



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 9, 2019

THE NEWS & OBSERVER

A blast from the past as former Thrashers catch Hurricanes off guard again, 13 years later

By Luke DeCock

There have certainly been worse games of hockey played at PNC Arena than what the Carolina Hurricanes perpetrated on Friday, but rarely when they had been playing as well as they have lately or been clinging precariously to a potential playoff spot.

The latter condition hasn't often been satisfied in recent years, which of course tends to limit the pool of candidates to start. It's been so rare that the Hurricanes are this good, there haven't been many opportunities for their good teams to be this bad.

On their way to an 8-1 win, the Winnipeg Jets scored four goals in the first period and probably should have been up by more. The Jets were quicker, stronger and flat-out better in every respect. They even scored twice in the last minute.

In spirit if not volume, it was reminiscent of the 9-0 loss to the Jets nee Atlanta Thrashers that put a savage end to the Hurricanes' nine-game winning streak in November 2005, when the Hurricanes looked unbeatable until they looked incompetent.

Rod Brind'Amour remembers. He remembered during the first period Friday.

"When it got to 4-0, I was thinking, 'I've seen this before,' " the player then and coach now said. "Maybe I shouldn't have, because sometimes you think things and they do happen. It felt the exact same way."

The Hurricanes can only hope things turn out slightly as well in the end.

However bad it was, the Hurricanes deserved worse. The Jets were quicker, sharper, tighter. The Hurricanes spent a good chunk of Thursday's practice working on neutral-zone play and a good chunk of Friday's first period playing like they had practiced just about anything else.

"It's just not us," Justin Williams said.

Sebastian Aho and Nino Niederreiter were on the ice for the first five Jets goals. Aho finished minus-5, whatever the hockey equivalent of the golden sombrero is. *Le chapeau d'or*. Niederreiter one-downed him, setting a new franchise record at minus-6. *Le chapeau d'platine*.

Oh, and if the result wasn't bad enough, Micheal Ferland took an incidental helmet to the chin in the third period and could potentially be dealing with another concussion. More good news. By the time Brind'Amour came to the podium after the game, Ferland was still in the training room and had been there almost an hour.

This was the collision of a strong, heavy playoff team with one that still isn't quite sure whether it is or not. In some ways, it was a chilling vision of Game 1 against a superior opponent, the worst-case scenario if the Hurricanes do make the playoffs and get matched up with a team that's better down the middle and tougher everywhere else.

It should be a wake-up call in that respect, if nothing else.

The days when the Hurricanes saw every backup goalie ever to come out of junior hockey – and, too often, made them look infallible – are over. They're not sneaking up on anyone. Winnipeg was ready. The Hurricanes were not. It's going to be that way from here on out. It's for real now.

And as much as you'd like to say, hey, it happen, there's not a lot of wiggle room here. The Hurricanes were off to Nashville immediately afterward for Saturday's game against the team the Jets just passed in the Central Division standings, sitting at home getting worked up about that – another strong, heavy team that's better down the middle than the Hurricanes.

"No way we're going to get through that if we show up like that against a team like Winnipeg," Justin Faulk said, having just been proven correct in the most embarrassing way possible.



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Hurricanes hammered by Jets 8-1

By Chip Alexander

There is no easy ride into the Stanley Cup playoffs.

Winning the Stanley Cup is hard. But so, too, is getting a chance to play for the Cup.

The Carolina Hurricanes will have a hard time getting that chance if they play more games as poorly as they did Friday against the Winnipeg Jets. The Canes were hammered 4-0 -- in the first period -- in what was an ugly 8-1 loss at PNC Arena.

"We didn't have anything going," Canes defenseman Justin Faulk said. "I don't think there was one part of our game that was any good. We made it very easy for them.

"We need every point we can get. We come out like that we're not going to get any points."

The Canes (36-24-7) held one of the Eastern Conference wild-card playoff spots before Friday's game. An overtime loser to the Boston Bruins in their last game, when they donned the Hartford Whalers green jerseys for the second time, they were playing at home and in their "lucky" black sweaters on Friday.

The Jets (40-23-4) had lost three of five and were looking to rebound from a 5-2 road loss against Tampa Bay. And did. Strongly.

How bad was it for the Canes? Nino Niederreiter was minus-6, a franchise worst plus/minus rating for a game. Sebastian Aho was minus-5 and Justin Williams minus-4. That's the Canes' top line.

"We haven't had one of those this year," Williams said of the Canes. "That was not us."

Jets goalie Laurent Brossoit picked up his second victory of the season over the Canes. He had to make 42 saves in the first game, in October, but wasn't as pressed nearly as much Friday.

Greg McKegg scored his sixth of the season for the Canes midway through the third period, but that came after the Jets had taken a 5-0 lead.

Jets coach Paul Maurice said Thursday that while he personally liked the Canes' much-discussed post-game celebrations, he didn't want the Canes to have that opportunity again Friday.

No problems there. Kevin Hayes scored in the first for Winnipeg. Blake Wheeler scored. Ben Chiarot scored, then Nikolaj Ehlers.

Chiarot would score again in the game, Andrew Copp added two goals, Kyle Connor a power-play score and Adam Lowry a goal for the Jets.

The Jets, for the most part, used their speed to beat the Canes up and down the ice, beat them to pucks. For the most part, the Jets shooters were unchecked, especially in the slot area, leaving goalie Curtis McElhinney -- 10-2-1 in his past 13 starts before Friday -- alone to fight for his life. The Jets ended the game by scoring twice in the final minute.

Williams called it "totally inexcusable and something quite frankly we're all ashamed of. ... Chance after chance after chance, we all owe him an apology for that."

Even when Brossoit made a mistake, no problem. He misplayed the puck behind the net in the first, allowing Aho to get the puck to Teuvo Teravainen for a shorthanded chance. But Brossoit bounced back into the crease and made the stop.

The only time the Canes disturbed the Jets very much in the opening period was when Williams whistled a shot past Brossoit. But the whistle already had blown as Niederreiter had been called offside, and the Jets angrily swarmed around Williams.

Williams was called for unsportsmanlike conduct and the Jets' Dmitry Kulikov for roughing. It was four-on-four but Chiarot soon had an open shot in the slot and that was that.

Despite a semblance of a push by the Canes, it didn't get better in the second as Copp scored his first for a 5-0 lead, again with the Aho line on the ice.

Canes forward Micheal Ferland left the game in the third after taking a big, clean hit from Kulikov in the Jets zone. Canes coach Rod Brind'Amour had no update after the game.

The Canes realized this was a big weekend against two very good teams -- Winnipeg and Nashville. After a big loss at home, it's off to face the Predators on Saturday, coming off two losses and badly needing points.

"We can turn the page quickly," Williams said. "We've always answered the bell this year and it's time to do it again."



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Proposed PNC Arena renovations could cost \$200 million

By Chip Alexander

The Centennial Authority was presented Friday with architectural renderings of an enhanced and renovated PNC Arena.

An 80-minute presentation headed by Bill Browne, president of Ratio Architects of Indianapolis, provided the “new vision” of the arena. The discussion included proposals for a rooftop bar and restaurant on the south end facing Carter-Finley Stadium, the possibility of removing stairwells or suites for more “income-producing spaces” and removing some aisles on the lower level to add more seats.

Late in the presentation came the bottom line: the cost.

The projected construction cost value from the Ratio and HOK architects was an estimated \$167.4 million to \$201.8 million, with additional costs for planning and fixtures. And the scope of the enhancements would be contingent on the authority, the arena landlord, agreeing on a new lease with the Carolina Hurricanes and its parent company, Gale Force Sports & Entertainment.

“We’ll move forward. The building is always going to be here,” authority chairman Tom McCormick said Friday. “But ultimately what we’re going to be looking for in the near future is an allocation of money which we might be able to get. How much of that we ultimately get will probably depend somewhat on what the guaranteed future of the Hurricanes here is.”

The Canes’ arena lease expires in 2024. McCormick said the authority has “just begun talking” to the Hurricanes on a new lease and have hired a consultant.

Recent arena enhancements, requested by Hurricanes owner Tom Dundon, included the installation of a 3D projection system and theatrical lighting. Plans call for a new scoreboard to be installed before next season.

N.C. State uses the arena for its men’s basketball games and commencement exercises, and the arena has hosted NCAA basketball regionals, concerts and family events.

Money for the arena enhancements would come from Wake County and the City of Raleigh, provided through the Interlocal Agreement, which is funded by the hospitality industry’s hotel/motel and prepared-food tax.

In its response to a request for information for hospitality projects by Wake County, the authority noted PNC Arena will have had a \$4 billion economic impact for Wake County since its opening in October 1999. Other projects are being considered.

If approved, the arena construction would begin in 2020, starting with new office space for the Hurricanes and Gale Force staff and additional meeting spaces.

The south end entrance facing Carter-Finley Stadium could potentially be opened up to provide a view into the bowl area, or as Browne said, for fans to immediately feel the arena “experience.”

The PNC Arena enhancement and renovations have been in the planning stage since 2015 and the projected cost then was pegged at about \$115 million to \$120 million

“There are a few things in this plan that weren’t in that plan then,” McCormick said.

Removing stairwells, removing aisles, adding wider seats, perhaps building lounges on the mezzanine levels below the main concourse level -- there are a number of wide-ranging proposals in the project, not that all will eventually be approved or built.

McCormick, speaking for the authority, said he thought the members “probably would like to do all of them.”

“But it’s money and there are other people competing for it,” McCormick said.



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Jets humiliate Hurricanes with 8-1 decision

Winnipeg scores four in the first period to bury Carolina early

By Cory Lavalette

RALEIGH — Hurricanes coach Rod Brind'Amour has oftentimes said that in order to win, the best players need to be your best players. On Friday night, Carolina's best were its worst.

The Winnipeg Jets scored four times in the first period and coasted to an 8-1 win in front of 15,928 at PNC Arena. First-liners Sebastian Aho (minus-5) and Nino Niederreiter (a team-record minus-6) were on the ice for the Jets' first five goals, and captain Justin Williams (minus-4) was on for four as goalie Curtis McElhinney was left unprotected in the Hurricanes' most resounding defeat of the season.

"Obviously, it's not something we want to see and certainly not acceptable," Brind'Amour said. "Haven't had one of those this year, really. We've had a couple bad games, for sure, but nothing like that. So that's a little shocking. I didn't expect that at all."

Defenseman Justin Faulk had an even blunter evaluation of the team's performance.

"That's not OK," he said of the game. "We can live with the loss if we all show up and work our balls off. That didn't happen tonight."

The loss stung twice as much given Carolina's tenuous hold on a playoff spot. After the games, the Hurricanes have 79 points in 67 games and hold the first of two wild-card spots in the Eastern Conference. Montreal, in the second wild-card spot with as many points but one more game already played, were in Anaheim on Friday with a chance to move ahead, while Columbus — trailing Carolina by two points — was idle.

The good news is the Hurricanes are right back at it Saturday in Nashville with a shot at redemption.

"It just depends on what we do the next day, and we're lucky enough that we play tomorrow and try to get past this," Faulk said. "But that can't happen. We're not in the position to let that happen. We need every point we can get."

The Jets caught the Hurricanes flat-footed at the start, scoring three times in the first half of the opening period, and Carolina never regained its balance.

First, trade deadline acquisition Kevin Hayes got his second goal with the Jets at 2:58, taking a second whack at the puck after his initial shot was blocked and beating McElhinney on the blocker side to make it 1-0.

Less than three minutes later, Winnipeg rushed up the ice and Patrik Laine found a trailing Blake Wheeler for a quick shot and a 2-0 lead at 5:48.

Then with the teams at 4-on-4 after Carolina captain Justin Williams and the Jets' Dmitry Kulikov were sent to the box with matching minors, Winnipeg extended its lead to three.

With the puck in the Carolina zone, Kyle Connor saw Jets defenseman Ben Chiarot shake free from Niederreiter. Connor found Chiarot in the high slot and he beat McElhinney (21 saves) to make it 3-0 at just 9:16 into the game.

"We addressed it a little bit after the game, but that was — what happened in the first 10 minutes of the game, what happened in the last three minutes of that game was totally, totally inexcusable and something that, quite frankly, we're all ashamed of," Williams said.

Then with 76 seconds left in the opening period, Nikolaj Ehlers added his 17th goals of the season for a 4-0 lead.

A mostly uneventful second period ended with Andrew Copp making it 5-0 with just 31 seconds left in the middle frame.

The Hurricanes did break up the shutout in the third when Greg McKeeg redirected a Calvin de Haan pass past Laurent Brossoit (28 saves) shortly after a Carolina power play expired to make it 5-1, but not before injury was added to insult.

Micheal Ferland — who was a game-time decision after leaving Tuesday's game in Boston with an injury — left Friday's game in the third period after Kulikov checked him and the crown of the Jets defenseman's helmet caught Ferland in the jaw.

"He's still in the training room, so I don't know," Brind'Amour responded when asked about Ferland's status.

Connor, Copp and Adam Lowry added more salt to the wound the third for Winnipeg, the last two goals coming in the final minute with the Hurricanes playing their bottom six forwards to avoid any more injuries.

While the team had already checked out of an embarrassing loss, it was clear the Hurricanes were already thinking ahead about the chance to redeem themselves.

"We've always answered the bell this year so far, and it's time to do it again," Williams said. "At this time of the year, a game like that can go one way or the other. So, we've answered the bell and we're going to do it tomorrow."

Notes: Lucas Wallmark led all Hurricanes with six shots on goal and 11 shot attempts. He was also 12 of 15 on faceoffs. ... Niederreiter's minus-6 is a franchise worst. In franchise history, 11 players — including Brind'Amour — registered a minus-5. ... All but four Jets skaters registered a point.



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Preview: Hurricanes at Predators

Canes in search of rebound effort in Music City

by Michael Smith

NASHVILLE - The Carolina Hurricanes are in search of a rebound effort against the Nashville Predators following a lopsided loss to Winnipeg at home on Friday.

The Jets grounded the Hurricanes' six-game point streak to leapfrog Nashville for first place in the Central Division. Now, the Canes draw the Predators, who have sat idle since Tuesday.

About Last Night

The best way to describe what transpired on Friday night in Raleigh was captured in five simple words from Hurricanes captain Justin Williams.

"That was just not us," he said.

From start to finish, from top to bottom, from the first goal against to the eighth, that was not the Hurricanes, certainly not the team that has experienced a renaissance in the new year.

"We didn't have anything going. I don't think there was one part of our game that was any good. We were getting beat right from the beginning," Justin Faulk said. "We made it very, very easy on them."

The Jets used a pair of goals in the first 5:48 of the game to springboard their offensive attack. They added two more goals in the opening frame to take a 4-0 lead to the locker room at the intermission. Another goal late in the second plus three more in the third stretched their margin of victory.

"Every grade-A we gave up, it went in the back of our net. We couldn't recover," head coach Rod Brind'Amour said. "The game was almost over before it got started, unfortunately."

About Tonight

The scheduling demands of the Hurricanes' 14th of 17 back-to-backs this season will force the team to not ruminate on an 8-1 score for long.

Instead, the Canes are afforded the opportunity to return to the frozen sheet less than 24 hours later and bury the result from Friday night just as quickly as it happened.

"We've always answered the bell this year so far, and it's time to do it again," Williams said. "This time of the year, a game like that can go one way or the other."

"Guys come in, come to work and bring maximum effort every day. That's how we get through that and how we've managed to be where we are today. That's the only way we can look at it tomorrow," Faulk said. "We just need to work and compete. You do that, it's OK. It looks right. Everyone's on board. That's not OK."

The Last Meeting

The Hurricanes and Predators met for the first time this season on a Sunday afternoon nearly two months ago. Sebastian Aho potted a hat trick, which included an even-strength goal, a power-play goal and a shorthanded, empty-net goal, to lead the Canes to a 6-3 victory, their seventh in eight games at the time.

The Opposition

Nashville won consecutive games over the Minnesota Wild in the shootout on Sunday and Tuesday to improve to 39-25-5 (83 points) on the season. The Predators, who occupy second place in the Central Division, are 22-12-1 at home this season.



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Recap: Jets Fly By Canes

McKegg scores lone goal in 8-1 loss

by Michael Smith

The Carolina Hurricanes had their six-game point streak grounded by the Winnipeg Jets in an 8-1 loss on Friday.

The Jets netted four goals in the first period en route to sweeping the two-game season series between these two old Southeast Division foes.

One

"That was just not us," a dejected Justin Williams offered after the game.

And that just about sums it up.

That was not the Hurricanes of 2018-19, certainly not the Hurricanes of 2019.

That was the first true clunker, the first game all season that, from the start, felt like the Hurricanes just didn't have it.

"You name it, we weren't there," Williams said. "You name any play, they won it."

"We didn't have anything going. I don't think there was one part of our game that was any good. We were getting beat right from the beginning," Justin Faulk said. "We made it very, very easy on them."

Two

So, you flush it and move on.

For the Hurricanes, that might be easy - at least, easier - to do, considering they get right back on the horse less than 24 hours from now in Nashville.

"It's not something we want to see. Certainly not acceptable," head coach Rod Brind'Amour said. "Haven't had one of those this year, really. Had a couple bad games, for sure, but nothing like that. That's a little shocking. I didn't expect that at all. The good news is we've got to go play tomorrow. We can kind of tank this game and move one."

The response will say more about this Hurricanes team than the box score of this game.

"Guys come in, come to work and bring maximum effort every day. That's how we get through that and how we've managed to be where we are today. That's the only way we can look at it tomorrow," Faulk said. "We just need to work and compete. You do that, it's OK. It looks right. Everyone's on board. That's not OK."

It will be a tall task for the Hurricanes to rebound in Nashville, an emotional gut-check for a team to right the wrong of a game from the night prior against a team sitting near the top of their division that has been waiting since Tuesday to sink their teeth into Saturday's match-up.

But, if the Hurricanes have been anything in the last two-and-a-half months, it's resilient.

"We've always answered the bell this year so far, and it's time to do it again," Williams said. "This time of the year, a game like that can go one way or the other."

Three

In such a run as the Hurricanes have been on since New Year's Eve - a 21-6-2 record entering Friday, which was tied for the most wins and points by any NHL team in that stretch - a game like this was bound to happen.

As fun as it would be, the Hurricanes aren't going to go undefeated down the stretch.

And, if we're searching for the silver lining, the two points the Canes surrendered in this one went to a team in the opposite conference.

"It just counts as a loss at the end of the day," Brind'Amour said. "I think it's probably easier to park that one and move on than if we lost in the last minute or so. We'll see."

Four

Greg McKegg scored the lone goal of the game, a simple redirection in front of a Calvin de Haan point shot.

