where I could fully participate in training camp.

Staple: What had you planned to do after you retired before this opportunity came along?

Snow: When I went to Maine, my mindset was if I wasn't going to be an NHL player, I wanted to be in a position to get a bachelor's and a master's degree so I could go into college coaching, become an athletic director, work either on the pro side or the college side somehow. For me, did I ever envision getting the call to be manager of the team? I went through the interview process months before, something I don't think people really recognized at the time. My mindset in getting my degrees was to be a coach, potentially an AD, maybe coach or manage at the pro level. I was going to play as long as I could and then turn in that direction.

Staple: When you get the job the way you did, how do you go about building the trust and the respect you need to function as an NHL GM?

Snow: I thought going from playing to managing, I knew the league better than any scout or manager at the time. I went from being on the ice, on the bench, at ice level, where you get a better appreciation for the talent, the character of teammates and guys you play against. There's a lot you see down there that you can't see in a press box. That's true even today. I was fortunate in that regard.

Another positive was the great support staff I had around me when I started. Joanne Holewa (manager of hockey operations), I think you know her track record and how important she is to this organization and has been for many years. Kenny Morrow (head pro scout), Kerry Gwydir (assistant to the GM), the whole support system helped me tremendously. And that leads to my interactions with other managers, who were also great to me. Never had an issue with them—there was a common respect from my having played in the league for several years.

Everyone goes through different paths, from scouts, player development, assistant GM. I don't think I was the first to go from player to manager—I think Bobby Clarke did it too in Philly—and the weaknesses I had going in were softened by the people already in place here.

Staple: Any regrets over moves you made or things you thought?

Snow: That's part of life, right? We'd all like mulligans over certain circumstances. You take those mistakes and you apply them to your next decision so it can be a better one. I think we all do that no matter what job or situation we have.

Staple: Your organization has been knocked for having one of the smaller scouting and development staffs in the league. How do you take that criticism?

Snow: I think over the course of the last few seasons we've doubled our scouting staff. We've added Chris Lamoriello (assistant GM) from Jersey, Claude Loiselle (hockey operations consultant) from several stops he's had and then several additions to the scouting staff. I don't know where that comes from. Eric Cairns is on our development staff but if he goes to see one of our prospects in college or junior, he's writing reports on other potential prospects. That's part of the job. I don't think that's any different than any other organization.

Staple: Turning to the arena, you're president of hockey operations. You've dealt with arena issues—locker-room design, player satisfaction among other things—for a few years and many wouldn't think that's a big part of your job. Is it enjoyable to handle those duties?

Snow: We have a tremendous track record in preparing locker-room space. We had scenarios to build space at the Coliseum. We were going to expand Iceworks. We had a plan for Cantigue Park once upon a time. Then we set up Northwell, Barclays Center and now Belmont. With our experience in building a campus that's a first-class facility as a game rink or a practice facility, we've done a tremendous job. The whole staff has been terrific.

Staple: Belmont Park will be a big addition and selling point for your club. How will you handle the next three years of splitting time between Barclays Center and Nassau Coliseum?

Snow: It was similar to when the lease was expiring at the Coliseum and we didn't know where we were going to play before Barclays came along. We knew where we were going to call home. It does make a difference with the Andrew Ladds, the Jason Chimeras, Johnny Boychuk—you see how those things affect a team's ability to plan ahead. Belmont gives us that same opportunity and it's definitely a positive.

The Athletic LOADED: 02.13.2018

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The Athletic / Q&A with Ray Shero: Handling the trade deadline, building a brotherhood (not a neighborhood), developing players, more

By Arthur Staple 22 hours ago

Ray Shero has been Devils general manager since 2015. The 55-year-old Shero was previously the Penguins GM from 2006-2014, winning the Stanley Cup in 2009. The Devils currently sit second in the Metro Division, and should they reach the playoffs, they would snap a five-year postseason drought, tied for the third-longest in the NHL.

Staple: With the success your team has had so far this year, has it changed your thinking as you approach the deadline?

Shero: The only thing that's changed is we're better than we were last year, which is great. No different than I first started when Lou (Lamoriello) was still here and for (Devils owners) Josh Harris and David Blitzer, it's important to put a plan in place. Last year was year two and it was the more painful year, but accumulating the draft picks we did to try and reset what Lou had built for 28 years. We had such great success but obviously, when you push the envelope to win, not as many draft picks, aging players—that's the cost of winning and trying to win.



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So we had to reset that. The last two drafts, we've had 20 picks—most in the league. We've gone from the oldest team in the league to the eighth-youngest. It's the transition to integrate some of these young players. I've been through expansion with Ottawa for five years, Nashville for eight and that's what really intrigued me about this job. With the support of Josh and David, this is the first time I felt, maybe halfway through training camp, that I could see this turning, on and off the ice.

Coaches, players, staff—whatever it was, I felt that way. Thank God it did turn or I'd have felt like a real idiot. But I've been through it before and you can just tell, a good feeling for me and most important for our fans to get off to a decent start in October, see a light at the end of the tunnel. It's a big part of what we're trying to do, for our fans, for potential fans and even players around the league, our goal was simple, to just earn respect around the league. We lost it last year and I think we've done that so far this year.

You can finally see that light at the end of the tunnel in terms of the vision we had, the direction we're headed, the number of younger players in our system. As Lou would always say, you have to hire good people and make decisions.

People talk about Taylor Hall—I mean, I wish we still had Adam Larsson, too. Stefan Noesen on waivers. Will Butcher as a college free agent. Nico Hischier—I did such a good job last year as GM that we had a chance at the first overall pick. You need that, though. You need a (Jesper) Bratt. Mirco Mueller—we traded for him—this guy can be a pretty good player and he's 22.

From a fan standpoint, to be passionate about the Devils or maybe you're just starting to get interested... It's a tough market, maybe not even a hockey market. And that's not a bad thing. I was in Nashville for eight years and that wasn't a hockey market, but they made it one. And that allows you to do some things you might not try somewhere else.

Staple: When you have some of that success, how much do you have to avoid temptation getting into this time of year?

Shero: I don't think it's that hard. There's probably 23 markets, 24 saying, "Who can we add?" And the rest are saying, "Who can we get rid of?" And that's the league. In terms of the (Sami) Vatanen-(Adam) Henrique deal with Anaheim, that's the kind of hockey deal we're looking to make. I don't think you ever say never to a rental at the deadline, we'll see where we are in a couple weeks, but we'll get (Brian) Gibbons back here in a few weeks, Marcus Johansson seems to be making some progress.

In terms of the rental market, we did it a lot in Pittsburgh. It worked out once, some other deals are maybe under the radar... I don't see us being players in the rental market, at least involving our top prospects or first-round picks. Not that I don't think it could help, but there's some pretty good faith I have in the team right here. If I can supplement that, great.

Everybody knows the names that are out there, but it's taken us to this point to play to an identity, the one that John (Hynes) and I talked about the day we got here. We say our players aren't playing to a system, they're playing to an identity. And there's a difference. I think of Blake Coleman, Gibbons, Hischier—they pressure pucks, play fast, all that. I think of our defense, some people didn't think it was an AHL defense, much less an NHL one. But they've done a pretty good job.

We're finally on that way and you can see that vision we talked about a couple years ago. Last couple years at the deadline, we moved guys out and I don't see us doing that at all this time around. We added with Vatanen on defense and it cost us Adam and that's looking forward—Adam's unrestricted in a year and Vatanen's up in two years. That comes into play.

You never say never towards the deadline, but we're certainly in a different spot than last year.

Staple: When you talk about guys like Bratt, Gibbons, Drew Stafford, it seems this is the year of unsung players pulling teams up, as Vegas has had. How important are those gap-filling guys to what you've done so far?

Shero: Absolutely. It's no different than the entry draft, you're looking for undervalued pieces. My first draft here we traded a second and a third for Kyle Palmieri. Kyle scored 14 goals in Anaheim and they had depth on the right side, he was playing third-fourth line. To me, guys like that, your identity comes from accountability—it's no different than parenting, no different than anything in life. We put up four words in the Pittsburgh locker room: Passion, accountability, work ethic. I'm a big believer in those. They're words anybody can use, but you have to apply them to everyone in your organization for it to matter.

Guys like (Brian) Boyle has come into play on that scale. Stafford, Ben Lovejoy. These veteran guys and it's been about a brotherhood, not a neighborhood—that's what John likes to say. There are no egos. It could be one of the kids, or it could be Gibbons, he's a great story. Or Noesen, off waivers from Anaheim.

The first two years, I didn't have an aversion to older players. But you get into free agency and it's three, four, five, six years—once you get into that, you can never get out of it. And we're not there yet, we're more about minimizing risk. One year, two years—we needed guys who were willing to prove it. (David) Schlemko had a great year for us, (Lee) Stempniak and they went on to get good deals elsewhere.

But I didn't want to be in a situation in year three here where we had the 33-year-old that's got four years left. It was beneficial the first couple years where you're not swinging for the fences on stuff. Once you make mistakes as a GM, it's hard to get out of them. I think we're set up well with our cap situation and our assets.

You look at a guy like John Quenneville, who's up with us now. He played a lot last year. You know why? We stunk. Now there's more competition, guys like him and (Joseph) Blandisi (dealt in the Vatanen deal), they had good camps, but we needed penalty killers. People think we messed with them; we liked them. What's wrong with the American League?

I'm getting the same questions on Steve Santini, that we don't like Steve Santini. Are you kidding? We love Steve Santini! But he does not need waivers, we have eight D and he needs to play. One day, when you do need waivers, it'll be someone else. It's about development, roster management and you're a better team when there's internal competition.

Staple: When you see Brian Boyle, with all he's been through this year, on the ice in Tampa at the All-Star Game, what are you thinking?

Shero: I knew Brian, we obviously played against him a lot, so when we got into free agency we talked and talked to him. Whether it was myself, John Hynes or (assistant GM) Tom Fitzgerald, who knows Brian well, our sell was pretty strong. "Teams say they want you, but we really fucking need you." We needed him. We knew he could make a difference. We didn't have what he had.

It was similar to our pitch to Will Butcher when he and his Dad came in. John was fantastic in showing him, we have a need for X, we don't have it and Will could give us that.

With Brian, we sell him hard and he comes here and then the first day of physicals (he gets the leukemia diagnosis)... Now, he's in the All-Star Game. That's pretty emotional stuff. It's not just with Brian, it's his son Declan (who has needed surgeries to repair a venous malformation in his chin), his whole family. It's just respect and pride for the way he's been. Forget the Devils. This is him as a husband, a father. I couldn't be more proud of him, his wife Lauren, the way she's handled things, the faith they both have.

The All-Star thing is amazing and he represented himself, the team and the league as well as you knew he would. I think he tried to grab as much swag as he could, thinking this might not come around again.

But when you know Brian, you can only be happy for him. We got lucky winning the draft lottery for Hischier, we got lucky with Bratt. But I know we got lucky having the opportunity to sign Brian Boyle, just to get to know him. It's been such trying circumstances for him and his family, but just to get to know him, it's just great stuff.



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The Athletic / Staple: The Islanders' targets at the trade deadline should include Ryan McDonagh, among others

By Arthur Staple 22 hours ago

As you can read in the Q&A with Islanders general manager Garth Snow, the team isn't looking to surrender much for rentals at the upcoming NHL trade deadline.

Snow wants a "hockey deal," as the GMs call it, if he were to give up any of the four picks the Islanders have in the first two rounds of June's NHL Draft or one of the few near-NHL-ready prospects in the team's system.

That doesn't mean the Isles can't fill in gaps in their depth by trading later-round picks before Feb. 26. But if Snow is looking for a hockey deal, he should look no further than his team's biggest rival.

Rangers captain Ryan McDonagh is among the players GM Jeff Gorton is discussing in potential trade offers. He's 29 and has quite a bit of mileage on him after all the deep playoff runs from 2012-15, but he could be just what the Islanders need.

They have given up a historic number of goals this season, on pace to surrender the most by any team since the 2005-06 season. They need defensemen, especially veteran ones accustomed to facing the opposing teams' top scorers.

McDonagh has one more year left on his contract at a \$4.7-million cap hit, which is hugely affordable for an Islander team that would be spending at least that much on a suitable replacement for Calvin de Haan, who is unlikely to return after suffering his third major shoulder injury since 2009.

The Islanders need to have maximum roster and cap flexibility to deal with the John Tavares unknown this offseason, but adding McDonagh as a top-four defender for at least another year solves a lot of issues on a defense that's been battered and subpar.

Now, the cost? Well, that's going to hurt. Snow has his own and Calgary's first-round picks in 2018. The Rangers will want one of those, likely the Isles', since that one could be a lottery pick.

The idea that Snow could help rebuild the Rangers for a decade with a first-rounder is tough to swallow and the main reason this trade, or any blockbuster between the two locals, is unlikely.

But if the price for McDonagh is a first, another high pick and one of the Isles' young, cost-controlled defensemen, that's a risk Snow should be willing to take.

Here are five other trade-deadline options that would fit what the Isles need:

*Tyson Barrie, D, Avalanche. The right-shot defenseman is a proven scorer from the back end and a good skater. He brings a lot of what the Islanders want to see from Ryan Pulock; if Snow were willing to deal Pulock, that might be enough to land Barrie. But Snow and Avs GM Joe Sakic went around and around on Matt Duchene last year and neither budged much, so this may not be a match made in deadline heaven.

*Petr Mrazek, G, Red Wings. He's still only 25 and has plenty of NHL experience. He would be a costly acquisition, though, as he's making \$4-million as a pending restricted free agent. The Isles would have to be committed to giving him a go next season to make this worthwhile and

that's going to be a large number considering Mrazek is Detroit's backup and Thomas Greiss, the Isles' backup, has two seasons left on his deal.

*J-G Pageau, C, Senators. He played very well in last season's deep Ottawa playoff run and earned a three-year contract at \$3.1-million per. The Sens are a mess this season but Pageau's speed and relentless effort would be good to have. It only works if the Isles see him as something better than what Casey Cizikas brings and whether that's worth surrendering assets to get.

*Michael Grabner, F, Rangers. As unlikely but welcome as a McDonagh deal would be, both those aspects are at play with Grabner, the one-time Isles star who has revived his career at the Garden. He's a pending UFA who may command a first-rounder from a team tight to the cap (he's on a \$1.65-million cap hit), and that would be too rich for Snow. But if the market for Grabner isn't as hot as the Rangers hope, maybe the Isles would send a second-rounder to get some depth scoring, speed and PK help.

*Matt Martin, F, Leafs. Seems like it's old home week on the market for the Islanders. Martin, maybe the only guy more popular on Long Island than Tavares, wisely went for the dough and the term when he signed a four-year, \$10-million deal with Toronto in the summer of 2016. Less than two years into it, he's a healthy scratch waiting to be moved. Snow and Lou Lamoriello have made plenty of deals and if the Leafs are inclined to pay half of the \$2.5-million per for the two years remaining, maybe the Isles make the leap.

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The Athletic / Carpiniello: An onions game for the Rangers, who are not ready to throw in the towel

By Rick Carpiniello 22 hours ago

Prepare to launch!

I've been waiting so long to do one of these, and the Rangers sure made it interesting for the first one. Rangers 3, Jets 1.

I was going to type ICYMI because I know a lot of you missed all or portions of it because of a technical snafu at MSG Network. Poor Sam Rosen and Joe Micheletti could have stayed in the cafeteria the first two periods because there was no TV audio until the third.

If you didn't see the game, you missed a doozy. Some of the Rangers' best, most emotional, physical, involved, competitive performances of the season. An onions game.

Thoughts:

1) The Rangers have really taken this declaration by management to be trade-deadline sellers to heart, as a sort of rallying cry. I said it the day of the presser—let's be honest, we all knew they were going to sell—that the infusion of some kids might add energy to a team that badly needed it, and inspire a playoff push. But I think the announcement actually pushed the veterans, too. And the head coach, who didn't get a vote of confidence and said he wants to, and plans to, coach to win every game.

2) Winnipeg's a tough place to play, and that's not only a great home-ice team but also a big, rugged, in-your-face team. Yet here were the Rangers, so passive so many nights, competing, being involved in lots of scrums and after-whistle stuff, getting crowds in front of the Jets' net. After a really difficult start—Dave Maloney called it a "tsunami"—which featured an early disallowed goal and a quick 1-0 goal for the Jets, the



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Rangers steadied and then played one of their best periods of the season in the second.

3) Most important, they got bodies to the net, and shots, too. Rebounds, tips, screens ... and they got the tie-breaking goal by Jimmy Vesey, off his body, on a shot by his roommate, Brady Skjei.

4) The Rangers' starts have been better lately, but Winnipeg was on them early. Tyler Myers fired a shot past Henrik Lundqvist 12 seconds into the game. Video coach Jerry Dineen found evidence for the Rangers to challenge for offside on the play, and the goal was overturned. Just 54 seconds later, Nikolaj Ehlers sent another one past Lundqvist's glove, which may have knuckled or dipped, 1-0 Jets. But Lundqvist, somewhat called out by Alain Vigneault last week—I hope to have more on that later in the week, about whether it was wrong to do so—rebounded well.

5) Not defending Lundqvist whatsoever on that goal, but there was also a gigantic breakdown by the Mika Zibanejad-Mats Zuccarello-Vesey trio of forwards. Defenseman Steven Kampfer was the closest Ranger to Ehlers, and really it should have been anybody else.

6) The Rangers killed the first Winnipeg power play, but yikes. There was some serious zone time and a few tremendous chances. The Jets really whipped the puck around and Lundqvist made some big stops. Lundqvist's best of the game was a stretching save on Myers cutting to the right post at 1-1 late in the second, and he made a couple of beauts on the second power play to open the third, at least one on Patrik Laine, one on Blake Wheeler.

7) Once the Rangers got their legs under them, Zuccarello put a big hit on Myers, then stole the puck just outside the blue line and broke in for a wrister that barely squirted through goalie Connor Hellebuyck's pads with 1:06 left in the first period. It was Zuccarello's first goal in 22 games. First since mid-December. Lundqvist called it a huge goal and said it really propelled the Rangers to play a strong second period.

8) It looks as if Zuccarello is making an effort to shoot the puck more. I know, he's the Rangers' leading scorer, but he hasn't been nearly good enough most of this season, and single-digits in goals won't get it done. During a third-period power play, Zuccarello had a break-in and was stopped, then put his own rebound off the post. He's on the block, but also sounds like one of the most determined to make the playoffs despite the upcoming sell-off.

9) David Desharnais nearly made it 2-1 in the final seconds of the first period on a semi-breakaway that Hellebuyck got just got a piece, the puck stopping between the goalie's skate and the left post.

10) Neal Pionk has not looked out of place in his first two NHL games. Ditto for John Gilmour. Pionk was beaten wide one notable time, but overall better than fine. He made a big block on a late second-period PK at 1-1, during Cody McLeod's penalty.

11) Daily Nash-O-Meter: As he almost certainly closes in on what he knows will be the end of his Rangers' tenure, Rick Nash is going like a freight train. He was robbed on a 3-on-2 one-timer from Zuccarello in the second. He nearly got decapitated by a shot on the power-play, and soon after made a goal-mouth pass that nearly broke the tie. Then he had yet another tremendous chance on the power play, but his stick snapped. Not sure if Dustin Byfuglien broke it, or if it was Nash's own weight leaning on it. Then he drew a penalty to Big Buff, and during the power play was cross-checked into Hellebuyck by Myers (play on!), creating chaos. Nash is doing everything he can do to drive up his trade value.

12) Byfuglien=Monster, by the way.

13) McLeod just demolished Toby Enstrom, who had a tough time getting off the ice and into the locker room. Not sure how late it was, if it was late, but the hit looked clean, shoulder to chest. But, of course, as we've seen with NHL officiating, time after time, game after game, season after season ... Hey, you never know. We've seen headshots that put three Rangers (Pavel Buchnevich, Vesey and Marc Staal) out of action without so much as a minor penalty.

14) Of course, McLeod had to fight the moment he left the box, Matt Hendricks clearly the instigator, not even a question. But the officials were apparently using the Sunday Afternoon Manitoba rulebook.

15) And while I've railed loud and long that the presence of tough guys does nothing to deter dirty hits or even hard clean hits, you can bet the house that his teammates appreciate what Hendricks did there.

16) Speaking of which, Vesey was sure involved in the rough stuff coming back from a concussion. The way that kid plays, he's going to have to take some, and give some, and at times drop them—and has dropped them in his young career—from time to time.

17) I'm gonna duck now ... but the Rangers' power play, despite missing so many players including three first-unit guys (Kevin Shattenkirk, Chris Kreider, Buchnevich) and its second-unit QB (Ryan McDonagh), has been really good lately. It created a lot of momentum in the second.

18) J.T. Miller takes a penalty, comes out of the box, makes a brain-freeze pass in the offensive zone, which causes him to take another penalty. These are the plays that keep him from being a complete player.

19) Michael Grabner. Another goner by the deadline, scored his 23rd goal of the season, adding to his trade value, too. Seven of those are empty-netters (Pavel Bure has the NHL record with nine in one season), but the fact that Grabner is on the ice in those situations and helping finish off games with his wheels, means those ENG's aren't cheapies and shouldn't be discounted.

20) Well, this was fun. Let's do it again on Tuesday.

My Three Rangers Stars:

Mats Zuccarello

Jimmy Vesey

Henrik Lundqvist

The Athletic LOADED: 02.13.2018

1098112 Websites

The Athletic / Selling satisfaction: How the 2017 trade deadline set the Stars up for success in 2018

By Sean Shapiro 21 hours ago

Dallas Stars general manager Jim Nill likes his team right now.

Even after no-show 6-0 loss to the Vancouver Canucks on Sunday, the Stars are within a point of third place in the Central Division with 70 points.

When a game starts, Nill feels confident his team will be in contention that evening.

"I like where we're at. I think the last nine weeks, we had the two games (against the Toronto Maple Leafs and Los Angeles Kings) that were kind of blips, funny how the game is, you can play so well for 15 games and then you can have two games and then be scared to death," Nill told The Athletic last week. "But that's how tight our game is. I like where we're at the last nine weeks, I feel like every night we've got a chance to win. Now you're not going to win every night, but I feel like we've got a chance to win. I like how we play the game. And with our skill level, if the game is close we have a chance to win."

It's a far cry from 12 months ago when the Stars were one of the most disappointing teams in the NHL.



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Dallas had entered the 2016-17 season with high expectations. The team was months removed from having the best record in the Western Conference during the 2015-16 regular season and even without Tyler Seguin, the Stars had come within a game of the Western Conference Final.

Then everything unraveled. Injuries piled up, the penalty kill was historically bad at 73.9 percent (the worst showing since the 1993-94 Ottawa Senators), and a team that used to be must-see TV for casual fans turned into a near-automatic win for opponents.

Nill said it was one of the most difficult seasons of his career, and by February the Stars were a seller at the trade deadline.

