



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 10, 2019



Gold: The Captain guides the Hurricanes to bounce back win in Nashville

By Adam Gold

Stones.

Not only is that a wildly underrated song by Neil Diamond, but it's what the Carolina Hurricanes displayed in a 5-3 win in Nashville on Saturday night. Less than 24 hours after getting swallowed whole by the Winnipeg Jets at PNC Arena, the Canes bounced back on the home ice of another Western Conference power.

Friday wasn't an ordinary loss. The Jets met no resistance whatsoever from Carolina — especially the Canes' top trio who were a collective -15 — in the 8-1 runaway. It was the kind of a loss that could shake a team's confidence. But, these Hurricanes are made of the right stuff. There was little doubt that they'd respond with a great effort, and it certainly showed from their front line, led by the guy who wears the "C".

Yes, Nino Niederreiter, who set a franchise record with his -6 showing against Winnipeg, scored a pair of 1st period goals and was a heavy presence all night long. Sebastian Aho bounced back (you knew he would) from arguably his worst performance as a pro with a solid effort that included a pair of points and winning two thirds of his face offs.

Then, there was the captain. Justin Williams provided a net-front presence all night long, helping to bother Nashville goalie Juuse Saros on the first Niederreiter marker and later would deflect a Teuvo Teravainen point drive for a 3rd period power play goal. The Captain also made several outstanding defensive plays late in the game and won a key, face off that ultimately led to the game-clinching empty net goal by Aho.

After the Winnipeg debacle Williams responded to a simple question about where his team was after such an embarrassing showing. "It all depends on what happens tomorrow", Williams said. "Good thing is we get to turn the page quickly."

Williams is a lot like his head coach in that he's never been a rah rah sort. Rod Brind'Amour was a captain that led more by example than with a fiery personality. Williams is quiet by nature, thoughtful, measured. But, when you're talking about coming through for a team that you ached to lead a year ago and were justifiably disheartened when that didn't happen, the proof, ultimately, is on the score sheet.

Williams goal was his 20th of the season, but the 10th this year that came in the 3rd period. It was also his team-leading 9th on the power play. But, it may have been the little things, some that don't show up on the "event summary" (the official NHL game sheet), that make the difference. A key back check to foil a grade-A Predators scoring chance in the game's latter stages. A deft pass from the wall, deep in the defensive zone to help escape harm and avert calamity.

Then, after the Preds had pulled back within a goal at 4-3, it was the Captain who won a key defensive zone face off that

helped secure the two points they gave away the night before. Williams, at age 37, isn't supposed to be playing his best hockey this late in the season. He isn't supposed to be averaging more than 17 minutes per night — more than 18 1/2 over the last 19 games!

But, the Captain came back to Raleigh with a plan. To drag a franchise that he loves back to where he believes it should be. Williams came home to get his team into the playoffs. In Nashville, in a game that Carolina had to have to regain their footing in a wickedly tight race for one of the last few coveted spots, the Captain came through again.

Mr. Game Seven was Mr. Game 68 on a night his team needed him the most.

* Nino Niederreiter has 21 points (11 goals, 10 assists) in 22 games for the Hurricanes. He had 23 points (9 goals, 14 assists) in 46 games with Minnesota. His two goals mark the fourth time since coming over in the trade with the Wild that Nino has scored twice in a game.

* Jordan Martinook scored his 15th goal of the season, off a rebound of a Brett Pesce drive, to make it 4-2. It ended up as the game-winner, Martinook's 5th such goal all year. Second on the team to Sebastian Aho (7).

* Aho had the second assist on the game's first goal and the hustle-play empty net tally that iced the win. It was his 30th goal of the season. Aho now has 77 points in 68 games.

* Teuvo Teravainen had a pair of assists and his 45 on the year are just two behind Aho for the team lead.

* Petr Mrazek stopped 31 shots in the win. It was his fifth straight win and his third straight on a Saturday night. He's won 6 of his last 7 starts with two shutouts and has a .936 SV% over that span.

* The Hurricanes swept the season series from Nashville and have won six straight against the Predators.

* Carolina moved back into third place in the Metro with 81 points. They're tied with Pittsburgh, but own the edge with one more non-shootout win. The Penguins lost at Columbus on Saturday, so the Jackets remain two points behind Carolina. Montreal is also sitting at 79 points, but the Hurricanes have a game in hand over the Canadiens. The Pens will host the Bruins tomorrow and could jump back into 3rd.

* The Hurricanes play at Colorado on Monday with the Avalanche chasing a playoff spot of their own. The Avs are two points behind Minnesota for the second wild card spot and coming off a 3-0 shutout of the Sabres on Saturday.

* In the 8th game of the year, Colorado beat Carolina, 3-1, at PNC Arena. The damage all done by the top line of Nathan MacKinnon, Mikko Rantanen and Gabriel Landeskog who combined for three goals and three assists.



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NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 10, 2019



Recap: Canes Bounce Back to Top Predators

Power play strikes twice in 5-3 win

by Michael Smith

NASHVILLE - Two power-play goals sparked the Carolina Hurricanes, who bounced back into the win column with a 5-3 victory over the Nashville Predators.

Nino Niederreiter contributed two goals, and Jordan Martinook's third-period marker was the difference in the Canes' sixth consecutive win against the Predators.

Here are five takeaways from Saturday night in Nashville.

One

Captain Justin Williams had this to say after the Hurricanes were embarrassed on home ice by the Winnipeg Jets by an 8-1 margin: "We've always answered the bell this year so far, and it's time to do it again."

Bell: answered.

Just as quickly as it happened, the Hurricanes were able to bury Friday night's lopsided result with a performance - and, most importantly, two points - much more indicative of the team.

"Two points. Absolutely," Williams said. "We played hard. We played it right from the onset, and we atoned from a dismal performance last night."

"I expected it," head coach Rod Brind'Amour said. "These guys have been really great all year with their effort."

Two

Just four minutes and 17 seconds had elapsed in Saturday's game by the time the Predators had taken a trio of penalties.

Unfortunately for the Canes, they came up empty on all three power plays, which included 95 seconds of 5-on-3 time that didn't produce much other than a few unscreened looks from the perimeter.

That could have easily sunk a fragile team early, especially with Nashville building momentum off three consecutive kills and feeding off the energy of their crowd.

But these Canes aren't so fragile, and they atoned for their power-play sins with two goals on the man advantage after that.

"They more than redeemed themselves," Brind'Amour said.

With just 31 seconds left in the first period, Niederreiter got a stick on a Teuvo Teravainen wrister, causing the puck to take a lively bounce off the ice and past Juuse Saros.

"The biggest key is to not get frustrated. Having a 5-on-3 and not getting a goal is definitely frustrating, but we've got to stick

with the process," Niederreiter said. "We had some good, quality shots during that time and had to make sure we got it done at some point."

The Hurricanes entered the third period with a one-goal lead, 1:51 of power-play time and the opportunity to stretch their advantage back to two goals.

Go figure, then, that it was the captain scoring a clutch goal. Positioned in front of the net, Williams redirected another shot from Teravainen to give the Canes a 3-1 lead.

"Huge. It gives you a little bit of breathing room," Williams said.

"Huge power-play goal by Justin to not put the game away but certainly give us some breathing room," Brind'Amour said.

Three

As Sheryl Crow predicted in the mid-1990s, a change did Niederreiter good.

In 22 games since being acquired by the Canes in mid-January, Niederreiter has totaled 11 goals, eclipsing the nine he scored in 46 games with the Minnesota Wild in the first half of the season. Four of Niederreiter's 22 games, including Saturday's match, have been multi-goal efforts.

"A change of scenery sometimes helps," he said. "I feel like the most important thing is the trust you get from the coaches and the belief in me. That's the biggest thing."

Just as the Canes rebounded as a team from a lackluster performance against Winnipeg the night prior, so too did Niederreiter course correct after eating a career worst minus-six.

"Our worst game of the year as a line last night, and I'm proud of the guys for answering the bell," Williams said. "Nino and Seabass did a great job tonight."

Niederreiter scored his first of two goals shortly after the Hurricanes dispatched the Predators' first power play of the game. He skated down the near wing, toe dragged toward the middle of the ice and sniped a perfectly-placed shot glove-side high on Saros to give the Canes a 1-0 lead.

"Nino got us going," Williams said. "He was just focused on shooting the puck."

Four

Each time the Predators trimmed the Canes' lead to a goal, Carolina would extend it right back.

Martinook's tally in the third period to give his team a 4-2 lead turned out to be the game-winner. It was a deft shot, as he slid a flat puck along the ice under a diving Saros for his 15th goal of the season.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 10, 2019

"We know we need everyone to contribute," Brind'Amour said. "It was just a group effort."

"We made sure we found a way to keep the lead," Niederreiter said. "We stuck to our game plan, got pucks in deep and found a way to score goals."