Laurent Brossoit made 42 saves on 43 shots against the Hurricanes in October. He didn't see as much rubber tonight, and the Canes couldn't convert when they needed to.

The Jets did, and that was that.

"Every grade-A we gave up, it went in the back of our net. We couldn't recover," Brind'Amour said. "The game was almost over before it got started, unfortunately."

The most unfortunate part of the eight-goal onslaught was that Curtis McElhinney had to absorb it. Because of the back-to-back situation, Saturday's starter Petr Mrazek wasn't going to get tossed into the fray after a 4-0 first period.

"That bothers me more than anything because [McElhinney] has been solid for us. That was a tough way to lose a game," Brind'Amour said. "I didn't expect that kind of effort."

"What happened in the first 10 minutes of the game and the last three minutes of that game was totally, totally inexcusable and something that, quite frankly, we're all ashamed of," Williams said. "We all owe [McElhinney] an apology for that."

Five

Micheal Ferland continues to fight through injuries.

A nagging upper-body injury that Ferland reaggavated in Boston made him a game-time decision for Friday's tilt, and despite being able to dress, he didn't make it through the game - again.

In the third period, Dmitry Kulikov lined up Ferland with a heavy, clean hit that appeared to be shoulder to chest. Ferland was slow to get up, went to the room and did not return. Brind'Amour did not have an update on his status following the game.

Up Next

Turn the page. The Canes fly to Nashville to take on the Predators on Saturday night.



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Projected Lineup: Jets vs. Hurricanes

Ferland (upper body) a game-time decision

by Michael Smith

The Carolina Hurricanes host the Winnipeg Jets in the front half of a back-to-back set against Western Conference opponents.

Micheal Ferland (upper body) is a game time decision, but head coach Rod Brind'Amour said he thinks Ferland will be able to draw in. Curtis McElhinney will get the start in net.

Here is the projected lineup for the Hurricanes.

Forwards

Niederreiter-Aho-Williams
Ferland-Staal-Teravainen

Svechnikov-Wallmark-Martinook
McGinn-McKegg-Maenalanen

Defense

Slavin-Hamilton
Pesce-Faulk
de Haan-van Riemsdyk

Goalies

McElhinney
Mrazek

Scratches: Foegele (healthy)

Note: Lineup subject to change prior to opening faceoff.



Jets score eight in win against Hurricanes, move into first in Central

15 Winnipeg players get at least one point in fourth victory in 10 games

by Kurt Dusterberg

RALEIGH, N.C. -- The Winnipeg Jets moved into first place in the Central Division with an 8-1 win against the Carolina Hurricanes at PNC Arena on Friday.

Laurent Brossoit made 28 saves for Winnipeg (40-23-4), which is one point ahead of the Nashville Predators in the Central. Andrew Copp scored two goals, and Nikolaj Ehlers had a goal and two assists. Fifteen Jets had at least one point, seven had a multipoint game, and all four lines scored.

"When we're able to play four lines, we can play a really fast, heavy game," captain Blake Wheeler said. "That's what we want to get to every night."

The Hurricanes (36-24-7) have lost two games in a row after winning five straight. They are tied in points with the Montreal Canadiens for the first wild card into the Stanley Cup Playoffs from the Eastern Conference and two points behind the Pittsburgh Penguins for third place in the Metropolitan Division.

Curtis McElhinney allowed eight goals on 29 shots in his third regulation loss (10-3-1) in his past 14 starts.

"We certainly haven't had one of those all year," Carolina captain Justin Williams said. "It's tough to even keep your head up in this interview because that was not us. You name any play there, [Winnipeg] won it."

The Jets, who have won three of their past four games after going 1-4-1 in their previous six, scored four goals in the first period.

Kevin Hayes made it 1-0 lead at 2:58. After Brett Pesce blocked Hayes' shot from the slot, Hayes batted the puck out of midair for his 16th goal of the season, his second with Winnipeg since being acquired in a trade from the New York Rangers on Feb. 25.

Wheeler drove the slot, held off Nino Niederreiter after a pass from Patrik Laine, and scored to make it 2-0 at 5:48.

A strong Jets forecheck resulted in a 3-0 lead. Kyle Connor's pass from the right corner connected with Ben Chiarot, who scored from the slot at 9:16.

Hayes sent a backhand from along the end boards to Ehlers between the face-off circles for a one-timer to make it 4-0 at 18:44.

"[Ehlers] is a great player, him and Kyle Connor," Hayes said. "They're both elite players in this league and easy and fun to play with. Tonight, we played pretty well."

Winnipeg coach Paul Maurice sees chemistry developing between Hayes and his linemates.

"For [Hayes], he's a real smart positional player, and he's got a good set of hands," he said. "Having [Ehlers and Connor], who are as fast as there are in the League, can open up some room. Both those guys like to shoot the puck, Kevin likes to pass it, so it looks like it's got something going."

Copp scored off the rush, finishing the rebound of Jack Roslovic's shot for a 5-0 lead at 19:29 of the second period.

Greg McKegg made it 5-1 at 9:37 of the third when he redirected a Calvin de Haan pass at the left hash marks.

Wheeler set up Connor for a backhand-to-forehand move in front of the net for a power-play goal to make it 6-1 at 13:45.



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Copp scored his second of the game with one minute remaining to make it 7-1, and Adam Lowry scored with 21 seconds left for the 8-1 final.

"I have to process it a little more, but obviously it is something we don't want to see and isn't acceptable," Hurricanes coach Rod Brind'Amour said. "I haven't had one of those this year. We have had a couple bad games, but nothing like that. It was shocking, and (I) didn't expect that at all."

They said it

"All these games leading up to the playoffs are (like) playoff games. You want to get the habits right. [The Hurricanes] are a playoff team, especially since December, one of the best teams in the League. To come into a building like this and quiet it pretty quickly, it was nice." -- Jets goalie Laurent Brossoit

"We addressed it a little bit after the game, but what happened in the first 10 minutes of the game and what happened in the last three minutes of the game was totally inexcusable, something that, quite frankly, we're all ashamed of. Leaving

our goaltender, who gives us his all, all the time, three late goals. It was chance after chance after chance. We all owe him an apology for that." -- Hurricanes captain Justin Williams

Need to know

The Jets outscored the Hurricanes 11-2 in two games this season, including a 3-1 win in Winnipeg on Oct. 14. ... Connor has 11 multipoint games this season. ... Niedderer was minus-6, the worst rating in Hurricanes/Hartford Whalers history, and Sebastian Aho was minus-5. ... Carolina defenseman Trevor van Riemsdyk played his 300th NHL game. ... Hurricanes forward Micheal Ferland left the game at 1:32 of the third period after a collision with Jets defenseman Dmitry Kulikov.

What's next

Jets: At the Washington Capitals on Sunday (7 p.m. ET; ESPN+, SN, NBCSWA, NHL.TV)

Hurricanes: At the Nashville Predators on Saturday (8 p.m. ET; FS-TN, FS-CR, NHL.TV)



Jets rout Hurricanes 8-1 to take Central Division lead

RALEIGH, N.C. (AP) — With first place in their sights, the Winnipeg Jets delivered their most dominant performance of the season.

Andrew Copp scored twice, Nikolaj Ehlers had a goal and two assists, and the Jets rode a four-goal first period to an 8-1 win over the Carolina Hurricanes on Friday night.

Kevin Hayes, Blake Wheeler, Kyle Connor and Ben Chiarot each had a goal and an assist. Adam Lowry also scored as Winnipeg posted its largest victory of the season and moved ahead of idle Nashville atop the Central Division.

"We forced them to make some plays at our line," Wheeler said. "Fortunately for us, we got a couple sticks and got some odd-man rushes the other way and were able to convert."

The Jets scored three times in the first 10 minutes to jump ahead early and then three times in the final 10 minutes to turn it into a rout. Laurent Brossoit made 28 saves.

Curtis McElhinney stopped only 21 of 29 shots for the Hurricanes. Greg McKegg scored their lone goal midway through the third period.

"We have had a couple bad games, but nothing like that," Carolina coach Rod Brind'Amour said. "It was shocking. I didn't expect that at all."

Hayes, Wheeler and Chiarot all scored in the first 10 minutes to set the tone immediately. Ehlers scored at the end of the first period and Copp's first goal came in the final minute of the second to make it 5-0.

All of the Jets' first five goals were scored from the slot as their forwards maneuvered largely uncovered through the Hurricanes zone.

"We were driving well," Winnipeg coach Paul Maurice said. "We were on the puck pretty good. We knocked a bunch of things down that went our way. We were good, they had a tough night."

In all, 13 players had a point for the Jets. Each of their four lines scored at least once.

"When we're able to play four lines, we can play a really fast, heavy game," Wheeler said. "That's what we want to get to every night."

The game got loose at the end.

Connor, Copp and Lowry all found the net with less than seven minutes to go, making it Carolina's most lopsided loss of the season. That included Copp and Lowry scoring in the final minute.

"What happened in the first 10 minutes of the game and what happened in the last minute of that game was totally, totally inexcusable and something that quite frankly we're all ashamed of," Hurricanes forward Justin Williams said. "Giving them chance after chance after chance, we all owe (McElhinney) an apology after that."

NOTES: Winnipeg is 7-2 in its last nine games at Carolina. The Jets have won five of their last six against the Hurricanes overall. ... Jets D Dustin Byfuglien (ankle) returned to Winnipeg for treatment and missed his ninth straight game. D Josh Morrissey (arm) missed his fifth consecutive game. ... Hurricanes D Trevor van Riemsdyk played his 300th career game. ... Hurricanes forward Nino Niederreiter finished minus-6, a franchise record. Sebastian Aho was minus-5.

UP NEXT



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 9, 2019

Jets: At the Washington Capitals on Sunday.

Hurricanes: At the Nashville Predators on Saturday.



Recap: Hamilton extends streak to 232 in Hurricanes' 8-1 loss to Jets

It wasn't that bad, was it? Narrator: It was that bad.

By Brian LeBlanc

RALEIGH — Every time you thought it couldn't get worse, it did.

The Carolina Hurricanes have won 21 games since the start of 2019. Number 22 did not come against the Winnipeg Jets on Friday night at PNC Arena. The only silver lining was that it took all of three minutes to confirm that fact, the Jets racing out to a 4-0 lead after one period on their way to an 8-1 win that never saw them leave first gear.

It was a horror show for the Canes' top line. Sebastian Aho, Nino Niederreiter and Justin Williams combined to go minus-15 on the evening, led by Niederreiter's franchise-record -6 - setting the low-water mark for single-game plus-minus futility - and the only reason Williams didn't get to -5 was in the penalty box for one of the goals.

Why was he there, you ask? Because he was whistled for unsportsmanlike conduct for shooting the puck into the Winnipeg net.

Now, it wasn't quite that simple, of course. Williams' shot found the back of the net, the only time a Canes player did that all night, on a play where Laurent Brossoit didn't even bother to make a save, the play having been whistled dead for offside. Predictably, that led to a skirmish behind the net, but instead of drawing momentum from it, the Canes laid down, apparently already looking forward to their visit to Nashville on Saturday.

Kevin Hayes opened the scoring for the Jets three minutes into the game, somehow batting the puck into the net off of his own blocked shot past a befuddled Curtis McElhinney. Then, it was Blake Wheeler's turn. Then Ben Chiarot's. Then Nikolaj Ehlers'. It was 4-0 after twenty minutes and it might as well have been 24-0.

Andrew Copp scored with 31 seconds left in the second period to make it 5-0, and the collective reaction was essentially nothing more than a shrug emoji. When Kyle Connor scored to make it 6-1 on a power play with 6:15 to go, the crowd couldn't even muster up the give-a-damn to perfunctorily boo the goal announcement. (Copp scored again with a minute left, to general indifference. Ditto when Chiarot scored his second of the game with 15 seconds left.)

In the third period, to add insult to injury - or, injury to injury, more accurately - Micheal Ferland was the victim of an inadvertent collision with Dmitry Kulikov in which Kulikov's helmet made contact with Ferland's jaw. Ferland went immediately to the room, and did not return, the second straight game where he was forced out of a game early.

Curtis McElhinney stopped 21 of 29 shots, and was never really in any danger of being pulled, given that the Canes faced a back-to-back scenario. At the other end, Brossoit was marvelous, although he didn't have to be anything more than simply mediocre. Greg McKeeg scored the dictionary definition of a consolation goal to spoil Brossoit's shutout just as a power play expired halfway through the third period, and the fact that Greg McKeeg was within shouting distance of a power-play goal at all tells you all you need to know about a forgettable night.

They Said It

Rod Brind'Amour:

[How does your approach to a game like that change as a coach?] I don't know. I have to process it a little more. Obviously it's not something we want to see, and certainly not acceptable. We haven't had one of those this year, really. We've had a couple bad games, for sure, but nothing like that. That was a little shocking. I didn't expect that at all. The good news is that we have to play tomorrow, so we can kind of tank this game and move on.

It's something that hasn't happened this year, so it's not like I'd seen it before. That was a one-off. One of the things I love about the group is that you don't see that — ever. Again, I'll have to sit down and look through this again, but really, my assessment early was that we weren't that bad. Our best players had a tough night, but everybody else was going pretty good. For whatever reason, every grade-A we gave up went in the back of our net. We couldn't recover. The game was almost over before it got started, unfortunately.

We talked about [McElhinney needing to stay in]. Unfortunately we play tomorrow, and I'm already looking ahead of that. I certainly didn't want to jeopardize that game tomorrow. It was a tough one. That, to me, bothers me more than anything, because he's been solid for us.

[Did the 9-0 loss to Atlanta cross your mind?] Yep. It actually did. When it got to 4-0, it felt like "I've seen this before" — and I shouldn't have, because sometimes you think things and they do happen, and that's what ended up happening. It almost felt the exact same way.

It just counts as a loss at the end of the day. I think it's easier to park that one and move on than if we'd have lost in the last minute or something.

Justin Williams:

It all depends on what happens tomorrow, really. We certainly haven't had one of those this year, and we can turn the page quickly, because that was... I don't know, it's hard to even keep your head up here in this interview and answer these questions, because that was not us.



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You name it, we weren't there. You name any play, they won it. We addressed [McElhinney] a little bit after the game, but that was...what happened in the first ten minutes of the game and what happened in the last three minutes was totally, totally inexcusable, and quite frankly something that we're all ashamed of. Leaving our goaltender who gives his all for us every time, three late goals, chance after chance after chance...we all owe him an apology after that.

We've always answered the bell this year so far, and it's time to do it again. This time of the year, a game like that can go one way or the other. We've answered the bell and we're going to do it tomorrow.

Justin Faulk:

[What was missing?] Everything. I don't know. Didn't have anything going, I don't think. There wasn't one part of our game that was any good. Getting beat right from the beginning, loose pucks, puck battles, just up-ice skating. We made it very, very easy on them.

Put any spin on it you want, I guess. It just depends on what we do the next day. We're lucky enough that we play tomorrow and can try and get past this, but that can't happen, and we're not in a position to let that happen. We need every point we can get. When we come up like that, we're not going to get any points.

[What will allow you to come back?] Our work ethic. Obviously, we didn't have it tonight, so it's hard to sit here and say that's our team, but it is. Guys come in, come to work, bring maximal effort every day, and that's how we get through that. That's how we've managed to be where we are today. That's the only way we can look at it. You do that, it's OK, it looks right, everyone's on board. That's not OK. We can live with a loss if we all show up and work our balls off. That didn't happen tonight, and that won't be the performance tomorrow.

Game Notes

- Let's just go ahead and get this out of the way so we can all move on:
- This will be brief. During the game I tweeted from the CC account, context free, the box score from that infamous 9-0 railroading the Hurricanes took at the hands of this very franchise, then the Atlanta Thrashers, on November 12, 2005. I saw the parallels, as did Luke DeCock of the N&O (who will have a column about this tomorrow) and so too did Rod Brind'Amour, the captain of the team on the receiving end of that pantsing.
- The point here being, every team - even a Stanley Cup winning team - has a clunker. The Canes' minds were already on the flight to Nashville ten minutes into the game. It happens. They've still won 21 games since January 1. Tonight's loss was just that - one loss.
- Now, if they come out tomorrow and have another bender, then we'll have some real soul-searching to do. But this one happened, it's over, and everyone has thrown it in the garbage where it belongs. We're on to Nashville.
- Somehow, Saku Maenalanen finished +1 in an 8-1 loss.
- Williams was benched with nine minutes to go. Jordan Staal didn't see the ice in the final 7:30, Teuvo Teravainen was done for the night with 5:30 left, and Aho saw just one shift in the final nine minutes.
- We're done here. Play nice in the comments.



Hurricanes 'ashamed' after blowout loss to Jets

By Andrew Schnittker

Despite not playing since Tuesday, and needing a win to continue their playoff race, the Carolina Hurricanes put in their worst effort of the season at PNC Arena Friday night, falling 8-1 to the Winnipeg Jets.

Forward Greg McKegg scored the lone goal for Canes (36-24-7), who never got going. They trailed 3-0 10 minutes into the game and 4-0 after the first period. Carolina struggled to get any kind of a consistent offensive attack going, and struggled mightily with the Jets' (40-23-4) talented offense, repeatedly leaving goalie Curtis McElhinney out to dry.

"I've got to process it a little more," head coach Rod Brind'Amour said. "Obviously it's not something we want to see and it's certainly not acceptable. We haven't had one of those this year. We've had a couple bad games, for sure, but nothing like that. So that's a little shocking. I didn't expect that

at all. The good news is we've got to play tomorrow so we can kind of tank this game and move on."

This one was pretty much put to bed in the opening 20 minutes, as the Canes were outscored 4-0 in their worst period of the year.

The Jets took a 2-0 lead just 5:48 into the game on goals from forwards Kyle Connor and Blake Wheeler. Both goals came off odd-man rushes, as the Canes' struggled to control the neutral zone early.

"We didn't have anything going," defenseman Justin Faulk said. "I don't think there was one part of our game that was any good. We got beat right from the beginning: loose pucks, puck battles, just up-ice skating. We made it very, very easy on them."

Shortly after, Canes captain Justin Williams shot the puck into the Winnipeg net after play had been blown dead offsides.



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That led to a skirmish behind the net, and both Williams and Jets defenseman Dmitry Kulikov went to the box.

Just seconds into the 4-on-4 sequence, Jets defenseman Ben Chiarot put Winnipeg up 3-0. With 1:16 left in the first, after the Canes were hemmed into the defensive zone and failed to clear multiple times, Ehlers snapped home a shot from the slot to make it 4-0 and wrapped up an abysmal opening frame for Carolina.