"It's a spot you don't want to be in," Nill said. "It's a spot where you know you haven't made the playoffs. But we're in a position (as general manager) where we have to look after the franchise. So your focus becomes, what's best for the organization?"

It's a difficult spot for a player, while there was still a message from the team that they would fight back, and they could still make a run, trading away Patrick Eaves on Feb. 24, 2017 — the first of four trades — effectively raised the white flag.

"That's never fun, especially with Patty, who I played with since I came here," John Klingberg told *The Athletic*. "That was tough. I don't know what to say."

"The fight's kind of over at that point. Hockey just wasn't fun last year," Tyler Seguin told *The Athletic*. "Games started not mattering."

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While selling can be frustrating, Nill believes the Stars made the best trades they could in 2017.

"We knew we had some (pending) free agents and got some assets for them," Nill said. "When you're in those situations you want to max out your value."

The Stars traded Eaves, a pending UFA, to the Anaheim Ducks for a conditional second-round pick, which became a first-round pick after the Ducks reached the Western Conference final.

"We knew with where the salary cap was going, we didn't know if we'd be able to re-sign (Eaves), his contract was gonna go," Nill said. Once they offered what they offered for him, it's something we had to do for the betterment of the organization."

Three days later the Stars made probably their most surprising move, trading Jordie Benn — the captain's brother — to the Montreal Canadiens for Greg Pateryn and a fourth-round pick.

On Feb. 28, 2017 the Stars traded Johnny Oduya, another unrestricted free agent, to the Chicago Blackhawks for a fourth-round pick and minor-league forward Marc McNeill. Right before the deadline, the Stars flipped left winger Lauri Korpikoski to the Columbus Blue Jackets for defensive prospect Dillon Heatherington.

"(Columbus) needed some depth, it's what all teams do in that position, and we were fortunate that Heatherington was the guy that they offered," Nill said. "We knew him pretty good, our scouts had seen, I'd seen, we'd seen him play in the world juniors, there was some potential there that we really liked."

There would have been a fifth trade, likely sending Patrick Sharp back to Chicago, if not for a hip ailment that the veteran forward was playing through. He ultimately had season-ending surgery in March.

Even without trading Sharp, the Stars were able to re-stock and put themselves in a better position for this season and the foreseeable future.

With a second first-round pick from the Ducks, the Stars made a trade on draft day to move up three spots and took Jake Oettinger, a freshman

goalie from Boston University that Dallas is hoping is the heir apparent in the crease when Ben Bishop's six-year contract nears its expiration.

The fourth-round pick from Montreal was later flipped to the Kings in exchange for Bishop's negotiating rights, and Heatherington has already played five games for the Stars, filling in well on the third-pairing in spot duty after a strong showing in the American Hockey League with the Texas Stars.

And on top of all that, the Stars also got Greg Pateryn.

When the trade was first announced it was a bit of a head-scratcher. Why would the Stars trade Jordie Benn?

He had just signed a three-year, \$3.3 million contract extension (\$1.1 million AAV) before that season. He was one of the few reliable defenders on the Stars that season, and he also happened to be the captain's older brother.

"I didn't expect it. I was playing well and I thought I'd be okay but like I said, it's a business and you never know," Jordie Benn told Marc Antoine Godin from *The Athletic* Montreal. "It doesn't matter who you are, you can always get traded."

To better understand the Jordie Benn deal, you also have to remember the unique wrinkle that came with last season. Every team was going to lose a player at some point to the Vegas Golden Knights in the expansion draft. And with how Jordie Benn had played, combined with his extremely affordable contract, it was a pretty good guess which player Vegas would claim if the defenseman was left unprotected.

"We knew that there could be protection troubles," Nill said. "That dictated a lot of that decision (to trade Jordie Benn)."

Nill wasn't outwardly shopping the defenseman, but he was listening to all offers when Canadiens general manager Marc Bergevin called.

Bergevin wanted Jordie Benn and was willing to give up both a player and a pick in the deal. From Nill's perspective, Benn and Pateryn were similar players, so Montreal not only solved expansion protection issues but also provided another pick that Nill could use as an asset in what would become a busy offseason.

It was a trade that Pateryn needed.

He was stuck in Montreal, buried as a healthy scratch after the Canadiens acquired Nikita Nesterov, and his wife's actions on social media didn't do him any favors with the local community.

"I needed a fresh start somewhere and Dallas gave me that opportunity," Pateryn told *The Athletic*. "And they looked at me with fresh eyes."

It took a bit of perseverance on the player's part, but acquiring Pateryn has been one of the biggest keys to the Stars defensive success this season.

Pateryn was a healthy scratch in the Stars' first nine games this season as the team carried eight defenders out of training camp. He didn't mope or sulk in the press box, something past scratches in that situation were guilty of, and while it was difficult, he did his best to remain positive.

"That was a really hard point in my career," Pateryn said. "Because you work on all this stuff, because you try to get better and you try to make a difference, and when things are kind of the same (on a new team) it's easy to look back and say, 'Did I do everything? Am I doing the right stuff?'"

Pateryn finally got his chance on Oct. 26 against the Edmonton Oilers and hasn't come out of the lineup since. He's playing the best hockey of his career paired with Dan Hamhuis, who has gone through a bit of renaissance season and is an anchor on one of the NHL's best defensive teams.

Pateryn ranks 10th in the NHL amongst defensemen that have played at least 600 minutes with a 23.86 Expected Goals Against according to



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Corsica Hockey. When opponents do get shots against Pateryn, it's often from the perimeter (chart via @ineffectiveMath).

On a team that rarely gives up the lead in the third period, Pateryn is often one of the key player protecting it and his emergence has had two other impacts in the lineup.

First, it's turned Marc Methot's injury into a minor footnote on the season.

Before this season the thought of Methot missing most of the season with a knee injury could have been a death knell for the Stars defense. Instead the Stars haven't had to rush the veteran defender back from injury, and in theory, when he returns to the lineup Methot will actually be in a so-called third-pairing role with Stephen Johns.

Second, and in a similar realm, Hamhuis and Pateryn have unlocked the game for Klingberg, who leads all NHL defensemen with 52 points (seven goals, 45 assists) and is starting to force his name into the Norris Trophy conversation.

Klingberg has taken major overall strides in his game this season, so has his defensive partner Esa Lindell, but they've been in even better spots because of Hamhuis and Pateryn.

Star coach Ken Hitchcock can use Klingberg in more offensive situations with Pateryn and Hamhuis, often with the line centered by Radek Faksa, facing the other team's top players.

"It's allowed more freedom for Lindell and Klingberg to play a little bit different role than they normally would at the start of the year," Hitchcock said.

Pateryn said that's a compliment from Hitchcock, and it's an ideal role for him.

"Consistency is a big thing for us," Pateryn said. "If Dan and I can consistently help the team in that way, and play those defensive minutes, it allows those other two (Klingberg and Lindell) to do more exciting things on the other end."

No matter what he does on the ice, Pateryn's career in Dallas is likely always going to be remembered for how it started, getting swapped for the captain's brother, who also happened to be roommates at the time of the trade.

"You didn't really know what to expect knowing it's the captain's brother and knowing they were so close," Pateryn said. "But Jamie is not the type of person that holds a grudge for that. He knows that it's a business and it's not my fault that he's out of here."

"We had a couple laughs about it last year," Jamie Benn said. "It's been so long now that it seems normal. We actually had some mutual friends, so it was kind of funny."

So what about the 2018 trade deadline?

After being willing to trade anything that wasn't nailed down by a long-term contract, how are the Stars going to navigate the next couple weeks before Feb. 26?

"I can't say we're big, big buyers," Nill said. "I keep getting asked, 'are you going to make any moves?' Well, we made a lot of moves this summer. Sometimes you've got to let things come together, and you can only make changes if they're going to get better."

Nill purposely plays things close to the vest and won't divulge his potential shopping list, but it's fairly obvious it couldn't hurt for the Stars to add another top-six forward.

While the top line of Jamie Benn, Seguin, and Alexander Radulov have been dynamic and combined for 71 goals this season, the rest of the forwards, 11 of them, have combined for 74.

Adding a forward like Evander Kane, Rick Nash, Mats Zuccarello, or Max Pacioretty, while costly, could create an intriguing top-six for Dallas and

provide a little bit of spark to a power play that's had its up-and-down moments.

According to CapFriendly, the Stars have an estimated \$1,843,776 available in cap space available at the deadline. So a deal is possible, but if the asking price really is three good assets, like Buffalo has indicated for Kane, Nill likely won't be motivated to make a move.

It's highly unlikely the Stars will pay that price, especially with Nill looking at a pair of "bonus acquisitions" as his team moves toward the postseason.

Martin Hanzal has had seven different injuries this season – yes, seven – but seems to be close to ready at the level that both Hitchcock and Nill expected when they signed him to a three-year contract on July 1. And Methot's return only solidifies a defense that is second in the NHL and has allowed the fifth-fewest high-danger scoring chances (410) in the NHL according to Natural Stat Trick.

"I know the way we're playing, our structure in our game, our commitment to be on the right side of the puck, we have a chance to win every game now," Nill said. "We like where that is."

The Athletic LOADED: 02.13.2018

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The Athletic / Staple: I like to win, and that means diving deeper into the coverage you want

By Arthur Staple 23 hours ago

It's pretty simple why I'm here at The Athletic now.

I like to win.

The goal in the newspaper reporting business is to be fast, be first and be right—sometimes, unfortunately, in that order. Especially in this digital age, speed is of the essence. I embraced it; wins to me meant getting Islanders news out before everyone and sorting out the rest afterward.

When I won in my time at Newsday, you won. Islanders fans got the news quickly and concisely.

From the moment that Paul Fichtenbaum called me a few days before Christmas to see if I were interested in signing on, I've thought more about what winning means to me. It means diving deeper, taking more time to craft stories, and utilizing all the relationships I've built with this team and around the NHL to give you something you haven't gotten before in your years of following the Isles.

I'll still tweet plenty. We'll still have Q&As. I'll still force my terrible taste in music on you.

But there will be more. Many of you over the years have voiced your frustration at not having more outlets covering the Islanders, reinforcing that feeling of being one of the NHL's middle children.

Starting today, that feeling should be gone. Because it's not just me. When you've got national writers like Pierre LeBrun and Craig Custance, Corey Pronman on prospects, analytics writers from all over the world and a New York crew that will cover teams in other sports that you also love, this is a real team.

And we're going to win. I can promise you that. We win, you win.

Like I said, it's pretty simple. Hope you enjoy the ride.

The Athletic LOADED: 02.13.2018



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Sportsnet.ca / Maple Leafs avoid collapse and show Lightning they're real

Chris Johnston | February 12, 2018, 9:47 PM

TORONTO – “It’s a long time till the playoffs,” said Frederik Andersen, refusing to even contemplate what it might be like for his Toronto Maple Leafs to trade chances with the Tampa Bay Lightning in a best-of-seven series.

The thought seemingly hadn’t crossed his mind.

He might be the only one inside Air Canada Centre who could claim that Monday after a lightning-fast, star-studded, back-and-forth 60 minutes between two of the top teams in hockey.

“Obviously, we’re a way better team than last year,” Leafs coach Mike Babcock concluded after a 4-3 victory. “We play better each night because we have to. Because the opponent plays way better against us.”

The Lightning have set the bar not just for the Atlantic Division, but the entire league to this point in the year. They harbour well-justified Stanley Cup aspirations. And they’ve seen the Leafs make up five points in the standings since Jan. 2, their last visit here.

It’s tightened things up in the most top-heavy division in the NHL, where Tampa, Boston and Toronto each face the prospect of having to go through one another just to reach the conference final.

No lead will be safe if the Leafs and Lightning end up colliding this spring.

There’s too much skill on either side. Too many gamebreakers. It would be appointment viewing for hockey fans even without a rooting interest.

We got a glimpse of the potential as William Nylander and Auston Matthews performed two-man breakouts and carved through the Lightning while staking Toronto to a 3-0 lead on Monday.

Then it all melted away inside six minutes, with Victor Hedman, Nikita Kucherov and Brayden Point skillfully working the puck around before Alex Killorn’s goal, and Kucherov burying another after a turnover, and Yannick Gourde tying it following some nice work from linemate Steven Stamkos.

Then, just as everything seemed to be collapsing on Toronto, James van Riemsdyk squeezed a rebound chance past Andrei Vasilevskiy off the rush. And Andersen closed the door for the final 15 minutes.

Never in doubt, right?

“We’ve come a long way that way, but we’re on a journey and we’ve got a long way to go,” said Babcock. “By no means are we a poised, veteran group who does it right. We still have these emotional swings in the game because we get off track. In saying all that, they’re the best team in hockey and I thought we [showed we] can skate and play with anybody.”

The result of one game in February can only tell you so much about the long-term fortunes of the teams involved. The Leafs will face a different challenge when they visit Amalie Arena on Feb. 26 and March 20 – with Lightning coach Jon Cooper taking control of the last line change, and some new faces potentially part of the matchup beyond the trade deadline.

Still, the Leafs have shown something here.

They are 8-1-0 since Babcock reimagined his lineup and built four forward lines that he’s comfortable rolling at even strength. It’s a

formidable group that poses challenges even for a team as loaded as the Lightning.

“I thought we skated really well and put pressure on their ‘D’ and didn’t give their good players too much time and space,” said Matthews.

“I think we’re skating,” added Andersen, who stopped 31 shots. “I think we’re playing our game and coming back [on defence]. Especially in the first period, we were coming back and pressuring them from behind when they had the puck coming into our end. Everyone knows when we play fast and skate a lot we move the puck quick.

“That’s our strength.”

It just happens to be the same strength as a Tampa team with two of the league’s top-three point-getters in Kucherov and Stamkos, and one of its best defencemen in Hedman. Then you throw in a class goaltender like Vasilevskiy and a breakthrough performer like Point and skill throughout the lineup, and it’s little wonder why 30 teams are currently looking up at the Lightning.

They have set the bar against which the Leafs are measuring themselves. The gap seems to be narrowing, slightly.

“I think we’ve taken a step forward and there’s another level we can get to,” said Nazem Kadri. “The last month, month and a half of the season, I think you really start to challenge yourself and really push yourself to want to be the best.

“So I think it’s important for us to get in that groove, and hit that rhythm heading into the playoffs.”

They are good enough to make it a series, should they draw the Lightning when they get there. It would really be something to watch.

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Sportsnet.ca / Maple Leafs' peculiar position puts playoff format in question

Luke Fox | February 12, 2018, 2:39 PM

TORONTO – The Toronto Maple Leafs are stuck.

With 25 games remaining on their schedule, an unfathomable Leafs surge would have to align with an unimaginable collapse by either the Tampa Bay Lightning or Boston Bruins for them to finish the season anywhere but third place in the Atlantic.

According to sportsclubstat.com, a site that crunches playoff odds, Toronto has a measly six per cent chance of climbing to the second seed. The Leafs’ odds of winning the division or falling out of playoff position all together are less than 0.01 per cent.

There is a 94 per cent chance the Leafs don’t go anywhere, and that number has been rising by the night – despite the fact Toronto has won seven of its past eight games.

The five worst Eastern Conference clubs all hail from the lopsided Atlantic, and that gap could widen further once teams like Ottawa, Buffalo, Detroit and Montreal weaken their rosters leading up to the Feb. 26 deadline.

Already, 18 points separate the third-place Leafs from the fourth-place Red Wings. In the Metro, just 11 points separate first-place Washington from the last-place Rangers.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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The Metropolitan race has become a dogfight, and the Atlantic a yawner. Can Boston catch Tampa for the top seed? That's essentially the only unanswered question with 30 per cent of the season still to play.

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Ahead of Monday's game in Toronto, a likely first- or second-round opponent, the Presidents' Trophy front-runners preached the importance of securing that top spot.

"The year we went to the Stanley Cup Final [in 2015], we played Game 7 against Detroit at home [in Round 1]. Who knows who's going to win that game if it's on the road?" Lightning coach Jon Cooper said.

"We got that one-nothing lead, and I know that home crowd carried us all the way in. You can't predict how series are going to go, but if you're giving me the option, you want home ice."

Lightning captain Steven Stamkos said he'd personally prefer a No. 1 vs. 8 conference-based format in the vein of the NBA. Washington coach Barry Trotz, whose Capitals are tired of butting heads with Pittsburgh so early, said the same thing a couple weeks ago.

Reading between the lines, we're guessing that would be Leafs coach Mike Babcock's inclination as well.

"But it would do me no good to let you know what my preference is right now anyway," Babcock said. "We have to get ready for what the league's rules are. I don't make those rules, but she's a grind all year to get the place you have, and then you'd like to play the right team. How's that?"

That's fair. The counter argument, and the reason the NHL switched to a division-based format, is to ramp up divisional hate. Surely, Gary Bettman was dreaming more of a Montreal-Toronto playoff series that's decades in the making, or a reignited Battle of Alberta, and not 25 games of thumb-twiddling until the playoffs start.

Sportsnet's newest podcast is a weekly deep dive into the biggest hockey news in the world. New episodes every Wednesday.

Even with their playoff fate essentially sealed, the Leafs themselves can't let complacency set in. They must believe they can make that six per cent chance of seizing home ice grow. Or else, what is there to play for?

"It's in the back of our minds. Home ice is an advantage in the playoffs, and we want to be looked at as one of those best teams," said Nazem Kadri, looking at three more dates versus Tampa and one more versus Boston. "We've got some work ahead of us, but we've got teams ahead of us that we're playing, so hopefully we'll make up some ground."

Toronto has the third-best record in the East. At this rate, it'll need to go through the teams with the second-best and (likely) best record in the conference just to reach the conference final. Boston is in a similar boat.

"I understand teams in those positions feeling they're playing higher seeds than they deserve," Cooper said.

After missing out on the post-season all together last spring, Tampa refuses to take anything for granted. Both Victor Hedman and Cooper pointed to the Los Angeles Kings' championship run as an eight seed in 2012 as an example of no easy match-ups.

"You can do the 1-16, you can do the 1-8, you can do division rivals," Cooper said. "Ultimately, to get the big prize, you still have to beat four teams."

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Sportsnet.ca / Drama builds as Leafs prepare for looming roster squeeze

Chris Johnston | February 12, 2018, 12:01 PM

TORONTO – This is as close to drama as you'll find at a morning skate in February.

We're in silly season now – with two weeks to go before the trade deadline – and the Toronto Maple Leafs have more bodies than available roster spots. They need to make a move, pronto, and no one with the organization is hinting at how this might shake out.

"I don't know what's going on there," head coach Mike Babcock said before Monday's game against the Tampa Bay Lightning, when asked if he expects Nikita Soshnikov to return from his AHL conditioning stint.

"That's the great thing about it: When they show up here I get to coach."

While general manager Lou Lamoriello later confirmed to a handful of reporters that Soshnikov will remain on injured reserve when recalled to the NHL team, that's not a long-term solution.

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Soshnikov just played five games with the AHL's Marlies – putting up five points, taking 17 shots on goal, and dressing for three games in three days this weekend – and can't be far away from a return to health.

Here's how Marlies coach Sheldon Keefe assessed his play on Sunday night: "There's times when I'm looking up and down the bench and trying to find guys who have some energy to them, trying to look past the guys that are clearly fatigued, and he didn't seem to be fazed at any point in time. So that was good to see. I felt like I could always call on him."

The 24-year-old winger will practise with the Leafs this week and should be activated sooner than later.

Before that can happen, Lamoriello needs to open a roster spot.

The easiest thing for him to do would be sending either winger Kasper Kapanen or defenceman Travis Dermott back to the Marlies since neither requires waivers, but both have been fixtures in a lineup that's won seven of eight games. The tougher option is trading or waiving one of the frequent scratches: Josh Leivo and Matt Martin.

Lamoriello is a master of never backing himself back up into a corner. He always seems to find more time. But the reality is the Leafs don't need 15 forwards and other teams have been calling about potential deals.

In the meantime, the drama builds. The players aren't immune from the chatter, but even they don't know what to expect.

"They don't tell me much, they just want me to play," said Kapanen. "I think I'm doing pretty well right now and doing everything that they're asking me to do. I feel confident. That's all I can do, right?"

"I can play and they can decide to do whatever they want to do with me. So we'll see."

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Sportsnet.ca / Few Oilers safe as trade deadline draws near

Mark Spector | February 13, 2018, 12:56 AM



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • Feb. 13, 2018

EDMONTON — We are 55 games in here in Edmonton, and it's over. The season is effectively over, and not long from now, more than one player's tenure in this city will come to an uncomfortable conclusion.

The Edmonton Oilers. Sellers at the deadline.

Stop me if you've heard this one before...

"We shouldn't be talking about this. We should be adding (players) for a playoff run, but we have to own where we are," said Mark Letestu, the fourth-line centre and pending unrestricted free agent who knows well what happens to 33-year-old UFAs on losing teams. "Guys are going to go and that's part of the business."

"There's no picking or choosing for me."

Edmonton lost its fourth straight Monday, 7-5 to the Florida Panthers, as the exalted roster of the 1984-85 Oilers — named the NHL's Greatest Team — watched from the pews. They used to play 7-5 games all the time. But that team would, you know, win most of the time.

"I'd say about four of them I'd like to have back," said Cam Talbot, who was porous in the Oilers' goal.

It's not about wins and losses anymore here. Northern Alberta is already in Next Year Country, which starts at the Feb. 26 trade deadline.

"The obligation of the team is to get the best deal possible," continued Letestu, who senses a trade. "I'll go to any team and be a pro about it. I'm in a situation where I'm easy to move. I'm an expiring asset and there may be something they can get for me."

An expiring asset.

Here in Edmonton, where the Oilers will miss the playoffs for the 11th season in the last 12 years, those three words can sum up a lot of different things. And people.

On Monday, Ryan Strome and Patrick Maroon started the game on Connor McDavid's flanks. That's where they put guys who are available in trade here in Edmonton, and Maroon obliged with a goal and an assist.

Few names are better traveled than Maroon's these days, with Deadline Day looming two weeks away. The big left-winger's name is on every trade board in the hockey world these days, right there on the first page.

"I've never been on the board before. I don't know what it means, how it works," Maroon, the soon-to-be 30-year-old said Monday. "It seems like these guys know everything before it goes down. As players, we don't know anything, then we turn on (the TV) and your name is splashed across the board.

"But it's an excuse for me. I can't let that affect me, or affect my play."

The sad truth of it all?

"I think it is affecting him," said his coach, Todd McLellan, before the game. "I don't think Patty has been as effective a player as he has been, in a large part probably due to (the trade rumours)."

After a 27-goal season last year, Maroon has been a shadow of that player in 2017-18. Sure, he got his 14th goal Monday. But garbage time has begun in Edmonton, largely because players like Maroon — who helped to carry the team last season — have not reached anywhere close to that level this winter.

Now, everyone will play for themselves, as always happens with losing teams. Everyone has personal stat lines, new contracts, and almost certainly for Maroon, new teams to worry about, now that the common goal of the playoffs is extinct.