Five

With each of his linemates finding the back of the net, Sebastian Aho didn't want to be left out. He pumped the

Projected Lineup: Hurricanes at Predators

Ferland (upper body) not in the lineup

by Michael Smith

NASHVILLE - The Carolina Hurricanes will wrap up a back-to-back set against Western Conference opponents in Nashville, and they'll be in search of a bounce-back effort after a lopsided loss to Winnipeg on Friday.

Micheal Ferland (upper body) is not on the trip with the team, so Warren Foegele will draw back in. Petr Mrazek gets the nod in net.

Here is the projected lineup for the Hurricanes.

Forwards

Niederreiter-Aho-Williams
Svechnikov-Staal-Teravainen

puck into the empty net late in regulation for his 30th goal of the season, a new career high.

"They were the difference. They came out and asserted themselves," Brind'Amour said of his team's first line. "They led the charge, for sure."

Up Next

The Hurricanes make their lone trip to Denver to face off with the Colorado Avalanche on Monday.

McGinn-Wallmark-Martinook
Foegele-McKegg-Maenalanen

Defense

Slavin-Hamilton
Pesce-Faulk
de Haan-van Riemsdyk

Goalies

Mrazek
McElhinney

Scratches: Ferland (upper body)

Note: Lineup subject to change prior to opening faceoff.



Niederreiter scores twice, Hurricanes hold off Predators

Mrazek makes 31 saves for Carolina, which gains in Metropolitan race

by Robby Stanley

NASHVILLE -- Nino Niederreiter scored two goals for the Carolina Hurricanes in a 5-3 win against the Nashville Predators at Bridgestone Arena on Saturday.

Sebastian Aho had a goal and an assist, Jordan Martinook and Justin Williams scored, and Petr Mrazek made 31 saves for the Hurricanes (37-24-7), who have won nine of their past 12 games and moved into third place in the Metropolitan Division.

"We knew what kind of stage we're in right now," Niederreiter said. "We're all fighting for a [Stanley Cup Playoff] spot, and I think we're in a good position. We made sure we couldn't lose like last night (8-1 loss to the Winnipeg Jets) and we had to make sure we bounced back, and that's what we did."

Mikael Granlund, Craig Smith and Brian Boyle scored, and Juuse Saros made 27 saves for the Predators (39-26-5), who had won two in a row and remain one point behind the Jets for first place in the Central Division.

"We were chasing the game, just the way the game started with penalties right off the bat," Predators coach Peter Laviolette said. "I feel like we didn't get in a rhythm on the bench and when we did we were slow. We were not up to the speed that they were at, and so I thought that they controlled the first period. I thought in the second and third periods we were pushing back, but at that point, you're chasing the game."

Niederreiter gave Carolina a 1-0 lead at 14:29 of the first period after he forced a turnover by Predators defenseman P.K. Subban and scored on a shot from the left circle. He extended the lead to 2-0 at 19:29 on a redirection in the slot on the power play.

Smith cut it to 2-1 at 2:52 of the second period on a slap shot from the top of the right circle.

Williams scored 55 seconds into the third period to make it 3-1 on a redirection of Teuvo Teravainen's point shot on the power play.

"It just gives you a little bit of breathing room," Williams said. "It lets you make a play that you might not have made if you're



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NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 10, 2019

only up a goal. I mean, it's huge, especially with the guys that we have in the net."

Boyle cut it to 3-2 at 2:35, chipping in a rebound in front, but Martinook gave the Hurricanes a 4-2 lead at 6:38 on a rebound of Brett Pesce's initial shot.

Granlund scored his first goal with Nashville to make it 4-3 at 17:31. Originally ruled no goal because of goaltender interference, Laviolette challenged the play and the call was reversed after a video review.

Aho scored his 30th goal into an empty net to make it 5-3 at 19:40.

"Obviously, getting ahead is huge," Hurricanes coach Rod Brind'Amour said. "You don't have to chase the game and you can just kind of settle in. They're going to have their push, and they did. They came out in the second and they took it to us pretty good, but that's when [Mrazek] was at his best for us and kind of kept us in there."

They said it

"The biggest key is don't get frustrated. Obviously, having another 5-on-3, we couldn't get the goal done. It's definitely frustrating, but at the same time, we knew we had to stick to

the process. We had some good quality shots during that time and we just made sure we got it done at some point." -- Hurricanes forward Nino Niederreiter on failing to convert on three early power plays

"That's details. It shouldn't happen. We know our changes and we need to execute it. So that's an opportunity for us to get into the game, and it slipped away." -- Predators coach Peter Laviolette on the penalty for too many men that led to the Niederreiter's second goal

Need to know

Mrazek is 8-0-0 against Nashville. ... Predators forward Filip Forsberg missed the game because of an upper-body injury and is listed as day to day. ... Granlund was playing in his fourth game with Nashville after being acquired in a trade with the Minnesota Wild on Feb. 25.

What's next

Hurricanes: At the Colorado Avalanche on Monday (9 p.m. ET; ALT, FS-CR, NHL.TV)

Predators: At the Anaheim Ducks on Tuesday (10 p.m. ET; ESPN+, SN360, SNE, SNO, SNP, FS-W, FS-TN, NHL.TV)



Carolina Hurricanes sweep season series, beating Preds 5-3

By Teresa M. Walker

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (AP) — The Carolina Hurricanes knew they had to shake off an ugly performance to keep pace in the playoff chase, and the schedule gave them a quick chance to do just that.

The Hurricanes didn't waste the opportunity.

Nino Niederreiter scored twice in the first period and the Hurricanes held off the Nashville Predators 5-3 on Saturday night to sweep the season series.

Sebastian Aho had a goal and an assist and Justin Williams and Jordan Martinook also scored. The Hurricanes snapped a two-game skid that included an 8-1 loss to Winnipeg on Friday night and jumped a spot to third in the Metropolitan Division in the Eastern Conference pushing Pittsburgh down to the first wild card.

"We knew what kind of a stage that we're in right now," Niederreiter said. "We're all fighting for a playoff spot. I think we're in a good position, so we made sure we can't lose like that like last night 8-1. We had to make sure we bounce back and that's what we did."

Teuvo Teravainen had two assists, and goalie Petr Mrazek improved to 8-0-0 against Nashville after making 31 saves.

"It's been the story of the year," Carolina coach Rod Brind'Amour said. "We're a battling team. We're working hard, but we're making mistakes just like everyone else. We need big saves at key times, and that's what we've been getting."

Mikael Granlund, Brian Boyle and Craig Smith scored for the Predators.

Nashville coach Peter Laviolette pulled goalie Juuse Saros with about 2:33 left, and Granlund scored with 2:28 left right in front with officials waving it off both on the ice and after an initial review for interference by Boyle who collided with Mrazek. The Predators challenged and won for Granlund's first goal since being acquired at the trade deadline.

Aho sealed the win with an empty-net goal with 19.3 seconds left.

The Predators played without Filip Forsberg, day to day with a lower-body injury. Granlund replaced Forsberg on the top line with Viktor Arvidsson and Ryan Johansen. Nashville also was coming off its first three-day break since the team's mandated break immediately after the All-Star Game in late January.

Carolina also had to travel after losing to Winnipeg. That didn't stop the Hurricanes from jumping on the Predators early, outshooting them 16-8 and grabbing a 2-0 lead after the first period.

"We played it right from the onset, and we atoned from a dismal performance last night," Williams said.

The Predators got into penalty trouble early and often starting with Smith just 30 seconds into the game. Then they wound up giving the Hurricanes a 5-on-3 for 95 seconds with back-to-back tripping penalties on Matt Irwin and captain Roman



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 10, 2019

Josi. Saros, starting for Pekka Rinne, made seven saves during the penalty kill to keep it scoreless.

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Niederreiter put Carolina up 1-0 at 14:29 with a wrister from the left circle that went top shelf over Saros' glove. Nashville took its fourth penalty for too many men on the ice during a power play, and Niederreiter made it 2-0 with a second left tipping in Teravainen's shot from the slot on the man advantage for his 11th goal in 22 games with the Hurricanes.

Nashville finished with five penalties and gave up two power plays. Laviolette said the too many men penalty while on the power play should not happen.

"We know our changes, and we need to execute it," Laviolette said. "That's an opportunity for us to get into the game and it slipped away.

Smith got Nashville on the board at 2:52 of the second, beating Mrazek's blocker with a slap shot from the top of the right circle.

Williams scored Carolina's second power-play goal 55 seconds into the third. Boyle answered quickly scoring at 2:35 to pull Nashville within 3-2. Then Martinook beat Saros with a wrister at 6:38 to pad the lead for Carolina.

NOTES: The Hurricanes improved to 10-3-1 in the second game of back-to-backs. ... Williams notched his seventh straight 20-goal season. ... Nashville dropped to 5-17-4 when trailing after the second period.

UP NEXT

Hurricanes: At Colorado on Monday night.

Predators: At Anaheim on Tuesday night.



The Buzzer: Niederreiter keeps scoring; Atkinson lifts Blue Jackets into wildcard spot

By Scott Billeck

Three stars

1. Nino Niederreiter, Carolina Hurricanes

The Hurricanes were going to need a hell of a performance against the Nashville Predators to beat them a night after the Canes dropped an 8-1 decision against the Winnipeg Jets.

