



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 8, 2020

THE NEWS & OBSERVER

Hurricanes recall Morgan Geekie from Checkers

Staff Report

The Carolina Hurricanes on Saturday recalled forward Morgan Geekie from the Charlotte Checkers of the American Hockey League.

Geekie, 21, could make his NHL debut on Sunday when the Canes face the Pittsburgh Penguins in a road game. Geekie has 22 goals and 20 assists in 55 games for the Checkers this season.

Geekie, listed at 6-2 and 192 pounds, was a third-round pick by the Canes in the 2017 NHL Draft and has played 128 games in two seasons for the Checkers, with 41 goals and 47 assists. He had 18 points (eight goals, 10 assists) in the Checkers' 19-game run to the 2019 Calder Cup championship.

THE ATHLETIC

'I loved everything about that game': Canes play ugly to snap winless streak

By Sara Civian

UNIONDALE, N.Y. — The oft-referenced “Your best players have to be your best players” cliché is usually true when a pattern of uninspiring offense plagues a team. It holds up when an expensive goalie is underperforming. And it's not like the Hurricanes had been lighting up the scoreboard or protecting the net particularly well through their four-game winless streak, but you got the sense a larger, team-wide issue was at hand.

It'd been elucidated in things that don't really matter until they do — like six straight opening goals allowed, a defensive lapse happening just when a dangerous player happened to be in a scoring position, “bounces” not going a team's way.

Head coach Rod Brind'Amour had been calling the general bad vibes “taking a breath at the wrong time,” and he wasn't wrong. It's just that the vagueness was troubling. How does he fix something like that when it seems like a combination of bad luck and incompetence?

We found out the answer Saturday afternoon, as the Hurricanes grinded out an ugly 3-2 overtime win over the Islanders. There's no right time to take a breath. The margin for breathing doesn't exist.

“Other than a few teams, everybody is grinding for playoffs. Everybody is doing it. I don't see any game being any different,” Justin Williams said. “Certainly for us. If we let up a little bit, we'll be left behind.”

The Canes proved there's a fix for “breathing at the wrong time.” It's not pretty, it's not easy, and as Jordan Staal said in Philadelphia, it's certainly not toe-dragging.

Sometimes their best players have to be their best players.

Sometimes Brock McGinn has to be Brock McGinn.

“So, that's the game for me, that sequence in the second period,” Brind'Amour said. “They get back in the game, and then we're on the kill for what felt like forever. We're blocking

shots, (Jordan Staal) got one, lose a stick. It was a whole comedy of errors there for a little while. But we were able to hunker down and at least get it done.”

“Oh, he's a stud,” Vincent Trocheck said of McGinn. “He works his ass off every single game, every single shift. It was no surprise that he was out there blocking shots.”

Said Williams: “You know what you're getting out of Brock every night. He's gonna put his body on the line. He's gonna work. There's nothing by chance — he's all heart. Obviously, he's a big part of our PK and a big part of our team.”

We all think our dramatic thoughts in real time and edit them a few hours after any given game, right? After that sequence, I thought, “If they don't win this for Brock, I'm not sure about the fight in this team.”

But to me, at least, it seemed they all thought the same thing. They were probably thinking that since the second that game in Philly ended, though. We all saw Sebastian Aho body a few folks early on. Then Ryan Dzingel looking for a fight all night — even before the McGinn sequence — was sort of an indicator.

“I mean, I just love the fight, I love Dzingel dropping the gloves, I loved the PK blocking shots, I loved our battle level,” Williams said. “I loved everything about that game. Can we do some things a little bit better? Yes. Play a little better with the lead? Yes. But we grinded it out, and that's a big one.”

Brind'Amour called the 4-1 loss to the Flyers “another lesson,” and I wondered how fast they could learn it. Maybe “live every day like you're Brock McGinn on the penalty kill” is the lesson for a team with young stars — it doesn't have to be the perfect goal, and it doesn't have to be a goal at all. It does have to be the perfect blocked shot and about preventing a loss. As critical as I've been about McGinn's contract, if he can teach Andrei Svechnikov and Martin Necas the value of playing ugly, then it pays off.

• I cannot let this game go without mentioning that noted laser goal scorer Haydn Fleury led all skaters in five-on-five time on



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ice. All skaters. All of them. He has deserved a spot in the NHL for probably two years, but the Hurricanes' blue line was stacked. Then he played like four minutes a game and one time went out for one shift and was benched. How is he going to be his best self under those circumstances? As much as the injuries to Brett Pesce and Dougie Hamilton have cost the Canes, as least Fleury is living up to what many said he wouldn't based off nothing.

- Anton Forsberg? Not bad.
- The Hurricanes recalled Checkers center Morgan Geekie after the game. We'll find out the reason on Sunday, but front-office sources have said since the beginning of last year that they take Geekie seriously as someone who could have an impact in the NHL one day. That's sort of why they've let him

quietly develop in the AHL. The crux of such conversations with the front office is that executives don't pay attention to points with their developing players. They obviously have a different set of analytics anyway — The Athletic's Justin Bourne just brilliantly touched on that.

• Brind'Amour, who has never lied about a call he's disagreed with, weighed in on Trocheck's overtime winner, which maybe could've been prevented had the refs called the high stick on Svechnikov before the play. "I was pretty sure we were going to get it," Brind'Amour said. "It was definitely not one of those obvious ones one way or the other, but we were preparing for, OK, if it doesn't happen, what do we do? We were getting ready for that." That's when you know he sees the other side.



Hurricanes Gameday Diary: First things first

By Adam Gold

The Carolina Hurricanes did something Saturday they hadn't done in seven games. No, not win, though they did win — a 3-2, overtime victory over the Islanders. They beat the Leafs in Toronto since then. You remember David Ayres, right?

The Canes scored the first goal in a game for the first time since their 4-1 win over the Predators! You might have forgotten such an event since it seems so long ago and there have been a fair amount of disappointing nights since. You'd think it would stand out because of that, not to mention the fact that their game in Nashville that night was spectacular.

Back to the first goal idea.

Maybe it shouldn't be so important, but for the Hurricanes it clearly is. When they yield the first goal, as they did in 12 of the 15 games prior to Saturday, they're 11-22-3. Oddly enough, they were not a total disaster in that most recent stretch of trailing early, going 4-6-2. But, when the Canes pot the first one, they are an NHL best 25-3-2. Yes, you heard me, best record in the league when scoring first.

In addition, they're 19-0-1 when leading after 20 minutes. So, my advice is to score first and lead after one period so we can all enjoy a beautiful afternoon with our families secure in the knowledge that the Canes will win the game.

Note: That last part was sarcastic.

One more thing. The guy who scored that first goal, Justin Williams, also known as the best part-time player in hockey history, has scored in three straight games and was Carolina's best player against the Islanders. I don't think you want Williams to be the best player, but it wasn't really by default as there were a lot of players who performed well in New York. But, last year, for about a two month stretch, the old guy was the best guy. If that starts becoming a regular thing, the Canes will be in GREAT shape.

The look...(Without a morning skate and info regarding a possible injury, here's a guess)

Svechnikov-Aho-Teravainen

Foegele-Trocheck-Necas

McGinn-Staal-Williams

Niederreiter-Geekie-Martinook

Edmundson-Slavin

Gardiner-van Rimesdyk

Fleury-Skjei

Forsberg

Nedeljkovic

Take me to your leaders...

Hurricanes

Points: Sebastian Aho, 63; Teuvo Teravainen, 61; Andrei Svechnikov, 60.

Goals: Aho, 36 Svechnikov, 24; Martin Necas 16.

Power play points: Teravainen, 20; Svechnikov, 19, Aho, 15.

Hot: Williams, 3 straight games with a goal.

Not: Goal droughts...Martinook (27), Dzingel (23), Slavin (12), Svechnikov (7).

Penguins

Points: Evgeni Malkin, 70; Bryan Rust, 54; Sidney Crosby, 47.

Goals: Rust, 27; Malkin, 22; Jason Zucker, 20.

Power play points: Malkin, 23; Crosby, 17; Rust, 16.



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Hot: Malkin, 7 points (1g, 6a) last 3 games; Crosby, 3 straight with at least a goal (3g, 3a); Zucker, 12 points (6g, 6a) in 13 games with Pens.

Not: Goal droughts...Brandon Tanev (14); Jared McCann, (20); Kris Letting, (10).

The stakes....

The Hurricanes had about as good a Saturday as you're going to see. Carolina won — duh — but you knew that. Columbus started a trip through western Canada with a 4-1 loss in Edmonton while the Rangers lost to the Devils, 6-4, at home (New Jersey is suddenly red hot, but more on this development next Thursday morning). So, the Canes gained ground on all three teams that were ahead of them in points entering the weekend.

Sure, Carolina allowed the Islanders to lessen the blow, giving up a late lead. But, the way I look at it, it's about point accumulation, nothing else. And, anything that gets you closer to 100 (we'll probably have to adjust that target down given the way everyone is playing) is okay. The Canes aren't there yet, but remember, with three games in hand on the Blue

Jackets, one on the Islanders and two each on the Rangers and Panthers (both a point behind the Hurricanes), making the playoffs is 100% up to Carolina.

Today marks the first of four meetings with the Penguins this year all taking place in the next 20 days. Pittsburgh is in a bit of a funk, losing at home to the Capitals, 5-2 yesterday afternoon and are just 2-7-0 in their last 9. The Canes have split the last 8 meetings with Cary's other home team (heh heh heh), so let's not assume anything about today. In each of the last two years, they've also won the first game in Pittsburgh by 4-0 scores.

What does all of that mean? Nothing. Just like scoring first doesn't guarantee anything. It's a light night for scoreboard watching as the only game of note is Columbus skating in Vancouver later this evening, but the only score to worry about is the one at PPG Paints Arena. Especially if Carolina scores first.

Storm Watch starring Alec Campbell begins at 12:00. Opening face off will follow at 1:38. Everything can be heard on 99.9 the Fan.



Preview: Hurricanes at Penguins

Metro Division opponents begin four-game series in the last month of the regular season

by Michael Smith

PITTSBURGH - With just four weeks remaining in the 2019-20 regular season, the Carolina Hurricanes and Pittsburgh Penguins begin their four-game season series with a Sunday matinee.

The Canes and Pens will face off four times in a 21-day stretch - twice this week and then twice again a five-day span in late March.

Playoff Mentality

The Hurricanes trail the Penguins by seven points in the standings with a game in hand. With four head-to-head matchups on tap in the next few weeks, it's possible the Canes could catch the Pens.

Like Saturday's tilt on Long Island, these are all critical swing games that should boast a playoff atmosphere.

"Other than a few teams, everybody is grinding for playoffs. Everybody is doing it. I don't see any game being any different," Justin Williams said. "Certainly for us, we let up a little bit, and we'll be left behind."

Homecoming

In his fifth game with the Hurricanes, Vincent Trocheck netted his first goal with his new team, the overtime winner on Saturday afternoon on Long Island.

"It was feeling like I wasn't getting any bounces these first few games," he said after the game. "To finally get one and for it to be an OT winner, that's definitely something I'll remember."

A native of Pittsburgh, Trocheck has totaled 283 points (112g, 171a) through 425 NHL games, the fourth-most goals, assists and points by a Pennsylvania-born player in NHL history.

Trocheck has tallied nine points (3g, 6a) in 16 career games against the Penguins.

600 for Nino

Nino Niederreiter is set to play in his 600th career NHL game, and he will become to fourth Swiss-born player to do so, joining Mark Hardy, Mark Streit and Roman Josi.

Niederreiter has registered 27 points (10g, 17a) in 65 games this season and will be looking to find the scoresheet for the first time since Feb. 22.

The Opposition

Like the Canes, the Penguins were also in action on Saturday afternoon, as they dropped a 5-2 decision to the Washington Capitals at home. Prior to that, the Penguins had dropped six straight games at the end of February before bouncing back to win two straight to begin March. At 39-22-6 with 84 points, Pittsburgh sits in third in the Metropolitan Division. Evgeni Malkin leads the team in scoring with 70 points (22g, 48a) in 53 games.



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Recap: Trocheck Lifts Canes to OT Win Over Islanders

Canes net power-play goal in overtime to win 3-2

by Michael Smith

UNIONDALE, N.Y. - Locked in a tight playoff race in the Eastern Conference, the Carolina Hurricanes secured a valuable two points in the standings with a 3-2 overtime win over the New York Islanders.

Vincent Trocheck tallied the game-winner in overtime for the Canes, who now trail the Blue Jackets by two points for the second wild card spot in the East.

Here are five takeaways from Saturday afternoon on Long Island.

1. Grinding Out a Win

The Hurricanes were winless in their last four games, the Islanders winless in their last five coming into this Metropolitan Division showdown between two teams jockeying for a playoff spot.

It felt like a big game in the hours leading up to puck drop, and that playoff atmosphere was evident throughout.

This was a big game. They're all big games down the stretch.

"Other than a few teams, everybody is grinding for playoffs. Everybody is doing it. I don't see any game being any different," Justin Williams said. "Certainly for us, we let up a little bit, and we'll be left behind."

Twice in regulation, the Canes took a lead. Twice in regulation, the Islanders tied it. It took overtime and a conversion on their fifth power play of the game to settle the score.

"When you lose a few in a row, you just really need to grind one out. That's what we said after the second: just stay in it, grind it out, be patient," Williams said. "It's a big win for our club."

"A game like this was something we needed," Trocheck said. "We've been playing really well and playing really hard, but it was just finding a way to win a 3-2 game, a 2-1 game, a one-goal game like that. It's huge for our momentum and confidence."

2. Welcome to the Team

Welcome to the Hurricanes, Vincent Trocheck.

In his fifth game with the Canes, Trocheck netted his first goal with his new team - and it couldn't have been bigger.

On a 4-on-3 power play in overtime, Andrei Svechnikov backhanded a puck out of mid-air. The puck deflected off the crossbar, right to Trocheck, who pounded it into the net.

Officials reviewed the play to ensure Svechnikov's stick was not above shoulder height when he contacted the puck. The Canes, meanwhile, prepared to resume their power play, just in case.

"I just put it in my mind that it wasn't a goal, just to kind of focus on if it was called no goal that we were going to go out there and make sure we got it again," Trocheck said.

It was beneficial for the Canes that the call on the ice was a goal. The video replay, then, would have had to be conclusive, and that's a tough call to make given replay angles.

"I was pretty sure we were going to get it," head coach Rod Brind'Amour said. "They called it [a goal] on the ice. It was definitely not one of those obvious ones one way or the other, but we were preparing for, OK, if it doesn't happen, what do we do? We were getting ready for that."

Point to center ice. A good goal. Celebration for the Canes, confusion for the Islanders. A huge goal for Trocheck, who had a handful of quality scoring opportunities in the four games prior.

"It was feeling like I wasn't getting any bounces these first few games," he said. "To finally get one and for it to be an OT winner, that's definitely something I'll remember."

"He's had a lot of opportunities, so it's nice to see him get one like that that's huge for us," Brind'Amour said.

3. Striking First

Finally.

For the first time in seven games, the Hurricanes scored the first goal of the game.

Haydn Fleury let go of a bomb from downtown, and Justin Williams redirected it into the net. A brief video review confirmed Williams' stick contacted the puck below the crossbar, though the scoresheet didn't properly credit him with the goal until the third period. Williams, who five goals this season, has now scored in three straight games.

The first goal of the game isn't the sole determinant of the game's outcome, of course, but it certainly does make a difference. The Canes are now 25-3-2 when scoring first versus 11-22-3 when not.

"It seems like we've been down quite a bit in the last few games early, so getting that first one was a big one for momentum," Trocheck said. "The team that scores first the majority of the time is going to win the game."

And what a difference it makes mentally to not have to chase the lead for the first time in what seems like forever, a tangible reward for a solid start.

"It's a little bit of a relief," Williams said. "Hopefully we can start that trend."

"We've been struggling on that. Even if we've played well, we haven't been able to score [first] and get ahead. It just relaxes you," Brind'Amour said. "It's a lot easier way to play, that's for sure."

4. Steady Eddy

Go to the net, and good things happen.



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Joel Edmundson joined a rush and scored to give the Canes a 2-1 lead at the 6:16 mark of the third period, a goal that looked like might hold up as the game-winner until Josh Bailey tied the score in the final five minutes.

Teuvo Teravainen crossed the blue line and laid the puck off for Svechnikov, who cut to the middle and gave the puck back to Teravainen. Usually one to look to make a play, Teravainen instead elected to shoot. Good decision, as it turned out. The puck deflected off Andy Greene's skate, right to Edmundson for the easy tap-in.

5. Special Teams Comes Through

While it had some quality looks, the Hurricanes power play didn't convert in regulation, then finally capitalizing when it mattered most - and that's all that really matters.

The penalty kill was a perfect 3-for-3, the best sequence coming late in the second period. The Islanders had evened the score 5:15 in on Ryan Pollock's one-timer from atop the right circle, and momentum seemed to be swinging in New York's favor. The Canes stifled that with an excellent kill. Brock McGinn handed Edmundson his stick and then

proceeded to block a pair of shots. The Islanders couldn't get any pucks through the Canes' tight defense, and the game remained 1-1 heading into the second intermission.

"That's the game, for me," Brind'Amour said. "That sequence in the second period where they get back in the game, and we were on the kill for what felt like forever. It was only for two [minutes], but we're blocking shots. Jordo got one. We lose a stick. It was a whole comedy of errors for a little while, but we were able to hunker down and get it done."

Attention to the details of the game is what helped the Canes ultimately grind out the win.

"I love the fight. I love Dzingel dropping the gloves. I loved our PK blocking shots. I loved our battle level. I loved everything about that game," Williams said. "Could we do things a lot better? Yes. Could we play a little bit better with the lead? Yes. But we grinded it out, and that's a big win."

Up Next

Another Metropolitan Division matinee is on tap for Sunday when the Hurricanes visit the Pittsburgh Penguins.



Hurricanes top Islanders in OT to end skid, gain in wild-card race

Trocheck scores at 1:36 for Carolina, which wins for first time in five games

by Brian Compton

UNIONDALE, N.Y. -- Vincent Trocheck scored a power-play goal at 1:36 of overtime and the Carolina Hurricanes moved within two points of the New York Islanders in the Eastern Conference wild-card race with a 3-2 win at Nassau Coliseum on Saturday.

Trocheck batted in a rebound after Andrei Svechnikov knocked down Sebastian Aho's shot from the right circle. The goal was confirmed after a video review determined that Svechnikov's stick was below the normal height of his shoulders when he made contact with the puck.

Joel Edmundson and Justin Williams scored, and Anton Forsberg made 24 saves for Carolina (36-25-5), which won for the first time in five games (1-3-1). The Hurricanes are two points behind the Islanders and Columbus Blue Jackets for the first wild card.

Trocheck's goal was his first in five games with the Hurricanes since he was traded from the Florida Panthers on Feb. 24.

"I wasn't getting any bounces these first few games," Trocheck said. "To finally get one, and for it to be an OT winner, it's definitely something that I'll remember."

Ryan Pullock and Josh Bailey scored for the Islanders (35-23-9), who are 0-3-3 in their past six games. Thomas Greiss made 25 saves.

"You hate to see it end like that; that was a good hockey game," New York captain Anders Lee said. "That doesn't sit well at all. I know there's a rule, an explanation, we'll know why. But I'm watching that over there thinking we're turning this around, we got a draw. Their team is drawing up another play. A lot of uncertainty on that one and I'm sure we'll figure it out, but that's just a tough way to lose a game."

New York was awarded a power play with 52 seconds left in the third period, but Mathew Barzal received a double minor for high sticking against Carolina center Jordan Staal with 24 seconds remaining.

"A little bit of a cardinal sin at the end," Islanders coach Barry Trotz said. "You can't take a penalty that late in the game as you're going into overtime. That's a little bit on us there."