"You name it, we weren't there," Williams said. "You name any play there, they won it."

The Jets took a 5-0 lead with 30 seconds left in the second period on a goal from forward Andrew Copp.

The Canes broke the shutout about halfway through the third period; forward Greg McKegg tipped in a point shot from defenseman Calvin de Haan. Connor's second goal of the game on a Winnipeg power play with 6:15 left restored a five-goal lead for the Jets, and Winnipeg scored twice in the game's final minute to make it a real laugh at 8-1.

"We addressed it a little bit after the game, but what happened in the first 10 minutes of the game, what happened in the last

three minutes was totally, totally inexcusable," Williams said. "It's something that, quite frankly, we're all ashamed of. Leaving our goaltender, who gives it his all for us all the time, it was three late goals and then just chance after chance after chance. We all owe him an apology for that."

Hurricanes forward Micheal Ferland, who has left both of the team's past two games with injuries, took a helmet-to-jaw hit from Kulikov in the third period and was slow to get up before going to the locker room. Brind'Amour did not have an update on Ferland after the game.

Despite the loss, the Canes still hold the first wild card spot in the Eastern Conference and are two points clear of the Columbus Blue Jackets, the first team outside the playoff picture. Carolina will be back in action Saturday in Nashville against the Predators.

"We're lucky enough that we play tomorrow and can try and get past this," Faulk said. "But that can't happen. We're not in the position to let that happen. We need every point we can get and if we come up like that we're not going to get any points."



Saarela scores twice but comeback comes up short

By Nicholas Niedzielski

The Checkers and Phantoms locked in another Atlantic Division heavyweight bout, but this time it was Lehigh Valley who came out on top, snuffing out a Charlotte comeback to win 3-2.

After an opening frame that saw the Checkers dominate the shot count 13-3 and carry most of the action, the Phantoms turned the tables in the second. Colin McDonald converted on an odd-man rush to break the ice early, then Mike Vecchione lit the lamp twice within five minutes, once on the man advantage and once on a shorthanded breakaway to build the home side a sizeable 3-0 lead through 40 minutes of play.

Never ones to roll over, the Checkers snatched the momentum back quickly in the third as Aleksii Saarela redirected a Josiah Didier point blast and then threaded home a wrister on the power play minutes later to pull Charlotte within one before the midway point of the period.

The Checkers would continue to push from there, including on a key man advantage late in regulation, but couldn't find a

way to put the equalizer behind Alex Lyon before the clock hit zero, snapping Charlotte's four-game winning streak.

NOTES

Tonight was Aleksii Saarela's third multi-goal game of the season and he became the second Checker this season to hit the 20-goal mark ... Three of the five meetings between Charlotte and Lehigh Valley this season have been decided by one goal ... Prior to tonight the Checkers had not allowed a second-period goal in four straight games ... The Checkers have allowed three shorthanded goals in their last three games ... The Checkers have scored a power-play goal in each of their last three games ... Patrick Brown, Trevor Carrick and Nick Schilkey all extended their point streaks to three games ... Janne Kuokkanen and Spencer Smallman missed the game due to injury ... Zack Stortini, Dennis Robertson and Bobby Sanguinetti were healthy extras

UP NEXT

After an unusual day off in between, the Checkers and Phantoms will square off once again on Sunday for a 1:00 p.m. puck drop.



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TODAY'S LINKS

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SportScan

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

1134968 Carolina Hurricanes

A blast from the past as former Thrashers catch Hurricanes off guard again, 13 years later

BY LUKE DECOCK

MARCH 08, 2019 11:04 PM

There have certainly been worse games of hockey played at PNC Arena than what the Carolina Hurricanes perpetrated on Friday, but rarely when they had been playing as well as they have lately or been clinging precariously to a potential playoff spot.

The latter condition hasn't often been satisfied in recent years, which of course tends to limit the pool of candidates to start. It's been so rare that the Hurricanes are this good, there haven't been many opportunities for their good teams to be this bad.

On their way to an 8-1 win, the Winnipeg Jets scored four goals in the first period and probably should have been up by more. The Jets were quicker, stronger and flat-out better in every respect. They even scored twice in the last minute.

In spirit if not volume, it was reminiscent of the 9-0 loss to the Jets nee Atlanta Thrashers that put a savage end to the Hurricanes' nine-game winning streak in November 2005, when the Hurricanes looked unbeatable until they looked incompetent.

Rod Brind'Amour remembers. He remembered during the first period Friday.

"When it got to 4-0, I was thinking, 'I've seen this before,' " the player then and coach now said. "Maybe I shouldn't have, because sometimes you think things and they do happen. It felt the exact same way."

The Hurricanes can only hope things turn out slightly as well in the end.

However bad it was, the Hurricanes deserved worse. The Jets were quicker, sharper, tighter. The Hurricanes spent a good chunk of Thursday's practice working on neutral-zone play and a good chunk of

Friday's first period playing like they had practiced just about anything else.

"It's just not us," Justin Williams said.

Sebastian Aho and Nino Niederreiter were on the ice for the first five Jets goals. Aho finished minus-5, whatever the hockey equivalent of the golden sombrero is. Le chapeau d'or. Niederreiter one-downed him, setting a new franchise record at minus-6. Le chapeau d'platine.

Oh, and if the result wasn't bad enough, Micheal Ferland took an incidental helmet to the chin in the third period and could potentially be dealing with another concussion. More good news. By the time Brind'Amour came to the podium after the game, Ferland was still in the training room and had been there almost an hour.

This was the collision of a strong, heavy playoff team with one that still isn't quite sure whether it is or not. In some ways, it was a chilling vision of Game 1 against a superior opponent, the worst-case scenario if the Hurricanes do make the playoffs and get matched up with a team that's better down the middle and tougher everywhere else.

It should be a wake-up call in that respect, if nothing else.

The days when the Hurricanes saw every backup goalie ever to come out of junior hockey – and, too often, made them look infallible – are over. They're not sneaking up on anyone. Winnipeg was ready. The Hurricanes were not. It's going to be that way from here on out. It's for real now.

And as much as you'd like to say, hey, it happen, there's not a lot of wiggle room here. The Hurricanes were off to Nashville immediately afterward for Saturday's game against the team the Jets just passed in the Central Division standings, sitting at home getting worked up about that – another strong, heavy team that's better down the middle than the Hurricanes.

"No way we're going to get through that if we show up like that against a team like Winnipeg," Justin Faulk said, having just been proven correct in the most embarrassing way possible.

News Observer LOADED: 03.09.2019

1134969 Carolina Hurricanes



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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Proposed PNC Arena renovations could cost \$200 million

BY CHIP ALEXANDER

MARCH 08, 2019 04:57 PM

The Centennial Authority was presented Friday with architectural renderings of an enhanced and renovated PNC Arena.

An 80-minute presentation headed by Bill Browne, president of Ratio Architects of Indianapolis, provided the "new vision" of the arena. The discussion included proposals for a rooftop bar and restaurant on the south end facing Carter-Finley Stadium, the possibility of removing stairwells or suites for more "income-producing spaces" and removing some aisles on the lower level to add more seats.

Late in the presentation came the bottom line: the cost.

The projected construction cost value from the Ratio and HOK architects was an estimated \$167.4 million to \$201.8 million, with additional costs for planning and fixtures. And the scope of the enhancements would be contingent on the authority, the arena landlord, agreeing on a new lease with the Carolina Hurricanes and its parent company, Gale Force Sports & Entertainment.

"We'll move forward. The building is always going to be here," authority chairman Tom McCormick said Friday. "But ultimately what we're going to be looking for in the near future is an allocation of money which we might be able to get. How much of that we ultimately get will probably depend somewhat on what the guaranteed future of the Hurricanes here is."

The Canes' arena lease expires in 2024. McCormick said the authority has "just begun talking" to the Hurricanes on a new lease and have hired a consultant.

Recent arena enhancements, requested by Hurricanes owner Tom Dundon, included the installation of a 3D projection system and theatrical lighting. Plans call for a new scoreboard to be installed before next season.

N.C. State uses the arena for its men's basketball games and commencement exercises, and the arena has hosted NCAA basketball regionals, concerts and family events.

Money for the arena enhancements would come from Wake County and the City of Raleigh, provided through the Interlocal Agreement, which is funded by the hospitality industry's hotel/motel and prepared-food tax.

In its response to a request for information for hospitality projects by Wake County, the authority noted PNC Arena will have had a \$4 billion economic impact for Wake County since its opening in October 1999. Other projects are being considered.

If approved, the arena construction would begin in 2020, starting with new office space for the Hurricanes and Gale Force staff and additional meeting spaces.

The south end entrance facing Carter-Finley Stadium could potentially be opened up to provide a view into the bowl area, or as Browne said, for fans to immediately feel the arena "experience."

The PNC Arena enhancement and renovations have been in the planning stage since 2015 and the projected cost then was pegged at about \$115 million to \$120 million

"There are a few things in this plan that weren't in that plan then," McCormick said.

Removing stairwells, removing aisles, adding wider seats, perhaps building lounges on the mezzanine levels below the main concourse level -- there are a number of wide-ranging proposals in the project, not that all will eventually be approved or built.

McCormick, speaking for the authority, said he thought the members "probably would like to do all of them."

"But it's money and there are other people competing for it," McCormick said.

News Observer LOADED: 03.09.2019

1135038 Nashville Predators

Since making cameo at forward, Preds defenseman Matt Irwin has been playing with more edge

Paul Skrbina, Nashville Tennessean Published 4:57 p.m. CT March 8, 2019

P.K. Subban has never met a fashion risk he wasn't willing to take.

So when the Predators defenseman took the ice for practice Friday at Centennial Sportsplex wearing a Matt Irwin sweater, it begged a question about his wardrobe choice.

Neither would fess up about exact reason behind the change of clothes, but Subban jokingly hinted it may be a good-luck charm going forward.

"Can you believe? That's the best I've looked on the power play in practice all season," Subban said with a grin. "It was the only blue jersey left. Maybe every practice I'll switch with him."

A switch is exactly what Irwin has seemed to flip during the last couple of weeks. The man who has been a regular on the healthy-scratch list this season has been noticeably more physical and playing with an edge.

Shifts in momentum

Irwin shifted from defenseman to forward for a few shifts Feb. 25. The Predators were shorthanded that night after dealing Kevin Fiala to the Wild for Mikael Granlund and Ryan Hartman to the Flyers for Wayne Simmonds and a conditional draft pick.

That left the Predators with slim pickings that night against the Oilers, leaving Irwin in unfamiliar territory in front of Wayne Gretzky and Garth Brooks, who sat together during the game.

When Irwin said he hadn't played forward since "Atom," he wasn't referring to biblical times. It only seemed that long ago.

Instead, Irwin was talking about when he was 9 or 10 years old and was an "offensive forward."

A notion he now laughs at.

"A little bit (shocked)," he said of seeing his spot in the lineup that night. "I ... was told I was going to play a couple of shifts at forward. So I just tried to read the notes, see exactly what we do.

"It was all new to me. It was a lot more skating, but it was cool to be on the other end of a forecheck for a change."

'Tis the season

Something seemed to change that night for Irwin, a 31-year-old in his seventh season.

He's played in the team's last seven games, accounting for 20 percent of his total for the season. His 69 hits are the sixth-most on the team, despite his limited ice time.

He played 11:56 during Tuesday's victory against the Wild, up more than two minutes from his previous three games and more than three minutes more than the two before that.



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SUBSCRIBE. IT'S FREE: Catfish Corner newsletter: Ryan Johansen, PK Subban, Lindsey Vonn and a Wild-Predators reunion

His Corsi-for of 52.24 is fourth among Predators defensemen. The Predators have scored 17 times while he was on the ice, and have allowed 11 goals.

Irwin's cameo at forward wasn't meant to suggest he is some sort of scoring machine — he has a goal and four assists this season — but it may have inadvertently served as a jolt for a defenseman who fights for every minute he plays.

"I wasn't out there to create too many scoring chances," he said. "It was just to work hard and keep the puck in their end and forecheck. I had a couple of shifts and I think I was able to do that."

Any correlation between the time of year and the energy in Irwin's game?

"You try to be consistent throughout the whole year," he said. "Maybe it's just the competition has ramped up a little bit more for both sides. Every game means so much right now for points. ... Emotions run high. It's a physical game. Part of my game is to be hard to play against. I don't want forwards on other teams thinking it's easy to get to our net. That's my job, to keep them away from it."

And while he prefers to keep wearing his own sweater on game nights, Irwin might want to get an extra one for practice, in case Subban sticks to his word.

"He looked good out there with that jersey on," Irwin said.

Tennessean LOADED: 03.09.2019

1135039 Nashville Predators

Catfish Corner newsletter: Ryan Johansen, PK Subban, Lindsey Vonn and a Wild-Predators reunion

Paul Skrbina, Published 6:13 a.m. CT March 8, 2019

What happens in GnashVegas stays in GnashVegas.

Well, mostly.

The playing surface at Bridgestone Arena was transformed into a casino floor Thursday night for the team's annual fundraiser.

Lindsey Vonn and boyfriend P.K. Subban were there, along with most of the rest of the Predators, who spent a good part of the night posing for pictures and mingling with fans.

There was plenty of reason to celebrate, what with the Predators in first place in the Central Division and on a two-game winning streak thanks to a pair of slow-motion shootout goals from Ryan Johansen that angered Wild goalies.

He did it

Johansen's first slo-mo goal happened Sunday in Minnesota, where there was a reunion of many Preds and former Preds.

Oops, he did it again

Johansen gave the Predators a 5-4 win two days later in Nashville, where he left Wild goalie Devan Dubnyk to call his approach a mockery. Oh, and Kevin Fiala scored a pair of goals for Minnesota.

Speaking of Vonn

The greatest female skier of all-time returned to her native town of St. Paul, Minn., on Sunday and dropped the ceremonial first puck as Subban looked on.

Speaking of Subban

The Predators defenseman said he isn't happy with his season, but added he embraces the adversity that's come with it.

It happens

Filip Forsberg took a stick to the face. The Jets' Adam Lowry was suspended for it after the Winnipeg came from behind to beat the Predators.

Catfish Corner: The podcast

We discuss the moves the Preds made at the trade deadline and what they might mean. Plus, hear from Forsberg about his favorite player and Swedish Fish.

SUBSCRIBE. IT'S FREE: Catfish Corner newsletter: Granlund arrives after baby is born; Simmonds trying to fit in

Quote of the week

Devan Dubnyk of the @mnmwild was not a fan of the slow motion shootout game winner by @PredsNHL Ryan Johansen. Believes players have an unfair advantage vs goalies.

#InTheCrease#nhlpic.twitter.com/7avZQbuJv1

— Linda Cohn (@lindacohn) March 6, 2019

"It's a mockery. We're trying to make the playoffs. Obviously I'm frustrated because we're on the wrong side of it, but you got a guy standing at the top of the crease not moving, stick handling. I'm down and out and he stands there and looks at me while I'm trying to lift my pad up and still waits and then shoots the puck in the net." Wild goalie Devan Dubnyk after Johansen beat him for a shootout-winning goal Tuesday.

Video of the week

Stat of the week

Johansen is 3-for-3 in shootout attempts, leading the NHL.

Tennessean LOADED: 03.09.2019

1134978 Colorado Avalanche

Avalanche captain Gabe Landeskog will miss 4 to 6 weeks

By THE DENVER POST | PUBLISHED: March 8, 2019 at 3:02 pm | UPDATED: March 8, 2019 at 3:03 PM

The Colorado Avalanche announced Friday that captain Gabe Landeskog will miss four-to-six weeks with an upper-body injury.

Landeskog, a 26-year-old left wing who has set career-highs in points (69) and goals (33) this season, was injured during the third period at Dallas on Thursday night when he collided with Stars goalie Ben Bishop. He left the ice and did not return.

The all-star forward plays on the Avs' top line with center Nathan MacKinnon and right winger Mikko Rantanen, which is commonly considered the best line in professional hockey. Landeskog leads the NHL in third-period goals (19).



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Colorado (70 points), which hosts Buffalo at 1 p.m. Saturday at the Pepsi Center, entered Friday four points behind the Minnesota Wild for the final wild-card playoff spot.

Denver Post: LOADED: 03.09.2019

1134979 Colorado Avalanche

Is the Avalanche's Tyson Barrie expendable? Colorado has options with Cale Makar and Conor Timmins

By MIKE CHAMBERS PUBLISHED: March 8, 2019 at 8:39 am |
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Tyson Barrie has heard the rumblings and understands the situation. The power-play quarterback realizes that two younger Avalanche defensemen of his same special ilk could lead to the end of his tenure in Colorado before the final year of his \$22 million contract kicks in next season.

The combination of Cale Makar and Conor Timmins, the Avs' first two selections of the 2017 draft, could make Barrie expendable. The Avs would covet two right-shot, offensive-minded defensemen, but not three — partially because they already have 170-pound defenseman Sam Girard, the savvy left-shooting playmaker from the 2016 draft.

And Barrie's \$5.5 million salary next season? It could be used elsewhere, while Makar and Timmins, both 20, are on their modest entry-level contracts. Girard, also 20, is on the second year of his three-year ELC.

"Obviously, I'm not blind to it," Barrie said of the situation last week when he stood 10th in NHL scoring among defensemen with 46 points (seven goals) in 63 games. "But right now we're in a playoff battle and that's certainly not the focus at all for me. The focus for me is to play good hockey and help this team win some games and get into the postseason for the second time in a row. That's so consuming in itself. It's such a hard league to win that you don't have time to focus on anything else."

For the record, Barrie, 27, wants to remain in Colorado. He wants to seek a contract extension with the Avs as soon as July 1, or well before he's eligible to become an unrestricted free agent July 1, 2020.

"I love it here," he said. "I've been here my whole career and I'd like to be a part of it going forward. But at the end of the day, that's up to management and where they see this going. That's probably a conversation for a later date. But this is the second home for me. It's become home. I spend a lot of time here. I love the guys. I love the organization. At the end of the day, it's a business. But I do love it here."

Makar was the fourth overall pick of the 2017 draft, and Timmins was the first pick of the second round (32nd). ESPN ranks Makar, the University of Massachusetts star sophomore, as college hockey's No. 1 NHL prospect. Timmins signed with the Avs last March from major-junior's Soo Greyhounds before he sustained a concussion that has prevented him from playing this season. He's practicing with the Avs' American Hockey League affiliate, the Colorado Eagles, but has not been cleared for full contact.

Makar is expected to sign with the Avs the day after UMass' season ends, and bypass the AHL entirely unless the Avs don't make the playoffs and the Eagles do. Because of his entry-level contract, Makar's cap hit will be less than \$1 million.