Playing the top two teams in the Central Division on consecutive days seems like an unfair lot in life, but the Hurricanes swept aside their embarrassing loss on Friday and putting together a fine display in a 5-3 win on Saturday, helping them stay in third place in the Metropolitan Division.

Niederreiter led the way, scoring twice in the first period to declare Carolina's intent. 'El Nino' has been lights out since he was traded to Raleigh from Minnesota. He has 11 goals and 10 assists in 22 games since the move.

2. Cam Atkinson, Columbus Blue Jackets

With the Blue Jackets struggling recently, Atkinson used a four-letter word to explain that the team needed to screw it on straight and start winning again. After losing to the Penguins

on Thursday, Columbus needed a bounceback to climb back into a playoff spot and they got just that, with Atkinson scoring twice in a 4-1 win as the Blue Jackets moved into the second and final wildcard in the Eastern Conference, level on points with the Montreal Canadiens (who lost on Saturday), who have an inferior number of ROWs.

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3. Philipp Grubauer, Colorado Avalanche

The Avs needed this one, if only to lift their spirits after the loss of Gabriel Landeskog for the remainder of the regular season.

Grubauer stood tall, making the 18 saves required of him in a 3-0 shutout of the Buffalo Sabres. The win moved the Avalanche to within two points of the final wildcard in the Western Conference.

It's a long shot, especially with their captain lost to injury, but Nathan MacKinnon picked up the slack in this one, putting up points on all three goals to make sure Grubauer had the run support.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 10, 2019



Hurricanes bounce back in 5-3 win against Predators

Canes sweep season series with Nashville on the back of Nino Niederreiter's two goal night

By Jake Lerch

Every NHL player has a bad game. How you respond goes a long way in determining your success over the course of an 82 game regular season.

Nino Niederreiter was coming off his worst game as a Hurricane. In at least one respect, he was coming off the worst game by any Hurricane, ever. Niederreiter recorded a plus/minus of -6 against the Winnipeg Jets on Friday night, the worst plus/minus rating in the Hurricanes' history. He responded with a two goal night in Nashville that led his team to a 5-3 victory.

The first period began with a ton of whistles as the Canes drew three straight penalties in the opening minutes. An early 5-on-3 advantage went to waste as the Canes continue to struggle to find confidence in that scenario. After killing off a Nashville powerplay, Carolina opened the scoring off a beautiful neutral zone play from Niederreiter. After initially blocking a pass with his skate, Niederreiter knocked the puck out of mid-air then toe-dragged to create room for a wrist shot from the dot which beat Predators' goaltender Juuse Saros high to the glove side.

Nino added his second goal on an abbreviated powerplay. Nashville had been on the man-advantage but were whistled for a penalty due to having somewhere between 6 to 10 skaters on the ice. Nino cashed in by tipping a shot past Saros with only one second remaining on the powerplay.

In the second period, Nashville controlled the better of the play. Craig Smith pulled Nashville back to within one on a rocket which beat Mrazek high on the blocker side. A late penalty by PK Subban lead to an early powerplay in the third for the Canes.

Justin Williams scored the second power play of the night just shy of a minute into the third as a point shot from Teuvo Teravainen deflected off of him and found its way past Saros. Brian Boyle quickly cut the lead back to one as he chipped a rebound past Mrazek after shaking free of Brett Pesce in front of the net. However, on a bounce back night for the Canes, Pesce kept with the theme and would add an assist on what would turn out to be the game winning goal. Pesce jumped into the rush and fired a wrist shot from the slot. Saros made a kick save which Jordan Martinook was able to collect and somehow fire under the sprawling Saros to re-establish a two goal cushion for the Canes.

A bizarre sequence pulled the Predators within one after Saros was pulled for the extra attacker in the game's waning minutes. A Mikael Granlund goal appeared to be waved off on the ice due to goaltender interference by Brian Boyle, then reviewed with the on-ice decision upheld, then overturned due to a challenge. The league explained the actions post-game:

"At 17:31 of the third period in the Hurricanes/Predators game, Nashville requested a Coach's Challenge to review the "Interference on the Goalkeeper" decision that resulted in a "no goal" call.

"After reviewing all available replays and consulting with the Referee, the Situation Room determined that the actions of Carolina's Jordan Staal caused Nashville's Brian Boyle to contact Petr Mrazek before the puck crossed the goal line. The decision was made in accordance with Note 2 of Rule 78.7 (ii) which states, in part, that the goal should be allowed because "the attacking Player was pushed, shoved or fouled by a defending Player causing the attacking Player to come into contact with the goalkeeper."

"Therefore, the original call is overturned - good goal Nashville Predators.

"Since the Coach's Challenge resulted in the original call being overturned, the Nashville Predators retain their time-out."

In the end, the goal did not impact the outcome as Sebastian Aho buried an empty-netter in the final seconds to secure the two points for the Canes, and a personal best 30-goal season for himself.

Notes: Teuvo Teravainen and Brett Pesce each had two assists on the night. Sebastian Aho, Justin Faulk, and Lucas Wallmark each added an assist. Petr Mrazek recorded 31 saves on 34 shots on goal, securing his 17th win of the season. The fourth line had a rough night, with each forward going -2 for the game. Michael Ferland did not travel with the Canes after sustaining yet another injury in the loss to the Jets.

The Columbus Blue Jackets beat the Pittsburgh Penguins in regulation, splitting their back-to-back games. The Canes' win pulls them even with Pittsburgh on points (81) and keeps them ahead of both Columbus (79) and idle Montreal (79). They also picked up 2 points on the New York Islanders (85) who lost 5-2 to the Philadelphia Flyers.

Up Next: The Canes travel to Colorado to take on the Avalanche on Monday night.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 10, 2019

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1135156 Carolina Hurricanes

Carolina Hurricanes sweep season series, beating Preds 5-3

BY TERESA M. WALKER AP SPORTS WRITER

MARCH 09, 2019 11:53 PM

NASHVILLE, TENN.

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NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 10, 2019

Avalanche dominates Buffalo Sabres in first game without Gabe Landeskog

By MIKE CHAMBERS | mchambers@denverpost.com | The Denver Post

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Producing shots Saturday was no problem, and preventing them seemed similarly as easy. The Avalanche, minus all-star left wing and team captain Gabe Landeskog, put together one of its most complete game of the season before a sellout crowd of 18,052 at the Pepsi Center.

In Landeskog's first absence of the season, Colorado's two other all-stars picked up the slack in a 3-0 triumph over the Buffalo Sabres. Star forwards Nathan MacKinnon and Mikko Rantanen each scored and goalie Philipp Grubauer made 18 saves as the Avalanche remained in the Western Conference playoff hunt, now two points behind the Minnesota Wild for the final wild-card spot.

Landeskog missed his first game after suffering an upper-body injury Thursday at Dallas. He is projected to miss 4-to-6 weeks, which would be the rest of the regular season.

The Avs, who have 13 remaining games, outshot the Sabres 26-7 through two periods and 30-8 early in the third period before Rantanen scored a 4-on-3 power-play goal to double the lead. MacKinnon, who gave Colorado a 1-0 advantage with an unassisted goal 3:14 into the second period, assisted on Rantanen's goal for his 25th multiple-point game of the season. He also assisted on Gabriel Bourque's empty-net goal with 1:10 to play.

"We're a better team with Landy, obviously. It doesn't need to be said," MacKinnon said. "But it's good that everyone stepped up. The problem with that is, we can't forget that he's not in the lineup. We need to have the same effort to try to fill that void. We can't fill a 33-goal scorer and 80-something points. That's elite in this league to be a point-per-game player or above. We can't forget that it's a huge loss for us."

Said Grubauer: "We did a lot of things right. I don't think they had too many scoring chances other than the one breakaway in the first period. If we keep playing the way we played today it's going to be really hard for teams. Obviously, a lot of great stuff today."

Rantanen's goal was his 30th, joining MacKinnon (35) and Landeskog (33) as Colorado's first trio of 30-goal scorers since the club's inaugural season of 1995-96, when Joe Sakic had 51, Claude Lemieux 39, Valeri Kamensky 38 and Peter Forsberg 30.

"We're proud of it. It's a good accomplishment for us," MacKinnon said of becoming the Avalanche's second trio of 30-goal scorers. "We want to be part of the solution, with new guys coming in and all that. We need to continue producing and winning. It's a new era here. When Joe retired it was a tough 10 years, I think. I feel like now, we've drafted some good players and we're only getting better."

The Avalanche is just one of two NHL teams with three 30-goal scorers. League-leading Tampa Bay has Brayden Point (37), Steven Stamkos (34) and Nikita Kucherov (31).

The Avalanche continues its four-game homestand Monday against the Carolina Hurricanes. The Anaheim Ducks and New Jersey Devils visit the Pepsi Center on Friday and March 17, respectively, before Colorado plays the Wild in St. Paul, Minn., on Feb. 19.