Edmundson gave the Hurricanes a 2-1 lead at 6:16 of the third when he tapped in a loose puck in front of the net after Teuvo Teravainen's shot from the right circle deflected off the skate of Islanders defenseman Andy Greene.

Bailey tied it 2-2 when he scored on a rebound of Noah Dobson's wraparound attempt at 15:02 of the third.

"The last 30 minutes of our game was good," Trotz said. "I think we had them on our heels. They got an opportunity to go up 2-1, our bench was good, we stayed with it. A real good play by [Dobson] and [Bailey] finishing on the goal. A real huge point when you're down and you haven't been winning lately."



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The Hurricanes scored first for the first time in seven games when Williams redirected Hadyn Fleury's shot for a 1-0 lead at 13:22 of the first period.

"We've been struggling on that," Carolina coach Rod Brind'Amour said of scoring first. "Even if we've played well, we haven't been able to score and get ahead. It just relaxes you.

"We have a mess-up, they get it tied up, but the game's still right there. We're not chasing it, and I think that's an easier way to play, that's for sure."

Pulock extended his goal streak to three games and tied it 1-1 at 5:15 of the second period on a one-timer from the slot after Lee stripped Hurricanes defenseman Brady Skjei.

They said it

"When you lose a few in a row, you just really need to grind one out. That's what we said after the second (period), just stay in it, grind it out, be patient. If it takes 25 (minutes), it takes 25. I think it's a big win for our club. We'll see." - Hurricanes forward Justin Williams

"We're in a playoff spot right now. There's a lot of hockey left. We played a good game tonight. There's nothing lost here,

other than a point. We had a good effort tonight, and we go on the road and we make it right." -- Islanders captain Anders Lee

Need to know

Carolina has won all three games against New York this season. The teams will play again at Barclays Center on March 22. ... Brind'Amour said Hurricanes goalie Petr Mrázek, who sustained a concussion Feb. 22, is feeling better but won't play in the next couple of games. ... Islanders forward Andrew Ladd had three hits and one shot on goal in 11:21 of ice time in his third NHL game this season. He replaced forward Cal Clutterbuck (undisclosed). ... Trotz said he expects center Casey Cizikas (lacerated leg) and defenseman Johnny Boychuk (eye) to make the upcoming road trip, which begins against the Vancouver Canucks on Tuesday.

What's next

Hurricanes: At the Pittsburgh Penguins on Sunday (1:30 p.m. ET; ESPN+, TVAS, ATTSN-PT, FS-CR, NHL.TV)

Islanders: At the Vancouver Canucks on Tuesday (10 p.m. ET; ESPN+, SNP, MSG+, NHL.TV)



Trocheck scores in OT, lifts Hurricanes over Islanders 3-2

By Christian Arnold

UNIONDALE, N.Y. (AP) — Vincent Trocheck scored early in overtime and the Carolina Hurricanes ended a four-game losing streak, beating the New York Islanders 3-2 Saturday.

Trocheck notched his first goal with the Hurricanes on a power play 1:36 into the extra session, sending the Islanders to their sixth loss in a row.

During a scramble in front of the New York net, Trocheck knocked the puck past goaltender Thomas Greiss after teammate Andrei Svechnikov appeared to possibly tap the puck off the crossbar with a high stick.

The goal was confirmed after a lengthy review by the officials. It looked as though Svechnikov's stick was above the crossbar, but the league ruled his stick was below his shoulders and therefore a good goal.

"I was feeling like I wasn't getting any bounces those first few games," said Trocheck, acquired from Florida on Feb. 24. "To finally get one and for it to be an OT winner definitely something I'll remember."

The win kept Carolina two points back of the Islanders and Columbus Blue Jackets, who occupy the two wild-card spots in the Eastern Conference.

"Every shift matters," Carolina head coach Rod Brind'Amour said. "It's all coming down to details and those little things that we're talking about. The shot blocks and they all get magnified this time of year."

Josh Bailey tied the game at 2 for the Islanders with just under five minutes to play in the third period. Noah Dobson took a shot that goalie Anton Forsberg kicked away, but the rebound went right to Bailey for the goal.

Forsberg made 24 saves for the Hurricanes as he picked up his first win of the season. Ryan Pulock also scored for New York and Greiss made 25 saves.

"I thought we played hard, I thought we played a pretty fully 60," Bailey said. "We just fell a little short. Not sure about the goal in overtime."

Haydn Fleury opened the scoring at 13:22 of the first period. The Carolina defenseman beat Greiss on his glove side for his fifth goal of the season and second in three games.

Pulock tied the game with a shot from the point 5:15 into the second. Anders Lee stripped Brady Skjei of the puck in the corner to set Pulock up for the one-timer from just inside the faceoff circle. Pulock scored in his third straight game.

NOTES: Hurricanes goalie Petr Mrázek was on the ice for the second consecutive day ahead after missing the previous four games with a concussion. Mrázek practiced with the Hurricanes on Friday for the first time and then worked with the team's goaltending coach on Long Island on Saturday morning. ... Carolina is in the middle of a season-high six-game road trip. It will face Pittsburgh, Detroit and New Jersey before returning to Raleigh to host Pittsburgh next Saturday. ... Carolina scratched goaltender James Reimer. ... Islanders forward Cal Clutterbuck was scratched from Saturday's game after missing all of the third period in Thursday's loss to St.



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Louis and not practicing on Friday. He did skate in the pregame warmups. ... New York defenseman Johnny Boychuk missed his second consecutive game after taking a stick to the face on Tuesday. ... The Islanders embark on a four-game road trip beginning on Tuesday, with stops in Vancouver, Calgary, Edmonton and Pittsburgh.

UP NEXT:

Hurricanes: At Pittsburgh on Sunday.

Islanders: At Vancouver on Tuesday.



Trocheck's First Hurricanes Goal Lifts Carolina to Big Overtime Win Against Islanders

Trocheck's first goal couldn't have come at a better time in Canes' big win on Long Island.

By Brett Finger

For two teams vying for a playoff spot but trending in the wrong direction, Saturday afternoon's tilt between the Carolina Hurricanes and the New York Islanders felt like an absolute must-win for both sides.

Sixty minutes of hockey wasn't enough for them, but the Hurricanes made good use of the overtime period to secure a gargantuan two points against the Islanders to gain some much-needed ground in the Eastern Conference playoff race.

The Hurricanes got off to a roaring start. From the first shift, they pinned the puck in the offensive zone and had the Islanders out of sorts and forced to ice the puck on numerous occasions.

Their sustained pressure was eventually rewarded in the form of a big opening goal. The Jordan Staal line commanded a heavy offensive zone shift that led to a loose puck finding its way back to the point. Haydn Fleury stepped in and fired an absolute rocket that got deflected in front by Justin Williams to give the Hurricanes their first 1-0 lead since February 18 in Nashville.

Carolina kept control of the game through middle stages of the opening frame, putting together their best start to a game in weeks. In the final minutes of the period, the Hurricanes were gifted a string of big opportunities.

Leo Komarov got assessed a double-minor for high-sticking Brady Skjei, and the Canes had four minutes to get another goal.

They maintained possession for a long time and generated some decent scoring chances, but they struggled to get to the middle of the ice and capitalize on it. They were kept to the outside, and as a result they couldn't get the quality that they needed.

New York killed off the penalty, but with just under two minutes to go in the period, Carolina got another power play, this time for two minutes.

Again, there was plenty of puck movement, but it was stationary and uneventful. The Islanders killed off six minutes worth of penalties in about eight minutes of in-game time.

The Islanders built off of those kills and put together a much better second period. At the 5:15 mark of the frame, they broke through and tied the game at one goal apiece.

Skjei couldn't corral a puck along the boards, and two neighboring Isles forwards pressed down and gained possession before finding Ryan Pullock pinching down and readying for the quick shot that would beat Anton Forsberg top-shelf.

The period was tightly contested and the physicality continued to play a big role in the game. Both teams finished their checks with a purpose and fought hard along the boards. Williams, in particular was a man on a mission. After taking a bit to settle in, it looks like the 38-year-old is feeling it right now.

The second period came to a close with the score even at one, setting the table for an intense final twenty minutes of regulation time.

Six minutes into the third period, the Hurricanes regained the lead after a frantic sequence in front of Forsberg.

Joel Edmundson blocked a big shot in front of the Canes net, and it sprung an odd-man rush the other way.

Andrei Svechnikov used his reach to finesse a pass to Teuvo Teravainen, and his shot bounced right in the middle of the crease, where an unmarked Edmundson swooped in and put the puck right into the empty net.

The Canes went most of the third period in control of the lead, but a late push from the Isles tied the game.

A long offensive zone shift was broken open after Trevor van Riemsdyk lost a battle with Josh Bailey and let him get open in front. Young defenseman Noah Dobson circled the wagons and fed Bailey in front with 4:58 on the clock to tie the game.

The final minute of the third period was a rollercoaster of emotions.

With 52 seconds left, Skjei got whistled for tripping. The Hurricanes were incensed because they thought Matthew Barzal embellished the call. It was especially irritating because Skjei got tripped very obviously earlier in the period and it somehow wasn't called a penalty.

That didn't matter, though, because the Islanders had a power play and a chance to win the ga...

Oh, okay never mind.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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Barzal delivered an extremely hard high-stick to Staal's nose. The Canes captain was bleeding heavily after the incident and just like that it was a 4-on-4 sequence in the final seconds of regulation.

The game went to overtime, wherein the Hurricanes smartly ragged the puck for the remainder of Skjei's penalty before going on a lengthy 4-on-3 power play that ended up not being very lengthy at all.

Just 96 seconds into overtime, Sebastian Aho's shot got kicked up in the air and batted down by Svechnikov off of the crossbar and onto the tape of Vincent Trocheck. The club's newest forward threw the puck off of an Islanders defenseman's face from a tough angle and it deflected into the net.

A lengthy review followed the goal, because it sure seemed like Svechnikov batted the puck down with a high stick. The call on the ice stood, though, which was a good goal.

Trocheck's goal was the difference in what was an absolute must-win game for the Hurricanes, who saw their four-game losing streak come to an end.

Svechnikov finished the game with the assists in 19:09 of ice time, including the primary helper on Trocheck's game-winner.

The quiet x-factor was the performance of Forsberg, who stopped 24 of 26 shots in his first win as a Hurricane. He was marvelous during a number of stretches in the game, and his big breakaway stop in the first period may very well have totally changed how the game would go onto play out.

With the win, Carolina have a record of 36-25-5. They are just two points behind the eighth-place Columbus Blue

Jackets with two games in hand. They're now two points shy of the Islanders with a game in hand, as well.

It'll be a quick turnaround for the Hurricanes, and a tough one at that. They'll take on the Pittsburgh Penguins in the Steel City tomorrow afternoon.

Following the game, the Hurricanes recalled Morgan Geekie from Charlotte, the first career NHL callup for the 2017 third-round pick. No players were visibly injured in the game, and no forward missed a shift, but someone could be banged up and with the Canes playing early tomorrow, they may have figured that having an extra body would give them a little bit of a cushion for tomorrow's game against the Penguins. The release from the team is below.

CANES RECALL GEEKIE FROM CHARLOTTE
Forward has posted 42 points in 55 AHL games this season

Don Waddell, President and General Manager of the National Hockey League's Carolina Hurricanes, today announced that the team has recalled forward Morgan Geekie from the Charlotte Checkers of the American Hockey League (AHL).

Geekie, 21, has tallied 42 points (22g, 20a) in 55 AHL games with the Checkers this season. The 6'2", 192-pound forward is looking to make his NHL debut. Geekie has registered 88 points (41g, 47a) in 128 AHL games over two seasons with Charlotte. During the 2019 AHL playoffs, he recorded 18 points (8g, 10a) in 19 games as the Checkers won their first-ever Calder Cup Championship. Geekie posted 202 points (78g, 124a) in 216 Western Hockey League (WHL) games with Tri-City from 2014-18. The Strathclair, Man., native was drafted by the Hurricanes in the third round, 67th overall, of the 2017 NHL Draft.



Checkers drop overtime decision to Utica

by Nicholas Niedzielski

The Checkers pulled out a point in their rematch with Utica, but a squandered lead led to an overtime defeat at the hands of the Comets.

Despite losing their leading scorer Morgan Geekie to an NHL recall just before puck drop, the Checkers pushed their way to a two-goal lead midway through the game thanks to a pair of redirections out front.

The Comets caught a spark from there, however, as Reid Boucher struck twice on the power play to even the score and push things beyond regulation.

The two sides traded chances in the overtime until the final 90 seconds when Utica pulled off a slick move in tight and lit the lamp to complete their comeback and earn the two points.

Coach Ryan Warsofsky on losing the 2-0 lead

They score the power-play goal off the faceoff play and we've just got to be a little bit tighter. I've got to look at the calls. They were horrendous calls, and we've seen it all year.

Warsofsky on Utica forward Reid Boucher

He's got a deadly shot, and we know when he's on the ice. We talk about it a lot. He's got a great shot and a knack for scoring goals. He's a smart player that finds time and space. He obviously had a big weekend for them.

Warsofsky on the Checkers' goals

Getting bodies in front. The one power-play goal Bourque gets a tip on it, and then the next one is just Coop going to the net. That's what we talked about – getting bodies and traffic to the net.



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Warsofsky on the three-on-three overtime period

We went two D there at one point because we have some really skilled defensemen and gave it a little different look, but I thought we pushed. The guys put a hell of an effort forward and unfortunately we couldn't get that second point.

NOTES

The postgame auction of Miracle on Ice themed jerseys raised \$27,825 for The Independence Fund ... The Checkers fell to 1-5 in games decided during the five-minute overtime period

Canes recall Morgan Geekie

by Nicholas Niedzielski

Morgan Geekie is headed to the NHL for the first time as the Carolina Hurricanes have recalled the forward from Charlotte.

The 21-year-old currently ranks third on the team with 42 points in 55 games and leads the Checkers with 22 goals. Geekie, who is the reigning AHL Player of the Week, has totaled 88 points (41g, 47a) in 128 career AHL games over the last two seasons with Charlotte and helped the Checkers

... Ryan Bourque scored his first goal as a Checker in just his second game ... Mark Cooper has four points in six games as a Checker ... Prior to giving up two goals tonight, the Checkers had killed 24 consecutive penalties over their last five games ... AHL scoring leader Reid Boucher (3g, 1a) and Carter Camper (1g, 3a) had points on four of Utica's five goals this weekend ... The Checkers fell to 0-2-1 against Utica this season ... Gustav Forsling has assists in consecutive games ... Forwards Brian Gibbons and Colin Markison and defenseman Cavan Fitzgerald missed the game due to injury.

capture a Calder Cup last season, tying for second on the team in postseason scoring.

This is the first NHL recall for Geekie, who was selected in the third round of the 2017 draft by Carolina. The Canes are in Pittsburgh Sunday for a 1:30 matchup with the Penguins, while the Checkers return to the ice Tuesday for the third of a six-game home stand.

TODAY'S LINKS

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CAROLINA HURRICANES

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SportScan

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

1180144 Carolina Hurricanes

Trocheck scores in OT, lifts Hurricanes over Islanders 3-2

Staff Report

BY THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

MARCH 07, 2020 10:46 PM

UNIONDALE, N.Y.

Vincent Trocheck scored early in overtime and the Carolina Hurricanes ended a four-game losing streak, beating the New York Islanders 3-2 Saturday.

Trocheck notched his first goal with the Hurricanes on a power play 1:36 into the extra session, sending the Islanders to their sixth loss in a row.

During a scramble in front of the New York net, Trocheck knocked the puck past goaltender Thomas Greiss after teammate Andrei Svechnikov appeared to possibly tap the puck off the crossbar with a high stick.

The goal was confirmed after a lengthy review by the officials. It looked as though Svechnikov's stick was above the crossbar, but the league ruled his stick was below his shoulders and therefore a good goal.

"I was feeling like I wasn't getting any bounces those first few games," said Trocheck, acquired from Florida on Feb. 24. "To finally get one and for it to be an OT winner definitely something I'll remember."

The win kept Carolina two points back of the Islanders and Columbus Blue Jackets, who occupy the two wild-card spots in the Eastern Conference.

"Every shift matters," Carolina head coach Rod Brind'Amour said. "It's all coming down to details and those little things that we're talking about. The shot blocks and they all get magnified this time of year."

Josh Bailey tied the game at 2 for the Islanders with just under five minutes to play in the third period. Noah Dobson took a shot that goalie Anton Forsberg kicked away, but the rebound went right to Bailey for the goal.

Forsberg made 24 saves for the Hurricanes as he picked up his first win of the season. Ryan Pulock also scored for New York and Greiss made 25 saves.

"I thought we played hard, I thought we played a pretty fully 60," Bailey said. "We just fell a little short. Not sure about the goal in overtime."

Haydn Fleury opened the scoring at 13:22 of the first period. The Carolina defenseman beat Greiss on his glove side for his fifth goal of the season and second in three games.

Pulock tied the game with a shot from the point 5:15 into the second. Anders Lee stripped Brady Skjei of the puck in the corner to set Pulock up for the one-timer from just inside the faceoff circle. Pulock scored in his third straight game.

News Observer LOADED: 03.08.2020

1180145 Carolina Hurricanes

Hurricanes recall Morgan Geekie from Checkers

BY STAFF REPORT

MARCH 07, 2020 06:34 PM

The Carolina Hurricanes on Saturday recalled forward Morgan Geekie from the Charlotte Checkers of the American Hockey League.

Geekie, 21, could make his NHL debut on Sunday when the Canes face the Pittsburgh Penguins in a road game. Geekie has 22 goals and 20 assists in 55 games for the Checkers this season.

Geekie, listed at 6-2 and 192 pounds, was a third-round pick by the Canes in the 2017 NHL Draft and has played 128 games in two seasons for the Checkers, with 41 goals and 47 assists. He had 18 points (eight goals, 10 assists) in the Checkers' 19-game run to the 2019 Calder Cup championship.

News Observer LOADED: 03.08.2020

1180146 Carolina Hurricanes

'I loved everything about that game': Canes play ugly to snap winless streak

By Sara Civian

Mar 7, 2020

UNIONDALE, N.Y. — The oft-referenced "Your best players have to be your best players" cliché is usually true when a pattern of uninspiring offense plagues a team. It holds up when an expensive goalie is underperforming. And it's not like the Hurricanes had been lighting up the scoreboard or protecting the net particularly well through their four-game winless streak, but you got the sense a larger, team-wide issue was at hand.

It'd been elucidated in things that don't really matter until they do — like six straight opening goals allowed, a defensive lapse happening just when a dangerous player happened to be in a scoring position, "bounces" not going a team's way.

Head coach Rod Brind'Amour had been calling the general bad vibes "taking a breath at the wrong time," and he wasn't wrong. It's just that the vagueness was troubling. How does he fix something like that when it seems like a combination of bad luck and incompetence?

We found out the answer Saturday afternoon, as the Hurricanes grinded out an ugly 3-2 overtime win over the Islanders. There's no right time to take a breath. The margin for breathing doesn't exist.



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"Other than a few teams, everybody is grinding for playoffs. Everybody is doing it. I don't see any game being any different," Justin Williams said. "Certainly for us. If we let up a little bit, we'll be left behind."

The Canes proved there's a fix for "breathing at the wrong time." It's not pretty, it's not easy, and as Jordan Staal said in Philadelphia, it's certainly not toe-dragging.

Sometimes their best players have to be their best players.

Sometimes Brock McGinn has to be Brock McGinn.

"So, that's the game for me, that sequence in the second period," Brind'Amour said. "They get back in the game, and then we're on the kill for what felt like forever. We're blocking shots, (Jordan Staal) got one, lose a stick. It was a whole comedy of errors there for a little while. But we were able to hunker down and at least get it done."

"Oh, he's a stud," Vincent Trocheck said of McGinn. "He works his ass off every single game, every single shift. It was no surprise that he was out there blocking shots."