Barrie understands the math.

"If you can get a guy to come in and contribute and be a big part of the team on an entry-level deal, it's a huge benefit," Barrie said. "You've seen teams that have won Cups who had guys contributing on their

entry-levels. It's a tough league to come into when you're young and be an impact player, but obviously, there are some special players out there that they can do that."

Avalanche coach Jared Bednar thinks considering Barrie's impending exit is premature.

"Fans get really excited about guys — your fan base knows you've drafted guys and they get excited to see them play," the coach said. "But you're not an NHL player until you prove it — Tyson Barrie is not expendable until someone can prove they can take his job. We need impact players, guys who impact the game. You're not that until you prove that you are."

"So we don't know. Everybody develops at a different rate, and defensemen and goalies usually take longer. We don't know if (Makar or Timmins) will develop into the players we think they'll become, but I will say this: Not everyone can come out of junior or college and just be Sam Girard. He's an impact player for us."

With or without Barrie, the Avs should be set with impact defensemen, because they won't trade him if they don't believe they can replace him.

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1134980 Colorado Avalanche

What lies ahead for the Avalanche without Gabriel Landeskog?

By Ryan S. Clark Mar 8, 2019

April 6 against the Sharks at the SAP Center. That is the Avalanche's final regular-season game, and it's also the earliest date Gabriel Landeskog could return to the lineup.

The question is, will it matter at that point?

The Avalanche confirmed Friday what was suspected when Landeskog exited in a 4-0 loss Thursday against the Stars at American Airlines Center. Their captain, who is having the best season of his career, sustained an upper-body injury that will keep him out for the next four to six weeks.

To view it another, perhaps more realistic way: The Avalanche will be without Landeskog for their final 14 games as they try to reach the playoffs in what's becoming an increasingly more difficult Western Conference wild-card race.

The ideal situation? The Avalanche would welcome a scenario in which Landeskog returns to a team that overcame a four-point deficit and clinched a wild-card spot for a second consecutive playoff appearance. Realistically? Nobody knows what the Avs' playoff chances will or won't be going into the final week of the regular season.

This is a team that went from being on a six-game point streak late last month to suddenly losing three of four while its chief wild-card rivals — Arizona, Dallas and Minnesota — continued to stay ahead in the standings.

"It's a huge loss for our team," Avalanche coach Jared Bednar said after practice Friday. "That's the second forward now that we've lost for the remainder of the regular season, and both guys are impact guys for us — (Matt) Nieto and now Landy. It's going to be a great opportunity for some guys. We need some guys to step up here."

"Guys like (Alexander) Kerfoot and (Tyson) Jost will get more opportunities. Everyone will get a little bit more opportunity here."



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Trying to replace Landeskog is a task that can be viewed through several prisms, beginning with the line combinations the Avalanche could use Saturday afternoon against the Sabres at Pepsi Center.

Bednar recently reunited Landeskog with superstar center Nathan MacKinnon and star winger Mikko Rantanen after separating the All-Star trio for seven games. What made them successful during the team's 17-7-5 start was the ability to play the sort of one-two game that allowed the third forward to get free into open space and launch shots from prime locations.

Opponents started to figure out how to counter that approach, and it led to a slow down in even-strength production.

MacKinnon, as he's done all season, remained on the first line but was partnered in practice alongside J.T. Compher and newly acquired Derick Brassard, who has played six games in an Avalanche sweater. Should those combinations from practice hold against the Sabres, it will be the first time this year Brassard, Compher and MacKinnon will start a game together.

The only sequence when they've played together came Tuesday in a 4-3 overtime win against the Red Wings, and that combo was used 1.8 percent of the time, according to data tracked by LeftWingLock.com.

A natural center, Brassard started playing on the wing this season while Compher has alternated between being down the middle and operating on the flank. Compher's ability to work the corners for possession – an aspect of Landeskog's profile as a player – will be utilized while he plays on the top line. Brassard can prove useful there and also in the faceoff circle.

It is likely Brassard will receive draws, a duty with which Bednar entrusted Landeskog. Although Carl Soderberg and MacKinnon lead the Avalanche in total faceoffs, Landeskog was third on the team with 651 on the season while averaging 9.57 per game. He won faceoffs at a rate of 51.8 percent. Brassard, who has won 48.2 percent of his career draws, has succeeded 51.4 percent of the time in his games with the Avs.

Brassard and MacKinnon have had limited even-strength minutes together but shared a few shifts in recent games. Brassard and Compher, however, started together as linemates against the Sharks and Ducks last weekend. Compher has played sparingly with MacKinnon in 5-on-5 play, but they have logged several shifts together on a first-team power-play unit that is also going to see changes.

Landeskog played in a more central role within the team's 1-3-1 setup that featured MacKinnon and Rantanen on the half wall. During practice Friday, those half-wall roles were occupied by Brassard and MacKinnon with Rantanen, who is 6-foot-4 and 215 pounds, using his size to occupy the net front and get a few goals past Semyon Varlamov.

Bednar swapped Brassard for Compher on the first-team power-play unit a few games ago, but both were alongside MacKinnon, Rantanen and defenseman Tyson Barrie in practice. That means Jost, Kerfoot, Soderberg, Samuel Girard and Erik Johnson will fill the second team.

One of the aspects of Landeskog's game that allowed him to score a career-high 33 goals was his presence in front of the net. His ability to score in the low slot or in front of the crease was paramount to the Avalanche's success. Landeskog also showed he could score from other areas of the ice.

Micah Blake McCurdy, a mathematician who maps and tracks numerous metrics, illustrated how Landeskog has also launched a high number of attempts – per a goaltender's view of the ice – from the right faceoff circle, high right slot and throughout the point, with a significant number coming from the right and center of the ice.

If Bednar sticks with Brassard and Compher, it will fall on one of them to get into similar scoring positions.

McCurdy's findings show that Compher has a profile similar to Landeskog's when it comes to where shots are taken. It's just that Compher's volume is not as high as Landeskog's. Part of that stems from

how each is used. Landeskog is asked to take a significant number of shots while Compher is not given the same task.

Compher, who sustained a concussion earlier this season, has played in 52 games. He has a career-high 15 goals on 95 shots. If that rate holds through the final 14 regular-season games, he'll finish with 19 goals on 121 shots. Over the course of a full 82-game season, he'd have 150 shots on goal and 24 goals. But with Landeskog out, Compher will be under pressure to boost that production.

Brassard, who is on his third team this season, is a little harder to assess.

For example, here's what McCurdy found from Brassard's 40-game stint with the Penguins, when he had nine goals from 62 shots on goal. Brassard was not highly active at the front of the net, with most of his attempts coming from either faceoff circle or the right point, along with a few scattered attempts in different areas.

OK. So what about his 10-game tenure with the Panthers, when Brassard had a goal and 16 shots? Brassard, compared with his time with the Penguins, was rather active in a smaller sample of games played.

He was able to fire off more attempts in the low slot, with quite a few coming in front of the net or just to the left of the crease.

Brassard did have a higher concentration of shots from the outer half of the right faceoff circle and the area just above. He also got off chances from the left faceoff circle and in portions of the left point.

Brassard's run with the Avalanche amounts to two goals from 10 shots through six games, a small sampling that does provide a brief roadmap of what he's been able to do.

Brassard is rather active in front of the net on either side of the crease. He's also primarily camped out on the right side of the ice and has taken shots from nearly every portion of the ice. He also has some attempts from the left point with the Avalanche.

It amounts to Brassard having 12 goals on 88 shots this season. Again, with Landeskog out, his pattern could be subject to change for these final 14 games.

Naturally, another question regarding Landeskog's long-term absence revolves around how this will affect the team's on-ice leadership and how its core will manage without him. Landeskog, 26, has the seventh-longest captaincy in the NHL behind Zdeno Chara, Sidney Crosby, Jonathan Toews, Mikko Koivu, Alexander Ovechkin and Ryan Getzlaf.

Bednar said Johnson and MacKinnon will continue to serve as alternate captains. Johnson, who turns 31 on March 21, is in his second stint wearing the "A," and MacKinnon has worn it for three seasons. The dynamic was created for Johnson and Landeskog to be the primary voices within the dressing room who also kept the big picture in view. MacKinnon's job is to do that but also use his presence to provide energy throughout the rest of the team.

The plan now is to enlist a third alternate captain.

"We'll pick a guy who we feel like can help lead us here," Bednar explained. "I don't think it changes anything for the guys that we have. You don't have to be wearing a letter on your jersey in order to lead in the locker room. Right now, we need guys leading by example more so than what they say."

It is possible Bednar goes with Barrie, considering he named Barrie an alternate captain earlier this season when Johnson was out with post-concussion symptoms.

Or Bednar could choose to go in another direction. He could lean toward veterans in Matt Calvert, Soderberg or Ian Cole. Although Calvert and Cole are in their first season with the team, they have quickly assimilated into the Avalanche's leadership group.



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The team could also lean on Brassard, who was a mentor to younger players, such as Thomas Chabot, during his time with the Senators.

Bednar said during preseason camp that he typically meets weekly with the Avalanche's leadership group to discuss such items as what topics could arise in the dressing room to how to help a player who is struggling with his game.

"Whether we're having breakfast and we'll be like, 'Hey, should we have a meeting today and talk about this? Should we address this within the team?'" Johnson told The Athletic earlier this season. "So it's pretty casual. I think leadership comes naturally to guys and if you kinda force it, it can kinda seemed forced. Everyone has their own style with how they do things.

"Me and Gabe and Nate and Tice and other guys get together and have casual conversations about things we need to address, and sometimes that will take place with the coaching staff. It's a good dynamic we have."

Landeskog or not, the Avalanche are trying to qualify for the postseason amid slow starts and with a tumultuous schedule in their view.

The sluggish starts are a season-long concern that has come under more criticism from both Bednar and the outside world. The Avalanche went 6-1-1 before a two-game California trip against the Sharks and Ducks. Over those eight games, they had only one – a 3-0 loss to the Blues – when they did not score first.

They fell behind early in the games against the Sharks and Ducks, going 0-2 on the trip, and those problems have continued to mount. The Red Wings scored first before the Avs rallied for an overtime win. The Stars scored four unanswered and sent the Avs to their third loss in four games.

The Avalanche are 8-22-7 when opponents score first this season. Four teams – the Blues, the Devils, the Kings and the Senators – entered the week with fewer wins in that section of situational play.

If that's not damning enough, there are a few more ways to assess the Avalanche's slow starts. The first: Slow starts have been a problem for some time. The Avs were 7-23-5 last season when opponents scored first. They were 10-44-4 the year before.

The bottom line is the Avalanche have left themselves quite the chore. They have 14 games left along with a 24 percent chance of reaching the postseason, according to The Athletic's latest playoff projection model.

Colorado came into the weekend with 70 points in 68 games. Dallas has 75 points in 67 games to control the first wild-card spot. Minnesota has 74 points in 69 games to possess the second wild-card position. Arizona, also ahead of Colorado in the standings, has 71 points in 67 contests.

Any attempt at cutting into those margins and overtaking those teams means the Avalanche must win games and hope those teams falter. In their finishing stretch, the Avalanche do have games at the Wild (March 19) and at the Stars (March 21), as well as a home game against the Coyotes (March 29).

The Avs also have some matchups against teams out of the playoff race, including the Devils, Ducks, Oilers and Sabres. The Avalanche will need to pile up points in those matchups.

Others — such as the Blues, Golden Knights, Jets and Sharks — are playoff-bound and will fight for seeding. For example, the Jets lead the Central Division by a point with three games in hand over the Predators. The Sharks are one point behind the Flames for the Pacific Division lead but have played two fewer contests. Those loom as considerable hurdles for the Avalanche.

"You gotta try and find some combinations that give you some success and also a little bit of depth," Bednar said. "You lose your top-line left winger and then we lose a middle-six winger that does a lot of things for us in Nieto. So every time you miss a guy, you're looking for other guys that can possibly step in and do that job, or you have to rearrange things.

"We're trying to rearrange some things and see if we can find some magic with guys split up on different lines and see guys can elevate their game."

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1134981 Colorado Avalanche

Avalanche lose Gabriel Landeskog for 4-6 weeks with upper body injury

By Evan Rawal - March 8, 2019

One day after a loss to the Dallas Stars put a serious dent in their playoff chances, the Avalanche announced an even bigger loss. Captain Gabriel Landeskog, who left the game halfway through the third period, will miss 4-6 weeks due to an upper body injury.

Landeskog, who has already set career highs in goals (33) and points (69), was chasing after a puck in the offensive zone when Dallas Stars goaltender Ben Bishop backed into him. The 26-year old Swede had his right arm extended at the time, and after the collision was in clear discomfort and when straight to the bench. The 4-6 week timeframe of the injury could mean Landeskog's season is over.

In terms of immediate replacement, the Avs simply do not have one. This will be a tough injury to overcome, as Landeskog does a lot for this team, not just in terms of offense but also in the defensive zone. He has taken more face-offs this year than any season in his career, and is arguably the Avs best face-off man at 51.8 percent, despite not being a natural center. His hockey intelligence and defensive ability have allowed his line mates Nathan MacKinnon and Mikko Rantanen to take off offensively since the trio were put together.

In the meantime, deadline acquisition Derick Brassard will move onto the top line. Brassard has two points in the six games he's played with the Avalanche.

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1134982 Colorado Avalanche

How the Avalanche can survive the loss of Gabe Landeskog

BY ADRIAN DATER MARCH 8, 2019

Maybe it's just a weird quirk of mine, but I'm always pessimistic when times are good and optimistic when times are bad.

So, I'm here to tell you that, while the loss of Gabe Landeskog for 4-6 weeks definitely was not good news today for the Colorado Avalanche, I am optimistic they can survive this and still sneak their way into the playoffs.

Why? Because, history for one thing. Did the Avs fall apart when they lost Peter Forsberg for the rest of the playoffs after Round 2 in 2001? Did the Avs fall apart when they lost Erik Johnson to a season-ending leg injury toward the end of last season? Did the Avs fall apart when they lost both Forsberg and Joe Sakic to injury at the same time in the '90s, only to win most every game for about 2-3 weeks?

No, to all.



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The Avs – especially this group of core players – have sometimes played better when everybody is counting them out, when they're the underdog. We saw it at the end last year, when Johnson's injury meant total doom, according to the pundits. But they rallied around each other and got into the playoffs without him.

Everybody said they would be horrible last season, coming off that 48-point disaster, and what happened?

Injuries to top players can be good for teams in the short term. In the long term? No, not usually. But this team is perfectly capable of winning some games without Gabe Landeskog in the lineup.

Here are more specifics on how that can happen, according to yours truly:

Derick Brassard will take Landy's spot on the top line. He's capable of being a solid fill-in. Here's a veteran can who can make plays, who has scored at a decent clip in his career. He'll also take Landy's spot on the first power-play unit, and I've liked his play on the PP so far. Has he been awesome? No, but he's been looking for an opportunity to prove he's a very good player again, and now he really has it.

This might make Avs D-men more involved in the play offensively, which I think is a good thing. Specifically, I think Jared Bednar should turn Erik Johnson loose more offensively, maybe even spot shift him down low on the PP. It's time to think out of the box a little bit here, get creative. Why not utilize EJ's skill on the offensive end more?

I think Bednar should just play seven D right now. Quit trying to get blood out of a stone from lower-line guys who just can't produce much offense, and rotate seven D instead. Bednar has done it before, to some good results. I think Ryan Graves should stay in the lineup and be that seventh guy. Nikita Zadorov will be back tomorrow, but I don't think Graves should pay the price and sit, while guys on the third and fourth line go another goose-egg game on the score sheet.

Bednar will probably try to tighten up more defensively in the neutral zone, especially without the back-checking Landy. Yeah, that might cost some offensively, but it's easier to win a low-scoring game than a higher one. It's not like Bednar isn't always trying to get his team better defensively, but it's another thing to get players to buy in when they know there is still a lot of star power up top. Now that the captain is out, players know they're going to have to play the system defensively.

We'll see what happens. Hey, if the Avs lose out from here, not the end of the world either. Their own first-round draft pick will be better. This has just been one of those seasons, hasn't it?

But hockey is a team sport. One guy doesn't determine all. See you tomorrow.

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1134983 Columbus Blue Jackets

Still no timetable for Ryan Murray's return

Brian Hedger

They are questions that get significantly more pressing with each game Ryan Murray misses because of an undisclosed injury.

Will the Blue Jackets' best puck-moving defenseman return this season? If so, when?

All that has been released is that Murray has an "upper-body" injury and will be out on a "week-to-week" basis, a prognosis that was originally

termed "out indefinitely" in a news release when Murray was placed on injured reserve.

Asked whether he's hopeful Murray will return this season, general manager Jarmo Kekalainen said: "I am always hopeful."

Murray's agent, Rick Valette, had a similar take after visiting his client this week.

"Hopefully, he gets back in the lineup soon," Valette said.

Whether that's possible is unknown. Murray is expected to miss his 10th straight game on Saturday when the Blue Jackets play the Pittsburgh Penguins at Nationwide Arena.

It's unknown whether the injury is related to a back issue that forced the 25-year-old to miss nearly three months last season. Regardless, Murray's absence is a problem for the Blue Jackets, who have sorely missed his presence on the top pairing with Seth Jones.

Murray's vision, passing and composure — especially in the defensive zone — have been critical in all three zones. He also has helped the Jackets' penalty kill to rise into the top five of the NHL rankings and has a career-high 29 points (one goal, 28 assists) in 56 games.

"He's an important piece," said Jones, who is now working with Zach Werenski but also has worked with Markus Nutivaara and Scott Harrington since Murray's injury. "It's not just his point totals, but how solid he was for us in every part of the game. We feel for him and we see him in the rink every day, so he's still around."

He's just not practicing or playing, and there is no telling when that might change.

"Hopefully, he gets back before the end of the season or as soon as possible," said David Savard, who worked with Werenski before Murray's absence. "It would be a huge plus for us if we can get him back, but we've just got to go game-by-game (until then)."

Dubious streak

The Blue Jackets have one more chance this season to end a losing streak to the Penguins that stretches to the 2016-17 regular season.

After losing 3-0 Thursday at Pittsburgh, they have lost eight straight games to the Penguins, which is the longest streak in the series. Pittsburgh is also 9-0-1 in the past 10 regular-season meetings and has won both first-round playoff series between the two teams (2014 and '17).

Who will start?

The Blue Jackets threw a curveball Thursday in Pittsburgh by starting backup Joonas Korpi instead of Sergei Bobrovsky.