Footnotes. The Avs tied a season-low three-shots allowed in the second period. They also limited the New York Rangers to three shots in the first period Dec. 4. ... The Avalanche finished 2-0 against Buffalo, outscoring the Sabres a combined 9-1. ... Colorado is on a season-best three-game winning streak at home and is 5-0-1 in its last six at the Pepsi Center. ... The Avs are 15-9-6 against the Eastern Conference.

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1135165 Colorado Avalanche

5 Takeaways: Avs shutout Sabres behind strong performances from Grubauer, MacKinnon

By DJ Stanec

March 9, 2019

Coming off of a tough loss, the Colorado Avalanche looked to respond Saturday afternoon against the visiting Buffalo Sabres. The Avalanche did exactly that, shutting out the Sabres, 3-0.

With team captain Gabriel Landeskog out with an upper-body injury, Colorado needed its other top players to step up.

Nathan MacKinnon was that guy as he led the Avalanche with three points, including an extremely difficult goal to get the party started. MacKinnon intercepted a pass in the neutral zone—got knocked down, but maintained possession—before stepping around the defender and roofing a wrist shot for Colorado's first goal of the game.

Colorado's strong defensive play allowed the club to take a 1-0 lead into the final frame. In the third, Mikko Rantanen provided an insurance goal and the Avs added an empty-net goal as well in Philip Grubauer's second shutout win on the season.

What did we learn from this game?

1. No Landeskog? No problem. Okay, maybe a little problem but Colorado needed other players to step up in the absence of the veteran leader. Nathan MacKinnon and Mikko Rantanen led that charge with four points between the duo.

Other players stepped up as well, like Carl Soderberg and Matt Calvert, who both ate minutes on the penalty kill in Landeskog's absence. Tyson Jost and Derick Brassard also played a valuable role in forcing the issue on the forecheck as well.

2. Grubauer continued to look solid in net. While it seemed like he was only challenged once, on a breakaway, every shot he faced was handled perfectly. Grubauer didn't give up any large rebounds, saw the puck through screens and also played the puck well when needed. He is showing that he just needed a little time to get used to his new surroundings and might give Varlamov a run for starting goalie down the stretch.

3. Colorado's defense played much better than the Dallas game. The Avalanche blueline only allowed seven shots on goal through the first two frames and finished the game only allowing 18 shots total on net. Colorado also finished with 11 blocked shots, keeping the Sabres attackers at bay.

4. Tyson Barrie wears the "A" in Landeskog's absence and proves why he is a leader for this team. Coach Bednar said, "The reason I gave him the letter is because he's been engaged lately." Barrie continued to look strong finishing the game with an assist, four shots on goal, and two blocked shots in 21:39 of ice time.

5. The playoffs aren't out of sight yet. Somehow, this team is finding ways to hang on to the thought that they will be making the playoffs. Still, only 2 points out of the final wild-card spot, Colorado needs some help from Central Division rival, Chicago Blackhawks, who face off against the Dallas Stars Saturday evening. The Avalanche are 3 points behind the Stars, before the Central division matchup.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 10, 2019

Colorado returns to action Monday night at home against the Carolina Hurricanes. Puck drop is set for 7:00 PM MST from the Pepsi Center.

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1135166 Colorado Avalanche

MacKinnon activates superstar mode in leading Avs to victory

BY AJ HAEFELE

MARCH 9, 2019

When you go on the road and have a virtual no-show against a division rival whom you're competing for a playoff spot with, it's hard to have any kind of response that makes you feel like it was just one game. That's especially true when that road game costs you your captain, third-leading scorer, and most versatile two-way forward.

And yet in the Avalanche's first game without Gabriel Landeskog, they completely shut down the visiting Buffalo Sabres. With the game still in question halfway through the third period, the Avalanche had given up just eight shots on goal. They ended up giving up just 18 all game as Philipp Grubauer recorded his second shutout of the season in a 3-0 win.

"It was nice," Nathan MacKinnon said of their defensive effort. "They didn't have their best game obviously but we did a really good job of being committed. We wanted a really good start, everyone was ready to go. It was good, yeah. We had a good defensive start. They didn't have many shots and it was kind of a tight game early, but we managed to get a couple."

MacKinnon starred yet again as the absence of Landeskog forced the lines to get mixed up again and head coach Jared Bednar found the right combination on that top line as Derick Brassard and J.T. Compher joined MacKinnon in a dominant effort. MacKinnon got the scoring off to a start early in the second period when he intercepted a pass, took a cross-check in the back from Jack Eichel, got up and danced Rasmus Dahlin before beating Carter Hutton glove-side with a wrister, his 35th goal of the season.

"Dahlin kind of let up when I was on my knees," MacKinnon said. "I don't know what he thought I was going to do with it but it was nice to get around him. The scouting report said high glove again so I just shot it there."

This was the second time in three games MacKinnon referred to a scouting report saying high on the glove side was the weakness to look to exploit. The last one was against Detroit and former Avs goaltender Jonathan Bernier, who MacKinnon beat in that spot for the overtime winner against the Red Wings earlier in the week.

"When it's there, I like to shoot there anyway," MacKinnon said with a chuckle. "I enjoy it when I can and it's a good option."

The play was a turning point in the game as the clash of superstars was won by MacKinnon, who went against both of Buffalo's best in Eichel and Dahlin, the stud defenseman selected first overall in last summer's draft.

"I managed to get up a little bit. Like I said, [Dahlin] probably got caught by surprise a little bit," MacKinnon said. "Usually, when guys are on their knees they'll just throw [the puck] but I saw some separation and took advantage of it."

While it was the first game for the Avs without Landeskog, it won't be the last as he will be out for the rest of the regular season at the very least. Colorado has just 13 games remaining on their schedule.

"It's just one game," MacKinnon said. "We're a better game with Landy, obviously, and that doesn't need to be said but it's good that everyone stepped up. The problem with that is we can't forget he's not in the lineup and we need to have the same effort to fill that void. We can't fill that 35-goal scorer who was on pace for 80-plus points. That's elite in this league to be a point-per-game player or above it. For him to go down is a huge loss for us."

How the Avs mitigate that loss will be the key factor in determining if they manage to make the playoffs again this year. The win today put them two points behind Minnesota, who has also played 69 games, and three points behind Dallas, who has a less-nice 67 games played. For now, Colorado also jumped Arizona but the Coyotes play the LA Kings tonight, a game everyone in Colorado will be rooting for the Kings for a number of reasons.

It may just have been one game, but it was a hell of an effort. Colorado is going to need a lot more like it to get where they want to be.

Takeaways from the game

Mikko Rantanen scored Colorado's second goal of the game, giving him 30 on the season. It's the second time in Avalanche history they have three 30-goal scorers. The first time came in the 1995-96 season when the Avs had four players hit the mark (Sakic, Forsberg, Lemieux, Kamensky).

There were three empty-net opportunities in the first couple of periods. Carl Soderberg shut down Buffalo's chance on their first PP with a stick lift and clear, Colin Wilson accidentally denied Tyson Barrie as they both fought for MacKinnon's centering pass, and Zach Bogosian lifted a stick on another opportunity. It was mostly good defense involved that somehow saw three would-be goals not get scored.

J.T. Compher is having a strong season overall but I've quite liked him lately. He was out there again flying around today and looking like a guy who belongs in this team's top six next season.

Since being traded to Pittsburgh and then Florida, Derick Brassard has largely been asked to be a complementary player. Even in his time in Colorado, he hasn't been asked to be the main guy. Today, he got slotted next to MacKinnon and he responded by turning into a one-man firing squad. If that's how he's going to respond, he just might stick there for a few games.

In fact, it took a very late flurry for the Sabres to outshoot the Brassard-MacKinnon-Compher line. The final total was 18 for Buffalo, 13 for the MacKinnon line. Yikes.

Speaking of yikes, Rasmus Dahlin had one of those days where you're reminded he's still just a teenager. He's had a very good rookie season and belongs in the Calder conversation but today he was on the other end of MacKinnon dismissing him for the game's first goal.

Philipp Grubauer obviously wasn't called upon much in his 18-save shutout but his save on Sam Reinhart's breakaway in the first period with the game still lacking a goal was huge. If Buffalo scores there, who knows how sideways this game ultimately goes. Instead, Grubauer shut the door and here we are.

Speaking of Grubauer, it looks like the extended time off really did him some good. He looks refreshed and confident in net once again. He has given up just two goals on the 79 shots he's faced in his last three starts. He has two shutouts in that time. The workload hasn't been tremendous overall as he faced just 18 shots today and 23 in his last start but he's very much trending in the right direction. Given the uncertainty of the goaltender position going into this summer, a strong finish to the season from Grubauer would go a long way to assuaging some of those fears.

MacKinnon's three-point afternoon moved him to 87 points on the season. It really goes to show what a special year he had last year that he's still ten points behind that total but just five games from matching the 74 he played in last season. He could still catch that pace, of course, but



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 10, 2019

looking at it really made me realize I might have taken last year's performance for granted.