Said Williams: "You know what you're getting out of Brock every night. He's gonna put his body on the line. He's gonna work. There's nothing by chance — he's all heart. Obviously, he's a big part of our PK and a big part of our team."

We all think our dramatic thoughts in real time and edit them a few hours after any given game, right? After that sequence, I thought, "If they don't win this for Brock, I'm not sure about the fight in this team."

But to me, at least, it seemed they all thought the same thing. They were probably thinking that since the second that game in Philly ended, though. We all saw Sebastian Aho body a few folks early on. Then Ryan Dzingel looking for a fight all night — even before the McGinn sequence — was sort of an indicator.

"I mean, I just love the fight, I love Dzingel dropping the gloves, I loved the PK blocking shots, I loved our battle level," Williams said. "I loved everything about that game. Can we do some things a little bit better? Yes. Play a little better with the lead? Yes. But we grinded it out, and that's a big one."

Brind'Amour called the 4-1 loss to the Flyers "another lesson," and I wondered how fast they could learn it. Maybe "live every day like you're Brock McGinn on the penalty kill" is the lesson for a team with young stars — it doesn't have to be the perfect goal, and it doesn't have to be a goal at all. It does have to be the perfect blocked shot and about preventing a loss. As critical as I've been about McGinn's contract, if he can teach Andrei Svechnikov and Martin Necas the value of playing ugly, then it pays off.

• I cannot let this game go without mentioning that noted laser goal scorer Haydn Fleury led all skaters in five-on-five time on ice. All skaters. All of them. He has deserved a spot in the NHL for probably two years, but the Hurricanes' blue line was stacked. Then he played like four minutes a game and one time went out for one shift and was benched. How is he going to be his best self under those circumstances? As much as the injuries to Brett Pesce and Dougie Hamilton have cost the Canes, at least Fleury is living up to what many said he wouldn't based off nothing.

• Anton Forsberg? Not bad.

• The Hurricanes recalled Checkers center Morgan Geekie after the game. We'll find out the reason on Sunday, but front-office sources have said since the beginning of last year that they take Geekie seriously as someone who could have an impact in the NHL one day. That's sort of why they've let him quietly develop in the AHL. The crux of such conversations with the front office is that executives don't pay attention to points with their developing players. They obviously have a different set of analytics anyway — The Athletic's Justin Bourne just brilliantly touched on that.

• Brind'Amour, who has never lied about a call he's disagreed with, weighed in on Trocheck's overtime winner, which maybe could've been prevented had the refs called the high stick on Svechnikov before the play. "I was pretty sure we were going to get it," Brind'Amour said. "It was definitely not one of those obvious ones one way or the other, but we

were preparing for, OK, if it doesn't happen, what do we do? We were getting ready for that." That's when you know he sees the other side.

The Athletic LOADED: 03.08.2020

1180239 Pittsburgh Penguins

Minor league report: Penguins snap losing streak

SETH RORABAUGH

Sunday, March 8, 2020 1:01 a.m.

Forward Jordy Bellerive and defenseman Zach Trotman each had a goal and an assist for the Wilkes-Barre/Scranton Penguins in a 5-2 home win against the Bridgeport Sound Tigers at the Mohegan Sun Arena in Wilkes-Barre on Saturday.

Goaltender Dustin Tokarski made 20 saves for the Penguins (28-25-3-5) who snapped a five-game losing streak.

Highlights:

The Penguins' next game is at home against the Binghamton Devils on Sunday, 3:05 p.m.

Tribune Review LOADED: 03.08.2020

1180240 Pittsburgh Penguins

Kevin Gorman: For Penguins, losing to Capitals was about missed opportunities

KEVIN GORMAN

Saturday, March 7, 2020 7:03 p.m.

With a chance to close the gap for first place in the Metropolitan Division, the Pittsburgh Penguins and Washington Capitals played the first period looking like playoff teams.

The Capitals resembled their 2018 Stanley Cup champions.

Unfortunately for the Penguins, it was their 2019 version.

Getting swept in the first round by the New York Islanders last spring should have been a wakeup call for the Penguins. They can't solely rely upon speed and skill to win games.

How the Penguins could sleepwalk through the first period of such a pivotal game for division standings and playoff seeding is a mystery. Where the Capitals played tic-tac-toe to the tune of three goals, the Penguins could hardly muster a shot on goal.

The result was a 5-2 loss to the Capitals on Saturday afternoon at PPG Paints Arena, one that was all about missed opportunities. The Penguins went 1 for 5 on the power play — failing to score on a 5 on 3 that covered 1 minute, 25 seconds — missed a penalty shot and allowed a short-handed goal.

The Penguins repeatedly found themselves on the wrong end of odd-man rushes, where they left goalie Matt Murray defenseless against the Capitals' crisscrossing passes.

Other than that, everything went pretty well.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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"It's a fine line at any point but especially this time of year," Penguins captain Sidney Crosby said. "It's very similar to the playoffs, where one little mistake and it's in the back of your net. We've just got to understand that and make sure we limit them and give ourselves a chance. It's an uphill climb when you're down 3-0 against good hockey teams. We competed hard and gave ourselves a chance to get back in it, but that's not a position you want to put yourself in."

The Penguins could have cut the Capitals' lead in the division to one point with a victory. Instead, Washington (89 points) has a five-point lead over the Penguins (84), who remain behind the Philadelphia Flyers for second place in the Metro and fourth place in the Eastern Conference standings.

"That's not something we can really dwell on," Crosby said, noting the Penguins host Carolina on Sunday. "We've got a lot of division games here the rest of the year. We've got to learn from it and move on pretty quick here."

Penguins coach Mike Sullivan made an interesting decision by starting Murray in goal over Tristan Jarry. I would have preferred to see how Jarry handled a playoff atmosphere against an archrival. We know what Murray can do in the postseason.

It's hard to fault Sullivan for picking Murray, as he was coming off a 4-2 victory at Buffalo on Thursday. The Penguins' defensive breakdowns made the decision largely irrelevant.

Evgeni Malkin blamed the Penguins for playing "easy" because of a healthy complement of players on the top three lines and defense. The blame should include the stars, as Crosby missed more shots on net (three) than he made (two), Malkin was a minus-3 and defenseman Kris Letang a minus-4.

But it starts with the power play. When the Capitals were called for too many men on the ice with Brenden Dillon in the penalty box, the Penguins had a prime opportunity to tie the score.

Instead, the Penguins missed shot after shot. Patric Hornqvist sent one from the slot into the protective netting. Bryan Rust missed from the right, Malkin from the slot, Crosby on a point-blank rebound that sailed over Capitals goalie Braden Holtby's left pad and through the crease.

The Capitals responded with goals by Nicklas Backstrom, who beat Murray's glove side, and Richard Panik for a 3-0 lead. The Penguins got a break when Jonas Siegenthaler was called for hooking Jared McCann on a breakaway, but Holtby stopped McCann on the penalty shot.

The Penguins also failed to take advantage of Capitals defenseman John Carlson's broken stick late in the second period. Holtby stopped Crosby's shot by sweeping his left pad on a two-on-one feed from Conor Sheary. Dillon drew a delay of game penalty in the ensuing scrum with 24.1 seconds left.

That led to more misery for the Penguins.

They started the third period on the power play, only for former Penguin Carl Hagelin to chip the puck past McCann and set up Nic Dowd for the short-hander and a 4-0 lead.

To Sullivan, the solution is in playing with simplicity.

"We've got capable people. We've got the depth that we need. We try to utilize four lines," Sullivan said. "It's more about just collective effort, playing the right way and paying attention to the details. That's what it boils down to."

"We've got to make better decisions, both with the puck and without the puck. When we do and we get locked in, that's when we're hard to play against. We're a lot stingier, and that's part of the fabric of the identity that we're looking for moving forward."

That identity should be of a Penguins playoff team, preferably one that has the fabric of the 2016 or '17 versions.

Tribune Review LOADED: 03.08.2020

1180241 Pittsburgh Penguins

Despite NHL coronavirus concerns, Penguins allow reporters in dressing room for interviews

KEVIN GORMAN

Saturday, March 7, 2020 5:07 p.m.

Despite reports the NHL would close dressing rooms to media because of concerns over the coronavirus on recommendations from the Centers for Disease Control, the Pittsburgh Penguins allowed theirs to be open Saturday.

Elliott Friedman of Rogers Sportsnet, an NHL rights holder, and Frank Seravalli of TSN, president of the Professional Hockey Writers Association, tweeted Saturday the league could close dressing rooms to reporters and that media availability would be held in formal news conference areas.

Reporters, however, were permitted to enter the dressing rooms to interview players after the Washington Capitals' 5-2 victory over the Penguins at PPG Paints Arena.

The New York Islanders did not allow reporters in their dressing room after their game against Carolina at Nassau Veterans Memorial Coliseum. The Minnesota Wild and L.A. Kings closed their dressing rooms at Staples Center. On Friday, the San Jose Sharks sent their players to the podium instead of opening their dressing room.

Starting today, @NHL will close dressing rooms to media, on recommendation of Centers for Disease Control (@CDCgov) in effort to stop the spread of coronavirus. NBA, MLB + MLS are expected to follow. Media availabilities will be conducted in formal press conference area.

— Elliott Friedman (@FriedgeHNIC) March 7, 2020

Starting today, #NHL plans to close dressing room access to media, on recommendation of Centers for Disease Control in effort to stop the spread of coronavirus. NBA, MLB and MLS are expected to follow. Media availabilities will now be conducted in formal press conference areas.

— Frank Seravalli (@frank_seravalli) March 7, 2020

On Friday, the Penguins released a statement announcing they would follow the recommendations of the CDC, UPMC and the NHL in response to concerns of the coronavirus spreading as the death toll rises throughout the U.S.

"Our medical staff has been in communication for several weeks with UPMC Infectious Disease about safety and prevention," the Penguins statement said. "The safety and health of our players, employees and fans are our first priority."

pic.twitter.com/7AkRgXhlf

— Pittsburgh Penguins (@penguins) March 6, 2020

In response to reports the NBA could close games to spectators, Los Angeles Lakers star LeBron James said he would not play if there were no fans in attendance.

Penguins captain Sidney Crosby said such a scenario would "absolutely" make for an odd circumstance but avoided discussing whether he would play if the NHL cleared arenas for games.

"We've discussed the situation and have been brought up to speed with what's going on," Crosby said, "but I haven't given any thought to that. I couldn't give you an opinion either way."

Tribune Review LOADED: 03.08.2020

1180242 Pittsburgh Penguins

Penguins look sleepy in home loss to Capitals



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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SETH RORABAUGH

Saturday, March 7, 2020 3:46 p.m.

When determining who his starting goaltender is for each game, Pittsburgh Penguins coach Mike Sullivan often proclaims his is a difficult decision.

After all, Matt Murray is a two-time winner of the Stanley Cup, and Tristan Jarry has matured into an All-Star this season.

On Saturday, the Penguins operated in such a way that it was largely irrelevant if Murray, Jarry or a stack of cinder blocks and mortar were in the crease.

Allowing a number of odd-man rushes and bumbling their way through an extended five-on-three power-play, the Penguins stumbled through a wretched first period that proved too daunting to overcome in a 5-2 loss to the rival Washington Capitals at PPG Paints Arena.

"The first period," forward Evgeni Malkin said, "we sleep."

They got a rude awakening only 1 minute, 26 seconds into regulation. After receiving a pass in the slot, Capitals forward Nic Dowd, virtually uncontested, roofed a wrister past Murray's blocker for his sixth goal of the season.

The Penguins had an excellent opportunity to tie the score at 7:12 of the first period when they were granted an extended five-on-three power-play opportunity that lasted a bloated 1:25. But all they could muster with that ample time was a single shot by Malkin.

At 18:28 of the first, Capitals forward Nicklas Backstrom converted a two-on-one rush into his 12th goal before Capitals forward Richard Panik collected his ninth goal off a three-on-two sequence.

"We just kind of chased a mistake with another one," Penguins forward Sidney Crosby said of the opening frame. "Our (effort) was there. It just (that) we made some bad reads. A team like that, that's pretty opportunistic, they're not going to make mistakes with those two-on-ones and things like that. We gave them too good of chances there."

Said Penguins defenseman Marcus Pettersson: "When you let in a couple of goals, sometimes you try to do too much. You try to get to the puck too quick instead of communicating with each other. There were a couple of pinches that made it a couple of two-on-ones. Got to play smarter."

After Penguins forward Jared McCann was denied by goaltender Braden Holtby on a penalty shot at 18:48 of the second period, the Penguins finally got on the scoreboard at 5:09 of the third when forward Conor Sheary stole a puck behind the Capitals net and set up Crosby at the crease for his 16th goal.

Malkin scored his 22nd goal of the season at 12:16 of the third and pulled the Penguins within two.

Capitals forward T.J. Oshie snuffed out any hopes of a comeback by scoring his 26th goal at 13:12 of the third.

"They took advantage of our mistakes and made us pay on the odd-man rushes," said Murray, who finished with 23 saves. "That's a skilled group, and they finished when they got their chances."

With the considerable exception of All-Star forward Jake Guentzel (to say nothing of contributing forwards such as Anthony Angello, Zach Aston-Reese and Dominik Simon), the Penguins dressed a lineup Saturday that was mostly able-bodied.

Yet they bore little resemblance to the team that relied on structure and succeeded with handfuls of call-ups from Wilkes-Barre/Scranton earlier in the season. Even in a 4-2 road win Thursday against the Buffalo Sabres, a team virtually eliminated from playoff contention, the Penguins allowed ample high-danger scoring chances.

"When a couple guys are injured, everyone steps up," Malkin said. "We understand we need to play better. But when everyone is back, everyone

is healthy, we think, 'Oh, it's so much much skill right now. And an easy game, we score every shift.'

"It's not. We need to step up. It doesn't matter who is in (the lineup.) When five or six guys are injured, we play so much better. It's a little bit hard to understand right now."

Tribune Review LOADED: 03.08.2020

1180243 Pittsburgh Penguins

Penguins to start Matt Murray against Capitals

SETH RORABAUGH

Saturday, March 7, 2020 12:05 p.m.

The Penguins will start goaltender Matt Murray against the rival Washington Capitals on Saturday according to coach Mike Sullivan.

In 36 games this season, Murray has a 19-10-5 record along with a 2.83 goals against average, a .900 save percentage and one shutout.

This will be the third consecutive start for Murray. He was in net for a 7-3 home win against the Ottawa Senators on Tuesday as well as a 4-2 road victory against the Buffalo Sabres on Thursday.

Murray has not started three consecutive games since he made eight consecutive starts between Oct. 26 and Nov. 15.

The Penguins have largely platooned Murray and Tristan Jarry in net since late December. The last time either goaltender made three consecutive starts was a three-game stretch by Jarry between Jan. 12 and 16.

"He tends to play his best when the stakes get high," Sullivan said of Murray. "And he's shown that since he's been a Pittsburgh Penguin. We think he's playing extremely well as of late and that's part of the reason why we made the decision that we made today."

Notes:

- The Penguins will wear their yellow third jerseys.
- The Capitals are expected to start goaltender Braden Holtby. In 46 games this season, Holtby has a 24-14-5 record along with a 3.16 goals against average and an .896 save percentage.

Tribune Review LOADED: 03.08.2020

1180244 Pittsburgh Penguins

Penguins-Hurricanes: Game time, TV-radio information, matchup notes

Staff Writer

MAR 8, 2020 7:00 AM

Who: Penguins vs. Carolina Hurricanes.

When, where: 1:30 p.m. Sunday, PPG Paints Arena.

Look, listen: AT&T SportsNet; WXDX-FM (105.9), PittsburghPenguins.com.

Noteworthy: The Hurricanes are the only team the Penguins have not yet played. They meet four times in March. ... Upper St. Clair's Vincent Trocheck has one point and a minus-5 rating in five games since Florida traded him to Carolina. ... Presumed starting G Tristan Jarry posted a



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.850 save percentage while losing his past three starts. ... Before beating the New York Islanders on Saturday, the Hurricanes had lost all four games since an emergency goalie, David Ayes, helped them beat the Toronto Maple Leafs Feb. 22. ... Penguins C Jared McCann, who got stopped on a penalty shot Saturday in a 5-2 loss to the Washington Capitals, has not scored in 20 games. ... Hurricanes D Dougie Halmton had 40 points and a plus-30 rating in 47 games before his leg was broken Jan. 16.

Penguins Brandon Tanev, left, tries to control the puck in front of Washington Capitals goaltender Braden Holtby, right, during the second period of an NHL hockey game, Saturday, March 7, 2020, in Pittsburgh.

Did you know? Assuming Penguins D Kris Letang suits up Sunday, he will pass Jaromir Jagr for fourth place on the team's all-time games-played list at 807.

Post Gazette LOADED: 03.08.2020

1180245 Pittsburgh Penguins

As COVID-19 spreads, NHL reportedly considers modifying media access

MIKE DEFABO

MAR 8, 2020 12:32 AM

NHL Commissioner Gary Bettman discussed the situation with NHL.com. I've updated. Here's the latest version below.

Amid growing concerns over COVID-19, the NHL is reportedly considering further precautionary steps to avoid spreading the virus to players and fans.

The league is considering a policy that would close the dressing room to the media, according to multiple reports, including from ESPN and The Athletic. NHL Commissioner Gary Bettman said the league is "considering every conceivable option" but it has not made any formal announcements.

"What we're trying to do is make sure that we're doing the prudent things," Bettman told NHL.com. "We're not looking to change our media policies on a long-term basis. This is in direct response to the coronavirus."

Penguins Brandon Tanev, left, tries to control the puck in front of Washington Capitals goaltender Braden Holtby, right, during the second period of an NHL hockey game, Saturday, March 7, 2020, in Pittsburgh.

The Penguins opened their dressing room to reporters following Saturday's 5-2 loss to the Capitals at PPG Paints Arena and have not announced any changes for Sunday's game against the Carolina Hurricanes. However, several teams around the league have already enacted their own policies.

The San Jose Sharks began conducting interviews in a press conference setting on Friday. The New York Islanders made select players available outside the locker room on Saturday. According to The Athletic, the Dallas Stars planned to conduct their interviews in a press conference room.

While no one will shed a tear over sports media access – nor should they – it is fair to wonder what next steps the NHL might take.

The NBA reportedly asked teams to make contingency plans if they have to play games in empty arenas with only essential staff present.

The NHL's deputy commissioner Bill Daly told ESPN he has not ruled out options such as postponing or canceling games, or even playing games in empty arenas. But he said that's "very unlikely."

"Let's not get ahead of ourselves here, OK?" Bettman said. "We're staying on top of it and we're in constant communication with our clubs

and the [NHL] Players' Association, and we're going to deal with this in as thorough, professional, on-top-of-it manner as possible. But let's everybody take a deep breath."

Los Angeles Lakers star LeBron James told the Associated Press on Friday that he wouldn't play in a game with no fans present.

"I ain't playing if I ain't got the fans in the crowd," James said. "That's who I play for. I play for my teammates, and I play for the fans. That's what it's all about."

Penguins captain Sidney Crosby said it "absolutely" would be strange to play a game in an empty arena. But unlike James, he did not voice an opinion on the matter.

"We've discussed kind of the situation and, you know, been brought up to speed on what's going on," Crosby said. "But I haven't given any thought to that. Couldn't give you an opinion either way."

Weeks ago, the hockey world began to feel the ripple effects of a serious situation in a rather trivial way – hockey sticks. Bauer and CCM, two of the top manufacturers, were forced to close production facilities in China, where the virus originated. This raised possible concerns about a stick shortage.

In the weeks since, the hockey world has been forced to address COVID-19 in many more tangible ways.

The 2020 International Ice Hockey Federation Women's World Championship that was scheduled to begin March 31 in Canada has been canceled, at the recommendations of the IIHF and Nova Scotia's chief medical officer of health.

The IIHF has also canceled six U-18 tournaments in Europe in March. It will wait until March 15 before addressing the World Championship, scheduled for May 8-24 in Switzerland. Switzerland's National League postponed its playoffs until at least March 15 after the Swiss government banned events with more than 1,000 spectators.