"What he has to do now is park it when the game starts," McLellan said. "Once you get on the ice you should be able to produce. That's the fun part. That's the escape, and playing with some fire should be able to help everybody."

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For one night, at least, Maroon was productive Monday. But he admitted before the game, being a prime target with Deadline Day approaching does get in between his ears.

"Do I think about it? Yes, I go home and think about it. I'm not going to lie," he said. "We're all human, but I can't let that affect my play."

There was some talk at one point of a new contract between Maroon's agent Allain Roy and Oilers general manager Peter Chiarelli. But the Oilers are too slow on the wing, and with Milan Lucic's giant contract anchoring him to the Oilers roster, it is likely they'll divest themselves of Maroon in hopes of parlaying him into a speedier left-winger.

Like Maroon, Letestu stated plainly that his preference would be to re-sign in northern Alberta, where he was born and raised in a small town called Elk Point. But a disappointing season has shaped Chiarelli's needs, and Letestu likely isn't one of those anymore.

"We've talked about it with my family, but the way the season's gone it's been, well, short of a disaster. It's been a bad year," Letestu said. "I don't think this is a trend, though. I think it's a one-off and it would be enticing to be a part of this (long-term). I'd like to stay here."

There are many moves to be made before this team is competitive again. Outside of McDavid and Leon Draisaitl, no one is safe.

Nor should they be.

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1098118 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Leafs' dynamic duo of Matthews and Nylander victimizes Lightning

Luke Fox | February 13, 2018, 12:15 AM

TORONTO — The best-laid plans by the best defenceman on the NHL's best team — even those can be laid to waste by the Toronto Maple Leafs' searing-hot duo of Auston Matthews and William Nylander.

"We'll do our best to shut them down tonight," Victor Hedman vowed Monday, before his Tampa Bay Lightning came up just a tad short in what both Eastern Conference powers categorized as a measuring-stick game.

"[Matthews] is a dynamic goal-scorer. Very shifty. He's a big guy who's strong on the puck, an unbelievable talent. That first line with him and William is a dynamic duo, and they've got [Zach] Hyman who's a big body who goes into the corner to get the puck for them. Big first line that's done some damage."

Despite getting outshot and out-chanced by Tampa, it was the Leafs who out-damaged their opponents in a 4-3 thriller that could've gone either way.

"I thought it was anyone's game," Steven Stamkos lamented. "Two skilled teams that can put the puck in the net and, tonight, don't need a lot of chances to do it. They can play a game where one team makes a mistake and the other team pounces."

Super sophomores Matthews and Nylander — who rank one-two in Leafs scoring and game-winners — were the pouncers Stamkos was referring to.

Each registered three points in orchestrating Toronto's early 3-0 lead. Matthews won an offensive-zone draw back to Jake Gardiner and



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popped open long enough to get the puck back and set up Nylander for a one-kneed one-timer from the right circle that zinged by Andrei Vasilevskiy's short side in Period 1.

It was Matthews, again, winning a puck battle and springing Nylander for a partial breakaway from the defensive zone early in the second, and Nylander again beat the Vezina frontrunner on his blocker side. The pair then combined to assist on a Jake Gardiner strike. Tampa would crawl back but never seize the lead.

"When we break out fast and just play fast, we don't let them set up. We're able to get the puck and control it a bit more," Matthews said. "I thought we skated really well and put pressure on their D and didn't give their good players too much time and space."

On the whole, the Leafs' end bore the brunt of the action, but not with Matthews and Nylander on the ice. They ranked one-two in possession with 59% and 56% Corsi marks, respectively.

More impressive, this puck-hoarding is coming against the opposition's top six, as coach Mike Babcock isn't shying away from giving the Matthews line the hard assignments previously reserved for Nazem Kadri's shutdown line.

"We felt either group could do it, and it gave better flow off the bench," the coach explained.

The lone blemish on the Leafs' current 8-1 stretch — the best hockey they've played all season — came two Saturdays ago in Boston, where Matthews' line was essentially owned by Patrice Bergeron's unit. Don't think that didn't fuel him.

"He usually bounces right back," Kadri said.

Over the past nine outings — the days of the optimal forward lines — Matthews has 11 points. Nylander has 12.

"We've found a rhythm, and this is what we want to stick to in the future," Nylander said.

As efficient with his blade as he is with his words, the 21-year-old only needed two shots to score twice.

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That the Matty and Willy Show clicks so well and can flow both ways makes us wonder why the stars were ever separated, or if they will be again. Both forwards can set 'em up and knock 'em down — for all his sniping prowess, Nylander has 17 more assists than he does goals.

Does Babcock eventually tear them apart in an effort to mould Nylander into the centre he'll likely lose in Tyler Bozak?

That's a question for another season.

For now, Leafs fans can enjoy the highlights, retweet the gifs, and Tampa can watch more tape.

"They have a lot of speed, got some good breaks and made some nice plays. They have good speed under their feet and can score goals. We have to do a better job of eliminating that," said Hedman.

"Those two guys are two [of the tops] in this league, so next time we play them, we have to make sure we shut them down better."

On the surface, pouring in three points while knocking off the NHL's leaders with their defence at full health is no big deal to Matthews. But you have to imagine he relished this one after his frustration in Boston.

"It's just another win. We expect to win every night, doesn't matter who you play," Matthews said.

"When you play the best team in the league, you've got to bring your A-game."

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Sportsnet.ca / NHL Rumour Roundup: Rick Nash open to trade to Canadian contender

Sonny Sachdeva | February 12, 2018, 3:41 PM

Exactly two weeks away from the 2018 NHL trade deadline, the rumour mill is in full swing. While some clubs are content to float through the final months of the regular season with their spot among the league's elite well-established, others will look to use the trade deadline as the means by which they climb out of mediocrity and into that upper echelon.

With a fair few marquee names being bandied about, here are a few notable rumours to keep an eye on:

Rick Nash open to suiting up for a Canadian club

After a return to the 40-goal club just a few seasons ago, New York Rangers winger Rick Nash has seen his stock fall in recent seasons. Thirty-seven games missed over the past two years, coupled with a declining goals-per-game pace, has led to conversations of a potential deadline deal to ship Nash out of Manhattan.

That hypothetical became a little more tangible last week, when Nash was asked to submit a list of 18 teams to whom he would not accept a trade (effectively asking him to list the 12 NHL clubs for whom he would be open to suiting up).

According to Nash's comments to the New York Post on Sunday, one or more of the Toronto Maple Leafs, Winnipeg Jets or Calgary Flames could be among the teams permitted to make a bid for the former Maurice 'Rocket' Richard Trophy winner.

"I included the teams that I think have the best chance of winning the Stanley Cup and are also places I think would be good for my family," Nash told the Post's Larry Brooks on Sunday.

"And, yes, that does include teams in Canada. I'm not excluding that as a possibility."

There are only three Canadian teams who appear to be in the championship mix at the moment, as Toronto, Winnipeg, and Calgary are the only northern clubs currently holding playoff spots. Winnipeg leads that group with 73 points thus far, followed by Toronto's 71 and Calgary's 66.

The Jets also lead the above trio in cap space, currently sitting with roughly \$18.6 million (per CapFriendly). The Flames are next in line with \$7.7 million in cap space, while the Leafs have \$4.7 million due to their LTIR situation.

Though the veteran sniper is apparently open to returning home for the next phase of his career, it appears the Nashville Predators are the current front-runner in the Nash sweepstakes — undoubtedly checking off the winger's desire to don a contender's sweater post-deadline.

Bruins brass have eyes for Oilers winger Pat Maroon

The Boston Bruins have been dispensing with the opposition with routine ease, finding themselves in the win column 10 times over their past 12 tilts. Much of that success has come on the backs of the team's top line, as Patrice Bergeron, Brad Marchand and David Pasternak all reside above the 20-goal plateau, with the next highest scorer on the team sitting at just 12.

It seems general manager Don Sweeney may be looking to the Edmonton Oilers for some depth scoring help, with winger Pat Maroon the reported target.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • Feb. 13, 2018

That's according to NBC Sports' Joe Haggerty, who wrote the following on Sunday:

"The B's have been interested in Edmonton Oilers power forward Patrick Maroon, per multiple hockey sources, and it's clear at this point the Oil are going to be a seller leading up to the deadline with their power forward as one of the big trade pieces."

Maroon broke out with a career-best 27-goal performance last season, that career year gifted to him largely via a front-row seat to Connor McDavid's crash course in offensive dominance. The Oilers captain figured in on 23 of Maroon's 42 total points, en route to a 100-point campaign of his own.

The 29-year-old Maroon has managed to score at the same pace (0.52 points per game) this season, however, putting him on track for another 40-point-plus campaign by season's end. His 13 tallies would place him fourth on the Bruins roster in the goals department presently, while his \$2-million cap hit should be manageable given the number of entry-level deals dotted throughout Boston's roster.

Golden Knights reportedly shopping sniper James Neal

The Vegas Golden Knights' Cinderella season has thus far earned them a residency on the Western Conference throne, as the club's 76 points currently pace their conference and rank tied for second-best league-wide.

But the question that has long followed the inaugural heroes is what happens when the deadline hits. Vegas is rolling, no question, but do they consider themselves a legitimate Stanley Cup contender? If yes, then standing pat or adding pieces seems the obvious route, with the potential to carry out one of sports history's greatest stories on the table.

If no, then the focus turns to selling high on the club's record-breaking start to build up for the future.

According to former Tampa Bay Lightning general manager and player agent Brian Lawton, now an analyst for the NHL Network, Vegas appears to be leaning towards the latter option:

Though the Golden Knights have seen five skaters outscore James Neal in terms of total points this season, the former 40-goal scorer ranks second on the roster with 24 goals through his 55 tilts for the new franchise. That total already sits above the sum he posted over 70 games last season, as Neal has emerged as one of Vegas' offensive focal points.

Contenders looking to bolster their secondary scoring are sure to take a long look at Neal should general manager George McPhee open the door to bids, with the winger's string of 10 straight seasons of 20-plus goals a potent enough selling point to get the ball rolling.

Coyotes coveting improvements down the middle

Many a rumour has swirled around the Arizona Coyotes recently, as is often the case for clubs mired in the league's basement. With franchise cornerstones like defender Oliver Ekman-Larsson and winger Max Domi seeing their names wind up in headlines, the club's positional desires are coming into focus.

Per Coyotes beat writer Craig Morgan, Arizona's brass feels improvement down the middle is key to contend in the Western Conference in the future, with many among the Western crop led by elite pivots.

"To win in the league you obviously have to be strong down the middle," head coach Rick Tocchet told Morgan. "Whether it's playing a 200-foot game or driving the engine offensively."

Adding to their centre corps might not necessarily come via the trade market, but the club doesn't believe the 2018 NHL Draft offers much in the way of elite middle-men.

"I think you're always looking at centre," Coyotes director of amateur scouting Tim Bernhardt said. "It's always your priority when you're

drafting forwards. There's not a ton out there. This year in the draft, I think there's no centermen even rated in the top 10. It's a hard position to fill. They just don't grow on trees."

Derek Stepan currently ranks as the club's No. 1 option, with a slew of not-yet-dominant prospects in line behind him. There are no guarantees the Coyotes do swing a significant deal at this year's deadline, but if Ekman-Larsson or Domi do find themselves back in trade talks, the nature of the positional need Arizona is most keen on addressing seems clear.

Brassard, Plekanec on the market for centre-deprived teams

Expect calls to be exchanged between John Chayka, Pierre Dorion and Marc Bergevin. While the former manager seeks a boost at centre, the latter two managers appear to have key names to offer.

Ottawa Senators veteran Derick Brassard is in the mix, according to Sportsnet's Elliotte Friedman, as the Canadian club's focus continues to shift to the future amid an abysmal 2017-18 season.

"I think they are little concerned about what they would look like at centre if Brassard was gone, but I think they've got some real action on him," Friedman said during Hockey Night in Canada's Headlines segment on Saturday.

Brassard made his own thoughts on a potential move clear back in late December, telling The Columbus Dispatch: "I'll play hockey anywhere."

"I'll play anywhere," he said at the time. "I wouldn't refuse to go anywhere in the world or anywhere in the East."

Sportsnet's Nick Kypreos added Montreal Canadiens veteran Tomas Plekanec to the conversation during Saturday's broadcast, highlighting San Jose and Pittsburgh as potential options for Bergevin.

After returning to the bright lights of the playoffs last season, Toronto looks to be gearing up for a run once again, currently sitting third in the Atlantic Division and well above the Eastern Conference wild-card crew.

Caught in the balance between leaning on their dominant young stars and including their crop of reliable veterans, the biggest question mark on the roster leading up to the 2018 deadline was James van Riemsdyk, the five-time 20-goal scorer set for unrestricted free agency this summer.

The 28-year-old has helped his own cause this season, his 22 goals ranking second on the team after leading sniper Auston Matthews. That being the case, the Leafs are apparently telling teams van Riemsdyk isn't available for the taking, according to Sportsnet's Chris Johnston.

Though the former Philadelphia Flyer looks likely to remain in blue and white through February's deadline, it's not clear at this time how long he'll be with the club once the campaign comes to a close.

"At this point there are no real serious negotiations on that front," Johnston said of a potential van Riemsdyk extension. The winger's understanding of his own value heading into the off-season has played a role in that, according to Nick Kypreos.

"He knows what the market is for goal scorers," Kypreos said. "He knows what the price is out there for a guy like Max Pacioretty. He's going to be in a position to say, 'If you want me to bring the [average annual value of a deal] down, you're going to have to go deep in term.' I don't think the Leafs are prepared to do what Washington did for T.J. Oshie, who had to go eight years."

"I think it's inevitable that the Leafs may just be looking at renting their own player."

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Sportsnet.ca / Pacioretty, Plekanec may not return from road trip with Canadiens

Eric Engels February 12, 2018, 2:57 PM

BROSSARD, Que. — You have to wonder if either one — or both — of Max Pacioretty and Tomas Plekanec have played their last games at Bell Centre as members of the Montreal Canadiens.

The Canadiens are on their way to Denver, where they'll take on the Colorado Avalanche Wednesday. Then they're off to Arizona, Las Vegas and Philadelphia before returning to Montreal on Feb. 21, just five days ahead of the NHL's trade deadline. There's a chance both Pacioretty and Plekanec will still be members of the team by then, and there's a chance both will remain through to the end of the season — and perhaps even beyond.

But there's also a chance either one of them will be traded between now and Feb. 26. It's a distinct possibility both will move, considering the Canadiens are 10 points out of a playoff spot and in such desperate need to accumulate assets that can help them avoid being in a similar position at this time next year.

It's the end of an era if things end up playing out that way. We're talking about two players who were drafted and developed by the Canadiens, and two of the three longest-serving, active members of the team (goaltender Carey Price is the other).

Plekanec was selected 71st overall in 2001, spent three full seasons with Montreal's AHL affiliate, and has now appeared in 976 regular-season games with the Canadiens. It was just a week ago that the alternate captain breached 600 points in their uniform, becoming the 13th-highest scorer in team history.

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Pacioretty was chosen 22nd overall in 2007, and he has since become Montreal's most prominent goal scorer over the 617 regular-season games he's spent in a Canadiens uniform. He was named captain in September of 2015.

Both players have had their triumphs with the only NHL club they've ever played for. Plekanec registered seven seasons of 20 goals or more and six of 50 points or more. Pacioretty has scored at least 30 goals in each of the last five full NHL seasons (and he had 15 in the lockout-abridged 2012-13 season).

Both players have had their tribulations, too.

Plekanec's struggles in the 2008 playoffs, when he famously quipped he was, "playing like a little girl," after posting a career-high 29 goals and 69 points in the regular season, certainly come to mind. And Pacioretty's career will forever be marked by the events of March 8, 2011, when he was left concussed and two fractured vertebrae in his neck after Boston Bruins captain Zdeno Chara slammed him into a Bell Centre stanchion.

But both players came through those bouts of adversity with flying colours, and both of them have served the organization exceptionally well — on and off the ice — ever since. To think this could be the end of the road for either one of them in a Canadiens uniform is a sad reality to for them and their fans to face.

It's a tough one to consider for their teammates, too.

"It would be weird if Pleky left, for sure. I grew up watching him," said Canadiens forward Jonathan Drouin. "Just having him here as a veteran and as my teammate has been special. It's weird, in general, having a guy as a teammate one day and then next day he's gone. Same goes for Patch. It definitely would be strange if we go on a road trip and our captain doesn't come back from it.

"But anyone can get traded. I've gotten traded (from Tampa Bay to Montreal in June of 2017). If Wayne Gretzky was traded, anyone can get traded at some point. You try not to think about it, but it's just how life goes."

It can't be easy living with the uncertainty.

Both Plekanec and Pacioretty have admitted as much over the last number of weeks, with their names cycling through the rumour mill since November. Neither were available on Monday to discuss the reality that their days with the organization could be numbered, but you can imagine how distracting those thoughts might get for them as we edge ever closer to the deadline.

"From my end of it, we're all pros and I've said that before," said Canadiens coach Claude Julien. "Whether you're a coach or whether you're a player, there's times where that kind of comes along the way, so you have to be able to manage it in a way where you focus on what you can control. And as far as a player is concerned, he's got to focus on controlling his game and doing everything he can because the other part he has absolutely no control on. So I think it's to their benefit to really focus on that because a lot of times they stress out and then at times the trade deadline goes by and nothing happens, so they wasted a lot of time stressing out.

"So if it's going to happen, it's going to happen. Very seldom have I seen a player go from one place to another and say, 'Oh, this is the worst thing that's ever happened to me.' Everybody adapts to where they are and they find ways to make themselves happy and proud to be playing for that team."

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Sportsnet.ca / Maple Leafs' peculiar position puts playoff format in question

Luke Fox | @lukefoxjokebox February 12, 2018, 2:39 PM

TORONTO — The Toronto Maple Leafs are stuck.

With 25 games remaining on their schedule, an unfathomable Leafs surge would have to align with an unimaginable collapse by either the Tampa Bay Lightning or Boston Bruins for them to finish the season anywhere but third place in the Atlantic.

According to sportsclubstat.com, a site that crunches playoff odds, Toronto has a measly six per cent chance of climbing to the second seed. The Leafs' odds of winning the division or falling out of playoff position all together are less than 0.01 per cent.

There is a 94 per cent chance the Leafs don't go anywhere, and that number has been rising by the night — despite the fact Toronto has won seven of its past eight games.

The five worst Eastern Conference clubs all hail from the lopsided Atlantic, and that gap could widen further once teams like Ottawa, Buffalo, Detroit and Montreal weaken their rosters leading up to the Feb. 26 deadline.

Already, 18 points separate the third-place Leafs from the fourth-place Red Wings. In the Metro, just 11 points separate first-place Washington from the last-place Rangers.

The Metropolitan race has become a dogfight, and the Atlantic a yawner. Can Boston catch Tampa for the top seed? That's essentially the only unanswered question with 30 per cent of the season still to play.



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Ahead of Monday's game in Toronto, a likely first- or second-round opponent, the Presidents' Trophy front-runners preached the importance of securing that top spot.

"The year we went to the Stanley Cup Final [in 2015], we played Game 7 against Detroit at home [in Round 1]. Who knows who's going to win that game if it's on the road?" Lightning coach Jon Cooper said.

"We got that one-nothing lead, and I know that home crowd carried us all the way in. You can't predict how series are going to go, but if you're giving me the option, you want home ice."

Lightning captain Steven Stamkos said he'd personally prefer a No. 1 vs. 8 conference-based format in the vein of the NBA. Washington coach Barry Trotz, whose Capitals are tired of butting heads with Pittsburgh so early, said the same thing a couple weeks ago.

Reading between the lines, we're guessing that would be Leafs coach Mike Babcock's inclination as well.

"But it would do me no good to let you know what my preference is right now anyway," Babcock said. "We have to get ready for what the league's rules are. I don't make those rules, but she's a grind all year to get the place you have, and then you'd like to play the right team. How's that?"

That's fair. The counter argument, and the reason the NHL switched to a division-based format, is to ramp up divisional hate. Surely, Gary Bettman was dreaming more of a Montreal-Toronto playoff series that's decades in the making, or a reigned Battle of Alberta, and not 25 games of thumb-twiddling until the playoffs start.

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Even with their playoff fate essentially sealed, the Leafs themselves can't let complacency set in. They must believe they can make that six per cent chance of seizing home ice grow. Or else, what is there to play for?

"It's in the back of our minds. Home ice is an advantage in the playoffs, and we want to be looked at as one of those best teams," said Nazem Kadri, looking at three more dates versus Tampa and one more versus Boston. "We've got some work ahead of us, but we've got teams ahead of us that we're playing, so hopefully we'll make up some ground."

Toronto has the third-best record in the East. At this rate, it'll need to go through the teams with the second-best and (likely) best record in the conference just to reach the conference final. Boston is in a similar boat.

"I understand teams in those positions feeling they're playing higher seeds than they deserve," Cooper said.

After missing out on the post-season all together last spring, Tampa refuses to take anything for granted. Both Victor Hedman and Cooper pointed to the Los Angeles Kings' championship run as an eight seed in 2012 as an example of no easy match-ups.

"You can do the 1-16, you can do the 1-8, you can do division rivals," Cooper said. "Ultimately, to get the big prize, you still have to beat four teams."

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Sportsnet.ca / Down Goes Brown Weekend Wrap: Setting odds on NHL deadline deals

Sean McIndoe | February 12, 2018, 10:55 AM

Every Monday, Sean McIndoe looks back at weekend play in the NHL and the league's biggest storylines. You can follow him on Twitter.

Opening faceoff: Subban wins again

The weekend featured 26 games, many with critical playoff implications. But the one that everyone seems to be talking about took place on Saturday night, and featured a first-place team earning a win over an also-ran.

Call it the P.K. Subban effect.

Subban and the Predators were visiting Montreal for the second time since last summer's blockbuster trade. The day began with a visit to a children's hospital, and ended with the Predators claiming a 3-2 shootout win. Subban wasn't much of a factor in the game; he didn't even play all that well. But that hardly mattered. Saturday's meeting came just as the GM who traded him away prepares to pull the trigger on his next wave of wheeling and dealing, so this visit took on an extra sense of symbolism.

Subban remains, to put it mildly, a divisive figure in the hockey world these days, both in Montreal and beyond. Many fans love him; many don't.

And apparently, some of his one-time teammates have mixed views of their own. After the game, Brendan Gallagher couldn't seem to figure out why he was being asked about Subban.

Brendan Gallagher on former teammate P.K. Subban: "I don't know why we're talking about him, that's what he wants. You can let him talk about himself all night. I'm sure he'll give you guys enough lines."

Well, let's see if we can crack this mystery. When you take a big run at an opponent and end up injuring yourself instead, you might be asked about that guy. When you score a goal and then make a point of seeking out an opponent on their bench for some extra trash talk, you might be asked about that guy. If both of those things happen in the same game, you're definitely going to be asked about it, and feigning confusion about why anybody would bring it up isn't an especially good look.