Bobrovsky's struggles against the Penguins are well-chronicled, but coach John Tortorella said that wasn't the reason he went with Korpi, who made 28 saves in a solid performance.

Korpi is 0-2-0 against Pittsburgh this season, but Tortorella's goaltending decision is a story line to watch heading into the morning skate Saturday. The Jackets also have Keith Kinkaid, a trade-deadline acquisition who went 3-1-0 against the Penguins for the New Jersey Devils this season and has a 6-1-1 record against them the past two seasons.

Toasted Bread

The Penguins have thrown a wet blanket on Artemi Panarin and the Blue Jackets' top line in the first three games.

Panarin has just one assist and a minus-7 plus/minus rating, while center Pierre-Luc Dubois has no points and is minus-3 and right wing Cam Atkinson has two goals with a minus-5.

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1134984 Columbus Blue Jackets

Blue Jackets try to work through sudden slump on offense

Brian Hedger

Posted Mar 8, 2019 at 8:39 PM Updated Mar 8, 2019 at 8:39 PM

This is not how this was supposed to work.

This is not how any of this was supposed to work after the Blue Jackets added three forwards and a goalie before the Feb. 25 trade deadline. Since fearlessly going all in, the lugnuts have loosened and the wheels on the Jackets' season are starting to wobble.

Since the deadline, they have lost two more games than they've won, have dropped from third in the Metropolitan Division to outside the playoffs, and their offense in just six games has gone from an overflowing fountain to a rusty, dried-up spigot.

"We're just not opportunistic right now — they are," is how captain Nick Foligno put it Thursday after another humbling loss, 3-0 at the Pittsburgh Penguins (a.k.a. "they"). "That's really the difference in this game. I thought we did a lot of good things and had a lot of good looks, and ... we're just not scoring."

The Blue Jackets, who play the Penguins again Saturday night at Nationwide Arena in the finale of the season series, have been shut out twice in six games since the deadline. During that span they're averaging about half of their previous goals per game, dropping from 3.2 (10th in the NHL) to 1.5 (29th).

Want to talk goal differential? Well, that's ugly, too.

Since adding at the deadline, including star center Matt Duchene and forward Ryan Dzingel in separate trades with the Ottawa Senators, the Jackets are minus-12 in goals for and against, and their top scorers are either slumping or not producing at their usual levels.

Artemi Panarin leads the team with a goal and five assists since the deadline, but he's also toting around a minus-7 rating. Cam Atkinson leads in goals in that span with two, but neither Duchene nor Dzingel have a point in the past four games.

"Still not totally in flow offensively," coach John Tortorella said after losing to the Penguins. "I think we need something good to happen. They blocked 24 shots. We have a lot of shot attempts and a lot of good things, but we still ... we don't score a goal."

That's a big problem at any time, but especially with the playoffs still within reach and games disappearing off the schedule every other day.

Whether the problem is simply nerves associated with increased expectations or something else, the Blue Jackets need to get things corrected quickly — and putting more pucks into the opposing net would be a good starting point.

"Scoring and not scoring are both contagious," Duchene said. "All of us are a little snakebit right now, and I have no explanation for it. We just have to work through it."

After adding Duchene and Dzingel, the Blue Jackets suddenly had six 20-goal scorers on their roster, the most of any team in the league. They leaped straight to the top of the league in depth scoring, statistically speaking. But players have to live up to their stats, which hasn't happened yet.

"We've got to find a way, because you're not going to win a game unless you score a goal," Foligno said, pointing out an obvious fact that has

become entirely pertinent. "There's chances to be had. We've just got to fight that extra inch to put them in right now."

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1134985 Columbus Blue Jackets

Penguins 3, Blue Jackets 0: Five takeways

Brian Hedger

PITTSBURGH – It was better than Tuesday.

That was the biggest thing the Blue Jackets took away from their latest loss to the Pittsburgh Penguins, a 3-0 shutout Thursday night at PPG Paints Arena.

Two days after escaping from a near catastrophe with a 2-1 shootout win in New Jersey, the Jackets played better, overall, in Pittsburgh – where they made the Penguins work for the victory.

The problem, however, is that it's getting late. Columbus didn't gain a single point, staying at 77, while the Penguins moved to four points ahead of them with 15 games left in the regular season.

It was encouraging to see the Jackets stay with the Penguins and even take it to their oppressors at times, but it wasn't enough.

Pittsburgh scored the first goal, again, when Phil Kessel capped a power play just 2:22 into the game. The Penguins also got a goal late in the second for a 2-0 lead and captain Sidney Crosby put it on ice with his second empty-netter in the past two games against the Blue Jackets.

"(I'm) not going to pick it apart," said coach John Tortorella, who went with backup Joonas Korpisalo in net over Sergei Bobrovsky. "I thought our effort was much better tonight. I thought we did some really good things. We just didn't win the game. You're not going to win the game if you don't score a goal."

They couldn't, so they didn't and here the Blue Jackets (37-27-3) stand – still outside the bubble in the Eastern Conference race for playoff spots.

The Penguins (36-22-9) are up next on Saturday, too, paying another visit to Nationwide Arena to conclude the season series. Until then, here are five takeaways from the Jackets' latest hiccup in Pittsburgh.

1) What it meant

The Blue Jackets remain in fifth place of the Metropolitan Division and ninth in the Eastern Conference, one spot (and two points) out of a wild card into the Stanley Cup Playoffs.

Pittsburgh moved into sole possession of third place in the Metro, the idle Carolina Hurricanes (79 points) moved down to the East's first wild-card spot and the Montreal Canadiens are clinging to the second wild card after losing x-x Thursday in San Jose.

The Blue Jackets will play 10 of their final 15 games against teams currently in playoff positions in both conferences, including the next six in a row against the Penguins, Islanders, Bruins twice, Hurricanes and Calgary.

Their work, as the old saying goes, is cut out for them the rest of the way.

2) Another early hole

The Blue Jackets allowed the first goal again, which has become a troubling trend. This was the 34th of 67 games Columbus has fallen behind 1-0 this season, including eight of the past 12 games.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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Phil Kessel gave the Penguins an early lead at 2:22 of the first period, sending a close-range shot into the net off Korpisalo lying in the crease.

The Jackets fell to 11-22-1 overall in such games and 1-7-0 the past eight times it's happened. There's only two ways to reverse it, too. Either find more ways to win those games or ...

"Try to score the first goal," Tortorella said. "I thought we have some good minutes there early on, we have energy, we take a penalty. You try to score the first goal. We didn't."

The Penguins did and improved to 23-11-6 in those games.

3) A Penguins block party

Pittsburgh's top skill players often get talked about, but one thing the Penguins have done well against the Blue Jackets is a blue-collar staple.

They've stepped in front of shots with regularity, paying the physical toll that often requires. Pittsburgh prevented 24 shot attempts from getting to goalie Matt Murray after blocking 19 in the Penguins' 5-2 victory Feb. 26 in Columbus.

During that game, a hard one-timer by Artemi Panarin injured forward Bryan Rust – who left that game, didn't return and is still out with a lower-body injury. Thursday, leading goal-scorer Jake Guentzel was hobbled by a Panarin shot but stayed in and assisted on Crosby's empty-netter to seal it.

"The flow of it, offensively, I mean, you give them credit," Tortorella said. "I mean, 24 blocked shots. We had I'm not sure how many attempts."

The Blue Jackets finished with 59 attempts, according to the stat sheet – 42 at even strength, according to naturalstattrick.com, an advanced-stat site.

4) Korpisalo responded

This wasn't the first time Tortorella has thrown a curveball by starting Korpisalo over Sergei Bobrovsky in a big game. He also did it Jan. 12 in Washington, when Korpisalo picked up the win in the Jackets' 2-1 overtime victory.

Korpisalo also started the season-opener in Detroit, getting another win in overtime, and started the first game this season against Pittsburgh – taking the loss in the Penguins' 4-2 win Nov. 24 at PPG Paints Arena.

Korpisalo played well Jan. 10 against the Nashville Predators, too, earning yet another overtime win while Bobrovsky was suspended. Prior to this game, Korpisalo hadn't started since allowing five goals in the Jackets' 5-1 loss to the Lightning on Feb. 18 in Columbus.

He finished with 29 saves, including 17-of-18 in the second periods.

"He played good," Tortorella said. "He doesn't care (about long layoffs). That's the greatest thing about Korpi. That stuff doesn't bother him."

5) No 'Bread' crumbs

The Penguins have found a defensive solution to Artemi Panarin and the rest of the Jackets' top line this year.

The Blue Jackets' dynamic leading scorer, who has 73 points, was tagged with a minus-2 plus/minus rating. That brings his rating to a frigid minus-4 in three games against Pittsburgh this season.

Panarin has one assist against the Penguins this year, but has traditionally had good success against them. He has nine career goals, six assists and 15 points against Pittsburgh,

One of his linemates, right wing Cam Atkinson, didn't fare much better. Atkinson also had a minus-2 next to his name.

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1134986 Columbus Blue Jackets

'One dog at a time': John Tortorella's passion for animals can't be leashed on 'Hockey and Hounds'

By Tom Reed Mar 8, 2019

COLUMBUS, Ohio — The blunt and pugnacious nature of John Tortorella makes him an inviting target to critics, but it's not the guest star of the NHL's most unconventional and quirky coach's show who wears a bulletproof vest.

"Anthony is the real deal," the Blue Jackets coach said. "He sees the animals and he helps save the animals. He is on the front line. I have so much respect for him."

Anthony Rothman is a sports talk show host for 97.1 The Fan in Columbus. He's also a volunteer humane agent for Columbus Humane, a labor of love that requires him to rescue dogs and other beasts from dangerous and abusive environments.

Tortorella and Rothman are "kindred spirits" and passionate animal welfare advocates who each week during Blue Jackets season take to the airwaves to discuss power plays, penalty kills and pit bulls.

Welcome to "Hockey and Hounds," the only show in America where a coach can talk about a doghouse in a positive manner. For the past three seasons, Tortorella and Rothman have combined to give fans insight on the Blue Jackets, while also educating them on issues surrounding endangered animals.

"I've done a lot of these shows throughout my career because it comes with the job," said Tortorella, who earlier this season became the first American-born coach to win 600 NHL regular-season games. "This is the most rewarding show I have been a part of."

The unique format demonstrates the powerful platform professional athletes and coaches have during their careers. Many use it to promote causes outside the sports world. In the case of John and Christine Tortorella, it's to "help those who protect children, animals and our environment from harm." It's the mission statement of Tortorella Family Foundation, which is run by the Stanley Cup-winning coach and his wife, an author of children's books and music.

The Tortorellas raise four rescued dogs and two rescued horses on their farm outside of Columbus. The family's love of animals has been well documented from the coach's time (2009-13) with the Rangers. But it wasn't until he took charge of the Blue Jackets in 2015 and met Rothman that the family gained a weekly forum to encourage people to adopt animals from shelters, promote low-cost and free clinics and enlighten the public on the cruelty and neglect of dogs.

Rothman and Bobby Carpenter, a former Ohio State football star, co-host a weekday sports talk show. They dedicate a weekly segment of about 20 minutes to "Hockey and Hounds" in which Tortorella calls the program and updates fans on pucks and pooches.

During a Jan. 25 episode, the coach spoke of the need for center Alexander Wennberg to elevate his play before Rothman segued to a spotlight on "Virginia," a 4-year-old pit-bull mix who had been at Columbus Humane since Christmas. Rothman informed listeners Virginia would make a wonderful pet in a one-dog-only home.

"Great stuff, Anthony, great stuff," Tortorella said.

Rothman followed the report with a letter from a loyal listener who works as a contractor for Lowe's Home Improvement. The man volunteered his labor to build shelters for dogs who live outdoors during the winter and hinted the company might be willing to donate material for the project.

"Stop right there, Anthony, stop right there," Tortorella said. "You've got to get with my wife right now because she's in the middle of an initiative



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involving building doghouses. ... When you finish your show today, you get with my wife because I think there could be a match with this man."

The show has become so popular they are printing "Hockey and Hounds" T-shirts with all the proceeds going to the Tortorella Family Foundation.

"We are going after the same goal when it comes to animals," Rothman said. "He inspires me and I think I inspire him. We both are so passionate that we don't take no for an answer."

The two men frequently trade text messages. Rothman ends every text with: "one dog at a time." Tortorella responds: "Damn right."

Anthony Rothman spotlights a different rescue during episodes of "Hockey and Hounds." He's pictured here with "Major." (Courtesy of Anthony Rothman)

Life-changing moment

Rothman's affinity for animals dates to his childhood in Chicago. He owned an English setter named Winston who pulled Rothman through his neighborhood on a skateboard. Child and dog slept in the same bed every night.

Tortorella's love for animals came later in life. He doesn't recall having a canine as a kid growing up in Concord, Mass. He had a dog while playing hockey and baseball at the University of Maine, but it wasn't until he met Christine, his wife of 31 years, that his "calling" took hold.

The Tortorellas were living in Westchester County, N.Y., when they discovered an animal shelter 2 miles from their home. Nobody in the neighborhood ever saw dogs outside the facility, which aroused Christine's suspicions.

One night, Christine and their son, Nick, broke into the shelter and were horrified by the sight of neglected dogs. With the help of volunteers, the facility's owners were driven out.

"There were 30 pit-bull mixes and nobody knew they were there because they were stuck in their cages," Tortorella said. "They saw these poor animals lying in their feces. That's what started all of this."

"We laugh about it and we cry about it, but that situation in Westchester County changed my life. I was down there every day at 8 a.m. waiting for the place to open to walk those dogs."

The Tortorellas, with an assist from the Rangers, organized a dog walk in New York City to benefit the Westchester Humane Society in 2012. Hundreds of dog owners, Rangers fans and a few Rangers players participated in the mile-long walk.

"I had (Rangers and Knicks owner) Jimmy Dolan out there with his Rottie (Rottweiler) in Riverside Park," Tortorella said.

The coach rarely makes his private life a matter of public record. His son, Nick, is a member of the elite U.S. Army 75th Ranger Regiment, a unit known as one of the most skilled special operations strike forces in the world.

Two years ago, Tortorella skipped a chance to coach in the All-Star Game to care for his son's ailing dog.

On a recent "Hockey and Hounds" episode, Tortorella spoke of touring his son's base and shared a story of Nick's transition to military life. He was an excellent high school athlete, but chose not to pursue a career in sports.

"Nick said, 'Dad, I just don't love it like you do,'" Tortorella told listeners. "He found his niche in service. I didn't see it coming, but I am so proud of him."

The coach seldom reveals lineup changes until game day and is notoriously tight-lipped on injury news. And yet "Hockey and Hounds" listeners sometimes are treated to nuggets before the media that covers the team on a daily basis. Several weeks ago, he told Rothman and Carpenter the upper-body injury to Ryan Murray was more long term

than first suspected, saying the defenseman would be sidelined for "a while."

Asked about his penchant for breaking news on "Hockey and Hounds," Tortorella laughs.

"It's a twofold thing," the coach said. "First, the fans deserve to hear it, but I also want them to keep listening to hear about the dog stuff, too."

There's no telling what humane agents might find on an abandonment call. In searching for two dogs, Anthony Rothman and Kerry Manion found a 4-foot-long monitor lizard. (Courtesy of Anthony Rothman)

'Our calling until we drop'

Despite their recent form, Tortorella has helped transform the Blue Jackets from a struggling franchise into a perennial playoff contender. To many Columbus sports fans, it represents his most meaningful rescue.

But his desire to have an impact on the lives of endangered animals and his work with a "rock star" like Rothman will endure long after the 60-year-old coach steps from behind the bench for the last time.

"I've told you before, I would rather be with animals than people," the coach said. "When I'm told to stop coaching and I'm gone, we're going to double up on animal welfare. That is going to be our calling until we drop."

Tortorella isn't sure where the family will live after he retires from coaching, but he plans to remain close to animal advocates in central Ohio.

Last June, former Gov. John Kasich signed landmark anti-puppy-mill legislation that implemented major reform designed to improve the lives of breeding dogs in Ohio.

Tortorella and Rothman used the "Hockey and Hounds" platform to campaign for the bill and encourage listeners to sign petitions. They continually update fans on the need to keep pets indoors during cold weather and urge them to adopt dogs from an overcrowded Ross County shelter that's been storing some animals outside.

"Hockey and Hounds" listeners have responded. A local automotive shop donated four new tires for a Columbus Humane rescue vehicle that had been rolling along on bald ones. The show also produced volunteers to assist "Save Ohio Pets," a group that goes into low-income areas and provides free vet care and spay/neuter for pets of people on government assistance.

"Stuff like that makes this the most fulfilling thing I've done in 25 years of broadcasting in Columbus," Rothman said.

It's not uncommon for UPS and FedEx drivers making deliveries to the Tortorellas to notify them of neglected animals they see on their routes.

The coach lauds the tireless effort of Rothman and other humane agents that investigate such cases.

"Christine saw a pregnant dog outside by itself and told Anthony," the coach said. "He and other agents went out there immediately and checked on the dog. We are connected for life with Anthony no matter where he goes or I go."

Recently, Rothman and Columbus Humane agent Kerry Manion answered an abandonment call for two mastiffs when they made a surprising discovery. As they searched the house, they noticed a pair of empty aquariums with heat lamps above them.

They opened a closet door and found a 4-foot-long monitor lizard that weighed 20 pounds.

"They're the ones with forked tongues," Rothman said. "When they breathe, it sounds like a blowtorch or a gas-leak sound."

Rothman sent a picture of the lizard to Tortorella with the message: "Do you want to find a home for this?"



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Columbus Humane placed the lizard with Jimmy's Reptiles and Exotic Rescue.

Tortorella treasures such stories.

"Both of us would rather talk animals than hockey," Tortorella said. "But at the end of the day, we know we have to talk a little hockey."

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1134987 Columbus Blue Jackets

Breaking down Blue Jackets prospect Emil Bemstrom's meteoric rise

By Scott Wheeler Mar 8, 2019

Here's the thing about prospect evaluation and scouting: It's hard. Really hard.

In some cases, talent is disguised by opportunity. Not all players are afforded leading roles on their teams — the kind of roles that encourage production and result in being selected highly at the NHL Draft. Some players are rushed to the pro level due to their athletic ability but lack the skill needed to make that jump smoothly. At the junior levels, not all 17-year-old linemates are created equal. Below the major pro levels, parity often doesn't exist. Context ought to be carefully considered as a result.

In many cases, when ice-time isn't publicly available for those levels, data-driven analysis can be complicated and challenging. A skills-based evaluation becomes necessary. But our eyes miss things. They play tricks on us.