It took 42 games but Gabriel Bourque got his first goal of the season. I've said a lot of negative things about his game this year but I'm genuinely happy for him. He's a guy who works hard and maximizes his talent every day and seeing him get a little reward in a trying season for him is nice. He's a good dude who deserves good things.

Personally, I will be very curious to see if Jack Eichel faces any discipline from the league on his hit to the head of Carl Soderberg. Because Soderberg appeared totally fine, I'd be surprised if anything came of it but I agree with Bednar, who said postgame the hit was "all head." I can understand officials missing the severity of it live but with slowed down looks, the league office would not be in the wrong to give Eichel's hit a long look.

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1135167 Colorado Avalanche

Avs-Sabres grades: Smoke show

BY ADRIAN DATER

MARCH 9, 2019

Mikko Rantanen (A) – I thought Mikko was excellent. That was a classic wait-him-out Mikko patience goal there in the third, on the PP. Mikko made Carter Hutton commit with his patience, then went top cookies. He became the third Avs player to hit the 30-goal mark, the first time that's happened since 1995-96 (Forsberg, Sakic, Lemieux).

Nathan MacKinnon (X) – Such a great goal he scored. Go back and watch it. He gets cross-checked from behind by Jack Eichel, gets back on his feet, still with possession of the puck, goes around a defender at the blue line and beats Carter Hutton top shelf from 30 feet. Might have been his best goal of the year. Also assisted on Mikko's goal and on the empty-netter.

He gets the fourth X grade I've ever given out – a game so good it was filthy.

Derick Brassard (A-) – I thought Brassard was real good in his first game on a line, at left wing, with MacK. Had the puck a lot and he wasn't shy in shooting it. Good defensively too. This is why the Avs got him at the deadline. He set a great screen on Rantanen's goal that made it 2-0. That's what he does. He goes to the net.

Carl Soderberg (A-) – Too bad he took a dirty hit from Jack Eichel, a blindside hit to the head that might earn the Sabres captain a suspension. Good thing was, he got back up and played like Carl does – hard and tough and at both ends.

J.T. Compher (A-) – He played a pain-in-the-arse game, always getting into it with some Sabre. I thought that helped get Sabres forwards off their game a bit. When you're thinking more about getting even with a guy instead of playing hockey, you've already lost.

Alexander Kerfoot (B+) – He made some nice passes today and skated well. Had a good day in the faceoff dot too. He needs to score some goals down the stretch, though, to take some heat off the top guys, especially with Landy out.

Matt Calvert (B+) – Good game for Calvy. He was just tough around the net and on the forecheck.

Gabriel Bourque (A) – He scored! He scored! Hey, an empty-netter, but the man scored. His first of the season, in his 42nd game.

Sven Andrighetto (A-) – Like a lot of Avs, had excellent puck-possession numbers (9 Corsi for, 1 against). Yeah, it would be nice if he could find the scoring touch again, but baby steps.

Colin Wilson (B) – Strong Corsi numbers, but not much when it came to offensive chances, etc.

Andrew Agozzino (B) – Kind of the same thing I just said about Wilson. Only played 7:52 though. He did fine considering.

Tyson Jost (B) – He kicked a puck backward that led to a breakaway the other way. Fortunately for him, he was bailed out by Grubauer. It was a bad pass by Sam Girard before the kick, but Jost needs to be smarter there. Otherwise, he was good.

Nikita Zadorov (A) – Had monster Corsi numbers (23 for, 9 against). He single-handedly turned the game into a chippy affair with a big hit on Jack Eichel in the first period. It was a late hit, for sure, but it changed the complexion of the game in a good way for the Avs I think. Well, but here's the thing: that might earn him a suspension too. We'll see.

Erik Johnson (A) – Just like I advocated in a column yesterday, EJ played a much more offensive game, jumping into the play a lot more than before. He had four shots on goal, the most he's had in a game since Feb. 12.

Sam Girard (A-) – Strong game I thought, even though he passed up a couple of good scoring chances for the extra pass.

Tyson Barrie (A-) – A frustrating day for him personally in a sense, getting robbed a couple times on chances. But his Corsi was 22-8. Strong game.

Ian Cole (B+) – Mostly solid game by a veteran D-man. He was part of an Avs core that gave Buffalo next to nothing today.

Patrik Nemeth (B+) – Ibid.

Philipp Grubauer (A) – I mean, he could have played the game in a recliner, but don't forget about that breakaway save on Sam Reinhart when it was a scoreless game. It was his second shutout in the last three starts. Does he maybe get the next start, against Carolina? He was awesome against the Bunch of Jerks in Carolina earlier this year.

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1135168 Colorado Avalanche

MacKinnon Grubauer lead Avs to 3-0 win over Sabres

Staff Report

March 09, 2019 09:08 PM

DENVER (AP) - Nathan MacKinnon bounced up from a big check to score a nifty goal. That helped the Colorado Avalanche bounce back from the blow of losing their captain.

MacKinnon had a goal and two assists, Philipp Grubauer stopped 18 shots for his second shutout of the season and the playoff-chasing Avalanche beat the Buffalo Sabres 3-0 on Saturday.

Mikko Rantanen scored on the power play and Gabriel Bourque added a full-length, empty-net goal as the Avalanche played without captain Gabriel Landeskog, who's sidelined four-to-six weeks due to an upper-



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 10, 2019

body injury. Colorado sits two points behind Minnesota for the final wild-card spot with 13 games remaining.

"It's good that everyone stepped up," MacKinnon said. "We have to have this same effort to try and fill that void."

MacKinnon made it 1-0 early in the second period when he was knocked down by a check in the back by Jack Eichel near center ice. MacKinnon quickly scrambled to his skates with the puck, glided past defenseman Rasmus Dahlin at the blue line and lined a shot over the glove of Carter Hutton. It was MacKinnon's 35th goal of the season.

"A great shot," Colorado coach Jared Bednar said. "We've seen it before and hopefully we see it a lot more."

The Sabres dropped their fourth straight on coach Phil Housley's 55th birthday. Hutton turned back 40 shots in a game that was filled with plenty of minor skirmishes once the whistle sounded.

"We are counting on our goaltender too much," Housley said. "He bailed us out too much."

Rantanen's 30th goal of the season gave Colorado a 2-0 lead midway through the third and Bourque added his first goal of the season to wrap up the win. Grubauer made 11 of his saves in the third period as Colorado outshot the Sabres by a 43-18 margin.

"If we keep playing the way we played today it's going to be really hard for teams," Grubauer said. "A lot of great stuff today."

Eichel was frequently at the center of the action, drawing a penalty for an illegal check to the head on Carl Soderberg in the second period.

That after Eichel was on the receiving end of a big check in the opening period. Eichel was skating along the boards when hard-hitting Colorado defenseman Nikita Zadorov hit Eichel in the shoulder area and knocked off Eichel's helmet. Buffalo players raced to the defense of their young center. Several players were sent to the penalty box for roughing, including Zadorov, who was drafted by Buffalo in 2013 before being dealt to Colorado two years later.

"He hits me after they (expletive), excuse my language, they blow the whistle," Eichel said. "Whatever. ... They were more desperate than we were."

Near the end of a scoreless first period, Sam Reinhart had a breakaway after he flew out of the penalty box following his elapsed penalty. He was stopped by the left pad of a sprawling Grubauer.

"The key save for me," Bednar said. "That's something we have to have this time of the year. You need better than average goaltending and we got it today."

The Avalanche were missing a big chunk of their offense in the absence of Landeskog, who was hurt Thursday at Dallas when he collided with Stars goaltender Ben Bishop. Landeskog has 33 goals this season.

"Start to finish, that might have been our best game all year," defenseman Erik Johnson said.

NOTES: Sabres D Jake McCabe (upper body) missed a third straight game. ... Colorado D Tyson Barrie recorded his 40th assist of the season. ... Colorado beat Buffalo 6-1 on Oct. 11. ...The only other Avalanche team to feature three 30-goal scorers was the 1995-96 club, which had four: Joe Sakic (51), Claude Lemieux (39), Valeri Kamensky (38) and Peter Forsberg (30).

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1135169 Columbus Blue Jackets

Victory puts needed charge in Blue Jackets' playoff hopes

Michael Arace

Posted Mar 9, 2019 at 11:39 PM Updated Mar 9, 2019 at 11:40 PM

The Blue Jackets beat the Pittsburgh Penguins. There, it has been written in your lifetime.

OK, that's a bit hyperbolic — but, golly, it has been a long time. The last time the Jackets posted a regular-season victory over the Penguins was Feb. 17, 2017. The last regular-season game the Jackets won in regulation against the Penguins was on Dec. 17, 2016. Remember that 7-1 romp just before Christmas?

The streaks ended Saturday night in Nationwide Arena, where the Jackets drew away to a 4-1 victory before an electrified, sellout crowd. Goaltender Sergei Bobrovsky played like he doesn't need a sports psychologist.

Everyone knows about Bobrovsky's playoff problems. They started with the Penguins in 2014. They continued with the Penguins in 2017.