For his part, Subban got in a relatively mild chirp of his own at Gallagher's expense. That was no surprise – the two clearly don't like each other, with a history that dates back to when Subban was still in Montreal. But no doubt, somebody somewhere is already filing that soundbite away as further evidence in the ongoing case against Subban. Even when he's playing at a Norris Trophy level, he's always been guilty of the cardinal hockey sin of not minding the spotlight, and occasionally even seeking it out. Never mind that a league full of dull, mumbling players should be desperate for exactly that sort of star – for whatever reason, it rubs some people the wrong way.

If Subban cares, he didn't show it on Saturday, just like he hasn't shown it since the trade that sent him to Nashville. Hockey fans love to debate winners and losers in blockbuster trades, and maybe you can argue that it's still too soon to know whether the Predators or Canadiens truly got the best of this one. But one thing seems clear: P.K. Subban won. He has a bigger spotlight than ever before. More importantly, he's been to one Stanley Cup final and may be headed for another while the Canadiens crash and burn without him. All the boos, trash talk and moronic tweets that come his way won't change that.

When you think of it that way, maybe you can understand why the Brendan Gallaghers of the world would rather talk about just about anything else. They don't have to like Subban, and plenty of people still don't. But that won't change the fact that he's winning and they're not.

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Road to the Cup

The five teams that look like they're headed towards Stanley Cup-favourite status.



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5. Pittsburgh Penguins (31-22-4, +5 true goals differential*): The record is still pedestrian, and they remain outside the top 10 in the overall standings. But they've been looking scary for the last month, and sure seem like a team that's waking up just in time to make a deep run.

4. Vegas Golden Knights (36-15-4, +35): They're no longer dominating, winning seven of their last 14. But 10 of those came on the road and the schedule served up some tough opponents; during the most challenging section of their season, the Knights bent but didn't break.

3. Boston Bruins (34-12-8, +48): By following Saturday's regulation loss to the Sabres with yesterday's win over the Devils, the Bruins still haven't gone two straight without at least a point since mid-November.

2. Nashville Predators (33-12-9, +29): Part of what makes the Predators so scary these days: GM David Poile seems like he's in on just about all of the big names.

1. Tampa Bay Lightning (38-14-3, +53): The team raised Vincent Lecavalier's number to the rafters before Saturday night's win over the Kings.

(*Goals scored minus goals allowed, without counting shootouts like the NHL does for some reason.)

So we're two-thirds of the way through the season, and we're well past the point where we can stop pretending that every team is still in the playoff race. Nobody's been mathematically eliminated yet, but that's a formality. When you're done, you're done, and there's no reason for the rest of us to pretend otherwise.

Arizona and Buffalo have been there since late October. The Canucks and Senators eventually joined them. The Oilers are basically there, too — as stunning as that is — after a California road trip where they probably needed five or six points and came away with none. And we can go ahead and add the Red Wings and Habs to the list, too.

And then there's... uh... well...

We can all agree that the Blackhawks are done, right?

On the surface, that shouldn't be a controversial statement. They came into the weekend with four straight losses and facing what seemed like an absolute must-win against the Wild, owners of the West's final wildcard spot. They coughed that one up to the tune of a 3-0 loss, leaving them 10 points back of a playoff spot with four teams to pass.

Ten points back in November is basically insurmountable. In February? You're done. It's not even a question.

The Hockey PDOcast with Dimitri Filipovic provides entertaining and thoughtful dialogue about the game of hockey with an analytical edge. Not as nerdy as it sounds.

Except... well, it's the Blackhawks. It's one thing to write off the Canucks or Red Wings or even the Oilers, but it feels like Chicago should get some special consideration here. Three Stanley Cups should buy you some benefit of the doubt, no?

Stan Bowman seems to think so. He says he's not ready to sell, and that he's not giving up the team's aging and expensive core. Maybe he means it. Or maybe he's just saying the only thing that he can; waving a white flag never goes over all that well, especially when you've got a room full of champions and a fan base that's used to being the bully on the block. Bowman has tried to thread the needle of rebuilding on the fly, getting younger while still contending. It hasn't worked.

Maybe that's because the plan was flawed from the start. Or maybe it's simply because the team lost its starting goaltender midway through the season, and not many teams can recover from that. Corey Crawford's last full game came on Dec. 21, and when it ended Chicago was tied for the final Western playoff spot. Two nights later, Crawford was hurt in a loss to the Devils; he hasn't played since, and the Hawks have plummeted ten points without him. Crawford seems ready to return, but now it's too late.

Probably.

Maybe Crawford's return changes everything, and the Blackhawks can catch fire. Maybe Brandon Saad remembers how to score, Jonathan Toews looks like a \$10.5-million player again, and Brent Seabrook gets back to at least something like he once was. Maybe Bowman pulls off a few deals for reinforcements. Maybe the Blackhawks rip off seven or eight straight wins to claw back within range.

That's a lot of maybes. Too many, if we're being honest. If it were any other team, we wouldn't bother with the charade of there being any suspense left in a failed season. Because it's the Blackhawks, it feels hard to admit what the standings are plainly telling us: This team is done. Now the question is what comes next.

Road to the lottery

The five teams that look like they're headed towards watching Rasmus Dahlin highlights and playing with draft-lottery simulations.

5. Edmonton Oilers (23-27-4, -26): Sometimes a single image really does tell the story...

4. Vancouver Canucks (22-28-6, -30): Two career shutouts? Now Jacob Markstrom is just running up the score.

3. Ottawa Senators (19-26-9, -41): It was yet another weekend of turmoil in Ottawa, with team president and CEO Tom Anselmi making an abrupt exit. Meanwhile, GM Pierre Dorion gets a three-year extension.

2. Buffalo Sabres (16-30-10, -52): They surprised the Bruins, but lost Jack Eichel for at least a month to a high-ankle sprain.

1. Arizona Coyotes (13-32-9, -60): They don't have many veterans to shop at the deadline, but according to Elliott Friedman they might be listening on 22-year-old forward Max Domi.

Speaking of the trade deadline, we're now two weeks away and so far it's been quiet. Too quiet. With apologies to the Viktor Loovs and Zach Leslies of the world, we haven't had a meaningful trade since the Blackhawks and Coyotes hooked up on Anthony Duclair on Jan. 10. That's an unusually silent market, so you can bet that there will be plenty of deals to come over the next 14 days.

So let's do that. Bet, I mean. Let's put on our bookie hats and see what kind of deadline odds we can come up with.

We tried this last year and people seemed to like it, so we'll break it out again. Unless otherwise noted, all odds below refer to total trades made between now and the deadline.

Most trades by a Canadian team

Canadiens: 2-1

Senators: 5-1

Oilers: 6-1

Canucks: 7-1

Flames: 9-1

Maple Leafs: 12-1

Jets: 15-1

The Habs seem like the easy call here, since they've all but conceded that they need to start over and Marc Bergevin may be dealing to save his job. The Senators and Oilers also have work to do; the Canucks do, too, but when you hear Jim Benning saying stuff like "If teams call us on our players, we'll listen to what they have to offer", you wonder if they realize that. The Flames are a decent dark horse, while the Leafs don't sound like they'll be all that busy, and making a bunch of deals just hasn't been Kevin Cheveldayoff's style.

Fantasy Hockey Pool



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Most trades by an American team

Rangers: 7–2

Red Wings: 7–1

Penguins: 9–1

Coyotes: 10–1

Islanders: 10–1

Sabres: 11–1

Predators: 12–1

Lightning: 14–1

Golden Knights: 15–1

The field: 9–1

Apparently the Eastern Conference might be where the action is. The Penguins were busy last year, while the Knights are a total wild card. You'd figure contenders like the Predators and Lightning would be the best bet to make big trades, and the rebuilding teams will be active as always. But in terms of sheer volume, the Rangers sure look like a team that's ready to burn it all down.

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.

Over/under on total trades

Between now and the day before the deadline: 22.5

Deadline day itself: 21.5

Last year, the dam broke on Feb. 15 with the Tom Gilbert trade; from there, we got 21 trades in the days before the deadline and then 20 more on deadline day itself. We'll bump that number up slightly because the market's been unusually quiet for the last month or so; we're guessing that means GMs have extra work left to do, although if it's actually a sign of a weaker-than-expected market then the unders would be the play here.

Over/under on trades involving...

A first-round pick: 2.5

A goaltender who has played in the NHL this year: 1.5

Six or more players/picks: 2.5

A former all-star: 5.5

Either 28 or 29 teams still own their 2018 first-round choice (with the Senators' pick still up in the air), and the draft isn't considered all that strong, so we could see a few firsts moved. The goalie market seems quiet this year compared to last, when guys like Ben Bishop were in play, although the Mike Smith injury could change that. And those complex deals are more common than you might think, especially when teams start tossing in late-round picks to balance out the ledger.

As for that all-star number, it probably feels high. But remember that it applies to guys like Rick Nash, Mike Green, Max Pacioretty, Evander Kane and even Thomas Vanek, plus a few more. Maybe it's wishful thinking, but we could see more than a few big names on the move.

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Quick shifts: Ten more notable moments from around the league

- Mike Smith had to be helped off the ice at the end of last night's win over the Islanders. At this point we don't know how serious it might be, although he was reportedly seen walking without assistance after the game.

- The Stars' saw their five-game win streak snapped at the hands of the Canucks. But they're making a push to break up that three-way party on top of the Central, sitting just one point back of the Blues heading into this week's action.

- Save of the weekend, and quite possible of the year: Andrei Vasilevski goes behind the back.

- It wasn't the weekend's best game, but Friday's Islanders/Red Wings matchup sure was fun. It featured a frantic Isles comeback, a late (and disputed) Detroit goal to tie it up, and a Brock Nelson OT winner to give New York a 7-6 win. It also featured another five-point night from Mathew Barzal, making him the first rookie in 100 years to have three.

- We had yet another five-point night on Saturday, this one from Toronto's Mitch Marner. That helped the Maple Leafs cruise to a 6-3 win over the Senators in the last Battle of Ontario matchup of the season.

- The Leafs also unveiled the uniforms that they'll wear for next month's outdoor game that you'd already forgotten was happening. And they're, uh, white. Very, very white.

- Dustin Brown will serve a one-game suspension for this knee-on-knee hit on Mikhail Sergachev.

- Make it four straight for the Flyers, who aren't just back in the Metro playoff picture but have actually built up a bit of a cushion. Not bad for a team that lost 10 straight earlier in the year.

- Two teams that are on the outside of the Metro race: the Islanders and Blue Jackets, who are both one point back of the wild card. They face each other tomorrow in a game that suddenly feels huge.

- Finally, this feature on three of the voices who've called the Canucks over the years is a great watch for Vancouver fans and history buffs:

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Sportsnet.ca / Drama builds as Leafs prepare for looming roster squeeze

Chris Johnston | February 12, 2018, 12:01 PM

TORONTO – This is as close to drama as you'll find at a morning skate in February.

We're in silly season now – with two weeks to go before the trade deadline – and the Toronto Maple Leafs have more bodies than available roster spots. They need to make a move, pronto, and no one with the organization is hinting at how this might shake out.

"I don't know what's going on there," head coach Mike Babcock said before Monday's game against the Tampa Bay Lightning, when asked if he expects Nikita Soshnikov to return from his AHL conditioning stint.

"That's the great thing about it: When they show up here I get to coach."

While general manager Lou Lamoriello later confirmed to a handful of reporters that Soshnikov will remain on injured reserve when recalled to the NHL team, that's not a long-term solution.

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NEWS CLIPPINGS • Feb. 13, 2018

Soshnikov just played five games with the AHL's Marlies – putting up five points, taking 17 shots on goal, and dressing for three games in three days this weekend – and can't be far away from a return to health.

Here's how Marlies coach Sheldon Keefe assessed his play on Sunday night: "There's times when I'm looking up and down the bench and trying to find guys who have some energy to them, trying to look past the guys that are clearly fatigued, and he didn't seem to be fazed at any point in time. So that was good to see. I felt like I could always call on him."

The 24-year-old winger will practise with the Leafs this week and should be activated sooner than later.

Before that can happen, Lamoriello needs to open a roster spot.

The easiest thing for him to do would be sending either winger Kasper Kapanen or defenceman Travis Dermott back to the Marlies since neither requires waivers, but both have been fixtures in a lineup that's won seven of eight games. The tougher option is trading or waiving one of the frequent scratches: Josh Leivo and Matt Martin.

Lamoriello is a master of never backing himself back up into a corner. He always seems to find more time. But the reality is the Leafs don't need 15 forwards and other teams have been calling about potential deals.

In the meantime, the drama builds. The players aren't immune from the chatter, but even they don't know what to expect.

"They don't tell me much, they just want me to play," said Kapanen. "I think I'm doing pretty well right now and doing everything that they're asking me to do. I feel confident. That's all I can do, right?"

"I can play and they can decide to do whatever they want to do with me. So we'll see."

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TSN.CA / Maple Leafs stay hot, beat first-place Lightning for 8th win in 9

Kristen Shilton

TORONTO – For better or worse, the Toronto Maple Leafs were going to make a statement on Monday against the league-leading Tampa Bay Lightning. A victory would go a long way in affirming the Leafs as true contenders; a loss would suggest they can't yet compete with the NHL's elite.

In the end, Toronto finished somewhere in the middle. A strong first half to the game earned the Leafs a commanding 3-0 lead, but that had evaporated by the opening minutes of the third period when they allowed two goals in 20 seconds. Toronto kept its composure, though, and James van Riemsdyk scored the game-winner to lift the Leafs over Tampa Bay 4-3.

"We're on a journey and we have a long way to go. By no means are we a poised, veteran group that does it right," said Leafs head coach Mike Babcock. "We still have these emotional swings in the game because we get off track. But they're the best team in hockey and we [showed we] can skate and play with anybody."

It was the Leafs' eighth win in their last nine games, since Babcock altered his lines and inserted Kasper Kapanen in as a regular and empowered more of Toronto's speed and skill to shine. Those factors ultimately propelled the Leafs to success against a powerful Tampa Bay team that has been atop the NHL standings since the outset of the season.

"I think we're skating and playing our game, especially in the third period when we were coming back pressuring them from behind when they had the puck in our end," said Frederik Andersen.

"I think everyone knows when we play fast and skate a lot and move the puck quick, that's our strengths. We bounced back right after they scored the quick goals, we re-set and started playing again. That was a big win."

For the second straight game, it was the Leafs' youngest players leading the charge toward victory. In Saturday's 6-3 win over the Ottawa Senators, sophomore Mitch Marner produced the franchise's first five-point game since Tomas Kaberle accomplished the feat on Oct. 26, 2009. On Monday, fellow second-year forwards William Nylander and Auston Matthews were the most dominant players on the ice for either team, combining for six points while matched up against the Lightning's top line centred by Steven Stamkos.

Nylander scored twice on Andrei Vasilevskiy, the league's top goaltender, with Matthews assisting both times. The play that led to Nylander's first goal was facilitated by a clean faceoff win by Matthews against Stamkos and his superb pass to the top of the circle where Nylander let his one-timer fly. Nylander's second score was off a breakaway generated by Matthews feathering a perfect dish through the neutral zone. Three of Nylander's last four goals have now come off breakaway chances.

"I think it's a testament to that backcheck and putting pressure on them from behind," said Matthews of the chances his unit is creating. "All in all, I thought we played pretty well. We skated pretty well, put pressure on their D, didn't give their players too much time and space."

Toronto has been perched in the Atlantic Division's third slot for most of the season, with Tampa and the Boston Bruins holding the spots ahead of them. The Leafs have two more meetings with the Lightning before the regular season is done, and could well see them come playoff time as well. If that's the case, Toronto will have plenty to learn from Monday's win.

The Leafs were outworked, possession-wise, in the second and third period by more than 55 per cent, with Matthews pacing all skaters at 57 per cent on the night. The Leafs were also woefully outshot 34-23, putting only six shots on Vasilevskiy in the third. Toronto's shot total was the lowest the team has produced since a 6-3 loss to the Vegas Golden Knights on Dec. 31. And, there was the blown multi-goal lead, a nagging bad habit that vastly predates this season.

That Toronto managed to take two points from the best team in the NHL despite those glaring deficiencies is an encouraging sign of their growing maturity. As for whether Monday was a true measuring stick for Toronto, Matthews re-confirmed the Leafs' belief they can beat any team at any time; but there's still plenty of work to do.

"We get carried away as soon as we score a few goals and we want to get more and then we start getting on the wrong side of the puck and the next thing you know we're not as good," said Babcock. "So it's a real big win for our team tonight against a real good team. We had a lot of real good contributors; now we have to just figure out how to play and be poised and do it for 60 each and every night."

TAKEAWAYS

Stating his case

Speaking of statements, Andersen had one of his own to make against a Lightning team backstopped by the league's leading Vezina Trophy contender in Vasilevskiy. Andersen has been terrific for the Leafs over their last 10 contests, and was on top of his game again from the puck drop against Tampa Bay. The league's top team didn't go easy on him, however, creating some solid first-period chances on which Andersen had to be sharp. Late in the first, Tyler Johnson took off on a short-handed breakaway, but was stoned by a great save from Andersen. After turning aside nine shots in the opening period, Andersen's workload increased exponentially in the second. Suddenly under siege, Andersen was making saves from every angle, including a couple that went directly



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off his mask, as the Lightning refused to relent. The Leafs did a good job boxing out much of the game's first half, allowing Andersen to track shots, but by the end of the second the Leafs were hemmed in their own zone and letting Tampa Bay get traffic in front of Andersen. That's when Alex Killorn finally broke through on a second-chance opportunity helped by Toronto's defensive zone turnovers. Another giveaway by the Leafs set up Nikita Kucherov's goal less than a minute into the third, and the Lightning kept the pressure on their next shift to set up a soft goal from Yannick Gourde to tie the game 3-3. Andersen was able to shake off the bad score and shut the door on Tampa Bay the rest of the way, even as the Lightning controlled the possession for the majority of the third period. Andersen may not have moved past Vasilevskiy in the Vezina conversation, but he proved he can go toe-to-toe in a goalie duel. Andersen finished with 31 saves and a .912 save percentage.

Second-period struggles

It's become a recurring theme for the Leafs in the last 10 days – a solid start in the first period devolves into a middling second period. The issue goes beyond just getting outscored, which the Leafs have been, 8-6, in that frame over their previous five contests. More concerning in the noticeable dip in their overall play once that period hits. Specifically against the Lightning, Toronto was carrying play all the way through Nylander's goal early in the second, and then a similar switch seemed to flip. The Leafs were suddenly chasing Tampa Bay the rest of the frame, committing lazy turnovers and lacking the same jump and energy they'd boasted in the game's first 25 minutes. The goal given up to Killorn and their lacklustre performance in the second depleted the Leafs of any momentum the first half of their game had offered, and they came out just as flat in the third as they'd left the second. On the season, Toronto has allowed the ninth-most goals in the league in the second period (55). Part of the problem could be the Leafs' seeming inability to keep pressing even when they score first, as they have in seven of their last nine games. But after the issue nearly cost them an important win over Tampa Bay, the Leafs have no cause to put off addressing the underlying cause, whatever it is.

Power to the penalty kill

Roman Polak was re-inserted into the lineup for Connor Carrick on Monday, in part because Tampa Bay boasts the second-best power play in the league (24.1 per cent) and Polak has continued to be an effective penalty killer for the Leafs all season. Andersen was Toronto's best killer though against a power play that produced five shots on goal on two opportunities. Monday was the third straight game in which the Leafs haven't ceded a power play goal (6-for-6). It was an interesting choice by Babcock to put Polak in, given Carrick had played well against Ottawa on Saturday and the Lightning are a fast team that lends itself well to exploiting a player like Polak. The Leafs' third pairing of Travis Dermott and Polak spent the majority of the game running around the defensive zone at 41 per cent possession. But Polak was tied for the team lead in short-handed minutes at 2:42, proving where much of his value to the Leafs resides.

Next game

Toronto caps off its five-game homestand against the Columbus Blue Jackets on Wednesday.

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TSN.CA / Leafs see Lightning matchup as 'measuring stick' game

Mark Masters

TSN Toronto reporter Mark Masters checks in daily with news and notes from Maple Leafs practices and game-day skates. The Leafs and Tampa Bay Lightning held skates at the Air Canada Centre on Monday morning.

Nazem Kadri calls tonight's showdown with the league-leading Lightning a "measuring stick" game for the Maple Leafs. It's a phrase the Tampa Bay players have become accustomed to hearing.

"We see that comment thrown around a lot when teams are playing us," said captain Steven Stamkos. "We want to get our game back on track here and playing against a very good team who plays extremely well at home, that's a good test for us, so you can spin it however you want."

The Leafs have won seven of eight and eight of their last 10.

"We're catching the Leafs when they're playing pretty strong hockey right now," said Tampa Bay coach Jon Cooper. "If we're going to go anywhere in this league these are the teams we need to go through so they can say, 'It's a measuring stick,' but I think it probably works both ways."

The Leafs, though, would certainly appear to have more to prove tonight. Dating back to late November, Toronto is just 2-4-1 in games against the teams currently ranked in the top eight in the NHL. That includes a 2-0 loss to Tampa Bay on Jan. 2 at the Air Canada Centre. Toronto only has one regulation win against a top team since late November – against Pittsburgh on Dec. 9 when the Penguins outshot the Leafs 36-25.

"We've taken a step forward and there's another level we can get to," said Kadri when asked about the latest hot stretch. "The last month, month and a half of the season, I think you really start to challenge yourself and really push yourself to want to be the best. So it's important to get into that groove."

Mitch Marner is eager to keep his personal momentum going after he exploded for five points against the Senators on Saturday. That effort earned him a shout out on Twitter from former Leafs captain Doug Gilmour.

5 Point-Game for this guy ☐ And a win for the @MapleLeafs ☐
pic.twitter.com/CxAffja190

— Doug Gilmour (@DougGilmour93) February 11, 2018

"We've been talking," said Marner. "He's always been a guy who is good to talk to. He's been a great mentor to me."

What's the biggest thing he's learned from the Hall of Famer?

"Just his mentality," Marner said. "He had the mentality that no matter what happened he was going to go out and work his best. He was a leader everywhere he went and that's the thing I definitely admire most about him."

Early in the year, Gilmour urged Marner to relax amid a tough stretch when he wasn't producing as much as he would've liked.

"He's been through a lot," said Marner. "He can help with a lot of things so it's good to have that."

Doug Gilmour tweeted out a picture with Mitch Marner congratulating him on his five-point night against the Senators. The young Leafs forward says the two talk once in a while and he's been a 'great mentor' for him.

Marner has been trying to both improve his shot and use it more this season, which is something Cooper is well aware of. The coach became a big fan of Marner's while working with him at last spring's World Championship.

"He's a little hot right now," Cooper said with a smile. "Fluttering that puck into the net. You can tell him I said that too [laughs]. No, no!"