The NHL has urged players to limit contact with fans. The league suggested players avoid handshakes, close contact and autographs. The NHL also implemented a policy where league office employees are banned from traveling outside of the U.S. and Canada.

"We've been told limit our interaction with fans and stuff like that, which is really unfortunate," Penguins defenseman Jack Johnson said. "That's just kind of the world we live in right now. Everyone is going to do their best to not get it. I don't know if there's much we can do about it. But you might as well try your best."

On Friday, Gov. Tom Wolf confirmed the first two cases of COVID-19 in Pennsylvania, one in Delaware County and one in Wayne County. There are still no confirmed cases of COVID-19 in Allegheny County, the county health department tweeted in a Saturday afternoon update.

On Friday, the Penguins issued the following statement.

"The team is following the recommendations of the CDC, UPMC and the NHL," the Penguins statement read. "Our medical staff has been in communication for several weeks with UPMC Infectious Disease about safety and prevention. The safety and health of our players, employees and fans are our first priority."

In other NHL cities where the virus has spread, teams have been forced to make decisions. The San Jose Sharks were advised by Santa Clara County public health officials to cancel their game on Thursday night game against the Minnesota Wild. But that game against the Minnesota Wild – and Saturday's matchup against the Ottawa Senators – went on as scheduled.

"When we were out on the West coast, they told us to try to stay away from large crowds," Penguins defenseman Marcus Pettersson said. "It's all over the news. For sure, we talk about it. Coach addressed it. He told us to be aware."

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1180246 Pittsburgh Penguins



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 8, 2020

Penguins cough up three goals on odd-man rushes in 5-2 loss to Capitals

MATT VENSEL

MAR 7, 2020 8:56 PM

The Penguins have a major problem, and it's not picking who is in goal. Because if they keep this up, it isn't going to matter which guy they throw in there.

Over the first three months of the season, the Penguins were among the NHL's most disciplined teams when it came to limiting odd-man rushes against.

That was something coach Mike Sullivan, still irked about the meltdown against the New York Islanders last postseason, harped on during training camp and then stayed on them about whenever they showed the slightest bit of slippage.

But since the calendar turned to 2020 and even more so after the All-Star break in late January, some players have fallen into old habits, allowing too many of those dangerous chances against their dueling goalies. Matt Murray fought off a few of them in Thursday's win in Buffalo, earning himself a third straight start.

The goalie didn't bail them out this time around as the Penguins lost, 5-2, to the Washington Capitals at PPG Paints Arena on Saturday. The Capitals twice scored on odd-man rushes in the first period and got another one in the third.

"It's certainly an area we've discussed a lot in the last five or six weeks," Sullivan said. "It just boils down to discipline to details and making sure we pay attention, we have an awareness on the ice, we make better decisions and we support one another. It's definitely an area of our game where we've got to improve."

The Penguins had an atrocious first period, one of their worst all season.

They had a breakdown in their zone, leaving Nic Dowd alone in front of Murray for the game's first goal just 1:52 in. They hardly threatened on a 5-on-3 power play that lasted for 85 seconds. And then a pair of failed pinches by Penguins defensemen at the offensive blue line led to goals off odd-man rushes.

"[The Capitals] were waiting for those opportunities," Marcus Pettersson said. "They played hard. Give them credit. But I think we made a lot of mistakes."

Nicklas Backstrom made it 2-0 with 3:45 left in the first after Kris Letang tried to hold the blue line and got caught flat-footed. The Penguins had all three forwards below the dots on that play. Evgeni Malkin tried to get back to break up a 2-on-1, but he had too much ground to cover and not enough gas in the tank.

"First period, we just weren't above the puck enough. The way we play, our D are going to be going down the walls in the offensive zone, trying to keep the play alive," Jack Johnson said. "There were just a few times where we had [two players doing] the same job. It cost us some odd-man rushes, cost us some goals."

Washington Capitals' Nic Dowd, left, celebrates with teammates after scoring on Pittsburgh Penguins goaltender Matt Murray during the first period, Saturday, March 7, 2020, in Pittsburgh.

Not long after that, Justin Schultz stepped up to contest a clear and crashed into Sidney Crosby, leading to another 2-on-1. Conor Sheary hustled back to even the numbers but nobody picked up the third man. Nick Jensen faked a shot then went back door to Richard Panik, who slid a shot under a sprawling Murray.

"We just kind of chased a mistake with another one," Crosby said. "You get down early in the game. I think our [competitiveness] was there. We made some bad reads and it ended up being a team like that, that's pretty opportunistic."

He added: "It's a fine line at any point, but especially this time of year. Very similar to the playoffs where one little mistake and it's in the back of your net."

The Capitals cashed in on one more 2-on-1 early in the third period, with the Penguins on the power play and still down 3-0. Jared McCann lost a foot race to Carl Hagelin then Hagelin and Dowd were off. Three patient passes later, Letang and Murray were pulled out of position and Dowd hit the open net.

"If we've got a contested puck on one side of the ice, we've got to make sure that we've got support on the opposite side so we stay above people," Sullivan said, referring to three Penguins who watched the play go the other way.

The Penguins finally scored early in the third period, after Sheary made a nice play to steal the puck behind the net then hit Crosby with a centering pass. Malkin made it 4-2 on a power play, notching his seventh point in the past three games. But T.J. Oshie answered right back to silence the crowd and seal a win.

The Penguins are 1-2 against the Capitals. They beat them Feb. 2 in Washington but lost to them twice in the past two weeks by a combined score of 10-5.

With 15 games left, the Penguins are running out of time to rediscover the poise and patience that allowed them to frustrate their opponents early on.

"We've got capable people. We've got the depth that we need. We're trying to utilize four lines," Sullivan said. "It's more about collective effort, playing the right way and paying attention to the details. That's what it boils down to. ... We've got to make better decisions, both with the puck and without the puck."

The coach, who was calm, added: "When we do that, and when we get locked in, I think that's when we're hard to play against, we're a lot stingier and that's part of the fabric of the identity we're looking for here moving forward."

Murray, who won his two previous starts, made 23 saves in the loss. Tristan Jarry figures to get the nod Sunday in the second half of their back-to-back. They will host the Carolina Hurricanes, who snapped a four-game losing streak Saturday.

Post Gazette LOADED: 03.08.2020

1180247 Pittsburgh Penguins

Penguins-Capitals: Game time, TV information and matchup notes

Staff Writer

MAR 7, 2020 11:00 AM

The Penguins will be facing the Capitals tonight in Pittsburgh. Here's everything you need to know about this impending matchup:

Who: Penguins vs. Washington Capitals

When, where: 1 p.m. Saturday, PPG Paints Arena.

Look, listen: AT&T SportsNet, NHL Network (subject to blackout); WDX-FM (105.9), PittsburghPenguins.com.

Evgeni Malkin goes through drills during afternoon practice, Monday, March 2, 2020, at PPG Paints Arena.

Mike DeFabo

Evgeni Malkin's 5-on-5 production gives Penguins one-two punch that was missing last season

Noteworthy: The Penguins begin their 14th set of back-to-back games in 2019-20. So far, Pittsburgh is 12-13-1 in back to backs (6-6-1 the first



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night; 6-7-0 the second night). ... Defenseman Kris Letang enters the game having played in 805 career NHL games. He is one game shy of tying Jaromir Jagr (806) for the fourth place on the team's all-time games played list. ... Evgeni Malkin has racked up 48 assists in just 52 games after another multi-assist game on Thursday against the Sabres. Malkin, who has six assists over his last two games, is averaging 0.92 assists per game. That's the highest of his career and tied for the third-best assists-per-game ratio in the NHL. ... Forward Nick Bjugstad made his long-awaited return to the lineup on Thursday night after missing the last 46 games due to core muscle surgery. Bjugstad skated 11:02 minutes, primarily on a line with Jared McCann and Patric Hornqvist, and finished the game with an assist on Hornqvist's first goal. ... Although the Washington Capitals (40-20-7) are tied with the Flyers atop the Metropolitan Division standings with 87 points, they are marred in a slump. They're just 3-5-2 over the last 10 games, including a stretch of three losses in the last four games. ... Alex Ovechkin scored two more goals on Thursday night, bringing his career total to 705, eighth all-time. ... The Capitals' goaltending has been suspect recently. They've allowed 3.6 goals per game over the last 10 games.

Did you know?: Pittsburgh has been especially good against Washington at home, where they've won six of their last seven games (6-1-0). In those games, The Penguins are averaging 5.14 goals per game.

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1180248 Pittsburgh Penguins

Humbled at home by Capitals, Penguins facing pivotal point in their season

Rob Rossi

Mar 7, 2020

A week that began with defenseman Kris Letang defiantly proclaiming "everything we need is in this room" will end on a point that feels like it could turn or tip the Penguins' season.

Indeed, a home game against the Carolina Hurricanes on Sunday seems likes a pivotal moment. If so, the Penguins can't be arriving at it with too much confidence.

On its own, a 5-2 loss to the Washington Capitals at PPG Paints Arena on Saturday afternoon probably wouldn't be enough to shake the foundation of a group that looked into the abyss (two-plus months without captain Sidney Crosby) and ended up being the NHL's best squad over that span. But it's truly been a tale of two seasons for the Penguins, and the second is more like "The Empire Strikes Back" than "A New Hope."

Which is not to suggest anybody is about to lose a hand over what happens in Pittsburgh on Sunday. The Penguins' grip on a postseason appearance, which would extend the league's longest streak to 14 consecutive years, remains firm.

However, a 2-7-0 run is no way to win a division, let alone build momentum for a Stanley Cup run. While losing to the Capitals is no hanging matter, it's akin to a hockey capital crime to earn only 41.6 percent of available points from a stretch of 12 games against opponents who had a combined winning percentage of .405 before games played Saturday.

That's what has happened, though.

If the Penguins don't win the Metropolitan Division — and even with a game in hand on the Capitals, making up a five-point deficit would be some kind of feat — they'll have the dozen games from mid-February through early March to look upon and wonder what the heck happened.

It's kind of obvious what's been happening. The Penguins have gone from seemingly never losing to being lost.

A team that is blessed with two players who have won four scoring titles can't go on the power play without sending a shiver down the spine of everybody on its bench. That same team also couldn't do much of anything on a lengthy two-man advantage in the opening period against the Capitals, who essentially won Saturday by killing that glorious opportunity for the Penguins to get back into the game.

Aside from a 3-for-3 performance in a home win over the Toronto Maple Leafs last month, the Penguins are 6 of 36 on the power play during their slide. One of those goals was scored in the third period Saturday as Evgeni Malkin's goal briefly cut the Capitals' lead in half.

T.J. Oshie snuffed out any spark with his goal within a minute of Malkin's. Oshie's goal was the seventh for the Capitals in three third periods against the Penguins. Against the rest of the league, the Penguins' goal differential in the final period of regulation is plus-10, but they are at minus-3 against the Capitals.

They've also trailed first each game against the Capitals. Not that the Penguins allowing an opponent to take a lead should strike anybody as surprising. That has happened in 37 of 67 games this season and 142 of 313 games the past four seasons.

When the Penguins allow the first goal

2019-20

15-19-3

.405%

7

2018-19

16-15-4

.457%

3

2017-18

14-20-1

.400%

8

2016-17

20-11-4

.571%

1

"We just kind of chased a mistake with another one," Crosby said of the Penguins falling behind 3-0 in the first period. "You get down early in a game and ... I think our compete was there. We made some bad reads. And, you know, a team like that, that's pretty opportunistic, (is) not going to make mistakes."

The Penguins surrendered 22 scoring chances to the Capitals and 11 were of the high-danger variety (as charted by Natural Stat Trick). Given the potential for a first-round playoff showdown between the teams, the Penguins probably will want to work on being a lot better in their final regular-season game against the Capitals on March 22.

Let's get real: The Penguins will need to have improved on a lot by that game.

If they don't, it'll be another example of Malkin sitting or standing at his dressing room stall and trying to send a message. He has done that on multiple occasions, three times in the last 12 games, and is clearly grasping for words that will bring about a sense of urgency with teammates.

Their most consistent player this season, Malkin is having one of his finest seasons. Seven players are averaging at least 1.30 points per game, and Malkin is the oldest by five years. Last summer, while training in Moscow, Malkin vowed to again reach a rarefied level. He also talked of wanting to become a better leader.



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As he answered questions Saturday afternoon, Malkin looked to be at a loss. As he had in recent weeks, he lamented the Penguins playing hard and outworking opponents their first 50 or so games only to abandon that approach when players returned from injury.

"Now, we feel like everyone's back, we have so much skill," Malkin said. "We think it's easy game because we have a good team."

Do they?

General manager Jim Rutherford had talked openly about not wanting to disrupt the team chemistry. Then he added four forwards within a month of the trade deadline. Coach Mike Sullivan insisted "we've got the depth we need" and that the Penguins are "trying to utilize four lines." That's accurate.

It's not inaccurate to suggest the Penguins looked out of sync (and thus far too plodding for Sullivan's do-everything-fast preferences) against the Capitals. They have looked to be off — either slow or unlucky or frustrated, but always something — in stretches of every game since the trades that brought in forwards Patrick Marleau and Evan Rodrigues and brought back winger Conor Sheary.

It would make sense the Penguins resemble a group of players trying to figure things out on the fly. Each of the four lines has been altered by either an acquired or returning or injury-replacement player. The defense corps has played more games together this week than it had since Black Friday. Matt Murray has made three more starts since the All-Star break than Tristan Jarry, even though Jarry was an All-Star goalie.

Arguably the finest work of Sullivan's tenure was rallying the Penguins to dominate while Crosby was recovering from core/sports hernia surgery from early November through mid-January. Then, their success was attributable to what their failings were Saturday afternoon — and mostly over the 11 prior games, too.

"It's more about just collective effort, playing the right way and paying attention to the details," Sullivan said. "That's what it boils down to."

Also, it boils down to an end-of-season schedule that featured 14 of 16 games against opponents within the division. That stretch began Saturday.

Even when they were rolling, the Penguins always were aware a big part of their postseason fate could be determined by how they handled the final 20 percent of their regular-season schedule. They'll get one more crack at each of the teams they trail in the Metropolitan. They'll also face potential playoff teams trailing them nine times, starting with the Hurricanes at home Sunday.

A quick turnaround after an ugly loss usually does a good team, well, good. The Penguins are probably still a good team, but it's not too often inconsistent teams end up doing much more than make token playoff appearances — and that won't be good enough this season because it wasn't too long ago the hockey team in Pittsburgh seemed ticketed for a deep run.

No team reaches a pivotal point in a season unless something has gone wrong. So, what's wrong with the Penguins?

"I don't have one," defenseman Jack Johnson said of the answer. "If I did, things wouldn't be this way right now."

The Athletic LOADED: 03.08.2020

1180161 Detroit Red Wings

Reports: Detroit Red Wings to close dressing room to media because of coronavirus

Helene St. James, Detroit Free Press

Published 2:37 p.m. ET March 7, 2020 | Updated 3:55 p.m. ET March 7, 2020

The Detroit Red Wings opened up their locker room to media Saturday as routine, but that could change pending a mandate from the NHL.

The NHL is recommending teams make players and coaches available in news conference areas. That is where Wings coach Jeff Blashill routinely talks to reporters after games, while players, whether after a game or a practice, have been available in the locker room.

Earlier this week, the Wings discussed the virus, which the CDC says is spread through close proximity to an infected person, and through respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes.

"You have to be careful," Wings center Dylan Larkin said Wednesday. "You do have to be cautious whenever you're out in public."

Detroit Free Press LOADED: 03.08.2020

1180162 Detroit Red Wings

Here's how the Detroit Red Wings played like the team they want to be

Helene St. James, Detroit Free Press

Published 8:00 a.m. ET March 7, 2020 | Updated 2:02 p.m. ET March 7, 2020

The Detroit Red Wings are, at long last, playing the way they want to, playing to the identity they crave.

It is too late to impact the standings beyond playing spoiler to a litany of playoff-bound opponents down the stretch, but at least it's fun. And fun is something the Wings have experienced very little of this season.

They take on the Tampa Bay Lightning on Sunday buoyed by a rare victory, earned Friday against the Chicago Blackhawks at Little Caesars Arena. The atmosphere was great and the Wings fed off it, but they also fed it, with goals and special teams battles and huge saves in a 2-1 final.

"We were relentless," Dylan Larkin said. "Minus the first shift and until they scored, I thought we controlled the play. They didn't really have a whole lot and their big guys were getting frustrated. We were smart with the puck and we created a lot.

"It was a good game for us and that's the way we have to play more. We need to build off that."

The Wings (16-48-5) are all but locked into 31st place — a 10-game winning streak wouldn't boost them from last place. So winning now would not affect finishing with the best odds in the draft lottery. What it would do is build a measure of confidence into a team that has endured three stretches of at least eight-game losing streaks, and suffered nearly 300 man-games lost to injury.

"We came out really good in the first and were playing fast and getting it deep," Tyler Bertuzzi said after scoring his 19th goal of the season. "We were hard on the forecheck."

Jonathan Bernier was stellar in the opening minute, making a huge save on Alex DeBrincat on an odd-man rush. But Bernier has been excellent since mid-December. It was his teammates that looked noticeably better, who looked physically and emotionally engaged.

The Wings have lacked the personnel to offset injuries, but there's a chance they may have some depth down the stretch. Filip Zadina (ankle) has been cleared to practice and could be back in the lineup within a . Sam Gagner looks like he's developing chemistry with Valtteri Filppula and Daren Helm, and fellow newcomer Dmytro Timoshev provides physicality.

"Now you do start to add some depth of scoring in the lineup by having Gagner, by having Zadina," coach Jeff Blashill said. "We just haven't ever



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been able to get to that. I thought Larkin's line again was really good, but we can't be a one-line team. You have to have depth of scoring."

The Wings haven't won two consecutive games in two months. They haven't won three in a row since mid-November. They emerged from the Feb. 24 trade deadline to play three of their worst games of the season, the nadir a 7-1 loss to Minnesota.

Now they've played two of their better games in a row, though they lost, 2-1, to Colorado.

"It's ups and downs," Larkin said. "More so the downs with the injuries and guys coming in and out. We get one guy back and it seems like one guy was going down. It was tough. It was tough to find chemistry, to find rhythm.

"It's been tough with the injuries, but we're seeing some positive signs."

Those positive signs could have a negative impact as the Wings trundle through the last 13 games of their season. The slate features three games against the Lightning, capped by the April 4 season finale, two games against the Washington Capitals twice, and also have games against the Carolina Hurricanes, Florida Panthers, Arizona Coyotes, Vegas Golden Knights, Boston Bruins, Philadelphia Flyers, St. Louis Blues and Toronto Maple Leafs. Every one of them is either jockeying for position within the playoff picture or within striking distance.

The Wings were eliminated Feb. 21, but see these last four weeks as an opportunity to spark joy, and spoil.

"No matter where you're at, wining is way better," Larkin said. "We could be a big part of this and disrupt some seasons. We want to win here, we're competitive guys and proud guys, so that's what we're focused on right here."

Detroit Free Press LOADED: 03.08.2020

1180163 Detroit Red Wings

Jeff Daniels, Dave Coulier announce Detroit Red Wings starting lineup: How it happened

Helene St. James, Detroit Free Press

Published 8:32 a.m. ET March 7, 2020 | Updated 10:38 a.m. ET March 7, 2020

"He can put a lot of beer away."

To the delight of a team that needed a laugh, actors Dave Coulier and Jeff Daniels stopped by the Detroit Red Wings' locker room to announce their starting lineup against the Chicago Blackhawks. Coulier drew laughs as he went through the names, calling out Anthony Mantha, "Mantha, big man, where are you, buddy?" When Mantha raised his right hand in acknowledgement, Coulier quipped, "he can put a lot of beer away." When it was Trevor Daley's turn, Coulier quipped, "this next guy's not weekly, he's daily, eh?"