On Saturday night, Bob outdueled Matt Murray — one of the hottest goalies in the league over the past three months. He can say anything he wants about his process and his focus, but this game had to ease a particular pain buried deep in his hippocampus.

"Statistics live in the past," Bobrovsky said. "You go out there and you create history."

Yes, he was feeling it.

Cam Atkinson had two goals, one unassisted and short-handed, the other an empty-netter. Two of the new guys — Matt Duchene and Ryan Dzingel — neatly set up the killer goal by Oliver Bjorkstrand. It put the Jackets up by two late in the third period and allowed the home fans, if not the usual contingent of Penguins fans on hand, to breathe. And to roar.

The Jackets needed this for so many reasons. They are two games over .500 (and are maintaining a negative goal differential) at home this season. They are a game over .500 in this calendar year. They are 3-4 since the trade deadline, when they made deals that were supposed to jolt them with offense and deepen their defense.

It has been depressing to the hard-core fans who thought the Jackets were a playoff lock before the deadline — and were stoked when general manager Jarmo Kekalainen went "all in" at the deadline. They've been filling Nationwide, hankering for some home cooking.

They finally got a taste, against the hated Penguins.

"I have so many things to worry about, I can't get worried about the crowd," Jackets coach John Tortorella said. "But I thought they were a big part of it. I thought they really gave us some juice. ...

"You're damn right. I think we've had a lot of situations where the crowd's there and we've laid a lot of eggs this season. I'm glad. I think they helped us and I hope we returned it the right way for them. Because it's a long time coming where we've had opportunities like this a number of times this year and we basically, uh, didn't get the job done. I have other words for it, but I'll leave it at that."

The playoff race is so tight among the teams fighting for a place among the top three in the Metropolitan Division, and for the two wild-card spots in the Eastern Conference, that the Jackets have just as good a shot as their closest competitors. Beating the Penguins, at home, injected some more hope.

Are the Carolina Hurricanes better than the Jackets? Are the Montreal Canadiens, who had a tenuous hold on the No. 2 wild card heading into the weekend?



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 10, 2019

If the Jackets have been mediocre for quite a spell here, it's not out of the realm of possibility that they could be out-mediocred by the Canes, Canadiens and maybe even the Islanders. In fact, it's not a bad bet. The odds improved Saturday night.

Who knows? Maybe the Jackets get hot. They are certainly due.

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1135170 Columbus Blue Jackets

Settling in takes time for Matt Duchene, Ryan Dzingel

By Brian Hedger

The Columbus Dispatch

@BrianHedger

Saturday

Posted Mar 9, 2019 at 10:16 PM Updated Mar 9, 2019 at 10:16 PM

It has been two weeks since the Blue Jackets made a splash with trades to get Matt Duchene and Ryan Dzingel from the Ottawa Senators.

It hasn't been an easy transition for either, including a choppy flight from Ottawa that included a white-knuckle landing in Buffalo, New York, to clear customs. It's been turbulent in other ways as the former Senators assimilate to life with the Blue Jackets.

"You think it would be easy," said Dzingel, who played for Ohio State. "You have it set up (in your mind) that you're going to get traded and you know a couple weeks in advance, but it's not (easy). It's a new city, living in a hotel, you have family trying to get down to see you. Everything's weird."

He means literally everything — from a new system to new roles and new teammates to living out of a hotel.

"You're trying to get all your stuff out of your old place (in Ottawa), wearing the same socks every day ... not really, but it's a little bit different lifestyle," Dzingel said. "You just have to get used to it."

It's the first trade for Dzingel, 26, who is playing his fourth NHL season. Everything about the process is new. Duchene, 28, experienced life after a trade last season, when the Colorado Avalanche dealt him to Ottawa on Nov. 5, 2017.

"Every team has different styles and systems, but at the end of the day, hockey's hockey," Duchene said. "For me last year, when I got traded to Ottawa, it took a little while for my teammates to get acquainted with me and vice-versa. It's coming every game (here)."

Time is the issue. The Blue Jackets have just 14 games left after playing the Pittsburgh Penguins on Saturday night, and they're locked in a tight race for a playoff spot. Duchene went into the game with only three points in seven games as a Blue Jacket (one goal, two assists), and Dzingel had two assists in six games.

"I'm getting there," Duchene said, when asked if he's feeling more comfortable. "Once pucks start to go in for me and my linemates it'll feel even better, but sometimes you've got to work through that. It's kind of the first little slump I've gone through this year, but I've been through it before."

Dzingel is also feeling more at ease.

"The first couple games were weird," he said. "At first, I came in here just trying not to step on anyone's toes and make sure everyone's OK, but you've got to put the pedal down and play your game, too. It's definitely been a learning lesson for me in my first trade."

Upon further review

Blue Jackets coach John Tortorella didn't challenge the Penguins' second goal for potential offside Thursday at PPG Paints Arena because neither he nor video coach Dan Singleton could find the puck in midair as it crossed the blue line.

Two days after the Jackets' 3-0 loss, he had a more definitive take.

"I thought (Penguins goalie Matt Murray) played very well at certain times in the game, as (Joonas Korpisalo) did with us," he said, before addressing the goal by Pittsburgh's Nick Bjugstad. "The second goal's offside, too."

Bob's back

After getting an unexpected night off Thursday in Pittsburgh, Sergei Bobrovsky returned to the Jackets' net Saturday. Korpisalo handled the backup role and Keith Kinkaid was a healthy scratch.

Quotable

"We're playing Pittsburgh tonight and you guys (media) can talk about the record. It doesn't matter what the record was before. We never talk about it." — Tortorella on the Penguins' eight-game winning streak against the Jackets before the game Saturday.

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1135171 Columbus Blue Jackets

Blue Jackets 4, Penguins 1 | Sweet success for Jackets

By Brian Hedger

The Columbus Dispatch

@BrianHedger

Posted Mar 9, 2019 at 9:49 PM Updated Mar 9, 2019 at 11:41 PM

They'd had enough of it.

Oh, sure, the Blue Jackets clung to their claim that an eight-game losing streak against the Pittsburgh Penguins didn't mean anything to them, but their actions betrayed their words Saturday night at Nationwide Arena.

The Jackets, who ended the skid with a 4-1 victory, put everything they had into their final crack at the Penguins this season — outshooting them 22-13, outshooting them 33-29 and finally outscoring them for the first time since Feb. 17, 2017.

"Statistics live in the past, you know?" said Blue Jackets goaltender Sergei Bobrovsky, who made some great stops among his 28 saves to overcome a personal struggle against the Penguins. "So, you go out there and you create the history, actually. That's it."

This time, the Blue Jackets (38-27-3) created some happier history, for themselves and their fans nestled amongst Penguins fans inside the sold-out arena.

They gave the local backers something to crow about, for once, moving back into the second wild card in the Eastern Conference with an impressive effort from start to finish.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 10, 2019

The Jackets took it to the Penguins and didn't let up until the final horn, getting two goals from Cam Atkinson and one each from Boone Jenner and Oliver Bjorkstrand.

Bobrovsky, who was healthy scratch Thursday in the Penguins' 3-0 victory at PPG Paints Arena, was a major factor, helping the Jackets go 3 of 3 killing penalties and allowing just one goal, by Zach Aston-Reese 6:39 into the second period.

His teammates, meanwhile, played like the team most assumed they could be after adding four players before the Feb. 25 trade deadline. The Jackets were aggressive and physical, making assertive reads all game.

They helped Bobrovsky with some heady plays in front of their net and made life difficult for Penguins goaltender Matt Murray (29 saves), who made three fantastic stops against Jenner in the first (lunging stick save), Markus Nutivaara in the second (desperate blocker stop) and Josh Anderson in the third (sprawling right pad denial).

Jenner got one past him 2:31 into the game, though, 11 seconds after getting out of the penalty box, taking a pass from Anderson and burying a wrist shot past Murray for his 12th goal and Anderson's 100th career point.

It was the start of an exciting period, which had a mix of pushing, shoving, hard hitting and scoring chances — almost all in favor of the Blue Jackets. A Penguins power play in the second led to Atkinson's first goal, and he scored the second one into an empty net to seal it, 2:12 after Bjorkstrand's goal off a great pass from Ryan Dzingel.

"We play like that, we're a dangerous team and it can't be a one and done," said Atkinson, who set a career-highs with his fourth short-handed goal and 38th overall. "It's exciting. Our fans are amazing, especially when we play the right way. And we owed it to them, especially against Pittsburgh."

Columbus Dispatch LOADED: 03.10.2019

1135172 Columbus Blue Jackets

Blue Jackets 4, Penguins 1 | Sweet success for Jackets

By Brian Hedger

The Columbus Dispatch

@BrianHedger

Posted Mar 9, 2019 at 9:49 PM Updated Mar 9, 2019 at 11:41 PM

They'd had enough of it.

Oh, sure, the Blue Jackets clung to their claim that an eight-game losing streak against the Pittsburgh Penguins didn't mean anything to them, but their actions betrayed their words Saturday night at Nationwide Arena.