Marner has 10 points in eight games since joining a line with Kadri and Patrick Marleau on Jan. 24 in Chicago. Kadri also has 10 points in that stretch.

"Mitch is a special player and he can do things that other guys in this league can't," Cooper said once the laughing subsided. "He can make



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plays. And with Kadri, sometimes he gets labelled as that checker and that guy who's always going against the top players, but the kid's got some skill. He can put the puck in the net too, so when you start putting these guys together it adds a different dynamic."

Having coached Mitch Marner at last year's World Hockey Championship, Jon Cooper says the Leafs forward has been hot as of late and jokes that he's been 'fluttering' the puck into net.

Vezina Trophy frontrunner Andrei Vasilevskiy made a season-high 44 saves in Tampa Bay's win against the Los Angeles Kings on Saturday night. Among them was an incredible behind-the-back grab to deny Anze Kopitar.

"That save was pretty incredible," said Auston Matthews. "He's big and most the time you're not going to beat him off just one shot."

That size – 6-foot-3, 207 pounds – is only part of what makes the Russian so intimidating to face.

"He's huge so he takes up a lot of space and he's very athletic too, which is unusual for a big goaltender," said Kadri. "Usually they don't move as well laterally so he has it all."

That blend of a huge frame and quick reflexes has apparently earned Vasilevskiy the nickname 'The Big Cat' among some of his teammates.

"That floats around the room a little bit," Ryan Callahan confirmed with a grin. "We have a [pet] calendar and he's surrounded by cats, so I think he's a fan of them."

Stamkos is most impressed with just how hard the 23-year-old works and said based on that dedication and Vasilevskiy's pure talent it's no surprise he's been able to reach this level. The only surprise, perhaps, is it happened so fast.

"You forget how young he is sometimes with how much poise he has in the net," Stamkos said. "He's our hardest-working guy and he's been our best player. We just don't want to rely on him as much as we have, especially of late."

Andrei Vasilevskiy is a front-runner for the Vezina this season and the 'Big Cat' added to his repertoire with an incredible behind-the-back save against the Kings on Saturday.

The Lightning have the league's leading scorer in Nikita Kucherov, who is heating up again after enduring an 11-game goalless drought.

"He's unbelievable," said Kadri, who often draws the toughest defensive assignment for the Leafs. "He's probably one of the toughest to defend just because his skillset is so high. He's very elusive when he has the puck and even without the puck to get in spots. He has a great shot and it doesn't take much for him to get it off."

Kucherov has scored in consecutive games since Cooper juggled his lines last Thursday splitting him up from Stamkos.

The Russian's creativity and courage has earned him big-time respect in the Leafs room. Kadri is still in awe over the excuse-me move Kucherov pulled in the shootout last year and then executed again in the recent All-Star Game.

"I can't believe he tried it in an actual game," Kadri said. "You don't have to be as brave to do it in an All-Star Game, but in a real game [shakes head], I think he's certainly got that skillset."

Matthews had a front-row seat to the repeat performance at this year's All-Star Game.

"It's a pretty crazy move," said the 20-year-old centre. "He put on a show at the All-Star Game. I had never seen that move before he did it, pretty special. You have to be pretty talented to pull that off."

After Nikita Kucherov tried out his patented deke in a game, Nazem Kadri and Auston Matthews shared their thoughts on the 'brave' move.

The annual father's trip starts tonight for the Lightning with the next stop in Buffalo. For Chris Stamkos, who raised his son in Markham, Ont., these aren't exactly the most exotic locations.

"My dad would probably have liked to go to a couple different rinks other than Toronto and Buffalo," Stamkos said to laughs this morning. "It's more for the experience and to be around the dads. It shouldn't matter what city you're in. But it was pretty funny when the schedule came out and the two rinks that he's probably been to the most in his life watching me play are the ones on this trip."

Despite the familiar environment, there's still a chance for some special moments. The dads joined their boys on the ice after the morning skate for a group picture and then afterwards Stamkos senior actually grabbed a stick and set up his son for a couple of his patented one-timers.

"Well, he had the long stick at the start and he flubbed one," said a smiling Stamkos referring to the Victor Hedman twig that his dad initially borrowed. "But once he got the shorter stick it wasn't bad."

The Lightning will begin their 'dad's trip' tonight in Toronto and Steven Stamkos spoke about what it means to have his father tag along and also assessed his dad's passing skills as the elder Stamkos joined his son on the ice for some warmup shots.

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TSN.CA / Maple Leafs are on Nash's 12-team trade list

Frank Seravalli

The Toronto Maple Leafs may be a long shot to land Rick Nash, but they are one of the 12 teams on the New York Rangers winger's approved trade list, TSN confirmed on Monday.

Nash, perhaps now the most sought-after player ahead of the Feb. 26 trade deadline with the Rangers' imminent sell-off, was asked by the club to submit his trade list at the beginning of the month. He can block a trade to any of the 18 teams not on his list, according to the modified no-trade clause in his contract.

"I included the teams that I think have the best chance of winning the Stanley Cup and are also places I think would be good for my family," Nash told the New York Post over the weekend. "And, yes, that does include teams in Canada. I'm not excluding that as a possibility."

It remains unclear which other Canadian teams, if any, are on Nash's list. The Nashville Predators and Dallas Stars are considered to be the front-runners for Nash's services and both are believed to be on his approved list.

One reason Nash may not be a fit for Toronto is the Leafs already have three "rental" players of their own in James van Riemsdyk, Tyler Bozak and Leo Komarov – all of whom do not have a contract for next season.

But Nash's ties to Maple Leafs brass are why people continue to connect the dots to Toronto. Nash helped Team Canada to two Olympic gold medals in Vancouver and Sochi under the guidance of head coach Mike Babcock. He also starred for the OHL's London Knights for two seasons under then assistant coach and co-owner Mark Hunter, who is now the Leafs' assistant GM. There is undoubtedly plenty of respect for Nash there.

Nash, 33, is in the final season of an eight-year, \$62.4 million deal that he signed with the Columbus Blue Jackets. The Brampton, Ont., native has 17 goals – including 14 at even strength – and 27 points in 56 games for the Rangers this season.



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Winnipeg, Boston, San Jose and Tampa Bay have all reportedly expressed interest. Teams not believed to be on Nash's list have also reportedly contacted his agent, Joe Resnick of Top Shelf Sports Management Inc., to inquire about the possibility of landing him.

"I'm not going to include 30 teams, but I would take a look if that came up," Nash told the Post. "I was asked to pick a certain number of teams, but I don't want to say anything is off limits."

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TSN.CA / Rielly reveals elbow injury kept him out of lineup

Kristen Shilton

TORONTO – Right in the middle of a career-best season with the Maple Leafs, Morgan Rielly took a fall that introduced him to a whole new world of pain.

Toronto's top-pairing defenceman has endured his fair share of lower-body injuries in the form of ankle sprains and an ACL tear over the years. But when Rielly awkwardly tumbled to the ice late in the second period against Philadelphia on Jan. 18, he sustained the first upper-body injury that's ever sidelined him for an extended period in the NHL.

"I'm not sure what I can say, but it was my left elbow. It's just taken some time to heal up," Rielly said after morning skate on Monday, revealing the injury in full for the first time. "It was my left arm that got tangled up. I mean, even my mom thought it was my right arm because I landed on it, but the left arm was tangled up. Not intentionally by [Jakub Voracek], but it was just the way the play unfolded."

Before that night, Rielly was playing the best hockey of his five-season NHL career. He had amassed 31 points in 46 games to lead all Leafs' blueliners, and was thriving under the tutelage of veteran defence partner Ron Hainsey. With only seconds left in the middle frame when the injury happened, Rielly decided to return for the third against the Flyers, completing nine shifts.

"I knew something was wrong when I came back and tried to play," he recalled. "After that, I went out for morning skate in Ottawa [two days later] and I just knew right away. You have to do the necessary things to make it to so you can play and get back right away."

With four games under his belt since stepping back into the lineup on Feb. 3 against Boston, Rielly is the first to admit he isn't all the way back just yet. Against the Ottawa Senators on Saturday, Rielly tallied his first point in three games, setting a new career-high in assists with 28 over just 51 games. The light at the end of the injury tunnel is burning bright, but Rielly discovered getting there is different when you're not familiar with the recovery process.

"It's not so much [your] wind as the rhythm of the game, and this is a learning curve for me a little bit for an upper-body injury," he said. "It's just hard to get your hands back. So it's not wind. It's not brain. It's more just the rhythm and the pace of the game. It takes a little time, but I've felt better and better and I'd expect myself to have more success moving forward and get back into the rhythm."

With the league-leading Tampa Bay Lightning visiting the Leafs on Monday night, there's no time like the present for Rielly to round back into form. The 23-year-old admitted he wasn't feeling totally 100 per cent when got back in, and the adjustment period takes as long as it takes to plow through.

"He's still not quite where he was, so we've got to get him where he was," said Mike Babcock. "We need him to be elite for us, so just getting your legs back and skating the way you can and getting your confidence back. It's just a process of playing."

Behind the scenes, Rielly was using all manner of tactics to lose as little of his edge as possible, starting with his treatment regime. The Leafs' reliance on a sport science-based medical staff has encouraged all kinds of colourful commentary from Babcock, who refers to an individual's recuperation process as a "science experiment" and to players being "in the cage."

When Rielly was pressed on the basics of what goes on in said cage – for example, alternating hot and cold therapies – he didn't bother trying to explain the specifics.

"If I agree to that [simple breakdown of treatments], the training staff would be mad at me because there's more to it than that," Rielly joked. "The most important thing is rest, being careful with it, icing it. We did a lot of work, a lot of different things; stuff in the gym, lot of stuff in the treatment room. There's like lasers and stuff back there. It's crazy."

He was only kidding about the lasers, of course. But whatever remedies were used, Rielly is ready to put the injury completely in his rear-view against the NHL's top team on Monday night.

"In our mind, it's probably one of the most high-powered offences in the league," he said of the Lightning. "Lot of skill, a lot of speed, good power play. So it's a good test for us."

Maple Leafs projected lineup vs. Tampa Bay

Hyman-Matthews-Nylander

Marleau-Kadri-Marner

van Riemsdyk-Bozak-Brown

Komarov-Moore-Kapanen

Reilly-Hainsey

Gardiner-Zaitsev

Dermott-Polak

Andersen starts

McElhinney

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TSN.CA / Statistically Speaking: Shooting more pays off for Marner

Scott Cullen

Marner making his mark as he shoots more; Barzal, Pavelski, Zetterberg, Nelson, Couturier, Tkachuk, Dubnyk, Rinne and more in Scott Cullen's Statistically Speaking.

HEROES

Mitch Marner – Toronto's sophomore winger erupted for two goals and three assists, with outrageous possession numbers (27 for, 4 against, 87.1 CF%, 13-2 scoring chances) in Saturday's 6-3 win over Ottawa.

He has 11 points (7 G, 4 A) in the past 10 games, and has recorded 34 shots on goal in that time, a major increase from his previous rate – he averaged two shots on goal per game in the previous 47 games.



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Mathew Barzal – For the third time this season, the Islanders rookie recorded a five-point game, earning five assists in Friday's 7-6 overtime win against Detroit. He added another assist in Sunday's 3-2 loss to Calgary, giving him 22 points (3 G, 19 A) in the past 15 games.

Joe Pavelski – San Jose's captain led the way in Saturday's 6-4 win against Edmonton, scoring two goals and adding two assists. He was held off the scoresheet Sunday, and has 18 points (6 G, 12 A) in the past 18 games.

Henrik Zetterberg – Detroit's veteran centre tallied a goal and three helpers in Friday's 7-6 overtime loss at the Islanders then added an assist in Sunday's 5-4 win at Washington. He has produced 23 points (3 G, 20 A) in the past 25 games.

Brock Nelson – The Islanders centre had a hat trick in a 7-6 overtime win vs. Detroit. He has 10 points (5 G, 5 A) in the past 10 games.

Sean Couturier – Philadelphia's ace two-way pivot had a goal and two assists in Sunday's 4-1 win at Vegas. He's been brilliant this season, and has 26 points (12 G, 14 A) in the past 21 games.

Matthew Tkachuk – Calgary's second-year left winger scored a pair of third-period goals to lift the Flames to a 3-2 win at the Islanders. He's put up 17 points (12 G, 5 A) in the past 18 games.

Devan Dubnyk – The Minnesota goaltender posted a 44-save shutout in Saturday's 3-0 win over Chicago. He had a .900 save percentage in his previous eight games.

Pekka Rinne – Nashville's netminder turned away 47 of 49 shots in Saturday's 3-2 shootout win at Montreal. He has a .941 save percentage in his past nine starts.

ZEROES

Kyle Okposo – The Sabres winger had a tough weekend (11 for, 30 against, 26.8 CF%, 3-18 scoring chances) and was on the ice for four 5-on-5 goals against in a win at Boston and loss vs. Colorado.

Carter Rowney – Pittsburgh's fourth-line centre struggled (7 for, 22 against, 24.1 CF%, 1-15 scoring chances) in a shootout loss at Dallas and win at St. Louis.

Petr Mrazek – Detroit's netminder allowed seven goals on 29 shots in Friday's 7-6 overtime loss at the Islanders. He had been on a good run, with a .958 save percentage in his past seven games.

Craig Anderson – Ottawa's veteran goaltender allowed three goals on 10 shots before getting pulled after 11:30 in Saturday's 6-3 loss at Toronto. He had been getting better results lately, with a .924 save percentage in his previous eight starts.

VITAL SIGNS

Mike Smith – Calgary's starting netminder left Sunday's win over the Islanders with a groin injury. David Rittich could be looking at some important playing time if Smith is sidelined.

Andrej Sekera – The veteran Oilers defenceman suffered a facial injury at Anaheim Friday, and didn't play in San Jose Sunday.

Drake Caggiula – Edmonton's second-year winger lost some teeth against the Ducks, and also missed the San Jose game. Time for full facial protection in Edmonton.

Ondrej Pavelec – The Rangers netminder suffered a sprained MCL Friday and will be out 2-3 weeks.

Chris Tanev – Vancouver's oft-injured shutdown defender is out for at least a week with a leg injury.

Jimmy Vesey – Returned to the Rangers lineup Sunday at Winnipeg after missing a week with a concussion.

SHORT SHIFTS

Embedded Image

Sidney Crosby is producing like an elite scorer once again.

Flames RW Michael Frolik earned a couple of assists in Sunday's 3-2 win at the Islanders; he had two points (1 G, 1 A) in his previous seven games...Penguins C Sidney Crosby scored a pair of goals in Sunday's 4-1 win at St. Louis. He has 26 points (5 G, 21 A) in the past 15 games...Penguins RW Bryan Rust added a goal and an assist, while rookie LW Dominik Simon chipped in a couple of assists. Rust has nine points (4 G, 5 A) in the past nine games, while Simon had zero points in his previous five games...Red Wings LW Tomas Tatar scored a couple of goals in Sunday's 5-4 overtime win at Washington, after managing two assists in his previous eight games...Red Wings C Frans Nielsen, C Dylan Larkin, and D Nick Jensen each recorded two assists against the Capitals. Nielsen has six points (1 G, 5 A) in the past four games, Larkin had two assists in his previous seven games, and Jensen matched his production from his previous 24 games...Capitals LW Alex Ovechkin scored a goal and added an assist in Sunday's 5-4 overtime loss to Detroit, giving him 23 points (10 G, 13 A) in the past 17 games...Capitals D John Carlson and C Jay Beagle both contributed a couple of assists. Carlson has nine points (4 G, 5 A) in the past nine games, and Beagle has four points (1 G, 3 A) in the past four games...Canucks LW Reid Boucher scored two goals in Sunday's 6-0 rout at Dallas, his first NHL points of the season, in his sixth game...Canucks RW Jake Virtanen contributed a goal and an assist against the Stars; he had three points (1 G, 2 A) in the past 17 games...Avalanche LW Colin Wilson recorded a goal and an assist in Sunday's 5-4 win at Buffalo, snapping a seven-game scoring drought...Sabres C Ryan O'Reilly put up a goal and two helpers in Sunday's 5-4 loss to his former team from Colorado. He has 15 points (8 G, 7 A) in the past 15 games...Bruins D Torey Krug scored a pair of goals in Sunday's 5-3 win at New Jersey, giving him 13 points (4 G, 9 A) in the past 12 games...Bruins C Patrice Bergeron added a goal and an assist, and has 25 points (15 G, 10 A) in the past 18 games...Devils LW Taylor Hall contributed a goal and an assist in Sunday's 5-3 loss to Boston, giving him 27 points (12 G, 15 A) in the past 21 games...Flyers LW Claude Giroux scored a goal and added an assist in Sunday's 4-1 win at Vegas. He has 36 points (7 G, 29 A) in the past 29 games...Flyers RW Travis Konecny added a pair of assists, giving him 19 points (9 G, 10 A) in the past 20 games...Sharks C Logan Couture had a goal and an assist in Sunday's 3-2 shootout win at Anaheim, and has 17 points (8 G, 9 A) in the past 18 games...Ducks RW Ondrej Kase produced a goal and an assist in Sunday's 3-2 shootout loss to San Jose; he has 12 points (6 G, 6 A) in the past 14 games...Ducks LW Nick Ritchie added a couple of assists; he had three points (1 G, 2 A) in the previous 10 games.

Artturi Lehkonen is emerging from a long slump.

Maple Leafs LW Patrick Marleau put up a goal and two assists while C Nazem Kadri added a goal and an assist in Saturday's 6-3 win vs. Ottawa. They combined for strong possession stats (24 for, 5 against, 82.8 CF%, 11-3 scoring chances). Marleau had two goals in the previous 16 games, and Kadri has 10 points (4 G, 6 A) in the past eight games...Senators RW Mark Stone returned to the lineup, after missing three weeks with a knee injury, and earned a pair of assists in Saturday's 6-3 loss at Toronto. Stone has 12 points (3 G, 9 A) in the past seven games...Canadiens LW Artturi Lehkonen picked up a pair of assists in Saturday's 3-2 shootout loss to Nashville. After one point in a 23-game stretch, he has five points (3 G, 2 A) in the past three games...Blue Jackets RW Oliver Bjorkstrand and LW Artemi Panarin both had a goal and an assist in Saturday's 6-1 rout of New Jersey. Bjorkstrand had one assist in his previous 13 games and Panarin has 17 points (8 G, 9 A) in the past 20 games...Blue Jackets LW Boone Jenner and D Seth Jones both had a pair of assists in Saturday's 6-1 win against New Jersey. Jenner had one goal in his previous 15 games and Jones has 12 points (1 G, 11 A) in the past 13 games...Lightning C Steven Stamkos contributed a goal and an assist in Saturday's 4-3 win against Los Angeles. He has 19 points (8 G, 11 A) in the past 20 games...Kings LW Andy Andreoff and C Nick Shore both had two assists in Saturday's 4-3 loss at Tampa Bay. Andreoff had one assist in his previous nine games,



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and Shore had one goal in his previous seven games...Hurricanes LW Brock McGinn scored a pair of goals in Saturday's 3-1 win against Colorado. He had one goal in the previous nine games...Hurricanes RW Elias Lindholm picked up a couple of assists; he had three points (1 G, 2 A) in the previous nine games...Wild RW Charlie Coyle notched a pair of goals in Saturday's 3-0 win over Chicago, matching his production from the previous nine games...Flyers D Shayne Gostisbehere recorded two assists in Saturday's 4-3 shootout win at Arizona. He has nine points (1 G, 8 A) in the past six games...Oilers RW Zack Kassian scored twice in Saturday's 6-4 loss at San Jose. He had two points (1 G, 1 A) in his previous 19 games...Oilers C Leon Draisaitl added a goal and an assist and LW Mike Cammalleri contributed a couple of assists. Draisaitl has 15 points (4 G, 11 A) in the past 11 games, and Cammalleri has five assists in the past four games.

Islanders RW Josh Bailey and RW Jordan Eberle both had a goal and an assist in Friday's 7-6 overtime win against Detroit. Bailey has 29 points (9 G, 20 A) in the past 25 games and Eberle had two goals in the previous seven games...Islanders C John Tavares chipped in a couple of helpers, but has just five points (2 G, 3 A) in the past nine games...Red Wings RW Anthony Mantha scored a pair of goals in Friday's 7-6 overtime loss at the Islanders and scored another goal in Sunday's 5-4 win at Washington. He had one goal in the previous nine games...Red Wings D Mike Green contributed a goal and an assist, matching his production from the previous dozen games...Red Wings D Niklas Kronwall added a couple of assists, matching his production from the previous eight games...Rangers LW J.T. Miller earned a couple of assists in Friday's 4-3 win against Calgary. He has eight points (2 G, 6 A) in the past seven games...Capitals centres Evgeny Kuznetsov and Lars Eller both had a goal and an assist in Friday's 4-2 win against Columbus. Kuznetsov has 10 points (2 G, 8 A) during a seven-game point streak and Eller has 11 points (6 G, 5 A) in the past 14 games...Hurricanes RW Sebastian Aho and D Brett Pesce both produced a goal and an assist in Friday's 4-1 win vs. Vancouver. Aho added an assist in Sunday's 3-1 win over Colorado and has 20 points (13 G, 7 A) in the past 18 games while Pesce had three points (1 G, 2 A) in the previous 13 games...Blues RW Vladimir Tarasenko scored a pair of goals in Friday's 5-2 victory at Winnipeg. He had one assist in the previous six games...Blues LW Alexander Steen and LW Jaden Schwartz both had a goal and an assist in a 5-2 win at the Jets. Steen has 15 points (8 G, 7 A) in the past 16 games and Schwartz has five points (3 G, 2 A) in eight games since returning from injury...Jets rookie LW Kyle Connor contributed a goal and an assist in Friday's 5-2 loss to St. Louis; he has six points (3 G, 3 A) in the past six games...Stars LW Jamie Benn earned three assists in Friday's 4-3 shootout win against Pittsburgh after he had two points (1 G, 1 A) in the previous six games...Ducks D Hampus Lindholm had a goal and an assist in Friday's 3-2 win over Edmonton. He had one assist in his previous nine games.

Canucks G Jacob Markstrom posted a 30-save shutout in Sunday's 6-0 win at Dallas. He had a .902 save percentage in his previous six starts...Flyers G Michal Neuvirth stopped 38 of 39 shots in Sunday's 4-1 win at Vegas. He had a .792 save percentage in his previous four appearances...Rangers G Henrik Lundqvist turned away 37 of 38 shots in Sunday's 3-1 victory at Winnipeg. He had a .865 save percentage in his previous seven games...Penguins G Matt Murray recorded 33 saves on 34 shots in Sunday's 4-1 win at St. Louis. He had a .890 save percentage in his previous 10 games...Hurricanes G Cam Ward had 29 saves on 30 shots in Saturday's 3-1 win over Colorado, giving him a .930 save percentage in his past nine games...Ducks G John Gibson stopped 37 of 39 shots in Sunday's 3-2 shootout loss to San Jose, giving him a .927 save percentage in his past 13 games.