Performed with accents mimicking Bob and Doug McKenzie from "Strange Brew," the performance was a hit.

"To see him and Jeff come in and lighten it up, they did a great job," Dylan Larkin said. "When they started, I thought it was going to be a little long, but it was well done and got us going.

"I think Tyler really was the one laughing at it the most. He's probably the most Canadian guy I know. He really enjoyed that."

Bertuzzi enjoyed it so much he scored the first goal in the 2-1 victory, only the 16th game the Wings have won this season. Bertuzzi was particularly enthralled by Daniels.

"I love 'Dumb and Dumber,' so that was pretty cool to see him in here," Bertuzzi said. "They did the starting lineup and it was good. They were funny.

It got us going, for sure."

It was coach Jeff Blashill's idea, one he set in motion when he heard the two Michiganders (Coulier was born in St. Clair Shores; Daniels grew up in Chelsea) would be at Friday's game at Little Caesars Arena.

"Dave Coulier and I have become friends over the last number of years," Blashill said. "I'd never met Jeff Daniels but really, really nice man. I'm a big fan of his. When I found out they were coming, I texted with Coulier last night and just asked them if they wanted to do it.

"I'm not sure our whole team understood 'Strange Brew,' but it was a great rendition and it was great."

Detroit Free Press LOADED: 03.08.2020

1180164 Detroit Red Wings

No, Detroit Red Wings won't set a team record for fewest points. But it'll be damn close

Ryan Ford, Detroit Free Press

Published 6:01 a.m. ET March 7, 2020 | Updated 2:51 p.m. ET March 7, 2020

The Detroit Red Wings actually won Friday, beating the Chicago Blackhawks, 2-1. The Red Wings still have 48 losses in regulation this year, just eight away from setting a franchise record (held by the 1976-77 Wings, who played before the NHL played overtime games). The Wings' 53 total losses, counting overtimes and shootouts, are just four off the franchise record of 57 losses, set by the 1985-86 squad.

All of that tells you something you probably already knew entering the final four weeks of play for the Wings: They. Are. BAAAAD. (And, honestly, that 16-48-5 record probably understates how bad they've been, with a minus-120 goal differential that's worse than the next two teams – combined.) But here's what we don't know: How bad will they end up?

Of the Wings' final 13 games on the schedule, 11 come against teams with winning records, and 10 of them come against teams in playoff spots. So ... don't expect a sudden winning streak for the Wings. Still, they've gotta have a chance in some of these games, right? We broke down all 13 games on the schedule to see what their final record will be.

Sunday: Tampa Bay Lightning (42-20-5)

The buzz: The Wings were actually competitive in their Dec. 29 loss to GM Steve Yzerman's former squad, falling 2-1 in regulation. Maybe they, well, unleashed the Lightning in that game: The Bolts are 22-7-1 since then.

The result: The Lightning have a Saturday night date with the Bruins in Boston, then a flight to Detroit, which could tire them out enough to send this one into overtime – but the Wings will still fall in the extra period.

Tuesday: Carolina Hurricanes (35-25-5)

The buzz: The "Canes, three points under the playoff line, won't be bringing their "Storm Surge" celebrations or celebrated emergency goalie David Ayres to Little Caesars Arena – we think – but they do bring an offense that outscored the Wings 9-3 in two November games.

The result: Expect a big game from star Finnish forward Sebastian Aho, who has three goals and an assist against the Wings already this season, as Carolina triumphs on EMU night at LCA.

Thursday: at Washington Capitals (40-20-7)



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The buzz: Alex Ovechkin came out of the All-Star break tied with Yzerman at 692 goals; Ovi has since joined the 700 club — he has 13 goals since the break, including two Thursday — but the Capitals are just 6-9-2 over that span.

The result: Ovechkin had a hat trick (plus an assist) when the Caps visited Detroit in late November. We'll pencil him in for just two goals in this one in D.C. as the Wings fall for the 30th time in 35 road games.

Saturday: at Tampa Bay Lightning (42-20-5)

The buzz: That 22-7-1 record since Dec. 29 we mentioned? The last four games of it have come without star Steven Stamkos, who had core muscle surgery — similar to what the Tigers' Justin Verlander had in 2014 — and is out through at least the first round of the playoffs.

The result: The Lightning are 2-2 in this latest stretch without Stamkos — but they've still averaged 2.8 goals a game, more than enough to hand the Wings (averaging just two goals a game) another loss.

March 16: Florida Panthers (33-26-8)

The buzz: The Panthers led the NHL in goals at the All-Star break and looked playoff-bound. They're just 5-10-3 (including losing six of their past seven games) since then while scoring 2.3 goals a game and tumbling down the wild-card standings.

The result: The Wings' porous defense could be just what the Panthers need — Florida scored at least four goals in all three games against the Wings this season — but we think the Wings take advantage of home ice in this one to snap a four-game losing streak.

March 20: at Arizona Coyotes (33-28-8)

The buzz: The famously penny-pinching Coyotes went all in this year with an offseason trade for Phil Kessel and a midseason deal for former MVP Taylor Hall. Hall and Kessel haven't been great, but the Coyotes are two points out of the West's final wild-card spot with a couple of games in hand.

Oct 13, 2018; Glendale, AZ, USA; Arizona Coyotes center Clayton Keller (9) shoots during the second period against the Buffalo Sabres at Gila River Arena.

The result: Third-year forward Clayton Keller had two goals in the teams' Dec. 22 meeting (won by the Coyotes, 5-2) and is peaking again, with five goals and six assists in his past 11 games. Look for him to deliver another loss to the Wings.

March 21: at Vegas Golden Knights (37-24-8)

The buzz: The Golden Knights are well on the way to making the playoffs for the third time, in their third season in the NHL. They sit in first place in the Pacific Division, a couple points up on the Oilers, which is a long way from beating the Wings in November to get within a game of .500.

The result: The good news — the Wings won't have much time in Las Vegas, with a game the night before in Arizona. The bad news — the Knights will be well rested, coming off two days between games. Mark it down as another Wings loss.

March 24: at Boston Bruins (43-13-12)

The buzz: If there's a baffling aspect to this Wings season, it's that they've beaten the big, bad Bruins — tops in the league with 98 points — twice in three tries.

The result: In the Wings' two wins, they kept star right wing (and Dunkin Donuts pitchman) David Pastrnak from scoring a goal. He scored in the Bruins' win in early February, and we're betting he does so in another Bruins win here.

March 26: Philadelphia Flyers (40-20-7)

The buzz: The Flyers have an eight-game winning streak for the most unlikely of reasons — great goalie play. This is a franchise best described as having been "to goalies what the Cleveland Browns have been to quarterbacks" over the past two decades. But 21-year-old Carter Hart is 8-1 with a .928 save percentage in his past nine games.

The result: Hart stopped 32 of 33 shots in his start against the Wings on Nov. 29 and the Wings' offense hasn't gotten better since then. Another loss.

March 28: Washington Capitals (40-20-7)

The buzz: How ridiculous has Ovechkin's season been? With 47 goals in 66 games, Ovi is a virtual lock for 50 goals at age 34. Just one player in NHL history — John Bucyk, who scored 51 at 35 in 1970-71 — has a 50-goal season at 34 or older.

The result: The Caps have enough scorers to finish off the Wings even if Ovechkin sits this one out. He won't.

March 31: at St. Louis Blues (40-18-10)

The buzz: Remember, on Jan. 3, 2019, the Blues were dead last in the NHL with a 16-18-4 record. Since then, they've gone 69-29-15 — for 153 points in 113 regular-season games — won a Stanley Cup and sit atop the Western Conference with 90 points. The Wings, meanwhile, were 15-20-7 that day — things, uh, haven't gone as well for them.

The result: The Blues will likely have to play hard all the way to season's end, thanks to an extremely competitive Central Division, which means, yep, another loss for the Wings.

April 2: at Toronto Maple Leafs (35-25-9)

The buzz: Speaking of midseason turnarounds... the Leafs were 9-10-4 when they fired ex-Wings coach Mike Babcock on Nov. 20. Their 26-15-5 sprint since then — and remember, that includes a loss to Carolina's emergency backup goalie — has Brendan Shanahan's squad solidly in the No. 3 spot in the Atlantic, even if Toronto fans have been driven nuts by the Leafs' up-and-down campaign.

The result: Do we dare, the day after April Fools' Day? On the one hand, the Wings have struggled all year on the road. On the other hand, a loss to the Wings at home right before the playoffs would be the most "That's So Leafs" thing this team could accomplish. Sounds like a win for the Wings to us — in the shootout, no less.

April 4: Tampa Bay Lightning (42-20-5)

The buzz: There shouldn't be much at stake, with the Bolts just looking to stay healthy ahead of a first-round matchup against the Leafs or Panthers.

The result: The Wings opened this season in October with a surprising two-game win streak. They won't end it the same way.

Where does that leave us?

Even with Friday's win, the Wings are just a couple of games from locking up the No. 1 position in the draft lottery, and their tough schedule won't do them any favors. A 2-10-1 finish, like we've projected, would put the Wings at 18-58-6 for 42 points, the second-worst record in franchise history in the modern era, two points ahead of the 1985-86 squad that went 17-57-6. Come to think of it ... Stevie Y was around back then, too, right before things took off again.

Detroit Free Press LOADED: 03.08.2020

1180165 Detroit Red Wings

NHL taking precautions against coronavirus — asks to teams to close locker rooms to media

Ted Kulfan, The Detroit News

Published 5:10 p.m. ET March 7, 2020 | Updated 7:28 p.m. ET March 7, 2020



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 8, 2020

Detroit — The Red Wings and the NHL — with the NBA, Major League Baseball and MLS to follow suit — are taking precautions against the coronavirus.

According to multiple reports Saturday, the NHL has asked teams to close dressing rooms to the media, on the recommendation of the Centers for Disease Control.

The Red Wings' locker room was open to media members Saturday — before reports surfaced later in the afternoon about the NHL shutting off access.

The NHL is advising teams to make coaches and players available in a central area, similar to where coach Jeff Blashill — and Pistons coach Dwane Casey — address the media during postgame and pregame interviews.

Playing spoiler

You look at the remainder of the Red Wings' schedule and it's apparent they have a great opportunity.

A tremendous opportunity, actually, of being a spoiler to an array of playoff teams, and would-be playoff teams, who are looking for a prime playoff seeding — or simply securing a playoff spot.

The Wings are ready to accept that role and challenge.

"No matter where you're at, winning is way better," said forward Dylan Larkin, of playing the spoiler role. "We could be a big part of this and disrupt some seasons. We want to win here. We're competitive guys, proud guys, so that is what we're focused on."

The Wings put a massive dent Friday in Chicago's slim playoff aspirations, defeating the Blackhawks 2-1.

Sunday, they'll face the Lightning — who have defeated the Wings a staggering 16 consecutive games — in the first of three games between the teams the rest of the schedule.

The Lightning have slim hopes of skating past Boston for the lead in the Atlantic Division, but also are looking to end a recent slump (5-5 in last 10 games).

The Wings ended a six-game losing streak with Friday's victory, with one of their better all-around efforts.

"We went through those three games, or so, around the trade deadline when we were bad," Blashill said. "Since then, we've gotten way better with our physical engagement, emotional engagement, there's been more talk on the bench.

"It gives life to our team."

Blashill also credited the Little Caesars Arena crowd for maintaining energy for a team that has struggled mightily.

"The crowd has been awesome all year," Blashill said. "Our crowd has done an unbelievable job, and under extremely tough circumstances. They've been super supportive.

"Detroit fans respect hard work and physicality. We did those two things (Friday)."

Tyler Bertuzzi ended a 14-game goal-scoring drought with Friday's second-period goal.

"As long as we're winning, that's not something I think about at all," said Bertuzzi of the goal-scoring slump. "Obviously you want to help score, you want to contribute to wins. It felt good to get a goal, but it was bigger to get a win."

Said Blashill: "Bert has been real good the last couple of games. The thing I've said to Bert all year is it's nice to get points but I want him to be hard skill, because when this team is good enough to be in a better spot, we're going to need him to be hard skill, not just a guy who scores on a bad team. He's done a good job of understanding that and making sure he stays to his identity."

Detroit News LOADED: 03.08.2020

1180166 Detroit Red Wings

As coronavirus precaution, NHL and possibly NBA closing rooms to media

Updated Mar 07, 2020; Posted Mar 07, 2020

By Ansar Khan | akhan1@mlive.com

Major professional sports leagues are taking preventative measures to prevent the spread of the coronavirus.

The NHL, beginning on Saturday, will close dressing rooms to the media, according to Elliotte Friedman of SportsNet. Coach and select player availability will take place in formal press conference areas.

The NBA is considering following suit, Shams Charania of The Athletic reported.

Friedman reported the NHL acted on recommendation of the Centers for Disease Control and that the NBA, Major League Baseball and the MLS are expected to follow.

The Red Wings room was open to the media after practice Saturday, before news of the impending shutdown.

Coach Jeff Blashill said earlier this week: "Certainly want to make sure we're being as good as we can about those simple but effective methods to try to stem the spread of any kind of illness."

Charania and others reported earlier that the NBA sent a memo to teams telling them to prepare for the possibility of playing games without fans or media in attendance, only essentially team personnel.

The International Ice Hockey Federation on Saturday announced the cancellation of the Women's World Championship, which was scheduled to run from March 31 to April 10 in Halifax and Truro, Nova Scotia, due to cononavirus fears.

As of now, the World Under-18 Championship in Plymouth and Ann Arbor (April 16-26) and World Championship in Switzerland (May 8-25) are scheduled to proceed.

Michigan Live LOADED: 03.08.2020

1180167 Detroit Red Wings

Red Wings' Filip Zadina to benefit from more games this season

Posted Mar 07, 2020

By Ansar Khan | akhan1@mlive.com

DETROIT — The Detroit Red Wings have nowhere to go in the standings with 13 games remaining, having virtually clinched last place overall.

But winning can build confidence moving forward. Players in the final year of contracts might have added motivation to do well.

And the club wants to see growth from younger players.

That group is led by 2018 top pick Filip Zadina, who was progressing nicely before being idled Feb. 1 by a fractured ankle.

He will get an opportunity to gain more valuable NHL experience soon, after returning to practice Saturday.



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"I just want to get stronger and get better and get back in the lineup," Zadina said.

"I just need to be a little more patient and get healthy 100 percent, get myself in shape and feel ready to go. Right now, I just want to (spend) most of the time on the ice and in the gym to get stronger."

Coach Jeff Blashill doesn't know when Zadina will be cleared to play, but he won't be ready for Sunday's game against the Tampa Bay Lightning at Little Caesars Arena (5 p.m., Fox Sports Detroit), a team that has won 16 consecutive games against the Red Wings.

Zadina was injured Jan. 31 at the New York Rangers in the first game following the All-Star break. He played 20 minutes the next night at home vs. the Rangers, before the team realized the extent of the injury.

"It was just getting worse and worse," Zadina said. "I tried to push myself, but I couldn't even walk after. I just said, 'I can't go through that much.' We did the X-ray and it showed up."

He said of playing through the pain after the injury, "We are hockey players. This is what you do.

"I just wanted to play through it. They said it was just bruised, so why not?"

Zadina was cleared Friday night to resume practicing.

"I think everything went pretty good with the doctor last night and now it's ramping him up back into game shape, with the exception of you don't know how increased soreness is going to happen as he's getting back closer to full speed," Blashill said. "But we got to get him going full speed."

The Red Wings don't have a morning skate Sunday due to the early start time for the game and won't practice Monday, which makes it difficult for Zadina to simulate game situations. But he will skate Sunday and possibly Monday.

"It's always hard in the NHL to get guys back going because rarely do you practice consistently in a row," Blashill said. "We'll take it day by day."

The nature of the injury prevented Zadina from being on the ice for several weeks, so he's just catching up conditioning-wise.

"I did some condition skating after and it was tough, but it's something good for myself," Zadina said. "Right now, I just need to be on the ice every day.

"Maybe conditioning is one of the hardest things to do after you are injured. But it's getting better."

Zadina has eight goals and seven assists in 28 games with the Red Wings, after starting the season with the Grand Rapids Griffins.

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1180168 Detroit Red Wings

Red Wings turn back clock in spirited game against former rival

Updated Mar 07, 2020; Posted Mar 07, 2020

By Ansar Khan | akhan1@mive.com

DETROIT – For one night at least, the Detroit Red Wings went back in time to how many of their games were some seven years ago, when they regularly hosted a division rival in front of a festive crowd and enjoyed much success.

They don't see the Chicago Blackhawks as much since moving to the Eastern Conference in 2013-14. Their building isn't as packed or as lively as it once was. And they don't win many games.

That's why they will savor Friday's 2-1 victory over the Blackhawks at Little Caesars Arena, at least until the Tampa Bay Lightning, a team that has beaten Detroit 16 consecutive times, visits on Sunday.

"We went through those three games or so around the trade deadline when we were bad," coach Jeff Blashill said. "Since then we've gotten way better with our physical engagement, our emotional engagement, more talk on the bench. It just gives life to our team.

"Then the crowd, I think's been awesome all year. I think our crowd's done an unbelievable job and under extremely tough circumstances. They've been super supportive. Detroit fans respect hard work and physicality. I thought we did those two things tonight."

Jonathan Bernier called the crowd engagement "awesome."

"To be honest, with the season we're having, we're pretty fortunate to have fans that are here to support us every night," he said. "That makes a big difference."

The Red Wings (16-48-5) stopped a six-game slide (0-5-1) while snapping Chicago's four-game winning streak and damaging the Blackhawks's fading playoff hopes (31-29-8).

Tyler Bertuzzi (20-second mark) and Robby Fabbri (10:05 on the power play) scored in the second period off one-timers. But their best player, as has been the case most games since mid-December, was Bernier, who made 32 saves, allowing only Patrick Kane's goal with 1:05 remaining in the second period.

Bernier is 9-12-1 since Dec. 12, no small feat given how much this team has struggled. He has an impressive 2.47 goals-against average and .923 save percentage during that stretch.

Bernier set the tone a little more than a minute into the game, sliding across his crease to rob Alex DeBrincat's shot off a two-on-one rush.

"That was an elite, elite, elite save," Blashill said. "I would have guessed it would have been in. What that did was just allow us to find our game. He made that save and I thought after that for 40 we were really good."

Said Bernier: "I thought we gave up maybe a little bit too many odd-man rushes, but I thought our PK and our power play was really good."

Why haven't they been able to play like this more often?

"I have no idea. Wish I had the answer," Bertuzzi said. "If we can take what we did tonight and keep going from there and build off that ..."

Maybe they need actors Jeff Daniels and Dave Coulier to read the starting lineup to the team in the room more often before the games, like the Michigan natives and long-time Red Wings fans did on this night.

"Dave Coulier and I have become friends over the last number of years, and I see his prowess on the softball field at Joe Kocur's event," Blashill said. "I had never met Jeff Daniels but nice, nice man. I'm a big fan of his. So, when I found out they were coming, I texted with Cooler last night and asked if they wanted to do it.

"We're playing the Chicago Blackhawks on a Friday night in front of a great crowd, let's go out and enjoy it."

Larkin said they lightened the mood before the game.

"When they started, I thought it was going to be a little long, but it was well done, and got us going," Larkin said. "I think Tyler was the one laughing at it the most. He's probably the most Canadian guy I know. He really enjoyed that."

Said Bertuzzi: "I loved Dumb and Dumber, so that was pretty cool to see (Daniels) here. They were funny."

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1180205 New Jersey Devils

7:05 PM; Today 7:00 PM

Devils erupt for 6 goals to play spoiler in win over Rangers

Chris Ryan

Chris Ryan

NEW YORK -- In terms of their position in the standings, the Devils don't have a ton to play for down the stretch of the 2019-20 season.