What we're left with is an imperfect science on all fronts. The best evaluators do their best to consider all of the factors and available information and still often come up short.

In my annual fall series, "The Gifted" (here's the 2017 series and here's the 2018 series), I explore through video the variety of tools that, when mastered, allow players to dominate.

The truly elite talents (the Elias Petterssons and the Miro Heiskanens) are easy to spot for the dynamic way they manage to take over games and the variety of skills they can use to remain unpredictable. Others, players of Jordan Kyrrou's skating ability or Vitaly Abramov's puck skills, can sometimes take one skill far enough and still become stars — but it's much less predictable and takes a closer evaluation.

Emil Bemstrom has become one of those players. He's the fourth-round pick from the 2017 draft who went from being an ordinary forward in the second-tier Allsvenskan to the highest scoring under-20 forward in the SHL (as well as, on the date of publication of this piece, the league's leading goal scorer with 22 goals through 44 games), and a breakout star at the world juniors, where he was named one of Sweden's top three players.

Due to that meteoric rise, I decided to make Bemstrom an honorary addition to "The Gifted" and dive deeper into what makes him tick as a player — and whether that skill is complemented by enough else to make him a true star-level prospect. This analysis is founded upon viewings of the majority of his games this season.

It starts with his shot. His one-timer, more specifically.

The vast majority of Bemstrom's goals are scored from the same spot (the left-wing faceoff circle), with one touch. He's a right shot winger who prefers to position himself on the left wing (both on the power play and at even strength).

Because he's not the biggest player in the world (he stands 5-foot-10) and he doesn't have the leverage that length provides a player whom they turn on a puck, Bemstrom (No. 72 in all clips) has to get low, drop his trailing leg, and use all of that pressure to make his one-timer as hard as it is. Look for all of that here:

It's a repeatable motion that gives the shot some kick while also allowing Bemstrom to control it. While many players struggle with hitting the net once that shot slides out from the bottom of the circle to the top, Bemstrom doesn't:

When he's not releasing it from a standstill and he's in motion, Bemstrom also does a wonderful job, when necessary, shooting from an upright by sliding back onto his heels and opening up to the pass even further:

The other thing worth picking up on with Bemstrom's one-timer, and maybe the most valuable of the bunch, is the way he gets open for it. The goals above happen predominantly because A) either Bemstrom is on the power play in that spot or B) thanks to the spacing international ice affords him. He'll continue to get those power-play looks if the right coach uses him in the right spot at the next level, but to earn those opportunities he's going to need skills that allow him to score at even strength.

For shooters, the ability to get open becomes their biggest asset at the next level as the ice gets smaller and defenders close faster.

Bemstrom's pre-shot moment is a strength too, though. He does a nice job sliding off of defenders to the backdoor off the rush:

And off of set plays:

And while it predominantly happens to one location, he's also adept at sliding into open space in the more crowded slot, rather than the circle, when the backdoor isn't available:

Watch how he's constantly in motion ahead of this goal, to prevent the defenders (who have their backs turned to him) from picking him up:

Watch how instantaneously he attacks with his crossovers to activate from the left wing when the board-side winger sends the puck down low on this power-play goal, too:

There, the goal isn't scored if Bemstrom is stationary and doesn't drive the low slot for the set play from below the goal line (a lot of shooters are too slow to react on a play like that, but Bemstrom anticipates it).

Notice all of the curls and stops and starts below, as Bemstrom tracks the play from high in the zone and, rather than staying there, goes to the far post ahead of the pass:

Bemstrom is persistent. If his play doesn't work the first time, he'll fade away from it before giving it another try:

He's also not afraid to drive into players, rather than away from them, in order to make himself available for passes:

Bemstrom is also a strong kid for his size and he has added muscle this season to push above 180 pounds. While he's not an overtly physical player, Bemstrom isn't afraid to engage in a battle before releasing to his spot:

Or to just drive the net and bump his man along the way:

Those net-front plays give him some much-needed versatility — and prevent teams from stacking a forward on him at the top of the circle in the offensive zone. Instead of all of his goals being scored back-door or from the circle, he's able to create some jam plays (the kind of plays some players his size shy away from):

The biggest issue with Bemstrom's game translating to the NHL level is that players like him need other players to get him the puck. Bemstrom is not going to drive a line or be the primary carrier on his line off the rush. And he's likely going to need to play with a passer to truly become a high-end goal scorer.



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Bemstrom is not a particularly strong playmaker. Instead, he's more of an opportunistic scorer. Even his assists can be reliant on his shot:

That can work in the NHL but it requires some help and the right coach.

This isn't to say Bemstrom lacks skill outside of his shot altogether. He doesn't. There have been real flashes of some puck skill off the rush this season too:

And when he releases the puck, rather than one-touching it, Bemstrom has the ability to pick his spots and cleanly beat goalies:

That's true even from distance:

More than anything, his shot is also extremely accurate, even from awful angles:

These are real, tangible, translatable NHL tools. But you'll notice they rarely start with Bemstrom making the play. None of the above plays began with a Bemstrom entry or a Bemstrom retrieval. Someone else did that for him and he had the talent to finish it off.

Does this mean Bemstrom won't be a star? Not necessarily. But it will likely limit his ceiling.

Because while he shows the occasional flash of cross-ice vision ...

... those plays tend to be fleeting.

Instead, the bulk of Bemstrom's goals and shots (I tracked more than four dozen shot attempts for this piece), come from the same location. Over time, opposing forwards and defenders (watch for how not one but two close on him below) learn to anticipate and front the shot:

And so do goalies. Watch the way the goalie Malmo cheats and pushes out to Bemstrom before the shot is even released here:

There are similar flashes as a carrier. Bemstrom has the speed needed to make plays off the rush:

But his problem is one of creativity. Because when he does activate and use the speed to create an entry, his default instinct is to throw it on net, rather than look for a teammate:

The end result is a player who plays a north-south game a little too much, at the expense of east-west options:

And when Bemstrom does pick up assists, it often means they are byproducts of an attempt to score, rather than a heads up play to a linemate. In fact, three of Bemstrom's 11 assists this season look exactly like this:

Yes, that's Bemstrom getting a stick on a backdoor chance and a teammate scoring off of it.

His one layer is a darn good one. An elite one. It will translate. There are smaller translatable layers too. Bemstrom's size, for example, isn't a major concern. As highlighted above, he competes, sometimes even for great assists off of a won battle one-on-two:

That skill set will allow him to battle with NHL-level competition. And when he makes a little play off of it, we know that he has the headspace to release from that battle and slide into open space.

When he does, he scores a lot of goals. And if teams defend that shot threat well, he can burn them in other ways:

Bemstrom's biggest challenge, on his way to the NHL, will likely be to execute on those less-developed layers more consistently.

The one-timer (and the ability to get into space to receive it) will carry him far. He's got a good thing going with the one-timer, and his ability to score on his off wing. Despite being a right-handed shot, here's a map of each of the goal locations tracked in this piece:

That skill will make him a terror on a power play at any level. What he has done this season is remarkable. It is tied for the sixth-best goal scoring season by an under-20 SHL player ever (behind names like

Nilsson, Pettersson, Forsberg and Naslund). He will inevitably score goals. Probably a lot of them.

But everything else (from linemates to his coach to the way he can develop some other evident tools) will determine whether he becomes a star.

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1135113 Websites

The Athletic / Faceoff tinkering won't significantly increase offence. Getting rid of them would

By Tyler Dellow Mar 8, 2019

An interesting idea percolated out of the GM meetings in Florida this week. I first saw it on Twitter from Friend of The Athletic Frank Seravalli at TSN, although it was subsequently discussed on Sportsnet during their broadcast on Wednesday.

Now, I am anti-faceoff. If it was up to me, the only time we'd have faceoffs would be at centre ice. Other than that, I'd just give the puck to the team closest to the opposition goal. My reasoning for this is pretty straightforward: hockey's at its most fun when it's littered with scoring chances and the team closer to the opposition net is more likely to create a scoring chance. As fascinating as the drama of a linesman trying to settle down two centremen who are doing everything possible to cheat is, I'd be willing to trade it in for more scoring chances. Call me crazy.

The funny thing about this is that I think the NHL's hockey operations kind of agrees with me. They're constrained by faceoffs being a part of the game historically but they've already taken a step to try and make it more likely that the team closer to the attacking zone wins the faceoff by forcing the other player to put his stick down first. This would be another step toward what I'd like: a de facto 100 percent faceoff rate for the attacking team. (It would be nice if we could skip past this only applying for the first faceoff after a penalty is called but, one supposes, baby steps.)

How much of a difference would this rule change make? Well, let's start by identifying the difference in outcomes between a faceoff win and loss. As I've mentioned before, I slice the game into shifts at the team level based on the location and result of the preceding faceoff, with certain events triggering a transfer to what I call on-the-fly play. The difference between winning and losing an offensive zone faceoff at 5-on-4 is immense.

Through games played on Tuesday, the average shift starting with an OZW (offensive zone win – if you see anyone asking what an OZW is in the comments, please throw buns at the person asking for failure to read closely) lasted 40 seconds. An OZL (offensive zone loss ... come on – do I really have to define this given the context) shift lasted 43 seconds on average. When you think about it, that makes sense: an OZW shift is much more likely to result in a really short shift after a puck is fired at a goalie who freezes it than an OZL shift, where pucks are generally cleared right away.

In terms of process, unsurprisingly, shots are attempted and put on goal by the team on the power play at a much higher rate when they win the faceoff than when they lose it. When the team on the power play wins an offensive zone faceoff, they attempt 128.6 shots per 60 seconds with 69.8 of those becoming shots on goal. If they lose the faceoff, those numbers fall to 82.4 and 45, respectively. Unsurprisingly, teams score more when they win the offensive zone faceoff at the start of a shift too: 9.7 GF/60 vs. 5.5 GF/60. There's a shooting percentage bulge in there



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this year but it's not remotely surprising that more shots leads to more goals.

So how big might this impact be? Well, the change as reported by Seravalli would apply only to the first faceoff on a power play. I'm focused on 5-on-4 here, so let's look at how many 5-on-4 faceoffs might be impacted. In order to figure this out, I looked for all 5-on-4 offensive zone faceoffs this year in which the preceding second of play was not 5-on-4 hockey. That gave me a group of 5,208 faceoffs so far this year. I have 2,643 of them on the right side of the ice and 2,565 on the left side. Unsurprisingly to me, as a league, teams have done better on the left side of the ice. There are more competent left-handed faceoff guys than right-handed faceoff guys and players are being selected for power play units primarily on the basis of skills other than winning faceoffs – coaches want guys out there who can make plays after the faceoff is won.

As I've discussed here before, there are significant differences between taking faceoffs on the right and left, depending on what hand you are. I won't revisit that discussion – there's a lot of it out there – but let's take a look at how much better teams have been at winning faceoffs on the left as compared to the right side of the ice.

It's a little bit funny that both Seravalli and the Sportsnet Wednesday Night Hockey gang highlighted the possibility of Washington doing this to set up Ovechkin in his office. The Capitals are actually struggling to win faceoffs on the right side of the ice this year. When you think about it for a minute it makes sense – Ovechkin's not taking the draw. John Carlson's not taking the draw. TJ Oshie is having a bad year. That leaves a couple of left-handed shots. They don't have a lot of good options.

Looking at this, you can see that most teams tend to be around the mean, with a few teams that really struggle on one side or the other. Edmonton having the biggest differential isn't surprising. The Oilers were running with a five left-shot power play for a while this year and it didn't really feature anyone who was great at faceoffs, let alone great at winning them on his weak side. Boston's presence is a little more surprising but Patrice Bergeron has missed some games this year and there's a bit of an additional issue that we're going to encounter when we contemplate how much of an impact this rule change might have – sample size. Boston's difference in left vs. right faceoffs is being driven by an absurd 61-20 record on the left dot for the first faceoff of a 5-on-4 situation. They're 40-39 on the right side, which isn't actually that bad.

For the sake of completeness (and because I know people will ask if I don't provide the information), here are the numbers on the right and left dots on faceoffs to start a power play for the league.

It's one thing if you've got a big differential on one side because you've done spectacularly well, like Boston; another if it's because you've done poorly, like Edmonton and Washington on the right side.

The critical question is this: how many extra faceoff wins might a change like this produce? Let's do some back of the envelope math. Assume that the numbers teams have achieved this year represent their true talent and that every team in the NHL would choose to take faceoffs exclusively on their strongest side to start the power play, if given that opportunity. My math – with some favourable assumptions – suggests that we'd have seen an extra 188 faceoff wins to start power plays so far this year. Prorating that to a full season, we're talking about an extra 232 offensive zone faceoff wins to start a power play.

To put a goal value on that, I'm going to use the numbers just from power play opening faceoffs. They're very similar to the numbers discussed above for offensive zone faceoffs but the shifts last slightly longer on average, which makes sense. My estimate comes out to something like an extra 12 goals scored. By the entire league. Over the course of a season. Some of that would be given back in an unseen fashion because we'd get more power-play goals earlier in power plays, returning the game to a 5-on-5 state in which goals occur less often. It's not a game-altering change.

What if we did away entirely with faceoffs to start power plays? If you use the numbers for shifts starting with an offensive zone faceoff win only,

you end up with an extra 185 goals scored when you prorated it out. In other words, the real gains aren't going to be found in making marginal changes to how faceoffs are conducted that add a few points to the attacking team's likelihood of winning a faceoff; the real changes will come from just giving the attacking team the puck and letting them get after it.

You can imagine what a change we'd see if we got rid of all offensive zone faceoffs and just gave the puck to the attacking team. You can see the same tendency in 5-on-5 hockey, although it's not as extreme. If a team wins an offensive zone faceoff at 5-on-5, there is nearly 30 percent more offence that occurs on the shift than there is if they lose it.

Is this too drastic a change for hockey? I don't think so. To me, there are things that the general managers, as custodians of the NHL game, have to protect. They have to protect the essential nature of the game, the things that make NHL hockey NHL hockey. Some things are absolutely central to that. I can't imagine endorsing, say, the elimination of ice from the game and turning NHL hockey into floor hockey. Fighting is an example of something that a lot of people argued for a long time was central to the game and then, as decisions by teams all but eliminated it, we started to see a shift toward a conclusion that it's not really central to the sport.

We've seen changes like this in other sports, so it's not really something that can't be done. Soccer banned goalkeepers from picking up the ball when it's passed back to them by a teammate. The NBA added the three-point line and then experimented with different distances for it. Major League Baseball added the designated hitter and lowered the mounds. Sports are constantly evolving – the choice that custodians of the game have is how to respond to those changes and how to keep the games exciting while simultaneously preserving the essence of the sport.

Faceoffs, to me, are a lot more like fighting than they are ice. Nobody gets out of their seat for a faceoff win. They aren't central to what hockey or the NHL are selling. And while, yes, it would be devaluing a skill that some people have spent years perfecting, it would simultaneously be increasing the value that other skills – defending and creating offence – provide. Those skills, particularly the latter, are a lot more fun to watch. While I wouldn't expect it to happen for a long time, the fact that the managers are prepared to tinker with faceoffs suggests to me that there might be a day where they simply do away with them altogether.

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Sportsnet.ca / Canadiens' forgettable effort in Anaheim will come back to haunt them

Eric Engels March 9, 2019, 1:44 AM

An 8-2 loss to the lowest-scoring team in the league, the Anaheim Ducks, suffered a night after a heartbreaking loss to a formidable San Jose Sharks team they dominated? It's going to cost the Montreal Canadiens.

Exactly what? We're not quite sure yet. If they're lucky, it'll just be the two-point edge they hold over the Columbus Blue Jackets in the race to one of the final two playoff spots in the Eastern Conference. If they're unlucky, well, you can figure it out.

With 13 games remaining in their season, currently sitting in the second wild-card position, we're not yet prepared to say the loss against the Ducks Friday has effectively killed Montreal's chance to participate in the post-season. But if the team can't rebound immediately come Tuesday, against the Detroit Red Wings at the Bell Centre, its chances diminish significantly.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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While the Canadiens rest idle until then, the Blue Jackets will play the two games in-hand they own. The Carolina Hurricanes, who are even in points with the Canadiens, will play their two as well. And the Pittsburgh Penguins, who are two points ahead of Montreal, will make up one of their two games in-hand.

In other words: The heat is on.

Looking back a week, a trip to California all but promised this outcome for the Canadiens, who were losers of 20 of their last 23 games in the state. Now that the prophecy's been fulfilled, we'll see what else destiny has in store for them.

Will they continue to be the team that has shocked the hockey world for most of the season by continuing to achieve results as soon as their backs get pressed up against the wall? Or will they fizzle down the stretch with more losses to non-playoff teams like the Wings, the Chicago Blackhawks, the Philadelphia Flyers and Buffalo Sabres before having to close out the year with games against upper-echelon teams like the Winnipeg Jets, Tampa Bay Lightning, Washington Capitals and Toronto Maple Leafs?

It's all much more up in the air now than it was prior to puck-drop in Anaheim.

About Friday's game, here are some takeaways from it:

The Canadiens, a night after tilting the ice in a losing effort against the Sharks, after traveling across the state in preparation for their third game in four nights, didn't have the regular zip at even strength in this one. So, if there was ever an opportunity for their power play to bail them out, this was it.

But the woeful Canadiens power play, which came into the game having whiffed on all but one of its last 26 outings, failed on its first chance of the game.

A shift later, Daniel Sprong took advantage of a turnover by Nate Thompson and opened the scoring for Anaheim with a laser of a shot over Carey Price's blocker.

Montreal's power play got five more chances — most of them coming with them down by just a goal or two — and it converted just once, on a Shea Weber blast from the point that counted as the 200th goal of his career.

It was 62 seconds later that Troy Terry picked up a goal to make it 4-2 Ducks just over halfway through the second period. An easy goal, tipped from the middle of the slot without a Canadien in sight. The type of play Montreal hasn't found a way to manufacture with the man-advantage all season long.

Habs this year: Gave up 6 in a loss to BUF, beat VGK 5-4 next game; gave up 6 to EDM, beat CGY their next game; gave up to 7 to MIN, beat CAR 6-4 next game; lost 6-5 to TB, beat DAL 3-2 next game; 6-3 loss to FLA, beat CBJ 3-2 next game; 6-3 L to TOR, 8-1 win vs. DET 2 gms later.

— Eric Engels (@EricEngels) March 9, 2019

They have bounced back from the bad ones all season long. We'll see if they can continue to do that.

— Eric Engels (@EricEngels) March 9, 2019

Jesper Kotkaniemi's (un)eventful return to the lineup

The 18-year-old rookie with 32 points on the season was scratched from the 3-1 win in Los Angeles on Tuesday and scratched from Thursday's loss to the Sharks.