FIRSTS

Joakim Ryan – The Sharks blueliner scored his first two NHL goals, in his 46th career game, Saturday's 6-4 win over Edmonton.

Casey Nelson – The Buffalo defenceman notched his first NHL goal, in his 30th career game, in Sunday's 5-4 loss to Colorado.

Neal Pionk – The 22-year-old defenceman, who was signed as a free agent out of Minnesota-Duluth in the spring, and made his NHL debut in Friday's 4-3 win vs. Calgary. He had 17 points (1 G, 16 A) in 48 AHL games.

John Gilmour – Drafted by Calgary, but signed by the New York Rangers after a four-year career at Providence College, the 24-year-old made his NHL debut in Friday's 4-3 win against the Flames. He had 26 points (6 G, 20 A) in 44 AHL games.

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TSN.CA / TSN Hockey's Top 10 Storylines of the Week

Scott Cullen

Subban is back in Montreal, the Rangers are managing expectations, the Senators, TradeCentre, McDavid, Barzal, Marner and more in TSN Hockey's Top 10 Storylines of the Week.

SUBBAN IN MONTREAL

The Nashville Predators took a 3-2 decision via shootout in Montreal Saturday night, but the result of the game was practically an afterthought compared to the drama that followed.

Canadiens winger Brendan Gallagher was asked about Subban after the game.

There are obviously very simple reasons to ask Gallagher about Subban, even if he wasn't part of a massively controversial trade. For one thing, Gallagher scored Montreal's first goal of the game, beating Subban on the play, and he practically chased Subban to the Nashville bench to have words with the Predators defenceman. That's worth asking about.

Gallagher also took a pretty good run at Subban behind the Nashville net. It wasn't Alexei Emelin or Yannick Weber – other ex-Habs on the Predators blue line – it was Subban. So, that's worth asking about.

Obviously, there are hard feelings over the deal, at least in some places, and Montreal struggling while Nashville hovers around the top of the Western Conference only makes the feelings more raw.

Those hard feelings took an ugly turn afterwards, however. Colten Teubert, the 13th pick in the 2008 Draft, took to Twitter to offer support for Gallagher.

Trouble is, Teubert's choice of words has racial connotations, and whether he knew it or not (as I've seen pointed out, one of the benefits of using coded language is to provide plausible deniability), that's unacceptable. Worse, even if you buy Teubert's denial, there is at least one active NHL player who understood the reference.

This is of course coming during a) Black History Month and b) when the NHL is pushing a Hockey is For Everyone initiative. If that's really the case, the sport has some work to do.

RANGERS LETTER

The New York Rangers, sitting three points of a playoff spot at the time (now two), issued a letter to their fans, effectively bracing them for the organization's plan of attack, which would seem to be taking a step back in the short-term, with the hopes of building a more competitive team in the long run.

It's an unusual step to take, as many teams try to convince their fans that they are still competitive, even when they aren't, but as much as it's hard for the Rangers to bite this bullet, it's probably the right move. They have



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the league's worst possession stats, so there is little reason to believe that they are ready to contend now.

Setting expectations is a smart play for the Blueshirts, as it affords them the possibility of moving significant pieces. Pending unrestricted free agents Rick Nash and Michael Grabner are obviously on the trading block, but the likes of Mats Zuccarello, Ryan McDonagh and (maybe, perhaps?) Henrik Lundqvist could be considered too.

An interesting aspect of the Rangers making this public announcement is that it should put some pressure on the Montreal Canadiens, Ottawa Senators, Detroit Red Wings and Florida Panthers, teams trailing the Rangers in the Eastern Conference.

SENATORS

The Senators made their own news this week, too, giving GM Pierre Dorion a three-year contract extension.

Ottawa was within one goal of reaching the Stanley Cup Final last season and is now sitting 14 points out of a playoff spot this season and it's probably going to take some work to get this team built into a consistent contender, and owner Eugene Melnyk appears to recognize as much.

Sens press release announcing contract extension for Pierre Dorion has comment from Eugene Melnyk that seems to indicate the club is willing to go thru some sort of rebuild/retool process.
pic.twitter.com/GuC9tPpY3e

— Ian Mendes (@ian_mendes) February 9, 2018

Would that mean moves involving Mike Hoffman, Derick Brassard, or Cody Ceci? Ottawa could be poised to swing some significant deals.

TRADE DEADLINE

One side effect of having teams acknowledge that they are out of contention this season, is that it opens the door for more potential action as the NHL Trade Deadline approaches. More sellers always makes for a more interesting day.

TSN's Bob McKenzie had a terrific Bobcast, covering all 31 teams and their most likely trade deadline scenarios.

OLYMPICS START

While the 2018 Winter Olympics may not hold as much fan appeal without NHL players, the games are underway, and the Canadian women opened with a 5-0 win against Russia, while their expected rivals for the gold medal, Team USA, rallied for a 3-1 win against Finland.

The men's side of the tournament gets underway Wednesday, with Canada's first game against Switzerland coming Thursday.

MCDAVID

While the Edmonton Oilers' season is going nowhere fast, they get teased every so often by the brilliance of their 21-year-old franchise centre.

Connor McDavid put up four goals and an assist in a 6-2 win over Tampa Bay, and did it in typically brilliant fashion.

NICKELS FOR BARZAL, MARNER

McDavid wasn't the only young star to have a five-point game this week. Islanders rookie Mathew Barzal accumulated five assists in a 7-6 win over Detroit, already the third time this season that Barzal has recorded five points in a game. He's opened up an 11-point lead on Vancouver's Brock Boeser in the rookie scoring race.

Toronto's second-year winger Mitch Marner busted out for a two-goal, three-assist performance in Saturday's 6-3 win against Ottawa. While the season has been somewhat disappointing for Marner, he's still on pace for a 60-point season despite seeing his on-ice shooting percentage dip from 10.1% last year to 7.7% this season.

BRUINS RISING

The Boston Bruins suffered a 4-2 loss to the Buffalo Sabres on Saturday, only their second regulation loss in the past 25 games. Can't win 'em all, as they say, but the Bruins have been really good after a mediocre start to the season. They are a top possession team and three points back of the Tampa Bay Lightning, with one game in hand, in the race for first place overall.

That's good enough to re-claim top spot in my Snapshot rankings.

BLACKHAWKS FALLING

The Chicago Blackhawks have won three Stanley Cups in the past eight seasons, but it's looking increasingly likely that they're not going to be in the playoffs this season. They are currently 10 points out of a playoff spot, and it would be the first time since 2007-2008 that they missed the postseason.

As disappointing as that might be, Blackhawks GM Stan Bowman doesn't intend to break up the team's core four of Jonathan Toews, Patrick Kane, Duncan Keith and Brent Seabrook.

DEVILS DROPPING

After a surprisingly strong start to the season, the New Jersey Devils appear to have hit a significant market correction.

They still sit in a playoff spot, but have lost four straight and have six wins in 20 games since Christmas. The sooner that they can get starting goaltender Cory Schneider back from injury, the better, but New Jersey is going to have to turn the tide if they are going to maintain a playoff spot.

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TSN.CA / Snapshot: Bruins back on top; Leafs climbing

Scott Cullen

The Boston Bruins return to the top spot in this week's edition of Snapshot, ahead of the Tampa Bay Lightning and the Vegas Golden Knights.

Among the teams moving up this week, the Winnipeg Jets, Pittsburgh Penguins, and Toronto Maple Leafs have all landed inside the Top 10.

Moving down in the rankings, the Calgary Flames, Anaheim Ducks, and Colorado Avalanche have dropped from the last rankings.

(Snapshot is a continuation of the analytically-based Power Rankings that I've been doing on TSN for many years. They are generated using statistics and individual player grades, which allows for ranking flexibility based on player availability due to injuries, suspensions, coaching decisions etc. and are used for the model being measured, with others, here.)

BOSTON BRUINS (33-11-8)

THIS WEEK: 3 LAST WEEK: 1

GF: 3.27 GA: 2.35 SA CF%: 54.1

NET PP/60: +7.11 NET PK/60: -4.87

The Bruins have one regulation loss in the past 23 games and are back to a full lineup, with Charlie McAvoy returning from his heart procedure and Brad Marchand wrapping up his latest suspension.

Key Injuries: None.



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TAMPA BAY LIGHTNING (37-14-3)

THIS WEEK: 2 LAST WEEK: 4

GF: 3.56 GA: 2.59 SA CF%: 52.6

NET PP/60: +8.49 NET PK/60: -6.38

Six wins in the past eight games (seven of which were on the road) and the return of Victor Hedman from injury moves the Lightning back up the board.

Key Injuries: LW Ondrej Palat (lower body).

VEGAS GOLDEN KNIGHTS (36-14-4)

THIS WEEK: 3 LAST WEEK: 1

GF: 3.41 GA: 2.70 SA CF%: 52.5

NET PP/60: +6.56 NET PK/60: -5.23

A 7-4-2 record in the past 13 games may be some expected regression from the Golden Knights, but 10 of those games were on the road and they're headed home for nine of the next 10 games.

Key Injuries: None.

NASHVILLE PREDATORS (32-12-9)

THIS WEEK: 4 LAST WEEK: 2

GF: 3.06 GA: 2.51 SA CF%: 51.8

NET PP/60: +7.54 NET PK/60: -5.56

Yes, the Predators have dropped back-to-back games in Toronto and Ottawa, but they have suffered one regulation loss in the past 14 games, and that was a game in which they fired 43 shots on goal in a 2-1 loss to the Blackhawks. They're in it every night.

Key Injuries: LW Filip Forsberg (upper body).

DALLAS STARS (32-19-4)

THIS WEEK: 5 LAST WEEK: 5

GF: 3.05 GA: 2.55 SA CF%: 52.4

NET PP/60: +6.74 NET PK/60: -5.82

The Stars have won four straight, and are getting solid play from both goaltenders. It's been a while since that was happening for Kari Lehtonen.

Key Injuries: D Marc Methot (knee).

WINNIPEG JETS (32-13-9)

THIS WEEK: 6 LAST WEEK: 12

GF: 3.22 GA: 2.61 SA CF%: 51.7

NET PP/60: +8.42 NET PK/60: -5.80

6-0-2 in the past eight, and getting top centre Mark Scheifele back from injury, the Jets have six more games at home to wrap up their current 10-game homestand.

Key Injuries: C Adam Lowry (upper body), D Jacob Trouba (ankle).

WASHINGTON CAPITALS (31-17-5)

THIS WEEK: 7 LAST WEEK: 6

GF: 3.06 GA: 2.89 SA CF%: 48.3

NET PP/60: +6.27 NET PK/60: -7.30

It's not as though the Capitals have been consistently good – they've mostly been mediocre, winning nine of the past 18 games – but they're healthy and have top-end talent.

Key Injuries: None.

PITTSBURGH PENGUINS (30-22-3)

THIS WEEK: 8 LAST WEEK: 14

GF: 3.04 GA: 3.00 SA CF%: 51.9

NET PP/60: +9.58 NET PK/60: -5.49

10 wins in the past 13 games puts the Penguins back on the right track. They are still relying a little too much on their killer power play, and need better goaltending, but they're probably going to be heard from again in the postseason.

Key Injuries: RW Patric Hornqvist (lower body), LW Conor Sheary (lower body).

TORONTO MAPLE LEAFS (32-19-5)

THIS WEEK: 9 LAST WEEK: 15

GF: 3.16 GA: 2.77 SA CF%: 50.4

NET PP/60: +6.38 NET PK/60: -5.22

The Leafs are healthy, have won six of the past seven games, and have injected some youthful enthusiasm into the lineup, with D Travis Dermott and LW Kasperii Kapanen making seemingly smooth transitions from the AHL.

Key Injuries: None.

STATISTICALLY SPEAKING: Andersen saves the Maple Leafs, Bergeron is brilliant, Doughty may be having his best season and more. <https://t.co/8RTHspUtmM pic.twitter.com/plnBXzgaxA>

— Scott Cullen (@tsnscottcullen) February 8, 2018

LOS ANGELES KINGS (29-19-5)

THIS WEEK: 10 LAST WEEK: 13

GF: 2.85 GA: 2.42 SA CF%: 50.5

NET PP/60: +6.47 NET PK/60: -4.70

Four wins in the past five games, with backup goaltender Darcy Kuemper winning all four, has the Kings bouncing back from a January slump. Now they hit the road for the next seven games.

Key Injuries: C Jeff Carter (Achilles).

ST. LOUIS BLUES (33-20-3)

THIS WEEK: 11 LAST WEEK: 11

GF: 2.82 GA: 2.52 SA CF%: 51.8

NET PP/60: +4.87 NET PK/60: -5.89

Five wins in the past seven games would be a move in the right direction, but losing Joel Edmundson on the blueline does leave a hole. He's not a glamorous player, but has been logging 20 minutes a night.

Key Injuries: RW Robby Fabbri (knee), D Joel Edmundson (forearm).

CALGARY FLAMES (28-18-8)

THIS WEEK: 12 LAST WEEK: 8

GF: 2.80 GA: 2.74 SA CF%: 52.3

NET PP/60: +4.92 NET PK/60: -7.08

The Flames have won three straight, but that comes on the heels of a six-game winless streak. They probably should be better than their record indicates, but they're on the road for 11 of their next 15 games, so it's not going to be easy to find that missing consistency.

Key Injuries: LW Kris Versteeg (hip).



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SAN JOSE SHARKS (28-18-8)

THIS WEEK: 13 LAST WEEK: 10

GF: 2.83 GA: 2.72 SA CF%: 51.9

NET PP/60: +9.12 NET PK/60: -5.89

Losing six of eight, the Sharks are still in playoff position, but they may be clinging for life if they're going to try and push through without help while Joe Thornton is hurt.

Key Injuries: C Joe Thornton (knee).

ANAHEIM DUCKS (26-19-10)

THIS WEEK: 14 LAST WEEK: 7

GF: 2.76 GA: 2.80 SA CF%: 48.8

NET PP/60: +5.90 NET PK/60: -5.42

One regulation win in the past six games leaves the Ducks in the same kind of battle for a playoff spot in which the Sharks find themselves. Anaheim's roster, now relatively healthy with goaltender John Gibson on his way back, does appear to offer greater upside.

Key Injuries: RW Patrick Eaves (Guillain-Barre).

HEROES & ZEROES: Checking in on Rickard Rakell, a couple of Sabres and Jack Johnson. <https://t.co/JRjkFJP1uC>
pic.twitter.com/kDgxfLgAK

— Scott Cullen (@tsnscottcullen) February 9, 2018

MINNESOTA WILD (29-19-6)

THIS WEEK: 15 LAST WEEK: 16

GF: 2.94 GA: 2.87 SA CF%: 47.1

NET PP/60: +6.95 NET PK/60: -5.51

The Wild are 11-4-3 in the past 18 games, which puts them back in the playoff mix. Maybe a little help on the blueline is the next step, especially with Jonas Brodin out for the next month.

Key Injuries: D Jonas Brodin (hand).

COLORADO AVALANCHE (29-20-4)

THIS WEEK: 16 LAST WEEK: 9

GF: 3.15 GA: 2.92 SA CF%: 48.5

NET PP/60: +6.31 NET PK/60: -4.93

One regulation win in the past seven games is probably a case of some overdue regression, but also reflects how much the Avalanche miss star centre Nathan MacKinnon.

Key Injuries: RW Sven Andrighetto (leg), D Mark Barberio (lower body), C Nathan MacKinnon (upper body).

PHILADELPHIA FLYERS (26-19-9)

THIS WEEK: 17 LAST WEEK: 20

GF: 2.91 GA: 2.85 SA CF%: 49.5

NET PP/60: +5.43 NET PK/60: -9.31

10-4-1 in the past 15 games, the Flyers have climbed back into a playoff spot, and could be more interesting with a surge from young players like sophomore Travis Konecny and rookie Nolan Patrick.

Key Injuries: None.

CHICAGO BLACKHAWKS (24-22-8)

THIS WEEK: 18 LAST WEEK: 18

GF: 2.91 GA: 2.80 SA CF%: 53.4

NET PP/60: +4.83 NET PK/60: -5.72

Winless in four, the Blackhawks are finding it hard to climb out of the basement in the league's toughest division. Having Brandon Saad put up one assist in the past dozen games isn't helping matters either.

Key Injuries: G Corey Crawford (upper body).

NEW YORK ISLANDERS (26-23-6)

THIS WEEK: 19 LAST WEEK: 19

GF: 3.29 GA: 3.64 SA CF%: 47.8

NET PP/60: +5.15 NET PK/60: -8.21

Injuries on defence have just crushed an Islanders team that is already suspect defensively. They have three regulation wins in the past 18 games.

Key Injuries: D Calvin De Haan (upper body), D Johnny Boychuk (lower body).

COLUMBUS BLUE JACKETS (27-22-4)

THIS WEEK: 20 LAST WEEK: 17

GF: 2.51 GA: 2.75 SA CF%: 50.9

NET PP/60: +4.03 NET PK/60: -9.11

One regulation win in the past dozen games suddenly leaves the Blue Jackets reeling and at risk of falling from a playoff position that seemed virtually guaranteed a month ago.

Key Injuries: D Ryan Murray (upper body).

NEW JERSEY DEVILS (27-18-8)

THIS WEEK: 21 LAST WEEK: 23

GF: 2.94 GA: 2.92 SA CF%: 48.7

NET PP/60: +6.64 NET PK/60: -5.34

Since Christmas, the Devils have won six of 18 games, and they could really use Cory Schneider back between the pipes if they are going to save their playoff spot.

Key Injuries: LW Brian Gibbons (thumb), G Cory Schneider (lower body), LW Marcus Johansson (concussion).

FLORIDA PANTHERS (23-22-6)

THIS WEEK: 22 LAST WEEK: 26

GF: 2.82 GA: 3.16 SA CF%: 49.4

NET PP/60: +5.02 NET PK/60: -5.69

Four straight wins gets the Panthers to within six points of a playoff spot, with a couple of games in hand, and 28-year-old goaltender Harri Sateri has been a useful stopgap, posting a .914 save percentage in his first eight NHL games.

Key Injuries: G Roberto Luongo (lower body).

EDMONTON OILERS (23-25-4)

THIS WEEK: 23 LAST WEEK: 22

GF: 2.77 GA: 3.21 SA CF%: 51.3

NET PP/60: +4.50 NET PK/60: -9.08

5-2-1 in the past eight games, the Oilers are being carried by Connor McDavid, which is fine in one respect – that's what franchise players do – but give the man some help.

Key Injuries: C Ryan Nugent-Hopkins (upper body).



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Podcast of my visit, talking hockey, with @SportsKevinO today:
<https://t.co/0ck3T2spGv>

— Scott Cullen (@tsnscottcullen) February 8, 2018

CAROLINA HURRICANES (24-21-9)

THIS WEEK: 24 LAST WEEK: 24

GF: 2.61 GA: 2.98 SA CF%: 53.6

NET PP/60: +5.97 NET PK/60: -7.55

The Hurricanes are still in the playoff hunt, but they need better goaltending and more finishing talent if they are going to make that next step. Will new owner Tom Dundon be prepared to swing major moves before the deadline?

Key Injuries: None.

NEW YORK RANGERS (25-24-5)

THIS WEEK: 25 LAST WEEK: 21

GF: 2.85 GA: 3.04 SA CF%: 45.8

NET PP/60: +6.47 NET PK/60: -5.58

The Rangers are only three points out of a playoff spot, but they have announced to their fanbase that they are going ahead with a plan to rebuild, which could make them an extremely compelling team to watch as the deadline approaches. Strange as it might sound, it's probably the right move for the long term.

Key Injuries: LW Chris Kreider (blood clot), D Kevin Shattenkirk (knee), RW Pavel Buchnevich (concussion), LW Jimmy Vesey (concussion), D Marc Staal (neck).

DETROIT RED WINGS (21-23-8)

THIS WEEK: 26 LAST WEEK: 27

GF: 2.54 GA: 2.94 SA CF%: 48.0

NET PP/60: +5.60 NET PK/60: -5.71

While the Red Wings are reasonably competitive, winning eight of the past 16 games, there's still no reason to get particularly excited about their immediate chances.

Key Injuries: None.

MONTREAL CANADIENS (22-26-6)

THIS WEEK: 27 LAST WEEK: 25

GF: 2.59 GA: 3.09 SA CF%: 50.3

NET PP/60: +6.90 NET PK/60: -6.43

6-10-2 since Christmas, the Habs are in a difficult spot. Surely they aren't in playoff contention, but what does that mean for the future of their best players? Max Pacioretty is rumoured to be on the block, but if Montreal is going to trade him, why not Shea Weber or even Carey Price too?

Key Injuries: RW Ales Hemesky (concussion), D Shea Weber (foot), C Phillip Danault (concussion), RW Andrew Shaw (lower body).

VANCOUVER CANUCKS (21-27-6)

THIS WEEK: 28 LAST WEEK: 28

GF: 2.59 GA: 3.20 SA CF%: 47.3

NET PP/60: +6.97 NET PK/60: -7.51

One regulation win in the past six games is really not a big deal for the Canucks. They aren't contenders and need to get ready to make big decisions, with an eye to the future, leading up to the trade deadline.

Key Injuries: RW Derek Dorsett (neck), RW Sam Gagner (ankle).

OTTAWA SENATORS (19-25-9)

THIS WEEK: 29 LAST WEEK: 29

GF: 2.62 GA: 3.34 SA CF%: 46.5

NET PP/60: +4.89 NET PK/60: -7.80

The Senators have won four of five, though three of those wins have come after 60 minutes and, like Vancouver, they should be getting poised to make significant moves at the deadline. The challenge for the Senators is that if they move out good pieces, how would they plan to entice Erik Karlsson to stay?

Key Injuries: LW Clarke MacArthur (concussion), RW Mark Stone (knee), LW Bobby Ryan (hand).

BUFFALO SABRES (15-29-10)

THIS WEEK: 30 LAST WEEK: 30

GF: 2.30 GA: 3.28 SA CF%: 46.3

NET PP/60: +3.95 NET PK/60: -6.25

While the Sabres are 4-3-1 in the past eight games, missing a couple of defencemen from an already thin group doesn't inspire a lot of confidence.

Key Injuries: D Zach Bogosian (hip), D Jake McCabe (thumb).

ARIZONA COYOTES (13-32-9)

THIS WEEK: 31 LAST WEEK: 31

GF: 2.34 GA: 3.36 SA CF%: 47.3

NET PP/60: +5.14 NET PK/60: -7.26

The Coyotes have one regulation win in the past 15 games, and first-line left winger Max Domi still has just three goals, while playing more than 17 minutes per game in 54 games.

Key Injuries: None.

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TSN.CA / Rielly reveals elbow injury kept him out of lineup

Kristen Shilton

TORONTO – Right in the middle of a career-best season with the Maple Leafs, Morgan Rielly took a fall that introduced him to a whole new world of pain.