The Jackets, who ended the skid with a 4-1 victory, put everything they had into their final crack at the Penguins this season — outshooting them 22-13, outshooting them 33-29 and finally outscoring them for the first time since Feb. 17, 2017.

"Statistics live in the past, you know?" said Blue Jackets goaltender Sergei Bobrovsky, who made some great stops among his 28 saves to overcome a personal struggle against the Penguins. "So, you go out there and you create the history, actually. That's it."

This time, the Blue Jackets (38-27-3) created some happier history, for themselves and their fans nestled amongst Penguins fans inside the sold-out arena.

They gave the local backers something to crow about, for once, moving back into the second wild card in the Eastern Conference with an impressive effort from start to finish.

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Columbus Dispatch LOADED: 03.10.2019

1135173 Columbus Blue Jackets

How a Saturday morning adjustment paid big dividends in Blue Jackets' streak-busting win

By Tom Reed

Mar 9, 2019

COLUMBUS — Streaking into the attacking zone, Ryan Dzingel accepted a pass in the high slot from Matt Duchene and resisted his first impulse.

The Blue Jackets winger wanted to shoot the puck. Load up the musket with 3:02 remaining in a one-goal game and fire it from the top of the circles.

Many fans in the sellout crowd expected a shot. So did Zach Trotman — the only Penguins defender between Dzingel and goaltender Matt Murray.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 10, 2019

Hockey is an endless series of split-second decisions. The Blue Jackets winger had to make a big one at winning time. In that instant, Dzingel remembered a point of emphasis from Saturday morning's meeting with John Tortorella and the coaching staff.

The subject was the Penguins' penchant for blocking shots. They had blocked 24 on Thursday in Pittsburgh's 3-0 win against the Blue Jackets at PPG Paints Arena.

"I had that in the back of my head, and luckily it worked out," Dzingel said.

The winger froze the Penguins defenseman, who had started to crouch down, before stepping around him and feathering the puck to a wide-open Oliver Bjorkstrand, parked a few feet in front of the right post. Murray had to respect Dzingel's prime shooting position and was helpless to defend Bjorkstrand's tap-in goal.

A nervy one-goal lead was replaced by a 3-1 advantage en route to a vital 4-1 victory in front of 19,146 fans. The win thrust the Blue Jackets back into a playoff spot and snapped an eight-game losing skid to the Penguins.

"That's a really good play by Zinger at the end to (set up) a pretty important goal for us," Tortorella said.

Adjustments. Sports fans are inundated with the word during the broadcasts of sporting events. New England Patriots coach Bill Belichick is considered the master of halftime adjustments in football. Steve Kerr makes terrific tweaks for his dynastic Golden State Warriors in basketball.

They happen in hockey, too, but given the speed and free-flowing nature of the sport, they are sometimes more difficult to execute. There just aren't many set plays other than faceoffs.

But when the Blue Jackets arrived for morning skate, Tortorella addressed the bevy of blocked shots from Thursday's matchup. The Penguins rank eighth in the NHL in blocks, averaging 15.25 per game. The selfless, painful sacrifice served them well in their recent back-to-back Stanley Cup triumphs.

Blue Jackets fans should recall how effective Pittsburgh was early in the 2017 opening-round series when so many potential scoring chances caromed off Penguins' shin pads and body parts.

"They always have layers," Tortorella said. "I know the coach over there. He's always going to have layers blocking shots."

Penguins coach Mike Sullivan was a longtime Tortorella assistant. With the Rangers, they turned shot-blocking into a black-and-blue art form in the 2012 playoffs. Poor Dan Girardi probably still has bruises from the second-round series against the Capitals seven years ago.

Coaches often use video clips to illustrate their points in meetings. That was unnecessary Saturday morning. The Blue Jackets understood what Tortorella was saying without visuals.

Comprehending it in a meeting is one thing. Executing it on the ice in the heat of a playoff race is entirely different.

But on multiple occasions Saturday night, the Blue Jackets demonstrated restraint in key moments. They held onto pucks for an extra second as Penguins dropped to the ice anticipating shots. Sometimes, Columbus players changed the angle on shots. Sometimes, they moved laterally and either shot or passed the puck to an open teammate.

"They are a good team at blocking shots," said Cam Atkinson, who scored a pair of goals. "You make a fake and walk around, and it's amazing what it opens up."

In the second period, Atkinson was in the high slot and thought about shooting. Instead, he drifted to his right as Evgeni Malkin plopped to the ice. Atkinson whipped the puck to Pierre-Luc Dubois, who fed it to Markus Nutivaara cutting to the net.

Murray made a spectacular stop to rob the Finnish defenseman.

In the third period, a similar fake led to a power play as Penguins winger Jake Guentzel was boxed for interference.

"I thought we did a better job (of holding onto pucks)," Tortorella said, on a night Pittsburgh finished with 10 blocks.

The biggest payoff came on the Bjorkstrand clincher.

Nutivaara did a marvelous job keeping the puck in the zone at the left point after Trotman attempted to clear it along the wall. The puck popped in the air and Duchene, who arguably played his best game with the Blue Jackets, gloved it to the ice and spotted Dzingel barreling into the zone.

"I was going to shoot right away and (Trotman) went down to block it," Dzingel said. "I've been getting blocked a lot so I just tried to walk around him."

On Thursday, Trotman took a puck to the face and barely missed a shift while recovering. Two nights later, the Penguins defenseman got his ankles broken on Dzingel's fake. Trotman stumbled and fell.

In the NBA, such a clip goes viral.

Once past the fallen Trotman, Dzingel still had a decision to make. Shoot the puck at Murray, who made a handful of tremendous saves, or pass it to Bjorkstrand. If the pass had failed to connect, the sound of a groaning, second-guessing crowd would have been louder than a cannon blast.

But the feed was true and the Danish winger tapped it home for his 14th goal of the season to complete a perfect play.

"That pretty much ended it," Duchene said. "It was nice to get that one before (the Penguins) pulled their goalie and not have to white knuckle it to the end. It was a great play by Zing when he found Bjorky backdoor."

It was a play that started with a great pinch from Nutivaara. It was a finishing move that started with a productive Saturday morning meeting.

The Athletic LOADED: 03.10.2019

1135174 Columbus Blue Jackets

With so much at stake, Blue Jackets exact a measure of revenge vs. Pens

By Aaron Portzline

Mar 9, 2019

COLUMBUS, Ohio — The phrase "must-win game" gets thrown around like parade candy this time of year. There's less than a month remaining in the 2018-19 regular season, and the NHL standings change dramatically from one day to the next. Every win a party, every loss a funeral.

Saturday's game against Pittsburgh was truly not a must-win game for the Blue Jackets, but it started to have a similar feel when you considered all that was at stake.

The Blue Jackets hadn't played well for a couple of weeks. GM Jarmo Kekalainen added significant players at the NHL trade deadline, but it almost seemed as if the team's identity and confidence — not just its draft picks — were sent packing.

A win over the Penguins was important because the Blue Jackets were suddenly looking up to see the two wild-card teams in the Eastern



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 10, 2019

Conference. But it also mattered because the Blue Jackets hadn't beaten Pittsburgh in more than two years.

The Blue Jackets finally brought it all together — their energy level, forechecking, strong goaltending and offensive confidence. Before 19,147, the largest crowd in Nationwide Arena this season, the Blue Jackets beat the Penguins 4-1.

"We've been building toward this," Blue Jackets center Matt Duchene said. "We knew we needed to win this one. This was an absolute must-win, no doubt about it.

"(Beating Pittsburgh) is a little hurdle we had to get over. I felt like both games (including Tuesday's 3-0 loss) we could have won against them. Tonight I felt like we were the better team from start to finish, and when we needed Bob (goaltender Sergei Bobrovsky) he was there and played great. Hopefully, something like this kickstarts us."

So ended an eight-game losing streak by the Blue Jackets against the Penguins, one that dated to Feb. 17, 2017.

Boone Jenner scored the all-important first goal, Cam Atkinson had two goals (short-handed and empty-net) and Oliver Bjorkstrand scored a much-needed insurance goal late in the third.

But it was Bobrovsky, whose struggles have mirrored (caused?) his club's struggles against Pittsburgh in recent seasons, who was the revelation. He made 28 saves and looked perfectly composed against a club that had beaten him in 10 of his last 11 outings.

"It doesn't really matter actually what's been in the past," Bobrovsky said. "It doesn't matter what the score was last time we played, stuff like that. It doesn't really matter.

"Statistics live in the past. You are to go out there and create the history."

The Blue Jackets set a physical tone early in the game, nearly sparking a line brawl five minutes into the game when Pierre-Luc Dubois brushed past Pittsburgh's Patric Hornqvist, and Hornqvist responded by trying to fight Dubois.

What followed was a telling scene for how the Blue Jackets approached this game: Artemi Panarin jumped in front of Hornqvist and gave him a series of face washes before they were separated.

"We played the right way for the first time in a little bit," said Atkinson, who now has 38 goals. "It shows how well we can play, and we have to continue to do that.