You had to wonder how Kotkaniemi was going to respond to that. Without singling him out — because none of the Canadiens were good against the Ducks — it would be impossible to suggest he responded well.

Canadiens coach Claude Julien put Kotkaniemi on a line with Artturi Lehkonen and Jordan Weal and played him 10:51 at even strength. The kid finished minus-3 and didn't appear to have his rhythm at any point of the game.

Kotkaniemi also took nine faceoffs and lost seven of them, and he was credited with two giveaways in the game.

Carey Price will have to wait for 315

If it was destiny for the Canadiens to struggle in California, perhaps it's destiny for Price to seize the outright lead in franchise wins in front of his fans at the Bell Centre.

He remains tied with Jacques Plante after stopping only 21 of 29 shots in the game.

Friday's game marked the first time all season Price was beaten for eight goals. He was hardly the reason they went in, but it's not as if he was at the height of his abilities.

It was a night to forget for the 31-year-old goaltender and his Canadiens, intimated Julien in his post-game press conference.

"Hopefully we get a little bit of rest here and get ourselves ready on Tuesday," he added. "Get back on track here."

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Sportsnet.ca / Leafs looking for a breakthrough from Matthews line in Edmonton

Chris Johnston | March 8, 2019, 7:20 PM

VANCOUVER — Mediocre is not a word often associated with Auston Matthews, and so when Kasper Kapanen used it to describe the recent quality of the line he shares with Matthews and Andreas Johnsson, it stood out like a blown third-period lead by the Toronto Maple Leafs.

The towering centre agrees, too. There've been signs of life, such as the strong possession game and five scoring chances generated against the Canucks this week, but as they set off for Edmonton, it felt as though they were in search of something.

"I think we can be a lot better," said Matthews. "Our strength is our speed. When we take care of the puck and we just get it in their zone, I mean we're fast. Pretty agile, can make plays, move around in the offensive zone."

"I think a good goal for us is just to spend more time in the O-zone, hang on to pucks and [start] creating chances below the dots."

Matthews identified that as the area where the game is played during the stretch drive and into the playoffs. He's already felt the space in the neutral zone tighten and seen opponents collapse around their goaltenders.

Ingenuity might be his greatest asset — the special ingredient that makes him something more than a big centre with a deadly shot — and the task before him now is to find a way to break through, to be unpredictable, to find new ways to generate goals.

Before Matthews went up against Connor McDavid and the Oilers last week, he spoke of working towards the best version of himself:

"Obviously there's guys that are in the league like Connor, like Sid, that are kind of on their own level. I think guys look at that and they want to be on their level, obviously. But for myself, I measure myself to my own standard and I just want to be the best player I can be."



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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He's taken steps in his third NHL season, but can't escape the echo of the left shoulder injury that cost him 14 games and virtually all of November. He'd scored 10 goals through 11 games when he took that jarring hit from Winnipeg's Jacob Trouba. He's added another 20 in the 42 games since returning to the lineup, a hair below his typical otherworldly pace.

"The injury sets you back a bit," Matthews said after practice at Rogers Arena. "Probably about a month or two after, I felt like I got my legs back."

That was roughly a month ago. It's been a journey.

"It takes time, it's hard. You can do so much stuff in the gym, but until you really get back in the game it's really tough to get into game shape without playing games and practising every day and being in that setting, the pace," said Matthews.

The season is in full gallup now and the Leafs are due to get stronger with Nazem Kadri ready to rejoin the lineup for Saturday's game. He sat out the last eight while recovering from a concussion and head coach Mike Babcock hopes that layoff will provide a silver lining for his third-line centre — a little extra rest before the playoff grind sets in.

On the Johnsson-Matthews-Kapanen trio, Babcock was encouraged by how they played in a 3-2 loss to Vancouver on Wednesday. That game saw Kapanen use his speed to chase down pucks and disrupt defenders, while the only thing that kept Matthews from cashing on a couple Grade-A opportunities was sharp positioning from Canucks goalie Jacob Markstrom.

"I thought they were pretty good last game, to be honest with ya," said Babcock. "I didn't like 'em as much in Calgary [on Monday], but they've done a pretty good job. The biggest thing is taking care of the puck. Auston's a big man, he can roll around, and Johnny has that skill-set and so does Kappy."

"You're playing in one zone or the other, pretty much. If you don't have it, they have it, and that means you're playing defence. It's way more fun playing in the offensive zone."

Hence why the trio has spent time reviewing video during this road trip. They've been held without a goal since the 6-2 victory over Edmonton on Feb. 27 — a night where Johnsson scored one at even strength and another on the power play — and are looking for ways to curb the trend.

"Once we're going, it doesn't matter what team we're playing against. I think we can play against anybody," Kapanen said this week. "It's just us not being 100 per cent, but thank God we still have games left before playoffs."

For Matthews, it boils down to a simple formula. A set of steps that should lead to more scoring chances and sustained shifts at the proper end of the ice.

"Making sure we get pucks through, guys to the net, have good structure, use some creativity and not just do the same stuff over and over again," he said.

Heading to Edmonton, the Matthews line is looking for a breakthrough. Something fresh, with a chance to produce the old results.

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Sportsnet.ca / Oilers have chance to spoil Maple Leafs fan invasion in Edmonton

Mark Spector | March 8, 2019, 6:31 PM

It sucks to lose. But it REALLY sucks to lose in Toronto, to the Maple Leafs, the way the Edmonton Oilers did 10 days ago.

Then there's the way they lost — the Oilers dominated the first period, yet ended up on the wrong end of a 6-2 score. The Leafs had to play about 18 minutes to collect the two points. It was embarrassing.

On Saturday, the Oilers hook up with the Leafs again on Hockey Night in Canada. Of course, it's a 5 p.m. start in Edmonton, because, you know, THE LEAFS are here, and the TV station really only cares about when a Leafs fan wants to sit down in front of a game, right?

The Canucks fan? The Flames fan? The Oilers fan?

Let's face it: Out here in the colonies, we should just be happy the Maple Leafs go to the trouble of traveling all the way out here. It's their world, right? Our teams, they're just playing in it.

That's how it goes out here on the prairie, where a fresh six inches of snow greeted the Leafs when they flew into Edmonton on Friday, delaying their arrival as long as possible by practicing for two days in Vancouver after their Wednesday game against the Canucks.

One of my favorite Edmonton Oilers coaches was Ron Low, the old goalie who ran the Oilers' bench from 1995 'til 1999. The Oilers were at the beginning of a prolonged period of futility when they gave Low the reins, and under Low the Oilers were never a .500 team.

Nor did they ever play a home game against the Leafs where it seemed like more than 50 per cent of the fans were cheering for the Oilers. It ticked Low off, something fierce.

"Generally, you're 50-50 (Leafs and Oilers fans), and that's disturbing," said Low on Friday. "It's the same thing when Montreal comes to town. As a coach, when the 'Go Leafs Go' chants get going? It's a different scenario."

Low is a snowbird now, splitting his time between Edmonton and the warm Arizona desert. But him and the Leafs? They've never really seen eye to eye.

Even as a kid growing up in southwest Manitoba, near little towns named Foxwarren and Birtle, close to the Saskatchewan border, he was outnumbered by Leafs fans.

"In the 50s, 60s and 70s, you were one of two things: A Leafs fan or a Canadiens fan, and my Dad was a hell of a Leafs fan," said Low, who turns 69 in June. "We had six people in the house and I was the only Canadiens fan. Ironically, I got drafted by the Leafs. How weird is that?"

Low was an eighth-round pick in 1970, a time when there were only 14 NHL teams and players were under near-total control by the owners. As Toronto property, he bounced around in Tulsa and Richmond, then split the Leafs net in the 1972-73 season with Jacques Plante.

The great Plante was at the very end of his career and was, by all accounts, a lousy partner by that point in his career, on a mediocre Leafs team. To Low, even a move to the expansion Washington Capitals in 1974-75 was better than hanging around Toronto. When he eventually became a head coach in Edmonton, Low's motto was simple:

"There's nothing better than beating them, and sending a bunch of Leafs fans home unhappy," Low said. "It'd be nice if the Oilers could start to turn that trend around again."

Remember 1997 in Dallas, when Todd Marchant went around Grant Ledyard to score that goal in overtime of Game 7, vanquishing the Stars right in old Reunion Arena? While his players dog-piled on Marchant in the offensive zone, Low left the Oilers bench and went the other way to hug his goalie, Curtis Joseph, who moments before had robbed Joe Nieuwendyk with that miraculous save.

A year later, Curtis Joseph walked out of Edmonton as a free agent. He went to the Leafs.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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Today the Leafs roll into Edmonton with a fabulous, exciting, playoff-bound team. Oilers season-ticket holders have made their profits by selling tickets to Leafs fans, while business owners are bringing customers to the rink who will arrive in blue and white sweaters.

The man they called 'Low-tide' might watch a period or two, once his golf game is complete or he returns from a Cactus League game.

"There's disappointment again. It's a tough go right now, in Edmonton," the old goalie admits. "It's tough on Oilers fans. They've gone through a lot of stuff man, and they're still hanging in there. I give 'em full credit.

"That's a hell of a fan base."

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1135117 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Truth By Numbers: Is Columbus good enough to make the playoffs?

Andrew Berkshire March 8, 2019, 11:44 AM

With the playoff races in full swing, this week Andrew Berkshire looks at how important Brendan Gallagher's rise as a goal scorer has been to Montreal's wild card bid.

He also looks at the Columbus Blue Jackets, who are now 2-4-0 since the trade deadline, to try and figure out what is going wrong with them and how they're post-season hopes stack up to the others in the race.

Those topics, and more, in this week's Truth By Numbers column.

SPOTLIGHT PERFORMANCE

Now that he's accomplished the feat twice in a row, we can officially call Brendan Gallagher a 30-goal scorer in the NHL. That's something I've been expecting of him all the way back to his junior and AHL days because his shot rate was so obscene, I figured based on where he shoots from eventually the volume was going to overtake a poor shooting percentage and produce results.

After breaking his right hand twice in two years, first blocking a shot by Johnny Boychuk and then trying to provide a screen on a Shea Weber blast, Gallagher's utility as a top line player was highly questionable.

However, even when he posted a career-low shooting percentage of 5.3 while struggling to get his hand back to full health the underlying numbers proved that his impact on the Canadiens was among the best in the NHL for his position. Gallagher ranked as the ninth, 12th, and 11th best right winger in the NHL the past three years when I broke everything down.

For a large portion of his career, Gallagher rode shotgun with another one of the best play-driving wingers in the game in Max Pacioretty. But unlike other players who saw huge boosts alongside Pacioretty, Gallagher never saw much of a drop off when he was away from him – the two were just even better together. With Pacioretty now a Golden Knight, Gallagher has spent most of the season playing tough matchup minutes with Phillip Danault and one of the players Pacioretty was traded for, Tomas Tatar.

Danault isn't considered a high-end offensive centre and Tatar was coming off a down season, but put them both with Gallagher and what happens? They've formed a dynamite line that's led to career-best seasons for all three, even though the Canadiens' power play has been terrible, because they've been absurdly good at 5-on-5, led by Gallagher's huge breakout in shooting.

I included league ranks here in order to account for the NHL's growing number of scoring chances overall. You can see clearly that after Gallagher's hand was broken in 2015-16 he started to shoot more often from the high slot, dropping from more high danger chances than anyone in the league down to the 66th-most. Since then he's had two seasons where he's climbed up the rankings in high danger chances.

The thing is, moving out of the inner slot gave Gallagher more opportunity to contribute off the cycle with one-timers, and more room to get his shot off. As it turns out, he's actually quite efficient at scoring from further out as well. And though his high danger chances are increasing to career-high levels, just 47.5 per cent of his scoring chances on net are from the inner slot now. That's the lowest mark of his career and it's because he's absolutely spamming goalies with shots from the high slot.

Adding a new shooting option to his repertoire has made Gallagher a much better goal scorer, and he's proved that two brutal injuries to the same hand haven't hurt his ability to be a high impact player.

Being forced out of his comfort zone allowed Gallagher to discover that he's more than just a net-front goal scorer, and the Canadiens have benefitted.

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

THE QUESTION

The Columbus Blue Jackets have only been okay recently, going 4-6-0 in their past 10, and are on outside looking in at playoffs. They bought big at the deadline and are poised to lose at least Artemi Panarin and Sergei Bobrovsky in the off-season, so Steve Dangle asks:

"Should we expect Columbus to make the playoffs? They loaded up, but is the team playing well enough to force someone else out?"

I'm on record saying that I like Columbus' decision to keep Panarin and Bobrovsky and go for it this year, but I'm a little dubious on the heavy buying they did at the deadline. I like Matt Duchene and Ryan Dzingel, but adding them at a high cost puts even more pressure on the team for the rest of the season.

The Blue Jackets are in a tight race with the Montreal Canadiens, Carolina Hurricanes and Pittsburgh Penguins for one of the two wild card spots in the East, or even the third place spot in the Metropolitan Division. Which of these teams has an advantage over the final stretch of the season?

Let's look at how they've all been playing since the New Year.

Looking at this field of teams, the Canadiens are the only one that remains positive by all four measures. The Penguins are what they've been for the past three seasons, only okay in the more general metrics, but brilliant at controlling the most dangerous plays on the ice. The Hurricanes seem to be controlling volume better than quality, and the same goes for the Blue Jackets, except their high-quality plays are slightly further in the negatives than Carolina.

Three of these teams can squeeze in, so the Blue Jackets only need to be better than one of them, but getting shutout 3-0 by the Penguins Thursday night isn't a good sign. And actually, looking at the play of these four teams if I had to guess which one ends up on the outside, it'd be Columbus.

That would be a heart breaker for the franchise, but the Canadiens look strong, the Hurricanes are red hot, and I just wouldn't bet against the Penguins with Sidney Crosby kicking things up a notch.

BUY OR SELL

• He's not really talked about for his offence, but my eyebrow raised a bit when I noticed Bo Horvat has the sixth-most scoring chances on net in the NHL this season with 143. He's probably getting more power play time than he would on most teams, but he's getting to the right spots.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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Strangely, his shooting percentage this year is lower than his career average, but the shot volume has lifted him to a career high in goals anyway.

- I mentioned Tomas Tatar having a career year earlier. He's one of only 23 regulars in the NHL this season with a high danger scoring chance differential over 60 per cent, and he has the second-best Corsi at 59.4 per cent, behind only Erik Karlsson and a hair ahead of linemate Brendan Gallagher. The Habs have to be pretty happy he's got another two years left on his current deal, because a \$4.8 million cap hit looks like a steal right now.

- Nazem Kadri's streak of 30-goal seasons will end at two, but he has quietly had a fantastic season. No Leafs forward has a better high danger scoring chance differential and only Andreas Johnsson and Kasperii Kapanen have a better Corsi.

- Losing Robin Lehner to injury is going to hurt the Islanders. For the past three months, he's second behind only Andrei Vasilevskiy in save percentage at .934, and the other option the Isles have is all the way down at... the sixth-best save percentage in the league over that time. Thomas Greiss has a .930 save percentage in the same period... Never mind.

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1135118 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Sweden coach Gronborg keeping close eye on Canucks' Pettersson, Markstrom

Iain MacIntyre | March 8, 2019, 3:41 PM

VANCOUVER – Meaningful games in March are supposed to be preparation for more meaningful games in April. Nine points out of a National Hockey League playoff spot, the Vancouver Canucks aren't getting either.

But Calder Trophy favourite Elias Pettersson, among other Canucks, should play meaningful games in May at the world championships in Slovakia.

Swedish national team coach Rikard Gronborg is making his annual late-season tour around the NHL to see players from his country, and the 50-year-old would love to have Pettersson play in Slovakia if he's available.

Canucks goaltender Jacob Markstrom should also be an automatic choice for Sweden, although the 29-year-old may decline an invitation to the worlds after what could be a 60-game breakthrough season in the NHL.

"Fortunately, we have a lot of players in the National Hockey League," Gronborg said Wednesday between periods of the Canucks' game against the Toronto Maple Leafs at Rogers Arena. "But Elias is definitely a player we'd like to have for Swedish world championship teams and the Olympics, if they allow NHL players to play. He's the future, for sure."

"He's always been an exceptional player. But the second half of last year we saw he was special. I'm not surprised (by his rookie season in the NHL), but I'm tremendously happy for his sake that he's taken these steps."

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After his MVP season in the Swedish Hockey League, Pettersson played as a 19-year-old for Sweden at the 2018 world championships in Denmark, where the forward broke his thumb.

Pettersson scored 10 goals in his first 10 games for the Canucks this fall – just the fifth player in 100 years to start his NHL career that way – and with 57 points in 57 games has a 20-point lead in the rookie scoring race despite generating just one assist in his last five games.

Among the 83 Swedes who have skated in the NHL this season, only four have more points than Pettersson and at least two of them, Calgary's Elias Lindholm and Washington's Nicklas Backstrom, are going to be busy with the Stanley Cup playoffs this spring.

"He started this year as he ended last year," Gronborg said of Pettersson, who turned 20 in November. "After Christmas (last season) something clicked. He was good before, but after he was something special. During the whole playoffs in the Swedish League, he was unbelievable. He was part of our world championship team and unfortunately he got hurt and couldn't play the last few games."

"He's got special skills. You can tell watching him he does the work. He's not just an offensive player but does the dirty work also."

Gronborg has been involved with Sweden's national-team programs the last decade, and previously coached his country's world junior and Under-18 teams.

The bearded coach first came to North America in 1990 to play hockey at St. Cloud State University in Minnesota. He played professionally in the short-lived Roller Hockey International before beginning his coaching career.

He was an assistant coach on Sweden's 2013 world championship team that featured Canucks Daniel and Henrik Sedin and won gold medals on home ice. Markstrom, then a rookie with the Florida Panthers, was one of Sweden's goaltenders.

As a member of the Canucks, Markstrom played at the 2016 world championships and made Sweden's roster for the World Cup of Hockey that fall.

"We always saw that Markstrom was a good player, but now he's a great player," Gronborg said. "It takes a little longer for a goaltenders to develop into that type of player. It's such a pressure job, if you make one mistake it's a goal. I really enjoy watching him this year. You can see his confidence is shining. It's a breakthrough season for him, for sure."

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Markstrom is 24-19-8 this season with a .915 save percentage and since November has been one of the best goalies in the NHL. Only Vegas' Marc-Andre Fleury, Minnesota's Devan Dubnyk and Montreal's Carey Price have logged more minutes than Markstrom, and it's questionable whether he would want to pile on more work by playing at the worlds, which start May 10.