Toronto's top-pairing defenceman has endured his fair share of lower-body injuries in the form of ankle sprains and an ACL tear over the years. But when Rielly awkwardly tumbled to the ice late in the second period against Philadelphia on Jan. 18, he sustained the first upper-body injury that's ever sidelined him for an extended period in the NHL.

"I'm not sure what I can say, but it was my left elbow. It's just taken some time to heal up," Rielly said after morning skate on Monday, revealing the injury in full for the first time. "It was my left arm that got tangled up. I mean, even my mom thought it was my right arm because I landed on it, but the left arm was tangled up. Not intentionally by [Jakub Voracek], but it was just the way the play unfolded."

Before that night, Rielly was playing the best hockey of his five-season NHL career. He had amassed 31 points in 46 games to lead all Leafs'



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blueliners, and was thriving under the tutelage of veteran defence partner Ron Hainsey. With only seconds left in the middle frame when the injury happened, Rielly decided to return for the third against the Flyers, completing nine shifts.

"I knew something was wrong when I came back and tried to play," he recalled. "After that, I went out for morning skate in Ottawa [two days later] and I just knew right away. You have to do the necessary things to make it to so you can play and get back right away."

With four games under his belt since stepping back into the lineup on Feb. 3 against Boston, Rielly is the first to admit he isn't all the way back just yet. Against the Ottawa Senators on Saturday, Rielly tallied his first point in three games, setting a new career-high in assists with 28 over just 51 games. The light at the end of the injury tunnel is burning bright, but Rielly discovered getting there is different when you're not familiar with the recovery process.

"It's not so much [your] wind as the rhythm of the game, and this is a learning curve for me a little bit for an upper-body injury," he said. "It's just hard to get your hands back. So it's not wind. It's not brain. It's more just the rhythm and the pace of the game. It takes a little time, but I've felt better and better and I'd expect myself to have more success moving forward and get back into the rhythm."

With the league-leading Tampa Bay Lightning visiting the Leafs on Monday night, there's no time like the present for Rielly to round back into form. The 23-year-old admitted he wasn't feeling totally 100 per cent when got back in, and the adjustment period takes as long as it takes to plow through.

"He's still not quite where he was, so we've got to get him where he was," said Mike Babcock. "We need him to be elite for us, so just getting your legs back and skating the way you can and getting your confidence back. It's just a process of playing."

Behind the scenes, Rielly was using all manner of tactics to lose as little of his edge as possible, starting with his treatment regime. The Leafs' reliance on a sport science-based medical staff has encouraged all kinds of colourful commentary from Babcock, who refers to an individual's recuperation process as a "science experiment" and to players being "in the cage."

When Rielly was pressed on the basics of what goes on in said cage – for example, alternating hot and cold therapies – he didn't bother trying to explain the specifics.

"If I agree to that [simple breakdown of treatments], the training staff would be mad at me because there's more to it than that," Rielly joked. "The most important thing is rest, being careful with it, icing it. We did a lot of work, a lot of different things; stuff in the gym, lot of stuff in the treatment room. There's like lasers and stuff back there. It's crazy."

He was only kidding about the lasers, of course. But whatever remedies were used, Rielly is ready to put the injury completely in his rear-view against the NHL's top team on Monday night.

"In our mind, it's probably one of the most high-powered offences in the league," he said of the Lightning. "Lot of skill, a lot of speed, good power play. So it's a good test for us."

Maple Leafs projected lineup vs. Tampa Bay

Hyman-Matthews-Nylander

Marleau-Kadri-Marner

van Riemsdyk-Bozak-Brown

Komarov-Moore-Kapanen

Reilly-Hainsey

Gardiner-Zaitsev

Dermott-Polak

Andersen starts

McElhinney

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TSN Hockey's Top 10 Storylines of the Week

Scott Cullen

Subban is back in Montreal, the Rangers are managing expectations, the Senators, TradeCentre, McDavid, Barzal, Marner and more in TSN Hockey's Top 10 Storylines of the Week.

SUBBAN IN MONTREAL

The Nashville Predators took a 3-2 decision via shootout in Montreal Saturday night, but the result of the game was practically an afterthought compared to the drama that followed.

Canadiens winger Brendan Gallagher was asked about Subban after the game.

There are obviously very simple reasons to ask Gallagher about Subban, even if he wasn't part of a massively controversial trade. For one thing, Gallagher scored Montreal's first goal of the game, beating Subban on the play, and he practically chased Subban to the Nashville bench to have words with the Predators defenceman. That's worth asking about.

Gallagher also took a pretty good run at Subban behind the Nashville net. It wasn't Alexei Emelin or Yannick Weber – other ex-Habs on the Predators blue line – it was Subban. So, that's worth asking about.

Obviously, there are hard feelings over the deal, at least in some places, and Montreal struggling while Nashville hovers around the top of the Western Conference only makes the feelings more raw.

Those hard feelings took an ugly turn afterwards, however. Colten Teubert, the 13th pick in the 2008 Draft, took to Twitter to offer support for Gallagher.

Trouble is, Teubert's choice of words has racial connotations, and whether he knew it or not (as I've seen pointed out, one of the benefits of using coded language is to provide plausible deniability), that's unacceptable. Worse, even if you buy Teubert's denial, there is at least one active NHL player who understood the reference.

This is of course coming during a) Black History Month and b) when the NHL is pushing a Hockey is For Everyone initiative. If that's really the case, the sport has some work to do.

RANGERS LETTER

The New York Rangers, sitting three points of a playoff spot at the time (now two), issued a letter to their fans, effectively bracing them for the organization's plan of attack, which would seem to be taking a step back in the short-term, with the hopes of building a more competitive team in the long run.

It's an unusual step to take, as many teams try to convince their fans that they are still competitive, even when they aren't, but as much as it's hard for the Rangers to bite this bullet, it's probably the right move. They have the league's worst possession stats, so there is little reason to believe that they are ready to contend now.

Setting expectations is a smart play for the Blueshirts, as it affords them the possibility of moving significant pieces. Pending unrestricted free agents Rick Nash and Michael Grabner are obviously on the trading



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block, but the likes of Mats Zuccarello, Ryan McDonagh and (maybe, perhaps?) Henrik Lundqvist could be considered too.

An interesting aspect of the Rangers making this public announcement is that it should put some pressure on the Montreal Canadiens, Ottawa Senators, Detroit Red Wings and Florida Panthers, teams trailing the Rangers in the Eastern Conference.

SENATORS

The Senators made their own news this week, too, giving GM Pierre Dorion a three-year contract extension.

Ottawa was within one goal of reaching the Stanley Cup Final last season and is now sitting 14 points out of a playoff spot this season and it's probably going to take some work to get this team built into a consistent contender, and owner Eugene Melnyk appears to recognize as much.

Would that mean moves involving Mike Hoffman, Derick Brassard, or Cody Ceci? Ottawa could be poised to swing some significant deals.

TRADE DEADLINE

One side effect of having teams acknowledge that they are out of contention this season, is that it opens the door for more potential action as the NHL Trade Deadline approaches. More sellers always makes for a more interesting day.

TSN's Bob McKenzie had a terrific Bobcast, covering all 31 teams and their most likely trade deadline scenarios.

OLYMPICS START

While the 2018 Winter Olympics may not hold as much fan appeal without NHL players, the games are underway, and the Canadian women opened with a 5-0 win against Russia, while their expected rivals for the gold medal, Team USA, rallied for a 3-1 win against Finland.

The men's side of the tournament gets underway Wednesday, with Canada's first game against Switzerland coming Thursday.

MCDAVID

While the Edmonton Oilers' season is going nowhere fast, they get teased every so often by the brilliance of their 21-year-old franchise centre.

Connor McDavid put up four goals and an assist in a 6-2 win over Tampa Bay, and did it in typically brilliant fashion.

NICKELS FOR BARZAL, MARNER

McDavid wasn't the only young star to have a five-point game this week. Islanders rookie Mathew Barzal accumulated five assists in a 7-6 win over Detroit, already the third time this season that Barzal has recorded five points in a game. He's opened up an 11-point lead on Vancouver's Brock Boeser in the rookie scoring race.

Toronto's second-year winger Mitch Marner busted out for a two-goal, three-assist performance in Saturday's 6-3 win against Ottawa. While the season has been somewhat disappointing for Marner, he's still on pace for a 60-point season despite seeing his on-ice shooting percentage dip from 10.1% last year to 7.7% this season.

BRUINS RISING

The Boston Bruins suffered a 4-2 loss to the Buffalo Sabres on Saturday, only their second regulation loss in the past 25 games. Can't win 'em all, as they say, but the Bruins have been really good after a mediocre start to the season. They are a top possession team and three points back of the Tampa Bay Lightning, with one game in hand, in the race for first place overall.

That's good enough to re-claim top spot in my Snapshot rankings.

BLACKHAWKS FALLING

The Chicago Blackhawks have won three Stanley Cups in the past eight seasons, but it's looking increasingly likely that they're not going to be in the playoffs this season. They are currently 10 points out of a playoff spot, and it would be the first time since 2007-2008 that they missed the postseason.

As disappointing as that might be, Blackhawks GM Stan Bowman doesn't intend to break up the team's core four of Jonathan Toews, Patrick Kane, Duncan Keith and Brent Seabrook.

DEVILS DROPPING

After a surprisingly strong start to the season, the New Jersey Devils appear to have hit a significant market correction.

They still sit in a playoff spot, but have lost four straight and have six wins in 20 games since Christmas. The sooner that they can get starting goaltender Cory Schneider back from injury, the better, but New Jersey is going to have to turn the tide if they are going to maintain a playoff spot.1

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TSN.CA / Snapshot: Bruins back on top; Leafs climbing

Scott Cullen

The Boston Bruins return to the top spot in this week's edition of Snapshot, ahead of the Tampa Bay Lightning and the Vegas Golden Knights.

Among the teams moving up this week, the Winnipeg Jets, Pittsburgh Penguins, and Toronto Maple Leafs have all landed inside the Top 10.

Moving down in the rankings, the Calgary Flames, Anaheim Ducks, and Colorado Avalanche have dropped from the last rankings.

(Snapshot is a continuation of the analytically-based Power Rankings that I've been doing on TSN for many years. They are generated using statistics and individual player grades, which allows for ranking flexibility based on player availability due to injuries, suspensions, coaching decisions etc. and are used for the model being measured, with others, here.)

BOSTON BRUINS (33-11-8)

THIS WEEK: 3 LAST WEEK: 1

GF: 3.27 GA: 2.35 SA CF%: 54.1

NET PP/60: +7.11 NET PK/60: -4.87

The Bruins have one regulation loss in the past 23 games and are back to a full lineup, with Charlie McAvoy returning from his heart procedure and Brad Marchand wrapping up his latest suspension.

Key Injuries: None.

TAMPA BAY LIGHTNING (37-14-3)

THIS WEEK: 2 LAST WEEK: 4

GF: 3.56 GA: 2.59 SA CF%: 52.6

NET PP/60: +8.49 NET PK/60: -6.38

Six wins in the past eight games (seven of which were on the road) and the return of Victor Hedman from injury moves the Lightning back up the board.

Key Injuries: LW Ondrej Palat (lower body).



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VEGAS GOLDEN KNIGHTS (36-14-4)

THIS WEEK: 3 LAST WEEK: 1

GF: 3.41 GA: 2.70 SA CF%: 52.5

NET PP/60: +6.56 NET PK/60: -5.23

A 7-4-2 record in the past 13 games may be some expected regression from the Golden Knights, but 10 of those games were on the road and they're headed home for nine of the next 10 games.

Key Injuries: None.

NASHVILLE PREDATORS (32-12-9)

THIS WEEK: 4 LAST WEEK: 2

GF: 3.06 GA: 2.51 SA CF%: 51.8

NET PP/60: +7.54 NET PK/60: -5.56

Yes, the Predators have dropped back-to-back games in Toronto and Ottawa, but they have suffered one regulation loss in the past 14 games, and that was a game in which they fired 43 shots on goal in a 2-1 loss to the Blackhawks. They're in it every night.

Key Injuries: LW Filip Forsberg (upper body).

DALLAS STARS (32-19-4)

THIS WEEK: 5 LAST WEEK: 5

GF: 3.05 GA: 2.55 SA CF%: 52.4

NET PP/60: +6.74 NET PK/60: -5.82

The Stars have won four straight, and are getting solid play from both goaltenders. It's been a while since that was happening for Kari Lehtonen.

Key Injuries: D Marc Methot (knee).

WINNIPEG JETS (32-13-9)

THIS WEEK: 6 LAST WEEK: 12

GF: 3.22 GA: 2.61 SA CF%: 51.7

NET PP/60: +8.42 NET PK/60: -5.80

6-0-2 in the past eight, and getting top centre Mark Scheifele back from injury, the Jets have six more games at home to wrap up their current 10-game homestand.

Key Injuries: C Adam Lowry (upper body), D Jacob Trouba (ankle).

WASHINGTON CAPITALS (31-17-5)

THIS WEEK: 7 LAST WEEK: 6

GF: 3.06 GA: 2.89 SA CF%: 48.3

NET PP/60: +6.27 NET PK/60: -7.30

It's not as though the Capitals have been consistently good – they've mostly been mediocre, winning nine of the past 18 games – but they're healthy and have top-end talent.

Key Injuries: None.

PITTSBURGH PENGUINS (30-22-3)

THIS WEEK: 8 LAST WEEK: 14

GF: 3.04 GA: 3.00 SA CF%: 51.9

NET PP/60: +9.58 NET PK/60: -5.49

10 wins in the past 13 games puts the Penguins back on the right track. They are still relying a little too much on their killer power play, and need

better goaltending, but they're probably going to be heard from again in the postseason.

Key Injuries: RW Patric Hornqvist (lower body), LW Conor Sheary (lower body).

TORONTO MAPLE LEAFS (32-19-5)

THIS WEEK: 9 LAST WEEK: 15

GF: 3.16 GA: 2.77 SA CF%: 50.4

NET PP/60: +6.38 NET PK/60: -5.22

The Leafs are healthy, have won six of the past seven games, and have injected some youthful enthusiasm into the lineup, with D Travis Dermott and LW Kasper Kapanen making seemingly smooth transitions from the AHL.

Key Injuries: None.

STATISTICALLY SPEAKING: Andersen saves the Maple Leafs, Bergeron is brilliant, Doughty may be having his best season and more. <https://t.co/8RTHspUtmM> [pic.twitter.com/plnBXzgaxA](https://t.co/plnBXzgaxA)

— Scott Cullen (@tsnscottcullen) February 8, 2018

LOS ANGELES KINGS (29-19-5)

THIS WEEK: 10 LAST WEEK: 13

GF: 2.85 GA: 2.42 SA CF%: 50.5

NET PP/60: +6.47 NET PK/60: -4.70

Four wins in the past five games, with backup goaltender Darcy Kuemper winning all four, has the Kings bouncing back from a January slump. Now they hit the road for the next seven games.

Key Injuries: C Jeff Carter (Achilles).

ST. LOUIS BLUES (33-20-3)

THIS WEEK: 11 LAST WEEK: 11

GF: 2.82 GA: 2.52 SA CF%: 51.8

NET PP/60: +4.87 NET PK/60: -5.89

Five wins in the past seven games would be a move in the right direction, but losing Joel Edmundson on the blueline does leave a hole. He's not a glamorous player, but has been logging 20 minutes a night.

Key Injuries: RW Robby Fabbri (knee), D Joel Edmundson (forearm).

CALGARY FLAMES (28-18-8)

THIS WEEK: 12 LAST WEEK: 8

GF: 2.80 GA: 2.74 SA CF%: 52.3

NET PP/60: +4.92 NET PK/60: -7.08

The Flames have won three straight, but that comes on the heels of a six-game winless streak. They probably should be better than their record indicates, but they're on the road for 11 of their next 15 games, so it's not going to be easy to find that missing consistency.

Key Injuries: LW Kris Versteeg (hip).

SAN JOSE SHARKS (28-18-8)

THIS WEEK: 13 LAST WEEK: 10

GF: 2.83 GA: 2.72 SA CF%: 51.9

NET PP/60: +9.12 NET PK/60: -5.89

Losing six of eight, the Sharks are still in playoff position, but they may be clinging for life if they're going to try and push through without help while Joe Thornton is hurt.



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Key Injuries: C Joe Thornton (knee).

ANAHEIM DUCKS (26-19-10)

THIS WEEK: 14 LAST WEEK: 7

GF: 2.76 GA: 2.80 SA CF%: 48.8

NET PP/60: +5.90 NET PK/60: -5.42

One regulation win in the past six games leaves the Ducks in the same kind of battle for a playoff spot in which the Sharks find themselves. Anaheim's roster, now relatively healthy with goaltender John Gibson on his way back, does appear to offer greater upside.

Key Injuries: RW Patrick Eaves (Guillain-Barre).

HEROES & ZEROES: Checking in on Rickard Rakell, a couple of Sabres and Jack Johnson. <https://t.co/JRjkFJP1uC>
[pic.twitter.com/kDgxfILgAK](https://t.co/kDgxfILgAK)

— Scott Cullen (@tsnscottcullen) February 9, 2018

MINNESOTA WILD (29-19-6)

THIS WEEK: 15 LAST WEEK: 16

GF: 2.94 GA: 2.87 SA CF%: 47.1

NET PP/60: +6.95 NET PK/60: -5.51

The Wild are 11-4-3 in the past 18 games, which puts them back in the playoff mix. Maybe a little help on the blueline is the next step, especially with Jonas Brodin out for the next month.

Key Injuries: D Jonas Brodin (hand).

COLORADO AVALANCHE (29-20-4)

THIS WEEK: 16 LAST WEEK: 9

GF: 3.15 GA: 2.92 SA CF%: 48.5

NET PP/60: +6.31 NET PK/60: -4.93

One regulation win in the past seven games is probably a case of some overdue regression, but also reflects how much the Avalanche miss star centre Nathan MacKinnon.

Key Injuries: RW Sven Andrighetto (leg), D Mark Barberio (lower body), C Nathan MacKinnon (upper body).

PHILADELPHIA FLYERS (26-19-9)

THIS WEEK: 17 LAST WEEK: 20

GF: 2.91 GA: 2.85 SA CF%: 49.5

NET PP/60: +5.43 NET PK/60: -9.31

10-4-1 in the past 15 games, the Flyers have climbed back into a playoff spot, and could be more interesting with a surge from young players like sophomore Travis Konecny and rookie Nolan Patrick.

Key Injuries: None.

CHICAGO BLACKHAWKS (24-22-8)

THIS WEEK: 18 LAST WEEK: 18

GF: 2.91 GA: 2.80 SA CF%: 53.4

NET PP/60: +4.83 NET PK/60: -5.72

Winless in four, the Blackhawks are finding it hard to climb out of the basement in the league's toughest division. Having Brandon Saad put up one assist in the past dozen games isn't helping matters either.

Key Injuries: G Corey Crawford (upper body).

NEW YORK ISLANDERS (26-23-6)

THIS WEEK: 19 LAST WEEK: 19

GF: 3.29 GA: 3.64 SA CF%: 47.8

NET PP/60: +5.15 NET PK/60: -8.21

Injuries on defence have just crushed an Islanders team that is already suspect defensively. They have three regulation wins in the past 18 games.

Key Injuries: D Calvin De Haan (upper body), D Johnny Boychuk (lower body).

COLUMBUS BLUE JACKETS (27-22-4)

THIS WEEK: 20 LAST WEEK: 17

GF: 2.51 GA: 2.75 SA CF%: 50.9

NET PP/60: +4.03 NET PK/60: -9.11

One regulation win in the past dozen games suddenly leaves the Blue Jackets reeling and at risk of falling from a playoff position that seemed virtually guaranteed a month ago.

Key Injuries: D Ryan Murray (upper body).

NEW JERSEY DEVILS (27-18-8)

THIS WEEK: 21 LAST WEEK: 23

GF: 2.94 GA: 2.92 SA CF%: 48.7

NET PP/60: +6.64 NET PK/60: -5.34

Since Christmas, the Devils have won six of 18 games, and they could really use Cory Schneider back between the pipes if they are going to save their playoff spot.

Key Injuries: LW Brian Gibbons (thumb), G Cory Schneider (lower body), LW Marcus Johansson (concussion).

FLORIDA PANTHERS (23-22-6)

THIS WEEK: 22 LAST WEEK: 26

GF: 2.82 GA: 3.16 SA CF%: 49.4

NET PP/60: +5.02 NET PK/60: -5.69

Four straight wins gets the Panthers to within six points of a playoff spot, with a couple of games in hand, and 28-year-old goaltender Harri Sateri has been a useful stopgap, posting a .914 save percentage in his first eight NHL games.

Key Injuries: G Roberto Luongo (lower body).

EDMONTON OILERS (23-25-4)

THIS WEEK: 23 LAST WEEK: 22

GF: 2.77 GA: 3.21 SA CF%: 51.3

NET PP/60: +4.50 NET PK/60: -9.08

5-2-1 in the past eight games, the Oilers are being carried by Connor McDavid, which is fine in one respect – that's what franchise players do – but give the man some help.

Key Injuries: C Ryan Nugent-Hopkins (upper body).

Podcast of my visit, talking hockey, with @SportsKevinO today:
<https://t.co/0cK3T2spGv>

— Scott Cullen (@tsnscottcullen) February 8, 2018

CAROLINA HURRICANES (24-21-9)

THIS WEEK: 24 LAST WEEK: 24

GF: 2.61 GA: 2.98 SA CF%: 53.6



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NET PP/60: +5.97 NET PK/60: -7.55

The Hurricanes are still in the playoff hunt, but they need better goaltending and more finishing talent if they are going to make that next step. Will new owner Tom Dundon be prepared to swing major moves before the deadline?

Key Injuries: None.

NEW YORK RANGERS (25-24-5)

THIS WEEK: 25 LAST WEEK: 21

GF: 2.85 GA: 3.04 SA CF%: 45.8

NET PP/60: +6.47 NET PK/60: -5.58

The Rangers are only three points out of a playoff spot, but they have announced to their fanbase that they are going ahead with a plan to rebuild, which could make them an extremely compelling team to watch as the deadline approaches. Strange as it might sound, it's probably the right move for the long term.

Key Injuries: LW Chris Kreider (blood clot), D Kevin Shattenkirk (knee), RW Pavel Buchnevich (concussion), LW Jimmy Vesey (concussion), D Marc Staal (neck).

A Message from Glen Sather and Jeff Gorton.
pic.twitter.com/Q56CXS8vDc

— New York Rangers (@NYRangers) February 8, 2018

DETROIT RED WINGS (21-23-8)

THIS WEEK: 26 LAST WEEK: 27

GF: 2.54 GA: 2.94 SA CF%: 48.0

NET PP/60: +5.60 NET PK/60: -5.71

While the Red Wings are reasonably competitive, winning eight of the past 16 games, there's still no reason to get particularly excited about their immediate chances.

Key Injuries: None.