The Rangers, on the other hand, entered Saturday just two points out of a playoff spot in the Eastern Conference. Every game and point is vital for their postseason hopes.

So the Devils went into Madison Square Garden looking to play spoiler against their biggest rival, and they did just that.

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Four second-period goals erased an early deficit and highlighted a Devils offensive eruption in a 6-4 win over the Rangers.

Rangers goalie Igor Shesterkin appeared in his first game since suffering a rib injury in a car accident on Feb. 23, and the Devils ran the rookie sensation out of the game after he allowed five goals on 23 shots in two periods. Saturday marked just the second loss for Shesterkin in 11 starts, and he was pulled for the first time in his career.

The four Devils goals in the second period came in pairs. They scored twice 52 seconds apart to begin the frame, and the next two came 25 seconds apart deeper into the period.

Kyle Palmieri opened the surge with his second goal of the night, tying the game at 2-2 when he scored off a rebound 44 seconds into the frame.

Defenseman Fredrik Claesson scored his first goal as a Devils to secure a 3-2 lead when he buried a shot off a Nikita Gusev pass at 1:36.

Travis Zajac converted on a power play at 16:19 of the second period, redirecting a Nico Hischier pass in the slot to put the Devils ahead 4-2. John Hayden then tipped a Damon Severson shot into net at 16:44 for a 5-2 advantage.

Zajac tacked on a second goal with an empty netter with 55.7 seconds to play in the third period.

The Rangers held a 2-1 lead after the first period behind goals from Filip Chytil and Mika Zibanejad 1:44 apart. Palmieri also scored his first goal of the night between those two Rangers strikes to get the Devils on the board.

Despite allowing the two first-period goals, Mackenzie Blackwood settled in and returned to the win column with a 31-save effort. The Rangers pulled within 5-3 on a Greg McKegg goal at 13:42 of the third period, and Tony DeAngelo scored with 43 seconds to play.

Next up

The Devils will have an off day on Sunday following back-to-back games, and they will return to practice on Monday at Prudential Center in Newark before hosting the Pittsburgh Penguins at 7 p.m. on Tuesday.

They will also host the Carolina Hurricanes on Thursday before departing on a three-game road trip to Tampa Bay, Florida and Toronto.

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1180206 New Jersey Devils

Devils' lines, pairings vs. Rangers (3/7/20) | Janne Kuokkanen recalled from AHL

NEW YORK -- Forward Janne Kuokkanen was recalled from the AHL, but he will not make his Devils debut when the team visits the Rangers at 7 p.m. on Saturday at Madison Square Garden.

Kuokkanen was acquired from the Carolina Hurricanes in the Feb. 24 trade that sent defenseman Sami Vatanen to the Canes. Kuokkanen has played in four games for the Binghamton Devils since the deal, where he compiled three goals and three assists for six points.

The 21-year-old has played in 11 NHL games in his career, though none of them came this season.

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Kuokkanen was recalled for precautionary reasons, since the Devils had only 12 forwards on the roster prior to adding him.

Mackenzie Blackwood will start in goal to close the second half of a back-to-back.

Here's how the Devils will line up against the Rangers:

FORWARDS

Miles Wood - Nico Hischier - Kyle Palmieri

Jack Hughes - Travis Zajac - Joey Anderson

Jesper Bratt - Pavel Zacha - Nikita Gusev

Kevin Rooney - Michael McLeod - John Hayden

DEFENSEMEN

Mirco Mueller - P.K. Subban

Dakota Mermis - Damon Severson

Fredrik Claesson - Connor Carrick

GOALIES

Starter: Cory Schneider

Backup: Mackenzie Blackwood

SCRATCHES

F: Janne Kuokkanen

D: Will Butcher (right thumb surgery, out for season)

Here are more game notes via the Devils:

Today's contest marks the fourth and final contest between New Jersey and NY Rangers in the 2019-20 regular season series. The Devils trail the Rangers in the regular season series 1-2-0 (2PTS) in the regular season series.

In the last matchup, the Devils fell to the Rangers, 6-3. Through three games, New York leads New Jersey 12-8 in scoring. New Jersey is 10-13 on the penalty kill and 1-17 on the power play in three games played. The Rangers tallied a season high against the Devils for most penalty minutes in one game on Nov. 30, with 34 PIM.

The Devils are outshooting the Rangers, 120-91 in three contests. The club looks to improve their 8-8-2 record (4-7-0 road) against Metropolitan Division rivals this season.

New Jersey concludes up their 14th of 16 sets of back-to-back play tonight. The club looks to improve their 6-6-1 record in second games. New Jersey opens up their 15th set of back-to-back action Mar. 14 @ FLA and Mar. 15 @ TB.

Travis Zajac (3A) leads New Jersey in points against the Rangers tallying three in three games played. Damon Severson (1G-1A), Kevin Rooney (1G), Miles Wood (1G), P.K. Subban (1G) and Nikita Gusev (1G-1A) lead the Devils in goals, notching one a piece. Kyle Palmieri (1A), Jack



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Hughes (1A) and Pavel Zacha (1A) have tallied helpers in the regular season series against NY Rangers. Subban tallied a season high for New Jersey in the Oct. 17 contest for shots on goal (9).

Mackenzie Blackwood has seen 154:34 minutes of action through three games played. Blackwood is 1-2-0, posting a 3.88 GAA, allowing 10 goals on 78 shots in the season series. Blackwood looks to improve his 7-4-2 record against Metropolitan Division opponents this season. Cory Schneider is 6-8-3 against the Rangers, allowing three goals on 44 shots against (.914) in 18 games played.

Tony DeAngelo (4G-2A) leads the Rangers in points against the Devils this season. DeAngelo notched the most points against New Jersey in a single game when the Blue Shirt notched three goals and two assists for five points on Jan. 9 @ Madison Square Garden. Jesper Fast (3G) has tallied three goals in three games played against New Jersey, while Mika Zibanejad (1G-3A) and Ryan Strome (3A) lead their club in assists.

Alexandar Georgiev started the first two contests against the Devils. Georgiev stopped 66 of 70 shots (.943), posting a 2.05 GAA through two contests. Igor Shesterkin got the start in the last contest against New Jersey, allowing three goals on 49 shots against.

The Devils are 2-6-1 at Madison Square Garden and 9-8-2 overall against the Rangers since the 2015-16 season.

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1180207 New Jersey Devils

How Cory Schneider's NHL return has become a rallying point for Devils

Mar 07, 2020

Chris Ryan

Not to diminish the opponents from Cory Schneider's first three starts in his return to the NHL, but Friday served as his first big test.

Road ins over the Detroit Red Wings and Anaheim Ducks, plus an overtime loss to the San Jose Sharks, were all positive stepping stones, but all three teams sit in the bottom five of the NHL standings. Friday gave Schneider a chance against the St. Louis Blues — the defending Stanley Cup champions and winners of eight straight games.

And like his past three starts, Friday was another quality outing.

Schneider's 31 saves anchored a 4-2 Devils win at Prudential Center in Newark, and it gave Schneider his first home win of the season in his first start at The Rock since October.

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As Schneider grinded away in the AHL to make an NHL return, he occasionally mentioned his young son, who had been asking when he could see his dad play in New Jersey again. Schneider's wife and two children were in the building on Friday, able to see the culmination of a long road back.

"It's always nice to win, regardless. Doesn't matter when or where, against whom," Schneider said. "So for me it's just it's just nice to be rewarded. But it's not satisfying yet in terms of my game. Just want to keep at it and keep playing well and giving us a chance to win. So I think enjoy it for the night but kind of move on to the next one and just get ready because again the schedule's pretty tough here for us down the stretch, so we can't we can't take any for granted."

In his four games since being recalled the NHL, Schneider has stopped 119 of 125 shots, good for a .951 save percentage and 1.50 GAA in four outings.

After Schneider's wins, the satisfaction inside the Devils' wins has been palpable. Schneider's teammates want to see him succeed as much as

he does. Few have shown more joy than fellow goalie Mackenzie Blackwood, who has quickly jumped off the bench to hug Schneider after each outing.

Thanks to some injuries and the Devils' trade deadline moves, some of the players who played with Schneider in the AHL are now also with the big club, and they've seen his work carry over.

"I think his play is really speaking for itself, what he's doing back there. He was great the whole time he was down there, he really showed that he really didn't belong down there," defenseman Dakota Mermis said. "And he's continue that here. He's been an elite goaltender for a reason, and he just keeps showing it really."

Schneider's season is starting to play out exactly like his 2018-19 campaign in terms of results. A brutal and winless start to the season led to a second-half resurgence, and like last year, Schneider just wants to keep piling up the quality outings.

"You root for him as a player. I know I've been through tough times. I can't speak to Cory's experience particularly, but you try to handle it as a man for your family, with grace and not taking your work home with you and that kind of thing," defenseman Connor Carrick said. "He's been exceptional at that and extremely positive role model in terms of how he's handled some adversity. The only thing you want to do is play well, and he's done that and good for him. It's special to see, and I hope we can be a part of a resurrection for him and get back to where I would think he would want to be."

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1180208 New Jersey Devils

NJ Devils emboldened by win over Rangers, why they aren't tanking

Abbey Mastracco

4:16 a.m. ET March 8, 2020

NEW YORK — If the New Jersey Devils can't play in the Stanley Cup Playoffs then the least they could do is prevent the New York Rangers from getting into the postseason.

They may have done exactly that on Saturday night with a 6-4 win over their Hudson River rivals at Madison Square Garden.

Kyle Palmieri and Travis Zajac scored twice, former Ranger Fredrik Claesson scored his first goal since December 18, 2018, and John Hayden put one past Egor Shesterkin as well. Mackenzie Blackwood made 31 saves on 35 shots.

"We want to be spoilers," interim coach Alain Nasreddine said. "That was part of the message and the motivation."

With wins in back-to-back games, the Devils are 28-28-12 (68 points) and at .500 for the first time all season. It's a moral victory with the playoffs out of reach, but a victory nonetheless.

How they won

New Jersey Devils right wing Kyle Palmieri (21) is congratulated by center Kevin Rooney (16) after scoring a goal against the New York Rangers during the first period at Madison Square Garden.

The Devils have little to play for other than pride but as Nasreddine said they're enjoying spoiling things for other teams.

This was a big one to spoil. The Rangers came into this game just three points away from an Eastern Conference Wild Card spot and badly needed the two points to leapfrog Carolina.

"These are fun games to play in," Palmieri said. "With how young of a roster we have, it's a learning process to try and win games this time of



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year, whether or not you're the team fighting for those points. We're going to continue to grow as a group and go out there and compete."

It looked as though the Blueshirts would gain some ground in that playoff race when they pulled out to a 2-1 lead in the first period, but Palmieri tied it with his second of the night just 44 seconds into the second. With Shesterkin coming off a rib injury from a car crash in Brooklyn a few weeks ago, the Devils wanted to wear him out early and make him work. The key was getting to the net and they did exactly that. The Devils used an aggressive forecheck to score three more times in the second period.

Claesson scored less than two minutes later from the Upper East Side, hammering a cross-ice feed by Nikita Gusev past Shesterkin off the rush. Hischer fed Zajac in the slot for the power play goal at 16:19 and Hayden made it 5-2 at 16:44 to chase Shesterkin from the game.

New Jersey Devils defenseman Fredrik Claesson (33) is congratulated after scoring a goal against the New York Rangers during the second period at Madison Square Garden.

Henrik Lundqvist made five saves on five shots in what could possibly be his final appearance at Madison Square Garden, taking over for Shesterkin in the third period.

Greg McKegg pulled the Rangers to within two with just over six minutes left in regulation when he tipped in Brendan Smith's point shot but they would get no further. The Devils made the Rangers chase the game and they never caught up. Zajac put it away with an empty-net goal shortly before Tony DeAngelo, a native of Sewell, New Jersey, scored the fourth for the Rangers in a frantic sequence.

Why it mattered

The Devils now have points in 16 of their last 20 games and have won 14 of their last possible 18 points. They already sold off all of their assets, including trading Wayne Simmonds to the Buffalo Sabres for a playoff run that doesn't seem to be materializing. New Jersey is currently two points ahead of the Sabres in the Eastern Conference standings. The Devils and Sabres will both be sitting this one out, but there is still plenty left to accomplish.

Fans might want the team to tank for Alexis Lafrenière, the projected No. 1 pick in this year's draft out of the Quebec Major Junior Hockey League. The team could end up with as many as three first-round draft picks and as few as one, so why not take a nosedive in the standings and position themselves for better odds to draft yet another phenom?

The lottery system was put into place to prevent tanking, but since the Devils don't feel that they're far off from being competitive again, they'd like to accomplish some good things over the final month of play to be able to get a jumpstart on next season.

"We still have a lot to play for," said Zajac, a longtime alternate captain. "You want to feel good about your game going into the next season and winning definitely helps that."

New Jersey Devils goaltender Mackenzie Blackwood (29) makes a save on a close in shot by New York Rangers center Mika Zibanejad (93) during the second period at Madison Square Garden.

This roster is built around young talent like Blackwood, Hischer and Jack Hughes and supplemented by veterans like Palmieri and Zajac. It starts with the veteran leaders to establish good habits and motivate the team to keep up the intensity on a nightly basis.

Nasreddine has also proved to be an effective motivator with players hanging on to his pregame talking points and intermission speeches. It's a group effort and the younger members of the group seem to get it.

"We're really focused on creating a good culture here, playing the right way and building for next year," Blackwood said. "You never know what could happen but we want to set the standard for a good work ethic, responsibility for how you're supposed to play. Lately, we've been getting rewarded."

What's next

The Devils are back in action Tuesday night at Prudential Center when the Pittsburgh Penguins come to town for a 7 p.m., ET tilt.

Bergen Record LOADED: 03.08.2020

1180287 Websites

The Athletic / Women's worlds canceled, NHL considering media changes due to coronavirus

By Craig Custance

Mar 7, 2020

NHL teams are taking more steps in response to the spread of coronavirus. And at the same time, the international hockey calendar continues to shrink.

According to multiple sources, the league is considering a policy that will restrict dressing room access for the media, and the new guidelines could come as soon as Monday, although an NHL source said nothing had been finalized as of Saturday afternoon.

Speaking from the Panthers game on Saturday night, NHL commissioner Gary Bettman said the league is "considering every conceivable option that may be," as developments update almost every hour.

"We are considering no formal announcement," Bettman said. "Some clubs might be focusing on this on their own. As you all know, the locker room is an intimate environment and players are not always fully clothed. It may be best to have media accessibility at a podium for everybody's health and safety, not just the players, but yours (the media). And it's different than fans being in the stands, particularly because our players play in a closed environment. So we're focused on the fact that with the tightness, the crowdedness and the intimacy of postgame availability may need to be adjusted while we're focusing on the coronavirus."

When asked if the policy regarding media access would remain a decision for each individual club to make, Bettman said he "wouldn't be surprised if at some point we move in that direction (of there being a league-wide policy). It may be the prudent thing to do."

Some individual NHL teams have already enacted media restrictions, limiting postgame media access to press conferences and interviews outside the dressing room rather than opening up the room to the media.

The Islanders, for instance, opted to make select players available outside the dressing room on Saturday, as teams sorted through the best way to prevent the spread of COVID-19. The Stars planned to have postgame availability at a table in the press conference room. On Friday, the Sharks began using a podium and speaker for media interviews.

"Right now, you're as updated as I am," Islanders GM Lou Lamoriello said, according to The Athletic's Arthur Staple. "What the league has done is given us as many materials as are available on what to do to prevent it. What we have to do in our locker rooms, what we have to do around everything we do – you'll know as soon as we know."

On Saturday, it was also announced that the women's ice hockey World Championship, set to open on March 31 in Nova Scotia, was canceled (more on this coming soon from The Athletic's Hailey Salvian). During a conference call, the International Ice Hockey Federation council advised that Halifax and Truro host the 2021 women's worlds. According to a source, the men's U18 world championships are currently on as scheduled but the situation is being monitored. That tournament, should it take place, spans from April 16-26, and is being held in Plymouth, Michigan. The men's world championships, according to a source, are still on as scheduled (starting May 8), although there is growing concern that NHL players won't want to risk participation even if it takes place. Switzerland, the host country for the men's worlds, currently has a ban on any public events over 1,000 people because of the coronavirus threat. That ban is extended until at least March 15.

On Saturday, Bettman compared the current concern from the coronavirus to the mumps outbreak that impacted the NHL during the 2014-15 season. He said the reason there was no change to the media policy at that time is that the medical community was more familiar with mumps than it appears to be with COVID-19.



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"We're dealing with interesting – to say the least – and challenging times from a medical standpoint and we want to make sure we're doing the prudent things for everybody," Bettman said. "Again, a locker room is different than the stands. You'll have access to the players. But if we do it from the podium, it's better for them (the players) and for you (the media) because we're dealing with groups who are doing a lot of traveling and interacting with a lot of people. We want to make sure the community that is involved in the nuts and bolts of putting on the game are doing the right thing. That's why we're considering everything."

Bettman added that the change in access would not be on "a long-term basis" and was just "a response to the coronavirus."

Earlier this week, the NHL's general managers met in Boca Raton, Florida, where deputy commissioner Bill Daly detailed the league's efforts to prevent the spread of coronavirus, including the barring of all travel for NHL staff outside of North America for business purposes.

The idea of playing games in front of empty arenas was also discussed, although NHL commissioner Gary Bettman said it was too early to speculate on how realistic that option was for the NHL at that moment.

"We're aware of and focused on all possibilities," Bettman said after the GM meetings. "We're aware of what's happening in other places in the world. We understand that things may evolve or change and we also understand that we're going to have to react to it in a professional and timely and sensible basis."

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1180288 Websites

The Athletic / Bourne: Sorting one-offs from trends is a daily effort for coaches and media

By Justin Bourne

Mar 7, 2020

When I decided to leave the video coaching world to have a life that kept me closer to my family, it was with the understanding that I had gained a lot of knowledge about the game and coaching that could make me a more valuable member of the media. And that was a good position to be in, I thought. I had been doing work breaking down hockey plays before getting hired as a video coach — that work was basically how they knew I was qualified — but my ability to critically watch the game had improved a great deal.

The problem, I quickly discovered, was that media members simply don't have the same tools as teams, and those tools are pretty damn critical. I mean, I knew they didn't, but I figured I'd find workarounds. When you use a video program like "XOS" as the Maple Leafs/Marlies do, you have someone manually log each game in real time. The simple way to put it here is that when watching a period of hockey, I'd log about 250 to 300 events per period (call it 800-plus per game). I had the parameters set so that when watching the game, if I hit the letter "b," it would instantly create a clip (starting something like seven seconds before the button-push and 10 seconds after) that would go into the "breakouts" folder. Some buttons came with prompts to follow up, like if I hit "r" for retrieval, it might prompt me for "player number" as well, so it would sort into player retrieval folders. (A clip folder like faceoffs came with about five follow-up prompts.) There was a folder for my unique comments, which I typed after hitting "j," and folders for regroupings and forechecks and neutral-zone forechecks and on and on. There were a few dozen of them, all told.

The point is, the game — not just the highlights, but the actual game away from the goals — was clipped and sorted and organized. We brought a portable server with us everywhere we went, so within minutes of the final buzzer going, each coach had the game sorted appropriately to dig into immediately.

And, boy, wouldn't you know it, if you watch each unique breakout throughout a hockey game — which might mean 30 to 40 of them — in succession, you get a pretty good sense for the real trends. You're less likely to remember one egregious error, which I think is what gets glommed on to in the media, because you have the bigger sample right there at your disposal. Single events are less likely to influence your feeling of the bigger picture.