Canucks goalie Thatcher Demko and winger Brock Boeser are on USA Hockey's radar for the world championship, and Bo Horvat could be among Team Canada's invitees.

"We have a tricky job because we don't know what players are going to be available when the world championships start," Gronborg said. "We won in 2017 and won in 2018, and those were two totally different teams. We only had three players play on both those teams."

"If you want to have any chance of these guys committing to the world championships, we have to pay attention to what they're doing and spend some time with them. I grew up with most of these guys coming through the federation (as younger players). It's fun for me to see these guys coming into our program at 16 or 17 years old and suddenly they're old stars over here."



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 9, 2019

Gronborg is seeing nine NHL games in 11 days. There are Swedes on every NHL roster except Florida's.

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1135119 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Which of these NHL forwards will 'Finnish' with most goals this season?

Mike Johnston March 8, 2019, 2:03 PM

If you've ever scrolled through hockey reddit you'll know it's a place where plenty of fascinating stats, facts, observations, GIFs, tidbits and random thoughts get posted from fans worldwide on a daily basis.

One user pointed out that after Thursday's slate of games Mikko Rantanen, Sebastian Aho, Aleksander Barkov and Patrik Laine are tied for top spot among forwards from Finland with 29 goals, so it had us wondering which of those players has the best chance to complete the season on top?

Laine is the only Finnish player to reach the 30-goal plateau since Teemu Selanne did it for the 10th and final time of his career in 2011. This year, barring injury or a staggering season-ending cold streak, at least four Finns will get there – something that has never happened before in NHL history.

Prior to the season, the Winnipeg Jets sniper was among the odds-on favourites to win the Maurice "Rocket" Richard Trophy. The 2016 second-overall pick had a modest start to the season with three goals in the opening 12 games but November saw him score a whopping 18 times in 12 games, including this memorable five-goal performance against the Blues.

Laine went ice cold after that stellar month, though, scoring just four times in the next 36 games. He has gotten back on track with four goals and eight points in the past seven games. It'll be a stretch for him to match the 44 he scored one year ago but Laine is more than capable of going on a hot streak, especially considering he skates on a line with elite playmakers Mark Scheifele and Blake Wheeler.

Carolina Hurricanes eccentric owner Tom Dundon said after his team failed to qualify for the 2018 Stanley Cup Playoffs that some major roster changes were coming but that one player was untouchable. That player was Aho and the breakout campaign he's in the midst of has reflected well on his owner dubbing him the de facto franchise player. Aho finished last season with 29 goals in 78 games. It took him 66 games to reach 29 goals this year. He has scored in four straight after snapping a 10-game drought.

Rantanen has a 10-point lead on Aho for most points among Finns, so the overall scoring race should be his, but based on games remaining and trajectory his path to the Finnish goal title is most difficult. Rantanen only has six goals in his past 20 games but is still being productive on an elite line beside Colorado Avalanche teammates Gabriel Landeskog and Nathan MacKinnon, however the Avs will be in tough down the stretch with Landeskog expected to miss the next 4-6 weeks with an upper-body injury.

The 23-year-old Barkov is the elder statesman of this quartet. The Florida Panthers centre set a new career high when he registered his 29th in Thursday's heartbreaking loss to the Bruins and is on a serious heater with 10 goals in his past 11 outings, one of which was a legitimate goal of the year candidate.

The success of the four players above is symbolic of the Finnish revolution the NHL is currently seeing.

Last year, 33 Finns suited up for at least one NHL game; this year 41 have seen action. Last year 13 Finns scored double-digit goals; this year there have already been 12 with four players within two goals of doing it.

A Finnish player has been a top-three selection at the NHL Draft for three years running (Laine in 2016, Miro Heiskanen in 2017, Jesperi Kotkaniemi in 2018) and that trend should continue with Kaapo Kakko, the consensus No. 2 prospect eligible for the 2019 draft behind American Jack Hughes.

The country's hockey momentum doesn't appear as if it's going to be slowing down anytime soon, so considering everything above, what say you?

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1135120 Websites

TSN.CA / Matthews: 'We can be a lot better'

By Mark Masters

TSN Toronto reporter Mark Masters checks in daily with news and notes on the Maple Leafs, who practised at Rogers Arena in Vancouver on Friday before flying to Edmonton ahead of Saturday's game against the Oilers.

Auston Matthews believes he and linemates Andreas Johnsson and Kasperii Kapanen have more to give.

"I feel we can be a lot better," the 21-year-old centre admitted after Friday's practice. "Our strength is our speed. I think when we take care of the puck and we just get in their zone, we're fast, you know, pretty agile, can make plays, move around in the offensive zone. I think a good goal for us is just to spend more time in the O-zone, hanging onto pucks and creating chances below the dots."

With Nazem Kadri returning from injury Saturday in Edmonton, there was an opportunity for coach Mike Babcock to shuffle William Nylander, who's been filling in down the middle, back to the Matthews line. But Nylander remained on the third line at practice and Babcock made it clear he saw no pressing reason to change things with the Matthews group even though they haven't produced a goal in four straight.

"I thought they were pretty good last game, to be honest with you," Babcock said. "I didn't like them as much in Calgary, but they've done a pretty good job. The biggest thing is taking care of the puck and then Auston's a big man, can roll around, and Johnny has that skill-set so does Kappy."

Matthews has just two assists in five games matching his quietest five-game run of the season. He's one of the game's most dynamic scorers so you can understand why this dry spell doesn't sit well with him. He said establishing more of a cycle game is a priority.

"It's really important to not to be one and done because, especially towards the end of the season, that's kind of where the game's at, it's down low, below the dots and the neutral zone's pretty jammed up so it will be a good test tomorrow night to kind of get back on track. I thought we did a better job against Vancouver and generating more chances off the cycle, but we can always be better."

"Consistency in the National Hockey League is the toughest thing to have," noted Babcock, "but we need those guys to be effective and when they take care of the puck, especially when Auston's skating, when he's skating he's a load, and that's important that happens."

Matthews unhappy with line's play of late: 'I feel we can be a lot better'



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With only two assists in his last five games, Auston Matthews admitted today that he feels his line has more to give. The Leafs' young centre noted that with the speed and skill the trio has, they should be able to sustain pressure in the offensive zone for much longer. Mark Masters has more.

Adding to the sense of urgency is the play of the Bruins, who are 14-0-4 since Jan. 29 and have moved four points clear of the Leafs in the race for second place in the Atlantic Division.

"They've been extremely hot," Matthews said. "They're playing well and it's good for us to see that and make sure we take our game to another level as well."

How important is the race for home-ice advantage?

"I mean, it's important," Matthews said. "You'd obviously love to have it. I don't think that's really the main focus right now. We're just trying to take it one game at a time and obviously win hockey games and give ourselves a chance to compete and win every night. I think that's maybe in the back of our minds, but I don't think it's too much of a main focus for us."

If Bruins pull away, could boredom be a concern for Leafs down the stretch?

If the Bruins continue their winning prowess and pull away from Toronto in the standings, could boredom be a factor down the stretch for the Maple Leafs with nothing to play for heading into the playoffs? That's Hockey discuss.

With 30 goals and 30 assists in 53 games, the numbers suggest Matthews is having a great season.

"Yeah, I mean, they're fine," he said with a sigh when the statistics are mentioned.

Matthews then smiles when asked to assess his season to date.

"I don't know what you really want me to say. But, I just try and go out and play hockey, do what I do, which is obviously help this team score and play a 200-foot game and just do my thing."

Matthews would be on pace for an even better season had he not sustained a shoulder injury on Oct. 27, which forced him to miss 14 games.

"The injury sets you back a bit," he noted. "I mean, probably about a month or two after I felt like I got my legs back and skating was a lot better, just more comfortable out there."

Really? It took that long to get back to feeling right?

"Yeah, I mean, it takes time," he explained. "It's hard. I mean, you can only do so much stuff in the gym, but until you really get back in a game, it's really tough to get into game shape without playing games and practising every day and being in that setting and that pace so it's tough. It's not easy, but once you get back to where you were prior to the injury you start to feel more and more like yourself and kind of back to where you were at the beginning of the season."

While Matthews is happy with his improved skating stride this season, he's also proud of how the playmaking part of his game has grown. One objective at the start of the season was to have more assists than goals.

"I think just trying to find guys," he explained. "Teams Watch video and they make adjustments and they know I like to shoot the puck so maybe you draw a couple guys to you and you find a linemate or something like that ... so a lot of areas where you want to improve in and that was definitely one of them."

Matthews has already reached a career high in assists.

Did Matthews' hot start to the season change our expectations for him?

Leafs Lunch guest host Gord Miller with Dave Feschuk discuss how the matchup of Auston Matthews vs. Connor McDavid hasn't really lived up

to the hype and debate if Auston Matthews has performed up to the level that is expected of him.

Babcock raised eyebrows on Wednesday morning by saying the team was planning to cap Frederik Andersen at around 56 starts this season. Andersen, who made 66 starts in each of the last two seasons, wasn't really interested in discussing the matter after the loss to the Canucks – "I don't care about the number, per se," he said, "I just play when they tell me" – and then the team took off Thursday.

"I misspoke, no one misquoted me," Babcock said when asked about the team's plan to rest Andersen down the stretch. "When I asked the question about the math, the math was wrong, this is on me."

Babcock suggested that 60 starts is the more likely goal for Andersen.

"We got the schedule all laid out," he said. "I feel he's going to get to be around that, 60, but who knows. The 56 is on me. How's that."

One thing we know for certain is Andersen will make his 50th start of the season on Saturday. He's 10-0-1 with a .927 save percentage in his career against the Oilers.

After playing in Edmonton, the Leafs will have 14 games left with only three back-to-back sets.

Babcock misspoke on Andersen's starts target; number closer to 60

Before the Leafs' loss against the Vancouver Canucks, head coach Mike Babcock indicated the target number for starts for Frederik Andersen on the season was 56. Well, today while addressing the media Babcock admitted he may have misspoke and the number may actually be a bit larger.

Kadri will return to the lineup after missing eight games with a concussion and expectations are high for the centre down the stretch.

"I think when you get injured sometimes, to be honest with you, it can be a bit of an advantage, you get a real freshen up," said Babcock, "and we need Naz to come back and be as good or better than he's been all year and be a real important player for us so it's good to have him back. Obviously, he's had lots of skating opportunity so he's not coming back not ready to go. He's ready to go and now he's got to get himself used to the games, but it's important to get him back and get everyone in their right spots so that we can move ahead with the group we have."

Kadri, who only missed eight games combined in the previous three seasons, has been out since taking a big hit from Vince Dunn on Feb. 19 against the Blues in St. Louis.

"Just going to try and get into the game early," Kadri told a group of reporters including Leafs Nation Network, "get involved and engaged so I think just banging that first shift out right off the bat and after that it just feels like a regular hockey game. So, I'm excited to say the least, for sure."

Kadri slots right back in between Patrick Marleau and Nylander.

"We should catch on pretty quick," Kadri vowed. "It was a line that brought some success before the injury."

With Kadri's return, the competition to play on the fourth line is getting more fierce. Frederik Gauthier, who sat as a healthy scratch on Wednesday, missed practice due to illness, but is expected to play on Saturday.

"He's not feeling good today, but obviously we're counting on him playing tomorrow," Babcock stated.

Connor Brown shifts down to the right wing spot on the fourth line while Edmonton native Tyler Ennis, who picked up his first career hat trick against the Flames on Monday, was the left winger at practice. Trevor Moore appeared to be the odd man out.

"I don't know 100 per cent," Babcock said when asked if the plan is for Moore to sit. "We're just going to talk about that here on the flight and go



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from there. All those guys have played pretty well. I thought that the Moore-Goat-Ennis line, in particular, was really effective for us over a period of time."

Nic Petan skated as the centre on the fourth line at practice, but would likely sit should Gauthier be good to go. Against the Canucks, Babcock went with Ennis-Petan-Moore, but said afterwards it was a mistake because he didn't feel comfortable playing that trio as much in the defensive end.

"I made that decision last game, no one else, and didn't play the Goat and that line wasn't as good."

Leafs Ice Chips: Goat returns as Babcock takes blame for fourth-line experiment

With Frederik Gauthier a scratch against the Vancouver Canucks, the Leafs opted for a small, skilled fourth line featuring Trevor Moore, Nic Petan, and Tyler Ennis. The line ultimately disappointed, and Mike Babcock said on Friday that Gauthier would return to the lineup against the Oilers, taking responsibility for the fourth-line experiment.

Lines at Friday's Leafs practice:

Forwards

Hyman-Tavares-Marner

Johnsson-Matthews-Kapanen

Marleau-Kadri-Nylander

Ennis-Petan-Brown

Moore

Defencemen

Rielly-Hainsey

Muzzin-Zaitsev

Marincin-Ozhiganov

Holl

Goaltenders

Andersen

Sparks

Absent: Gauthier (Illness)

Power play units at Friday's Leafs practice:

Rielly

Matthews-Kadri-Marner

Tavares

Muzzin

Ennis-Johnsson-Nylander

Marleau

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USA TODAY / Spirit of Hockeytown glows at Ted Lindsay viewing. And it was stunning

Jeff Seidel, Detroit Free Press Published 7:13 p.m. ET March 8, 2019 | Updated 11:25 p.m. ET March 8, 2019

A solemn red light glowed inside Little Caesars Arena on Friday morning, like someone had cut through the heart of Hockeytown, as the entire Detroit Red Wings team and coaching staff walked slowly down a red carpet toward Ted Lindsay's casket.

There was a display of red roses in front of the casket — from the Ilitch family, the franchise owners — during a public memorial visitation, honoring Lindsay, who died Monday at age 93.

"We are celebrating an icon," Wings general manager Ken Holland said. "But I also think it's not only what the players do on the ice — and that's the most important — but it's what they do off the ice. How they lead their life. How they give back. That's what Ted did. He gave back."

Pallbearers, clockwise from left, Dylan Larkin, Terry Zangkas, Al Sobotka, Jeff Lindsay, Lew LaPaugh, Mike Bayoff, Eddie Mio and Joey Kocur move the casket of former Detroit Red Wings player Ted Lindsay at a public viewing, Friday, March 8, 2019, in Detroit. Lindsay pioneered the first NHL hockey players' union despite intense opposition from team management, began the tradition of taking the Stanley Cup closer to fans by skating it around the ice and refused to attend his own Hall of Fame induction ceremony because only men were allowed. Lindsay died Monday at the age of 93.

Red and white banners hung above the casket, creating the perfect backdrop and tribute to one of the greatest players in team history. The banner that was raised when Lindsay's number was retired was positioned directly above the casket. The banner itself was brought out of retirement, special for this moment, after it had been used in Joe Louis Arena. And that banner was sandwiched between four Stanley Cup banners that Lindsay played a role in winning for the Wings.

To the current players, Lindsay was not some forgotten star in the history books.

Lindsay was the guy who was working out in the weight room, well past his 80th birthday.

He was a man of courage and conviction, who played a major role in forming the players union.

Mourners visit the casket of former Detroit Red Wings player Ted Lindsay at a public viewing, Friday, March 8, 2019, in Detroit.

He was the guy who would walk around the dressing room and greet players by their full name.

"Myself, it wouldn't be Nik; it would be Niklas," Niklas Kronwall said. "And he took the time to talk to each player. It didn't matter if you were Nicklas Lidstrom, or someone barely playing. He made everyone feel great about themselves."

Lindsay, a Hall of Famer, was the guy who would call Henrik Zetterberg on the phone to talk about the team.

Always on the landline, never his cell.

"Over the years, we got closer and closer," Zetterberg said. "I think he meant a lot, just coming in the locker room, too. He was so involved in the team. He always knew what was going on. If you needed a confidence boost, he was there for you."

Zetterberg, who retired in September, became emotional talking about Lindsay.

"We are celebrating a legend, a true gentlemen, and he will be missed," Zetterberg said.

When Zetterberg had surgery on his back, Lindsay was one of the first to call him.



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"He called my wife and asked how Henrik is," Zetterberg said. "She said, 'He wasn't really woken up, so I don't really know.' "

About 20 of Lindsay's family members lined up near the casket and greeted everyone who visited. As the players and coaches paid respects to the family, it wasn't a quick, empty greeting. There were long conversations.

"I thought it was a great time, this morning, to get a chance to be up close and meet his family and pay our respects," Kronwall said. "The legacy he leaves behind is amazing."

The current players and coaches wore dark suits, which was somehow fitting.

"Ted Lindsay, if he were at this event, he would wear a shirt and tie — out of respect," former Michigan hockey coach Red Berenson said. "I just talked to his daughter. She said, 'Our dad would wear a shirt and tie to the bathroom if he thought it was important enough.' "

The players stopped and looked at tables filled with trophies.

One of the tables held the Ted Lindsay Award, formerly known as the Lester B. Pearson Award, which is awarded annually to the NHL's most outstanding player, as voted on by the players.

And that's probably all you need to know about Terrible Ted.

He was a living legend who was always around.

This moment was the essence of the Wings, the essence of Hockeytown.

The current group of players learning from past greatness.

"I can't say enough how Ted carried himself and his presence around our hockey team and our organization, it's something very special," former Red Wing Kris Draper said.

One year, Wings coach Jeff Blashill was getting ready for training camp.

"What are you doing?" Lindsay asked.

"Mr. Lindsay, we are getting ready for training camp," Blashill said. "We are getting our message ready."

"He said, 'Coach, you just tell them, if they go into the corner with another guy, and if they don't come out with the puck, they are a horse-(crap) hockey player.' And I thought that was awesome. It was true in 1950 and it's true today. And that was my first message to our team.' "

Mourners visit the casket of former Detroit Red Wings player Ted Lindsay at a public viewing, Friday, March 8, 2019, in Detroit. Lindsay pioneered the first NHL hockey players' union despite intense opposition from team management, began the tradition of taking the Stanley Cup closer to fans by skating it around the ice and refused to attend his own Hall of Fame induction ceremony because only men were allowed. Lindsay died Monday at the age of 93.

At the far end of the receiving line, there were several tables that honored Lindsay's charity work. He was a force in the community, and those are important lessons for these young Wings.

"Today is a celebration of an incredible life," Holland said. "Just as important, off the ice. What he meant to this game, to this sport, to this city. The respect that he gave and got. The passion he had for the sport, the passion. He was a fierce competitor. Great role for so many people."

This was an important moment for this young hockey team. It is how the spirit of Hockeytown gets passed from one generation to the next.

You could feel it.

You could see it.

As the players passed the casket, in the red glow.

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