MONTREAL CANADIENS (22-26-6)

THIS WEEK: 27 LAST WEEK: 25

GF: 2.59 GA: 3.09 SA CF%: 50.3

NET PP/60: +6.90 NET PK/60: -6.43

6-10-2 since Christmas, the Habs are in a difficult spot. Surely they aren't in playoff contention, but what does that mean for the future of their best players? Max Pacioretty is rumored to be on the block, but if Montreal is going to trade him, why not Shea Weber or even Carey Price too?

Key Injuries: RW Ales Hemesky (concussion), D Shea Weber (foot), C Phillip Danault (concussion), RW Andrew Shaw (lower body).

VANCOUVER CANUCKS (21-27-6)

THIS WEEK: 28 LAST WEEK: 28

GF: 2.59 GA: 3.20 SA CF%: 47.3

NET PP/60: +6.97 NET PK/60: -7.51

One regulation win in the past six games is really not a big deal for the Canucks. They aren't contenders and need to get ready to make big decisions, with an eye to the future, leading up to the trade deadline.

Key Injuries: RW Derek Dorsett (neck), RW Sam Gagner (ankle).

OTTAWA SENATORS (19-25-9)

THIS WEEK: 29 LAST WEEK: 29

GF: 2.62 GA: 3.34 SA CF%: 46.5

NET PP/60: +4.89 NET PK/60: -7.80

The Senators have won four of five, though three of those wins have come after 60 minutes and, like Vancouver, they should be getting poised to make significant moves at the deadline. The challenge for the Senators is that if they move out good pieces, how would they plan to entice Erik Karlsson to stay?

Key Injuries: LW Clarke MacArthur (concussion), RW Mark Stone (knee), LW Bobby Ryan (hand).

BUFFALO SABRES (15-29-10)

THIS WEEK: 30 LAST WEEK: 30

GF: 2.30 GA: 3.28 SA CF%: 46.3

NET PP/60: +3.95 NET PK/60: -6.25

While the Sabres are 4-3-1 in the past eight games, missing a couple of defencemen from an already thin group doesn't inspire a lot of confidence.

Key Injuries: D Zach Bogosian (hip), D Jake McCabe (thumb).

STATISTICALLY SPEAKING: Reinhart keeps rolling, Giroux bounces back, Subban's a big shooter; Monahan, Schenn, Cousins and more.
<https://t.co/p4zZi27WV8> pic.twitter.com/1EmCczCEsd

— Scott Cullen (@tsnscottcullen) February 9, 2018

ARIZONA COYOTES (13-32-9)

THIS WEEK: 31 LAST WEEK: 31

GF: 2.34 GA: 3.36 SA CF%: 47.3

NET PP/60: +5.14 NET PK/60: -7.26

The Coyotes have one regulation win in the past 15 games, and first-line left winger Max Domi still has just three goals, while playing more than 17 minutes per game in 54 games.

Key Injuries: None.

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TSN.CA / Statistically Speaking: Reinhart is on a roll

Scott Cullen

Reinhart keeps rolling, Giroux bounces back, Subban's a big shooter; Monahan, Schenn, Cousins and more in Scott Cullen's Statistically Speaking.

HEROES

Sam Reinhart – The Sabres winger continued his strong play with a goal and two helpers in a 4-3 win against the Islanders. After managing 13 points in his first 44 games this season, Reinhart now has 13 points (4 G, 9 A) in the past 10 games.

Claude Giroux – Philadelphia's veteran scorer put up a goal and two assists in a 5-3 win over Montreal. He had four points (1 G, 3 A) in his previous 10 games.

P.K. Subban – Nashville's star blueliner scored a pair of goals in a 4-3 overtime loss at Ottawa. He has 25 points (11 G, 14 A) in the past 24 games, and leads all defencemen with 15 goals this season.



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Sean Monahan – Calgary's top centre scored a couple of goals in a 3-2 win at New Jersey, and has 17 points (10 G, 7 A) in the past 15 games.

Brayden Schenn – The Blues pivot tallied two goals in a 6-1 rout over Colorado, giving him 11 points (6 G, 5 A) in the past 12 games.

Nick Cousins – The Coyotes winger scored two goals in a 4-3 overtime win at Minnesota, and has five points (4 G, 1 A) in the past six games. Despite playing fourth-line minutes, he's tied for third on the team with eight even-strength goals this season.

ZEROES

Carl Soderberg – The Colorado centre was pounded (10 for, 21 against, 32.3 CF%, 4-11 scoring chances) and on the ice for three goals against in a 6-1 loss at St. Louis.

Jesper Bratt – The Devils rookie winger had team-worst possession (9 for, 14 against, 39.1 CF%, 5-11 scoring chances) and was on the ice for two goals against in a 3-2 loss to Calgary.

Brandon Saad – In the midst of a horrible slump, the Blackhawks winger had no shot attempts in 14:37 of ice time at Dallas. He has no goals and one assist in the past 13 games.

Michael Del Zotto and Chris Tanev – The Canucks defence pairing had a tough game (8 for, 14 against, 36.4 CF%, 5-12 scoring chances) and was on the ice for two goals against in a 5-2 loss at Tampa Bay.

Jaroslav Halak – The Islanders netminder allowed four goals on 22 shots in a 4-3 loss at Buffalo. He had a .927 save percentage in his previous six starts.

VITAL SIGNS

Joel Edmundson – The Blues defenceman suffered a broken forearm against Colorado, and will be re-evaluated in six weeks, leaving a hole in St. Louis' top four. Rookie Vince Dunn may need to move up the depth chart.

Jonas Brodin – A broken hand has knocked the Wild blueliner out of the lineup for 3-4 weeks. Brodin's absence means there is room in the lineup for all three of Gustav Olofsson, Mike Reilly and Nate Prosser on a regular basis.

Jake McCabe – The Sabres lost a top-four defenceman for a month due to a broken thumb. Veteran Josh Gorges may see more regular action in McCabe's absence.

Julius Honka – Dallas' smooth-skating defenceman left a 4-2 win over Chicago with an upper-body injury.

SHORT SHIFTS

Taylor Hall has been a consistent scoring threat for the Devils.

Flames LW Johnny Gaudreau scored a goal and added an assist in a 3-2 win at New Jersey, and has 22 points (4 G, 18 A) in the past 16 games...Devils LW Taylor Hall produced a goal and an assist in a 3-2 loss to Calgary. He has 18 points (8 G, 10 A) during a 12-game point streak...Flyers RW Travis Konecny scored a pair of goals in a 5-3 win against Montreal, giving him 17 points (9 G, 8 A) in the past 18 games...Flyers D Shayne Gostisbehere accumulated three assists in the victory, and has seven points (1 G, 6 A) in the past four games...Sabres C Jack Eichel and LW Evan Rodrigues both contributed a goal and an assist in a 4-3 win vs. the Islanders. Eichel has 18 points (7 G, 11 A) in the past 13 games and Rodrigues had two assists in his previous 11 games...Senators LW Ryan Dzingel picked up a couple of assists in a 4-3 overtime win against Nashville, and has five assists in the past four games...Predators LW Scott Hartnell had a pair of assists in a 4-3 overtime loss at Ottawa, matching his production from the previous eight games...Lightning LW Yanni Gourde, C Steven Stamkos, RW Nikita Kucherov and D Victor Hedman each had a goal and an assist in a 5-2 victory over Vancouver. Gourde has 10 points (6 G, 4 A) in the past eight games, Stamkos has eight points (3 G, 5 A) in the past seven games, Kucherov had seven assists, but no goals, in his previous 11 games, and

Hedman has 19 points (6 G, 13 A) in the past 20 games...Canucks D Alexander Edler assisted on both goals in a 5-2 loss at Tampa Bay, giving him 11 points (1 G, 10 A) in the past 13 games...Blues rookie D Vince Dunn earned three assists in a 6-1 win over Colorado, and has seven points (1 G, 6 A) in the past 10 games...Coyotes D Kevin Connauton had a goal and an assist while playing a season-high 20:36 in a 4-3 overtime win at Minnesota. He has four points (3 G, 1 A) in the past four games...Coyotes C Derek Stepan and D Alex Goligoski both earned a couple of assists at Minnesota. Stepan has five points (1 G, 4 A) in the past five games and Goligoski had two points (1 G, 1 A) in his previous 10 games...Wild C Matt Cullen had a goal and an assist in a 4-3 overtime loss to Arizona. He had one assist in his previous 12 games...Stars C Tyler Seguin recorded a couple of goals in a 4-2 win over Chicago, and has nine points (6 G, 3 A) in the past seven games...Blackhawks D Brent Seabrook earned a pair of assists in a 4-2 loss to Dallas, after managing four points (2 G, 2 A) in his previous 20 games...Golden Knights LW Jonathan Marchessault had a goal and an assist in a 5-3 win at San Jose. He has 28 points (10 G, 18 A) in the past 23 games...Golden Knights D Colin Miller, LW David Perron and RW Reilly Smith each contributed a pair of assists against the Sharks. Miller has nine points (2 G, 7 A) in the past nine games, Perron has 25 points (6 G, 19 A) in the past 22 games, and Smith has nine points (4 G, 5 A) in the past six games...Sharks RW Joe Pavelski scored a pair of goals and D Brent Burns added three assists in a 5-3 loss to Vegas. Pavelski has 14 points (4 G, 10 A) in the past 16 games and Burns has a ridiculous 35 points (8 G, 27 A) in the past 28 games...Sharks LW Timo Meier added a goal and an assist; he had one goal in his previous six games.

Islanders D Sebastian Aho had a nice possession game (12 for, 3 against, 80.0 CF%) in a 4-3 loss at Buffalo...The Flyers' line of Michael Raffl, Scott Laughton and Jordan Weal controlled play (12 for, 2 against, 85.7 CF%, 7-1 scoring chances) in a 5-3 win over Montreal.

Stars G Ben Bishop turned away 37 of 39 shots in a 4-2 win against Chicago, and has a .939 save percentage in his past 13 starts...Flames G David Rittich stopped 30 of 32 shots in a 3-2 win at New Jersey, giving him a .936 save percentage in his past seven games.

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TSN.CA / The Boston Bruins are back

Travis Yost

It's starting to feel like 2013 again in Boston.

Bruins fans should remember that season fondly. Though it ended in a heartbreaking seven-game series loss against Montreal in the second round, there was a lot to love about the team's performance.

They won the President's Trophy with a 117-point regular season, 16 points clear of the second-best team in their division. Patrice Bergeron won another Selke Trophy. Tuukka Rask won the Vezina Trophy. Zdeno Chara finished runner up in the Norris Trophy race.

The Bruins struggled to recapture that magic in subsequent seasons. Yes, their top line – the vaunted Patrice Bergeron group, which generally saw Brad Marchand and a rotating third piece – still was a force in the Eastern Conference, but the organization had few answers for a sorely needed transition of talent further down the lineup.

The Bruins became a tale of two teams: the team you hated playing against for the 20 minutes Bergeron was on the ice, and the team you loved playing against for the 40 minutes Bergeron was on the bench.



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The skew in talent was on full display last postseason, where the Bruins were unceremoniously trounced by the Ottawa Senators in the first round. The Bergeron line played admirably, but the team had no answer whenever he needed a breather. Senators' defenceman Erik Karlsson could play substantially more minutes on a nightly basis, with some of those minutes coming against Boston's depth lines and pairings. Not surprisingly, Boston was crushed whenever that scenario unfolded.

It also didn't help that the goaltending in Boston had suddenly fallen apart. The Bergeron line – notorious for driving ridiculous shot and goal differentials year after year – had lost its effectiveness, in large part because they were bleeding goals against. And, again, it was probably most prominent during the 2016-17 season.

I don't think Boston's management was ever convinced that Rask had suddenly lost his game. The Bruins doubled down on both Rask and backup Anton Khudobin this summer, both of whom they felt would have a strong bounce-back season.

They weren't as confident about the skaters in their lineup. The summer brought substantial change both at forward and on defence. A number of young players were brought into the fold and immediately handed large roles – most of these minutes coming from older players who were past their playing prime, or prospects well into their 20s that didn't appear to be developing at the needed rate.

Just look at how much the ice time shifted in just one summer:

Jake DeBrusk and Charlie McAvoy were the two big names the Bruins wanted to bring into the fold this season, and both have been exceptional. But it's just as interesting to note how many players without the same type of draft pedigree have spent some time with the big league club this season. Danton Heinen, Anders Bjork, Sean Kuraly and Matt Grzelcyk were all mid-round picks from years ago. After some additional development, all have played a role in what's looking like a monstrous bounce-back season.

These names, among others, have been responsible for the Bruins turnaround this season. Their introduction into the lineup at the cost of veterans like Dominic Moore, Matt Beleskey, Drew Stafford, and John-Michael Liles has introduced a speed and energy to the lineup that the Bruins sorely needed. It's also alleviated some of the substantial burden previously placed on the Bergeron line, much to the delight of general manager Don Sweeney.

A combination of the influx of young talent and a rebound in goaltending – a bet the Bruins look like they are going to win on in considerable fashion – has made Boston a terrifying opponent once again. The Bruins are currently on pace for a 114-point season and it appears in every way legitimate. At 5-on-5, they are getting more than 54 per cent of the shots, which is best in the league. That big shot advantage is driving big goal advantages, too.

Below, you'll see a table showing the goals that Boston receives from both elements of their lineup this year. The Bergeron line is outscoring their opponents by two goals every 60 minutes. But unlike in prior years, the non-Bergeron lines are also outscoring their opponents. At aggregate, Boston is more than 2.5 goals better than their opponents for every 60 minutes of hockey.

This is the first Bruins squad since the great 2013-14 team (and prior) that is crushing on the goals front. Getting the goaltending is surely helping, but having so many ample young skaters in the lineup is too.

One final note: Whenever we do goal-based analysis, we need to be wary of sample variance. It's very possible in this league to run strong goal differentials with poor shot differentials over a small period of time. Eventually the shot differentials win out and the goal differentials come screaming back to earth.

I mentioned six names – Heinen, DeBrusk, Bjork, Kuraly, McAvoy, and Grzelcyk – as guys who were called upon to handle some additional duty. In the case of a few (notably Heinen, DeBrusk, and McAvoy), that role is substantial. You'll note that their Corsi% – a measure of the shots

in Boston's favour when the given player is on the ice – is all above 50 per cent.

For a frame of reference, an average hockey player on an average team is going to hold about a 50 per cent Corsi%. Keep that in mind as you note how big the deltas are from 50 per cent here. These are massive numbers, and each one of these guys had or has a materially different role from another player on the list. The point being: Boston has been able to spread around a bunch of new names into the lineup and yield exceptional results – the type of results that will drive favourable goal differentials for a long time.

It's one of the biggest reasons why the Bruins have emerged as a potentially significant buyer at the trade deadline and a legitimate Stanley Cup threat. They have the star talent. They have the goaltending. And now they have the depth – the type of depth you don't have to hope and pray about as your top-tier talent takes much-needed breathers.

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USA TODAY / IOC decides to allow Statue of Liberty image to remain on Team USA goalie masks

KEVIN ALLEN | USA TODAY SPORTS

Updated 15 minutes ago

GANGNEUNG, Korea — The IOC has decided to allow the Statue of Liberty image to stand on the goalie masks belonging to U.S players Nicole Hensley and Alex Rigsby.

The Americans were notified the decision before dressing for their game against the Olympic Athletes from Russia on Tuesday.

Earlier, the Americans were informed that the Statue of Liberty was being reviewed to determine if it was in violation of the IOC's ban of political symbols on masks.

Hensley's Statue of Liberty image is on the left side of her mask, and Rigsby's is on her chin. Neither goalie played in USA's opening 3-1 win against Finland. Maddie Rooney was the starter.

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USA TODAY / 2018 Winter Olympics: No NHL players, but NHL talent abounds

KEVIN ALLEN | Updated 2 hours ago

GANGNEUNG, South Korea – This year's Olympic hockey tournament is presented as the first non-NHL one in 24 years and yet player resumes tell a different story.

The U.S. team boasts 3,083 games of NHL experience. The Olympic Athletes of Russia have 1,769 games of NHL experience in just Pavel Datsyuk and Ilya Kovalchuk. Most of the Canadian Olympians have played in the NHL, including captain Chris Kelly, who played in last spring's playoffs.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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Does that sound like a non-NHL tournament?

"It's not an NHL All-Star tournament, but it's an NHL-caliber tournament," said U.S. defenseman James Wisniewski, who has played parts of 11 NHL seasons

The Olympic men's tournament opens Wednesday with the USA playing Slovenia (7:10 a.m., ET, NBC Sports Network).

No one is sure how this will play out because there never has been a situation like this. The world's player pool has never been deeper. Plenty of players abroad, particularly in Russia, are capable of playing in the NHL.

Swedish defenseman Rasmus Dahlin, projected to be the No. 1 pick in June's NHL draft, is in this tournament. USA's 6-5 wing/center Jordan Greenway could have signed with the Minnesota Wild last summer, but chose to play in the Olympics. Dallas Stars prized draft pick Miro Heiskanen will play for Finland.

"We've got guys who have played in the NHL," U.S. forward Jim Slater said. "And we've got guys that just never got the opportunity but are good enough to play in the NHL. I played in the NHL a long time, and all these players that haven't played in the NHL are good enough, they just didn't get the opportunity. It's not an NHL superstar tournament out here, but it's still NHL, top-tier quality. It's going to be a heck of a tournament."

The Americans are using four college players – Greenway (Boston University), Ryan Donato (Harvard), Troy Terry (Denver) and Will Borgen (St. Cloud) – who could be in the NHL next season, if not at the end of this season.

Tony Granato is coaching Team USA. Willie Desjardins is coaching Canada. Slovakia is coached by Craig Ramsay. All are former NHL coaches. Marco Sturm, coaching Germany, is a former NHL player. Even Korea has Jim Paek, the former Pittsburgh Penguins' Stanley Cup winner, behind its bench.

"The (caliber) of play will be high," Sturm said. "It will not reach the (NHL) tournaments, but it will be close. If you look at the Russians and Swedes, they still have plenty of talent, including good young players."

The NHL has sent players for five consecutive Olympics, starting in 1998. But the NHL decided the hardship of shutting down the league in midseason isn't worth the exposure value of being at the Games.

One difference between this tournament and the NHL Olympic tournaments is that players will have no adjustment issues to the wider European ice. That's particularly important to Canada and the USA.

"If you look at Nagano (in 1998) and all of the Olympics with the big rinks, Canada and USA always had a harder time than Sweden or the Czech teams," Sturm said. "It's a little different game on the big ice. Now all of the players in the tournament play in Europe. They all understand the game."

When the Olympics started, Bovada oddsmakers had the Olympic Athletes of Russia, boasting a handful of former NHL players, as 1/1 favorites to win. Canada and Sweden were at 9/2. The Finns were at 8/1, Czechs at 9/1 and Americans at 10/1.

Finland, with 16 Kontinental Hockey League players, might be the sleeper in the field. Analysts seem to like this team. But no one seems to want to discount any team's chances.

"I think every nation is kind of thinking the same thing," Slater said, "That there's a chance for a lot of countries to win gold here, and we feel we have as good a chance as anybody. People are going to be really surprised watching some of these players they haven't heard of before."

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USA TODAY / 2018 Winter Olympics: The five best stories from U.S. men's hockey team

KEVIN ALLEN | Updated 22 hours ago

GANGNEUNG, South Korea — U.S. men's hockey coach Tony Granato remembers watching the 1980 U.S. team and not having any idea who Mike Eruzione or Jim Craig were.

"Within two or three days, I kind of liked those guys," Granato said. "If you watch our teams, we'll find a few of those guys."

The late U.S. general manager Jim Johannson, who died in January, said after the NHL decided not to participate in the 2018 Games that the American team would be made up of "25 unique stories."

Here are the five best stories on the U.S. squad:

Goalie Ryan Zapski, Jokerit (Helsinki, Finland): His career sounds like a Johnny Cash song. He's been everywhere man. Walk-on at Mercyhurst. Passed over by the NHL. Played for six different ECHL teams. Went to Finland on a two-month tryout in 2013-14. Today he's a star in the Kontinental Hockey League and projected to be the USA's starting goalie.

"This has been pretty crazy," Zapski said. "I never would have considered this a possibility two years ago."

Forward Jordan Greenway, Boston University: He is the first African-American to ever play for a U.S. Olympic men's hockey team. "I hope I'm the first of many," Greenway said.

He's a 6-5, 230-pound playmaking forward whose draft rights belong to the Minnesota Wild. He could have turned pro last summer but wanted to be an Olympian.

Why haven't more African Americans played hockey? "A lot of reasons," Greenway said. "It's easier to look up to guys like Michael Jordan, LeBron, other guys playing other sports. It's easier to compare to them. Hopefully we get more black people playing hockey, and they can look up to Dustin Byfuglien, Wayne Simmonds, Willie O'Ree. Hopefully, I can be in there too."

Goalie Brandon Maxwell, Mlada Boleslav BK (Czech Republic): When it became official that USA Hockey was going to have to pick an Olympic team from the college, European professional leagues and the American League, Maxwell happened to be watching the movie Eddie the Eagle with parents.

"I remember thinking I'm going to be Eddie the Eagle," Maxwell said, chuckling.

As soon as the Olympics became a possibility, Maxwell said he told his parents, "It's going to happen."

"I did everything in my power to make it happen," Maxwell said. "I'm pretty confident in myself."

Maxwell seems to thrive on challenges. The Czech League doesn't use many imports, but he's been playing there for four seasons. The American coaching staff likes Maxwell because he handles the puck sharply.

"I have high aspirations and goals," Maxwell said. "But playing in the Olympics is No. 1"

Defenseman Noah Welch, Vaxjo HC (Sweden): Welch, 35, was retired when Johannson called him and said he was in the mix to be on the team.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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"I had been retired for two months," Welch said. "I had a retirement party and everything."

A Harvard graduate, Welch is looking at opening a multisport complex. Plus, he's partners with fellow Harvard grad Kwame Osseo-asare on three businesses in Ghana, including a recycling center and a micro-finance bank.

Even with all of this going on, Welch went back to Sweden to play just to give himself a chance to play in the Olympics.

Where does he rank playing in the Olympics on his list of hockey accomplishments? "The best," he said.

Forward Chris Bourque, Hershey Bears (AHL): The son of NHL legend Ray Bourque, Chris has been a star for eight years in the AHL.

He's averaged nearly a point per game (433 points, 437 games). It's never easy to be the son of a Hall of Famer: The younger Bourque has played 51 NHL games but has never been able to stick in the NHL.

But playing in the Olympics is an accomplishment he shares with his father. Ray Bourque played for Canada in 1998. Chris Bourque could outperform his father if the USA can win a medal.

Ray Bourque badly wants him to do that because he regrets that he didn't come away from the Olympics with a medal.

"It won't just be the biggest moment of my hockey career," Chris told USA TODAY Sports. "It will be one of the biggest moments of my life. This is every kid's dream.

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