What I liked to do when breaking down game clips was go through a folder like breakouts and make a note in my unique comments column on most of them (each coach has a section), then go back and look for trends. If I had typed the same comment a handful of times for a single game (let's use "stuffed up wall" as an example), well, now we have something for the coaching staff to talk about. "Hey, guys, I noticed we got stuffed going up the walls a lot on breakouts last game. Should we maybe see if we can't find a way to use reverses or get the puck to the middle of the ice more tomorrow night?" (I don't mean to make it sound like I just did that, by the way. I focused a lot on our opponents, in fact. The other coaches liked to comment on just about every clip, which made searching their comments on the season amazingly productive. You could search your comments on the year for "stuffed wall" and instantly have a package pulled together ... provided you'd done the requisite commenting along the way.)

The point in explaining all this is that in the media, we don't have those exact programs, we don't have people manually marking 800 events per game, and frankly, I don't even think there's much of an appetite for knowing that a particular winger was repeatedly a bit off in his neutral-zone positioning. So as I mentioned above, most people who cover the game for a living, even those who are very thorough, might have watched most plays just a time or two. Fans are the same: They watch the game once through, they remember the times they were frustrated by a player or a particular play, and that becomes the talking point. If a high-risk player turns the puck over in a dangerous spot against, it's easy to remember that and bring it up. If you look at a clip of a dozen of the player's high-risk breakout plays and directly see the positive effects of the times it worked out alongside the gaffe, the bad stuff becomes more liveable.

Of course, not every coach is hyper-diligent in making comments or even in watching all the clips from a given game. Sometimes it can be tough — say, in a back-to-back, with travel and lineup decisions to make and all the rest. Sometimes it's just really redundant. You generally know who your players are by this time of the season, so some coaches — gasp — let their foot off the gas. And some are just like the rest of us; their confirmation bias brings their eyes to the particular things they like or don't like over and over again, and no amount of contrary evidence can sway them from beliefs they hold. They'll make bad decisions based on their gut, based on single games or even single events in a single game.

For the media, it's even harder. Namely because a lot of us cover not just one team but all the teams. Being truly informed on the details of each group isn't hard, it's an impossibility. So you do the best you can, read what you can, watch as much as possible and form your opinions using the most information that you can. There's still value in this way of covering the league with beat reporters and leaguewide people — the same way that scouting departments have cross-checking scouts who have a better sense for context than those embedded in particular leagues and regions.

All of this blabbering on how the game gets analyzed internally and externally brings me to a difficult question both parties have to answer on a near-daily basis, which is one fans should consider, too: How many times do you need to see something to fairly determine a trend? Because trends are worth acting on and worth having opinions about. If you're a coach, you change your lines because of trends, you change your structure based on it. GMs change their personnel based on trends. You are what you repeatedly do, it is said, so if someone does something enough, it becomes worth acting on. For media, we analyze, critique and question the game and don't have to make the final decisions, so we can speculate a bit more and talk around issues to better understand them. "I think I see something here," "It seems like X is happening more lately," "Is it possible this player is hurt or much improved or slacking entirely?" (Coaches ask these questions, but they need a conclusion every day. I can tell you from doing two hours of talk radio a day, that isn't required in media.)



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That means we in the media have it easier, but I still often find media too quick to make assessments because things haven't had ample time to breathe. Did a new line struggle or did it just happen to get put together on a night when it played a good team (or in a back-to-back, etc.)? The problem with a question like that hypothetical is that the NHL rarely offers enough of a sample for anything to really flesh itself out. Maybe that "new line" I've created there gets a couple of games together, which ends up being about 15 minutes of five-on-five play each night for a total of 30 minutes and there are a couple of bad bounces squeezed in there. All that means is it's just tough to know if it really works, as its chemistry would still be developing, too. Then someone in the lineup gets hurt, things get shuffled as a result ... and we're constantly dealing in an analysis of it as a line based on the small amount of time we saw it together. In a big season sample, so many remain so small.

Because this is just life when assessing hockey, you do have to make some assessments on insignificant samples or you'd never have any opinions at all. I know even in my role as video coach, I was often hesitant to suggest change because I was always hoping for more time to make an assessment. I even stayed quiet with a lot of my doubts when those above me made quick changes to our lineups, but that hesitation faded away as I came to better understand that "trends" often start to reveal themselves pretty quickly and you'd rather be ahead of something that needs tweaking than carry on down the wrong path for an extended period of time because you "need a bigger sample." Similarly, in offering critique in the media, I like to have more time on things ... but sometimes what you see might just be the start of a trend, and that's all you have to go on.

The Athletic LOADED: 03.08.2020

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Sportsnet.ca / Mikko Koskinen helps tired Oilers get win despite being outplayed

Mark Spector | @sportsnetspec

March 8, 2020, 3:02 AM

EDMONTON — An old Edmonton sportscaster named Cecil "Tiger" Goldstick had a saying for games like the one the Edmonton Oilers and Columbus Blue Jackets trotted out on Saturday night.

"If they played this game in my backyard," Tiger used to say, "I'd draw the drapes."

Boring? It depends on how you'd define that word.

For the third time in a week the Oilers were completely outplayed and walked away with two points, scoring three times in the final 4:31 to cop a 4-1 win over the skill-challenged Blue Jackets.

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The question is, do we invoke the old narrative about good teams figuring out ways to win? Or should Edmonton be concerned with the regularity in which they are being dominated by its opponent?

"The name of the game is to win," points out head coach Dave Tippett, "and we won."

It's that simple?

"You have to win different ways and this was a really ugly win that your goaltender was great," he said, referencing a 45-save performance by Mikko Koskinen. "You have to recognize where we are at. When we are fresh, I like the way that we play. (But) it has been a hard week for us.

We have a day off tomorrow and hopefully we will recoup some energy and we will get back at it for a big game on Monday."

On a night when Oscar Klefbom made his return to the lineup after missing nine games with a shoulder injury, and Tippett broke up perhaps the best line in hockey to try and kickstart Connor McDavid, the Oilers were punchless. They got long slapshot goals from Alex Chiasson on the game's first shot, and the game-winner from Caleb Jones late in the third, both of which should have been stopped by Joonas Korpisalo.

Unfortunately, the Blue Jackets had the second best Finnish goalie on the ice. And when it came to capitalizing around the Oilers net, the injury-depleted Blue Jackets simply beat the puck square on their scoring opportunities. Gustav Nyquist finally broke Koskinen's shutout on a breakaway in the 59th minute, with the game long decided.

"Honestly, tonight I'm kinda out of words," said Chiasson, who has 10 goals. "There's probably one reason why we win the game: Our goaltending. Other than that, we'd better be prepared for that. If we play like that it's not going to look too pretty after 20."

The Oilers were outshot 21-7 in the opening stanza, starting late for the second straight game.

"At this time of year, you would as a team that games like this, the way the standings are, every game is meaningful," Chiasson said. "You would think maybe we would be on our toes a little bit more."

It's the dog days of the season, and their coach knows it. Tippett will give the boys Brier Sunday off, and he doesn't care if they watch curling or knit a sweater.

"Just don't play hockey," he decreed. "We got home at 3:30 or 4:30 in the morning (Friday) after playing three games in four days and this was four in six. You go through those rigours of that and hard games and it is hard.

"We just had no juice," he continued. "You look down (your bench) and you are just hoping that someone gives you something. Some nights are like that. I was worried this morning when I watched our group at the morning skate and you think about it all day and you hope it is not the way it goes, but it was the way it went. Fortunately our goaltender was really good and we won."

The win moves the Oilers into a tie with the Vegas Golden Knights atop the Pacific, prior to a visit by Vegas on Monday. (The Golden Knights play at Calgary Sunday).

Vegas will bring a far more dangerous offence, and likely better goaltending than the Blue Jackets came with on Saturday. This game was theirs for the taking and they left it on the table with poor netminding and a lack of NHL-quality finish around the net. At one point later in the third period, Emil Bemstrom waited and waited while a fallen Koskinen flopped and flipped, then fired it a foot-and-a-half wide of the open net, nearly taking Leon Draisaitl's head off in the process.

"I don't think we could have played any better," said Blue Jackets coach John Tortorella. "You can't be frustrated. We have another game here quickly tomorrow. We just have to stay about our business here.

"We just played good as a team. We played good as a team away from the puck. Their goalie is the difference. That's the different in the game, their goaltending."

Koskinen, who has stopped totally 97 of his last 99 shots in his last three appearances, has helped the Oilers absolutely steal four points this week.

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Sportsnet.ca / Luongo's legacy could leave Canadiens' Price thinking about his own



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 8, 2020

Eric Engels | @EricEngels

March 7, 2020, 11:20 PM

It's all about legacy in the end, and the ultimate legacy each and every NHL player wants to leave is that of a Stanley Cup champion.

Considering that, you had to wonder what Montreal Canadiens goaltender Carey Price was thinking as he looked on from somewhere inside BB&T Center as Roberto Luongo's No. 1 became the first number retired in Florida Panthers' history on Saturday.

Not that Price, or anyone else, should look down on Luongo's legacy just because the Saint-Leonard, Que., native never got to lift that fabled Cup over his head; it's just that it's patently obvious it's not the one he was fighting for himself when all is said and done. He made that abundantly clear in this exclusive interview with the Athletic last summer.

That had to be on the mind of the 32-year-old from Anahim Lake, B.C., prior to yet another loss for his Canadiens, who are tumbling towards a lottery pick and in the midst of winding down a third consecutive season that is bound to end in early April.

Still, Price had to be happy for Luongo, who carved out a remarkable career and was being celebrated for it. We're talking about a player who came within just one win of a Cup as a member of the Vancouver Canucks in 2011, a player who won the William Jennings Trophy that year, a gold medal winner for Team Canada in two World Championships, two Olympic Games and a member of Canada's 2004 World Cup of Hockey team.

If you're unsure if those are Hall of Fame credentials, consider that Luongo played 1044 NHL games (second-most in league history) and he retired in 2019 having made the second-most saves (28,409) and having recorded the third-most wins (489) of any goaltender before him. His numbers—a .919 save percentage and a 2.52 goals-against average—are beyond respectable considering the length of his career and the (often poor) quality teams he played for.

And when Luongo was on an edition of the Canucks or Panthers worthy of participating in the playoffs, he made the most of it by posting a .918 save percentage and a 2.49 goals-against average in his 70 post-season games.

"Bobby Lou," as he's affectionately become known, spent his first five seasons in Florida and returned there to play in parts of six more after spending eight seasons with the Canucks. No member of the organization was more influential on or off the ice over that time.

On it, Luongo won 230 times and recorded 38 shutouts for the Panthers. Off of it, he rallied his teammates often.

And we'll never forget how he rallied the entire Parkland, Fla., community with this speech in the wake of the mass shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School, which claimed the lives of 17 people and injured another 17 in February of 2018.

All of that was commemorated in the most profound way when Luongo's jersey was pulled to the rafters on Saturday evening.

We're sure Price was as thrilled to see it happen as anyone else in the building. Earlier in the day, he was unequivocal in his support for his former Olympic teammate.

"I'm very happy for him," Price told reporters. "He's such a fun personality to be around. He has very quick wit. I got to play with him in Sochi (in the 2014 Games), and he was a great partner for me there. He was always a great ambassador for goaltending. I definitely followed his career. He's been a role model for myself and many other Canadian goaltenders. His style, his competitiveness, he definitely had the right attitude coming into games."

But Luongo doesn't have a Cup, and we can't help but wonder if Price is thinking about his own legacy possibly being marked by the same distinction when all is said and done.

It would be normal if he was—especially just one day after Canadiens legend Henri Richard passed away and his Hall of Fame career, marked by an NHL-record 11 Stanley Cup wins, was paid beautiful tribute. If he wasn't thinking about it while Luongo's jersey was ascending, it might have popped into his head a couple of times as he watched backup Charlie Lindgren and his Canadiens teammates lose 4-1 to a Panthers team that had just lost six of its last seven games and a franchise-worst eight straight at home.

The goaltender might be under contract for six more seasons with the Canadiens, at an annual cap hit of \$10.5 million, but it would be understandable if his patience was wearing thin at the end of a week that started with the team's general manager, Marc Bergevin, stating in multiple interviews that he doesn't see it as a necessity to make many fundamental changes.

"I know I'm going to sound crazy, but I like our team," Bergevin also told our Elliott Friedman on Tuesday, from the GM meetings, which were held just a couple of dozen miles away from where the Canadiens recorded their 39th loss of the season on Saturday. "When our team is playing to their optimum level and we're healthy, I believe our team is a playoff team."

Whether or not Price agrees is a subject that's bound to be broached with him several times between now and when he returns to Kelowna, B.C., for his summer vacation.

And even if the goaltender does believe that the Canadiens, as currently constructed, are at least good enough to do what more than half the league does every spring—16 of 31 teams qualify for the playoffs—the hope has to be that he believes they can contend for a Cup sooner rather than later. Because Price isn't getting any younger, and his legacy—of being the Canadiens all-time leader in regular-season wins, an Olympic Gold medalist, a World Junior champion, a Calder Cup champion, a Hart, Vezina, Jennings Trophy winner and a Ted Lindsay Award winner—has to be at the top of his mind.

It's a legacy that's likely to see him eventually elected to the Hall of Fame, a legacy that will inevitably have his No. 31 raised to the rafters at the Bell Centre.

But he knows it'll be slightly out of place among the 14 that already hang there if he doesn't win a Cup, and that's definitely not how he'd like to stand apart when his magnificent career comes to an end.

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 03.08.2020

1180291 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / How NHL Seattle is changing the game with focus on diversity

Emily Sadler | @EmmySadler

March 7, 2020, 8:41 AM

The NHL's newest franchise doesn't have a name yet, but it's already forging its identity — and the league is all the better for it.

"I think from the beginning when you walk in you realize that the organization looks a little different than maybe other hockey organizations around the league," said NHL Seattle director of hockey strategy and research Alexandra Mandrycky.

Mandrycky was the first hockey operations hire in Seattle — and the first sign that this is a franchise looking to do things a little differently, both in terms of diversity and its attitude towards analytics.

"It's really exciting," Mandrycky, 29, said of the rare opportunity to build a team from the ground up. "So often when you come into any business and you're hired for this position, you're walking into something that



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already exists. You're trying to maybe help change a culture that's pre-existing. Here, it's such an exciting challenge because we really get to lay the foundation — we get to create the culture."

While the on-ice roster is still a ways away from taking shape, NHL Seattle CEO Tod Leiweke and the rest of the leadership core have been busy assembling an organization as diverse as the city it calls home. What truly separates Seattle from other pro sports clubs is its devotion to diversity. The organization currently has a 50/50 gender split throughout, and a leadership team that features women in more than half of its VP roles.

"Ultimately, the test for us is, how will we look on opening day? Will we look like the community we serve? Will we look like our fanbase?" Leiweke recently told Sportsnet's Christine Simpson. "I think there's a real movement afoot and it's really exciting to see that glass ceilings are being broken all around."

Leiweke is no stranger to Seattle, nor to the art of bringing an expansion franchise to life. He revived the NFL's Seahawks into the perennial contenders we know today, and also launched the city's Major League Soccer team, the Sounders. On the hockey front, he helped launch the Minnesota Wild and, most recently, was integral in building up the Tampa Bay Lightning into a formidable force in the Eastern Conference.

But the former NFL COO is not resting on his laurels as he takes on this new challenge.

"I think that when you're hiring people, one way that a lot of that happens is you think about who you've worked with and who you've had good experiences with," he said. "And when you've come from the sports business where it's a lot of men, there's a tendency to sort of round up the usual suspects. I think that we've not felt that pressure. We've been hiring early in a very thoughtful sort of way."

Leiweke has had plenty of help in the process, learning from those he's surrounded himself with in Seattle — people like Mandrycky, general manager Ron Francis, and VP of human resources April West — as well as NHL commissioner Gary Bettman and executive VP of social impact, growth initiatives and legislative affairs Kim Davis.

When it comes to the expansion-team challenge of cultivating a diverse fanbase, Davis pointed to the success of the Vegas Golden Knights.

"We know the demographics have shifted across North America — macro demographics, but micro demographics absolutely, by market," Davis said of Vegas during an interview last month. "I think each of our markets are beginning to get smarter about understanding where are the growth opportunities for them, and building these pipelines of talent from youth and ensuring that at every rung of that pipeline, there's an open, accessible opportunity — whether it be for girls, whether it be for people of colour, broken by race, ethnicity, sexual orientation — that we create an environment where people just win."

Among its hires, Seattle has brought in people like Dani Chu, hand-picked straight out of Simon Fraser University; siblings Kyle Boyd (youth and community development/training director) and Kendall Boyd-Tyson (now VP of strategy and analytics); and analytics guru Namita Nandakumar, a star in the analytics world who thrived with the Philadelphia Eagles.

"I think it's about time that we make that a priority in this business — and I'm speaking about the sports business overall," Leiweke said of diversity. "We have made it a priority here and in some ways it's not the path of least resistance. When you think about a key executive and you think about people you've worked with, so often you're thinking about men. So it takes a little bit of a double clutch to say, 'Hey, maybe they don't have to have 10 or 20 years of experience.' Maybe there are some leaps of faith. I'm really proud with the progress we're making. It's still a work in progress, but I can cite examples of just phenomenal people that have come on our team who represent diversity and who are going to serve us well going forward."

The hiring of USA Hockey legend and Hockey Hall of Famer Cammi Granato as a pro scout shed even more light on the club's way of thinking. While we had already seen women start to break into scouting departments across the NHL — Noelle Needham was hired as an amateur scout for the Toronto Maple Leafs in 2018 — Granato was the first woman to hold her position.

"I think that people will take note, and I think that we will see some change, and I think it'll just be really positive," Granato told Simpson. "Whatever background you are, it doesn't matter. I think that'll happen. I think the fact that Seattle's doing it like this, I think you'll for sure see more of it."

That's already begun to happen around the hockey world. Since Granato's hiring, Blake Bolden has joined the Los Angeles Kings in a similar role. And in October, the Moose Jaw Warriors hired Olivia Howe, making her the first woman to be part of a WHL coaching staff.

"The head coach actually credited and referenced — 'You know, I'd never thought of it before and then I was hearing about what NHL Seattle was doing and I just thought, 'Why not?'" Mandrycky said of the hiring. "So, I think if the NHL starts this trend, it's going to trickle down across the hockey world."

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A research-based role like Mandrycky's in Seattle wouldn't typically be in the spotlight — and that's just fine with her — but she understands the importance of being in the public eye when it comes to creating change.

"I don't really like attention, but I recognize that as these types of stories are written, if my name pops up in other stories, someone will see, 'Oh, she's a woman and she's in this story about hockey,' and then it just becomes the norm," she said.

As Mandrycky explained, it's not simply that NHL clubs have been averse to new ideas in the past. The issue lies in the pipeline and the traditional, hierarchy-based pools from which they're searching.

"I think if you only pool candidates from those traditional pipelines, you're doomed to not have diversity on staff," she said. "And that's not to say that those pipelines aren't extremely valuable — those people have lots of experience that they deserve to be in consideration for all these positions. But I think they aren't the only people that we're placing in consideration as we think about hiring out the group."

She pointed out that it takes a conscious effort to interrupt the traditional way of seeking candidates.

"It requires someone to be open-minded to consider that application and really try to hire the best person available," she said. "So I think the organizations that have shown ... open-mindedness to bringing women on board, I think that they should definitely be applauded in that way."

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Sportsnet.ca / Quick Shifts: Maple Leafs have 'an elite goal scorer' on the way

Luke Fox | @lukefoxjukebox

March 7, 2020, 8:30 AM

A quick mix of the things we gleaned from the week of hockey, serious and less so, and rolling four lines deep. EBUG-free for 14 days and counting!

1. One of the highest-scoring clubs in the league has another one coming.

Toronto Maple Leafs prospect Nick Robertson is absolutely lighting up the Ontario Hockey League, averaging 1.2 goals per game over a 44-game span.



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Robertson hit the 50-goal mark in Game 43 with a short-handed, game-winning beauty in a hat-trick effort.

Even better? Only 12 of Robertson's snipes have arrived on the power play, six have been shorties, and 10 have been game-winners. In addition to overall goals, he leads his junior circuit in short-handed and winning goals as well.

"This is not like Nick has had a good season. Nick's an elite goal scorer. That's what he is. One of the hardest-working players you'll ever see," Peterborough Petes head coach Robert Wilson told Lead Off Thursday.

"You're banking on, as a coaching staff, that Nick is scoring a goal a game — and he doesn't let you down that way."

Robertson's OHL-goal-leading campaign has been all the more impressive considering Wilson has constantly juggled the 18-year-old's linemates and the kid missed a month of action to represent the U.S. at the world juniors.

Wilson explained that Toronto has monitored the 2019 second-rounder's progress closely, even sending Barb Underhill across the 401 for power-skating sessions.

"They're pretty on it," Wilson said. "Leafs fans will definitely hear about Nick."

Toronto's general manager, Kyle Dubas, tweeted his congratulations to Robertson this week and took a moment to praise his prospect when the executive met with reporters at the GM meetings in Boca Raton, Fla.

"He's had a great season," Dubas said. "With his work ethic, he's only going to continue to push himself to get better."

Robertson himself has been thinking about how he'll fit into the Maple Leafs' system since draft day.

"They play my style. They play a big skill game with Matthews (and) Marnier. I'm not saying I'm that calibre of player yet — I hope to be — but there's a lot of skill," said Robertson, back when he was turning heads at development camp. "So it's a great spot."

"I don't think size is a factor. I think Toronto doesn't see it as a factor. They're a lot about skill and puck possession and hockey IQ. And that's what I bring."

2. When the Maple Leafs arrive at the rink on game days, they always discover that Santa has left an educational gift in each of their stalls: A preloaded, personalized iPad slapped with a blue leaf decal stamped with their individual sweater number.

The tradition began during Toronto's playoff series with the Boston Bruins last spring and has continued throughout this season.

"What exactly is on the thing?" we wondered.

- An edit of each skater's own shifts from the previous game.
- A breakdown of the night's opposing goaltender with his tendencies and weaknesses.
- The opponent's power-play and penalty-kill formations and strategies, for those on special teams.
- The opposition's breakout, neutral zone and forecheck inclinations.
- Face-off tendencies of the opponent's centremen, for those who take draws.
- Aspects the Leafs should key on for that game.
- Heart-rate monitoring software.
- Skills development drills.

Each player is left to his own devices (hey-oh!) to use his iPad when and how he chooses.

"Depends who you are, Alexander Kerfoot says. "Some guys, for sure, if it's too much information, then they're overthinking it. It's better for them to just get out and play. Other guys want all the information."

"At least I know it. If I make a mistake out there, it's on me. But I like to be prepared. I don't think I overthink it. The more you know, the more comfortable you are, and the more you can let your instincts take over on the ice."

Kerfoot leaves the iPad in his stall after the morning's skate or meeting, returns to the rink post-nap well before puck drop and goes through it, focusing mostly on the face-off scouting report and any changes Sheldon Keefe has made to their Leafs' own plan.

"It definitely helps. Probably some games more than others," says Kerfoot, who relied on the tool heavily in the season's early days. He was the new guy, and he was trying to take in as much as he could.

Kerfoot's former club, the Colorado Avalanche, used the same XOS ThunderCloud system for digital pre-scouts, but the Avs weren't served with their own preloaded tablets alongside their morning coffee.

Fellow centre John Tavares picks up the 91 tablet to drill down on the face-off scout and pays close attention to the special-teams info. He's also brought his iPad on the ice with him during practice to keep an eye on his heart rate and making sure he's pushing himself hard on a workday and not overexerting himself on a recovery day.

For, say, a Western Conference club, he might invest more screen time because it's an opponent he seldom sees. For other games, he'll scale back and lean on his own experience.

"It gives you as much information as you want or as you need. It's a great tool to have," Tavares says. "Some guys are on it in between periods. It just depends on the way you feel. Sometimes I feel like there's too much information, and it's just nice to just go out there and trust your instincts."

3. Jake Casey, everybody. Fathers, hide your daughters:

4. Precisely four weeks out from the conclusion of the regular season, here are my major individual trophy leaders.

Hart: Leon Draisaitl

Norris: John Carlson

Selke: Brad Marchand

Vezina: Andrei Vasilevskiy

Calder: Quinn Hughes

Lady Byng: Teuvo Teravainen

Jack Adams: Alain Vigneault

Jim Gregory: Joe Sakic

5. The NHL's salary cap is projected to rise from \$81 million in 2019-20 to somewhere between \$84 million and \$88.2 million. That \$4.2 million is a wide range, enough to accommodate a top-four defenceman like Oscar Klefbom, Jonas Brodin, or Josh Manson.

It could also mean the difference between giving one of your impending UFAs the raise he's gunning for or letting him walk and find his riches elsewhere.

Every GM wants more salary to play with, but cap-tight teams facing major decisions with key contributors are probably praying the ceiling gets pushed as close to \$88.2 million as possible.

The Vancouver Canucks (Jacob Markstrom, Chris Tanev), Washington Capitals (Braden Holtby), St. Louis Blues (Alex Pietrangelo), Arizona Coyotes (Taylor Hall or suitable replacement), and Boston Bruins (Torey Krug) stick out.

6. Markstrom had earned the Vancouver Canucks points in four straight games before going out long-term with his knee injury.

Since the goalie has been sidelined, the Canucks have gone 2-4. Friday's first regulation win since Markstrom's injury — a biggie over Colorado — is hopefully one to build on.

As a franchise — and a city — expecting to build on a campaign with so much excitement and promise, how can Vancouver not re-sign Markstrom and roll into fall with its fate in the hands of Thatcher Demko?



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7. Pittsburgh Penguins goaltender Casey DeSmith made 36 NHL appearances last season and zero with the farm club. He was rewarded with a three-year, one-way deal in 2019 for \$3.75 million.

And, as the flip side of the Tristan Jarry success story, he's played the entire 2019-20 campaign in Wilkes-Barre/Scranton for the baby Pens. Certainly, this is not how he imagined life as a millionaire.

"I just think he was a victim of circumstance, but he's an NHL goalie," says Mike Vellucci, DeSmith's coach.

Especially when the season opened, DeSmith took his demotion hard. Vellucci describes it as a "Why me? What did I do wrong?" kind of a thing.

For about two weeks, the coach let his disappointed athlete cool. Then he called DeSmith in for a good chat. The coach explained that DeSmith's bump to the minors was purely circumstantial — it helps the big club's cap picture that, until July 1, Jarry carries a more manageable hit — and that people would take notice of how he responded to this challenge.

"He started playing great," Vellucci says. "It's not what happens to you; it's how you deal with what happens to you. And that's what I talked to him about: Which way does he want to go? He's taken the positive route and worked really hard on his game. I'm really proud of how he's handled it."

If Pittsburgh opts not to give both Jarry and Matt Murray juicy raises in free agency this summer, they have a No. 2 in DeSmith who is hungry and under contract. If Jim Rutherford does want to reward both Jarry and Murray, DeSmith becomes intriguing trade bait for one of the handful of clubs that will be eager to shake up their crease.

8. Kudos to the league for easing up on its nitpicking around the blueline and reducing offsidess to a touchdown-esque "breaking the plane" determination.

The spirit of the rule was to discourage cherry-pickers, remember? If everyone could turn back the clock, would we not just go back to letting offsidess be the official's call, for better or worse.

Getting mad at refs is infinitely more fun than getting mad at the precious life minutes wasted by video review.

9. The NHL did the right thing by not drafting a batch of new rules and regulations surrounding the buzzy EBUG, a fluke occurrence that happens so infrequently and, it turns out, doesn't even harm the team you'd think.

If they were going to alter anything about the role, how about making it a paid gig?

David Ayres signed a contract for an amateur tryout (ATO) and was officially paid \$0 for his win — although he kept his Hurricanes sweater, and we're guessing his media tour included a few perks.

"Under this agreement, the Player shall receive no salary, bonus (of any kind) or any other form of compensation," reads the NHL regular-season ATO contract.

Like a true rent-a-goalie, the Carolina players dug into their own pockets to show some thanks for showing up in a pinch. "Yes, we did give a little bit of money," Sebastian Aho told Ilta-Sanomat, a Finnish outlet.

Funny: The NHL got its biggest mainstream publicity boost from its lowest-paid player. It probably wouldn't kill HRR for the league to kick in a bigger stipend to the next EBUG.

Not that he's in it for the dough, but perhaps Ayres gets some form of compensation down the line. Maybe from his hockey card — which is totally going on my Christmas wish list.

10. Mika Zibanejad scored five goals, including the overtime winner, Thursday. At the time, that was more than 441 NHL skaters had scored all season long. Dude is a star.

11. With Leafs coach Sheldon Keefe still tinkering around with his bottom six as he tries to find the perfect mix for secondary scoring, and Toronto's offence going dry during its California swing, I wonder if Kenny Agostino gets a call-up and a brief look.

The 27-year-old journeyman (Flames, Blues, Bruins, Canadiens, Devils) has 85 NHL games on his resume but none this season.

Taking off under new AHL coach Greg Moore, Agostino is now the Marlies' top scorer, outproducing a quartet of teammates who have earned a look with the big club: Pontus Aberg, Nic Petan, Egor Korshkov and Adam Brooks.

"Kenny has been our best player for the last two months. He's really, really driven the offence for us and even at times when we get down by two goals, he goes out and has physical shifts and gets a couple good hits and brings energy. He's finding ways to have an impact in every hockey game," Moore told reporters. "He can absolutely wire a puck."

With weeks still remaining in the season, the left-winger has already established a new career high in goals (27) and has added 22 assists. Friday's two-goal performance gave him nine points in six games.

"It feels good," Agostino said. "We've had so many different line combos the whole year. I just think it speaks to the depth of our team really. We have so many forwards that are skilled and can make plays and I've been fortunate to play with a lot of them like Aberg, Petan, (Tanner) MacMaster as of late, Korshkov. I've really kind of played with everyone at some point."

12. Strombone 1 love.

On Saturday night, Roberto Luongo will become the first player to have his number (1) retired by the Florida Panthers. Fun fact: At the same time, the Panthers will become the first NHL franchise to begin retiring sweater numbers sequentially. No other team began their rafters-hanging tradition with a player who wore No. 1.

Sources say there is no truth to the rumour that the Canucks must chip in \$3,033,206 to Saturday night's retirement party in Sunrise.

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Sportsnet.ca / Maple Leafs' California catastrophe could haunt them down the line

Chris Johnston | @reporterchris

March 7, 2020, 12:51 AM

ANAHEIM, Calif. — There is no way to sugar-coat an oh-for-California road trip.

Not at this critical stage of the season. Not with a journey formerly known as the Valley of Death now taking you through cities featuring three of the NHL's five-worst teams.

The Toronto Maple Leafs were left grasping for some positive talking points following Friday's 2-1 loss to the Anaheim Ducks because, at this stage in the process, what else could they reasonably do?

They're still holding a playoff spot and still holding out hope that things will start to fall in place with some key players soon set to return from injury. However, they also recognize the need to retreat into the safety of the team environment with the heat being dialled up around them.

"As a team, we're trying to stay calm," said Mitch Marner. "I know media's a big part in this city that we play in. I think for our team it's just about staying off that — the social media, people are just going to start getting on us and we're a unit in here, we're a team.

"We know what to say to each other to get ourselves going."

This is a group often criticized for being too run-and-gun and it just allowed two goals against in 125 minutes of play and earned one out of a possible four points. That's not something you'd ever expect to see from



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Sheldon Keefe's high-octane team and they're banking on the likelihood the scoring returns sooner than later.

Still, losing to this version of the Ducks should sting.

They were down their top four defencemen because of injury and somehow managed to tilt the Honda Center ice despite facing a huge deficit in talent.

The Leafs looked sluggish, choppy and disconnected while creating just four high-danger scoring chances at 5-on-5.

"I think they did a really good job in their neutral zone just kind of clogging it up," said Auston Matthews, in diagnosing why the offence dried up here. "Really wasn't much [for us] — not many entries, not a lot of odd-man rushes for us tonight, so they did a really good job. Obviously you've got to give them credit, they played really well in that area of the game and kind of forced us to dump pucks.

"We didn't really have too much speed or anything going in on it so they were able to break out pretty quick. We weren't able to generate much into their zone and sustain pressure."

Their offensive attack has gone stale, particularly on a once-lethal power play that turned in another 0-for-3 performance against Anaheim.

They also wasted a strong performance from backup goaltender Jack Campbell, who allowed a goal before the four-minute mark and slammed the door shut for the next 45-plus minutes.

He made a ridiculous save on Ryan Getzlaf late in the second period, displaying cat-like reflexes to glove a puck that appeared destined for the top shelf. All the Ducks captain could do was chuckle.

Marner, in the penalty box following an uncharacteristically poor tripping penalty, nearly broke his stick cheering on Campbell.

"That's a hell of a save," said Marner.

Under the duress of this playoff race — Toronto still holds a five-point edge over Florida in the Atlantic Division, but has opened the door slightly with two more games played — the team's young stars are taking ownership for missteps.

Marner apologized for that penalty.

"Just stupid on my part there," he said. "You know, frustration took over there. That's the last time that happens, I'm better than that."

And Matthews, who tossed the puck blindly into the middle of his own zone and saw Adam Henrique promptly bury it for a 2-0 Ducks lead, owned up to his lack of awareness in that situation.

"I thought I heard a guy, at least on our team, that was kind of in that spot," he said. "Usually I expect a guy to be there. I just tried to kind of break their pressure and obviously I made a bad mistake, bad turnover, that led to a goal.

"That's obviously on me and I take responsibility for it."

But the most puzzling stat of all is how a group that was until recently scoring four goals per game under Keefe went more than 147 minutes between goals on this trip — a stretch that went from the second period of Tuesday's game in San Jose until William Nylander's 30th of the season in the dying minutes.

Matthews suggested that they're still looking to find the right balance between defending and attacking.

"I think we're kind of one foot in the door, one foot out, as far as the way we want to play," he said. "I think we all just need to be 100 per cent in."

"You look at a lot of the goals that we've scored here in recent games, a lot of it's been happening around the net. We need to have more of a presence in there," said Keefe. "But it's an interesting road trip. You'd never think that our team would give up two goals in two games and only come away with one point.

"You'd probably think we were talking about a different team, but that's the reality, that's the way it was this week."

Should they end up losing grip on their playoff spot down the stretch, this string of games will haunt them.

There's no way around it.

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TSN.CA / Five Takeaways: Canucks vs Avalanche

Jeff Paterson

TAKEAWAYS

1) As it turns out, the third time was the charm for the Vancouver Canucks. After letting third period leads get away in their last two games, the Canucks were full value their 6-3 victory over Colorado on Friday night. After a loose first period in which they outscored the Avs 2-1 but were outshot 18-7, the Canucks tightened up their game considerably over the final 40 minutes allowing just 14 Colorado shots the rest of the way. And rather than sitting on their 4-3 lead after two periods, the Canucks extended their cushion and put the game out of reach scoring the only two goals of the final frame. The Canucks made the necessary adjustments defensively to slow the Colorado attack as the night went on. There is never any stopping Nathan MacKinnon entirely -- he had two assists, four shots and 12 attempts and looks like a threat every time he's on the ice. But the Canucks didn't allow MacKinnon to dominate the hockey game and swing the outcome in the Avs favour. According to Natural Stat Trick, the Avs had just four even strength shots on goal and five scoring chances at 5-on-5 over the final period. It felt like a much more controlled night of hockey by the home team than we've seen of late when they had the lead and couldn't make it stand up.

2) The Canucks third line had its game of the season. The trio of Adam Gaudette between Antoine Roussel and Zack MacEwen combined for three goals and six scoring points. Roussel's goal at 12:17 of the second period put the Canucks in front for good at 4-3 while MacEwen scored his first of the night 2:12 into the middle frame and then put the dagger in the Avalanche with the 5-3 goal with just 3:17 remaining. Both of his goals came on big-league shots just weeks after Canucks General Manager had declared MacEwen a 'full time NHL'er.' MacEwen did all of his damage -- two goals on two shots, four hits and drawing a second period penalty -- in just 7:15 of ice time. While his ice time was low, his impact was anything but. And his second goal was a clear nod from the coaching staff to the kind of night MacEwen and his linemates were having. With the Canucks up by one and with ghosts of recent games hovering over them, Travis Green utilized a line with two youngsters and his trust in that combination paid off when Roussel worked the puck from behind the net to MacEwen in the slot and the Big Fella roofed the puck short side on Colorado goalie Pavel Francouz. Aside from a Tyler Motte goal in Toronto on Saturday, depth scoring had left the Canucks during their losing skid. But the third line stepped up in a big way and that performance was key to delivering a much needed victory.

3) The Canucks power play went 0 for 3 on the night, but that didn't really matter to the bottom line of the hockey game. What was important to note about two of the three Canucks opportunities with the man-advantage was that they came back to back to open the third period. Veteran defenseman Erik Johnson was called for slashing 1:38 into the third and at 3:26 Vladislav Namestnikov was whistled for holding. The Canucks didn't do a lot with those four minutes over overlapping power play time that included a brief 10 second two-man advantage. But the most significant development of that stretch of the game was that it kept Nathan MacKinnon on the Colorado bench since he doesn't kill penalties. He had a 30-second shift to start the period, but then his team ran into penalty problems. MacKinnon didn't get his second shift of the period until the five and a half minute mark. The best way to contain one of the most-dangerous players in the league is to keep him on the bench and limit his opportunities to even the score. As it turned out, of the three



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periods on the night, MacKinnon played the least in the third when his team needed him the most.

4) MacKinnon still had his moments in the final period, but perhaps his most-noticeable sequence was snuffed out by Canucks defenseman Chris Tanev. With Alex Edler off for hooking and the Avs operating on the power play with a chance to tie the game, MacKinnon wound up for a one-timer from the circle to the right of Thatcher Demko but was unable to test the Canucks netminder. That's because Tanev stepped into the shooting lane and blocked MacKinnon's blast with his shin pad. It was the biggest of his eight blocks on the night -- a new season-high for any Canuck player. And the value of that play was underscored as Tanev's teammates made a point of seeking him out for a tap on those same ship pads as the puck flew up, over the glass and out of play. The shot block came on one of three Colorado power plays on the night. The Canucks were perfect on the kill and limited the Avs to just four shots on goal with the man-advantage. The Canucks penalty kill had struggled of late allowing seven goals on 18 opportunities entering the night including a pair of late power play goals in Columbus last Sunday. But with Demko providing the last line of defense and the penalty killers in front of him doing their part, too, the Canucks were able to shore up a sore spot in their game. They had key penalty kills at 1-0 in the first period and again at 4-3 in the third. Goals there could have swung this game in Colorado's favour, but the Canucks ensured that didn't happen.

5) It wasn't quite the Boston game of three weeks ago, but Friday was another solid showing by the Canucks against a top team in the league -- and one that arrived on their doorstep on a roll. Colorado was 7-0-2 in its last nine games overall and had won nine in a row on the road. Teams weren't taking points off the Avalanche of late. So give the Canucks credit for stepping up when they absolutely had to. Sure there are 15 games still left on the schedule so another loss wouldn't have sunk them, but given the recent blown leads, four straight regulation losses at the wrong time of the year and the mood in the market, it sure felt like the Canucks needed Friday's win. And they delivered. With Winnipeg blanking Vegas earlier in the night and temporarily moving in front of Vancouver for a few hours, it marked the first time since December 28th the Canucks had dropped below the playoff bar. But with their win, the Canucks ensured they won't spend the night looking up at eight teams ahead of them in the standings. Friday was a good night for the Vancouver Canucks. The challenge now is to back it up with another strong result on Sunday when Columbus comes to town. The Blue Jackets stop off in Edmonton, so the tables will be turned from a week ago. Last Sunday, the Canucks were playing back to back when they visited Nationwide Arena. Now it's the Canucks turn to get Columbus playing on consecutive nights.

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