"We were connected, forechecking hard. We had two guys in there battling, creating turnovers and hitting and playing the right way. We were in the right spots."

Jenner took a slashing penalty only 20 seconds into the game, but the Blue Jackets killed the penalty with ease and took a 1-0 lead when Jenner stepped out of the box and into an offensive rush.

Anderson had two Penguins on him as he entered the attack zone, but managed to get the puck over to Jenner for a clean look on Penguins goaltender Matt Murray. Jenner beat Murray to his stick side for a 1-0 lead at 2:31.

The Jackets took a 2-0 lead on the kind of break that usually befalls the Penguins in these games. Phil Kessel, skating the puck up the ice on the power play, simply tripped over his own two skates, allowing the puck to dribble ahead of him.

Atkinson gathered it, skated past the pile of Kessel and beat Murray for a 2-0 lead only 2:17 into the second.

The Blue Jackets may be most excited about the 3-1 goal, scored by Bjorkstrand with 3:01 remaining. Not only was it a dagger for the Penguins, but it involved two of the club's recently added players.

After a strong keep-in at the blue line by Markus Nutivaara, Matt Duchene gathered the puck on the left side half-wall and waited for

options. He fed Ryan Dzingel coming through the slot, and Dzingel weaved his way around a Penguins defender to set up Bjorkstrand on the doorstep.

"We played better with the puck," Blue Jackets coach John Tortorella said. "Made more plays.

"You can see ... still a number of guys are looking to get involved. But two new guys ... they want to be a part of this. They want to join in. That's a big goal by that line."

The Blue Jackets needed a win. They needed two points.

But earning a win over Pittsburgh made it feel like more than two points, even though Blue Jackets players and coaches (well, Tortorella) routinely acted as if ending the eight-game losing streak was meaningless.

Jenner: "Didn't even think about it, not gonna lie."

Tortorella: "It's a mental hurdle for you guys (in the media). You guys talk about it all the time. I'm not trying to be a smartass. I really think ... I don't think they really think about that much. I know ... you could see it growing. It's a really good game when these two teams play in either building. I don't think that team gets wrapped up in it either, as far as how many wins they have against us, whatever it is. When the puck is dropped, it's two competitive teams that are developing that stuff, playing some good games against one another."

Notebook

Bobrovsky had been 1-7-3 with an .880 save percentage and 3.89 goals-against average vs. Pittsburgh dating to April 4, 2017. Those numbers include the first-round playoff series in 2017-18.

Here's Bobrovsky: "Personally, I didn't think about how many, what's the streak, how are the statistics in the past. ... every game is a new game. I prepare myself for the one game at a time, and that's it. I didn't think about last time we played them, didn't try to watch the tape (to see) what they do. I tried to keep my mind clean and just try to compete against these guys today."

Here's Tortorella on Bobrovsky: "Bob has told me he's mentally good. He's physically good. Even if I played him in Pittsburgh, he's good. I thought he looked ... not a lot of extra movement. I don't know a hell of a lot about goaltending. But I know the goalies I've had ... and when I think they look confident. Pittsburgh's always around that net. Bob fought to see the puck and made some saves that were harder saves than they looked like after he finished his business. He did a really good job. I thought he was really confident in how he played. He's set. He's set. He was a big part of it tonight."

Bobrovsky, who is now 12-8-5 all-time vs. Pittsburgh, was given a night off Thursday when the Penguins won 3-0 in Pittsburgh. Not just a night as the backup, but an off night. He sat in the press box and watched the game while Keith Kinkaid served as Joonas Korpisalo's backup.

Yes, Bobrovsky was very good. But Penguins goaltender Matt Murray, who finished with 29 saves, was exceptional. "He had some unbelievable saves," Bobrovsky said. "Like three, maybe four (unbelievable) saves." Murray robbed Jenner of a second goal by making a paddle save in front of an open net during the first period. He also went left to right so quickly in the second period that Markus Nutivaara, alone in front of the net, couldn't believe he'd somehow brushed aside the puck. Nutivaara's left hand started up in celebration before he saw the puck at this feet beside the net.

Atkinson, with 38 goals, is now tied for the third-most single-season goals in franchise history. Rick Nash had 38 in 2007-08. Nash also had 41 in 2003-04 and 40 in 2008-09.

Atkinson's first goal was short-handed, his fourth of the season and 12th of his career. Only Nash — him again — has more short-handed goals for the Blue Jackets (14).



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 10, 2019

Jenner's goal at 2:31 of the first period ended the Blue Jackets' goal drought at 126 minutes, 39 seconds. The Jackets hadn't scored since the first minute (52 seconds) of a 2-1 shootout win in New Jersey on Tuesday.

The Blue Jackets got a beastly performance from their "identity line," with Jenner, Nick Foligno and Josh Anderson setting a tone right from the start of the game. Anderson finished with seven shots on goal and seven hits to lead the way. Jenner had the 1-0 goal with assists from Anderson and Foligno.

Panarin was slashed in the first period by Pittsburgh's Zach Aston-Reese, drawing a penalty. Panarin continued to play, but he was spotted on the bench getting a numbing agent applied to his hand.

The Blue Jackets had been 3-7-1 during sold-out games in Nationwide Arena this season, or 3-10-1 if you go back through the first round of the Stanley Cup playoffs last spring. The three previous wins were vs. Toronto, Ottawa and San Jose ... not exactly on the list of most-hated opponents (yet).

Here's Tortorella, who has made clear his disappointment in this stat all season: "I don't get too wrapped up in it. I can't. I have too many other things to worry about. I can't worry about the crowd. I thought they were a big part of it tonight. I thought they really gave us some juice. We've had situations where the crowd is there and we have laid a lot of eggs this year. I think they helped us, and I hope we returned it the right way for them. It's a long time coming where we've had opportunities like this a number of times and we (pause) didn't get the job done ... I have other words for it."

The Blue Jackets' penalty kill was perfect once again: 3 for 3, and scored a short-handed goal. When the Jackets acquired Ryan Dzingel at the trade deadline, his ability to kill penalties was mentioned as one of his strengths. So far, though, he's seen limited time on the kill — 0:00 Saturday night — as he gets acclimated to the Blue Jackets' hyper-aggressive style.

Three of Duchene's first nine games with the Blue Jackets have been against the Penguins. He's gotten a quick taste of what the rivalry is about. "Tonight was fun," he said. "There was a ton of energy in the building. In Pittsburgh, it was obviously a good crowd. Tonight I felt like our fans were outstanding for us. There's obviously a good bunch of Pittsburgh fans in the building, so it creates a rivalry in the crowd. It was fun to play out there tonight."

Penguins forward Patric Hornqvist matched a career-low with a minus-4 rating, something he'd done only once before in his 704-game career.

Analytically speaking

The Athletic's hockey data dynamo Alison Lukan provided these insights into the Blue Jackets' loss:

The Jackets came out strong in the first period, dipped a bit in the second, but then rebounded for another strong 20 minutes in the third to earn the win over Pittsburgh. On the whole, Columbus gained the edge in shot attempts (51.12 percent), scoring chances (51.77 percent) and high-danger attempts (56.09 percent) according to naturalstatstrick.com.

While the Jackets owned the offensive battles from a volume perspective, the Penguins had more quality looks. The expected goal total, according to MoneyPuck.com, was 3.47 to 2.39 in favor of Pittsburgh. But Bobrovsky was a difference-maker. In 60 minutes of play, Bobrovsky's save percentage was 3.73 above expectations given the shots he faced. That means he saved the equivalent of 1.53 goals against.

It was a monster of a game for Atkinson. Not only did he score twice, but he led the team in shot share (66.67 percent) and scoring chances (70 percent). He also generated the best individual chances of the night. The All-Star had nine shot attempts, seven on target, and totaled 32.73 percent of the team's quality chances.

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1135145 Buffalo Sabres

Nylander extends goal streak in Amerks' win at Binghamton

By Staff

Published Sat, Mar 9, 2019|Updated Sat, Mar 9, 2019

Alexander Nylander scored a goal for the fourth straight game and Victor Olofsson and Taylor Leier each scored a pair for the Rochester Americans Saturday night in a 5-3 victory over the Binghamton Devils before 4,318 at the Floyd L. Maines Veterans Memorial Arena in Binghamton.

Leier scored his first of the game and Nylander, the 21-year-old winger tallied on the power play to get the Amerks off in front in the opening period.

Binghamton tied it in the second on goals by Nikita Popugaev and Marian Studenic but Olofsson scored his 22nd and 23rd of the season to put the Amerks in front to stay before the middle period was over.

Sam Kurker made it 4-3 with a goal for the Devils at 6:44 of the third, but that was it for Binghamton.

Leier, who has scored seven goals for Rochester after coming from the Philadelphia Flyers organization in a trade last month for Justin Bailey, got an empty-net score with 36 seconds left.

The Amerks will be home against Binghamton at 3:05 p.m. Sunday to complete their three-games-in-three-days weekend.

Rochester (37-18-5, 79 points) remains in second place in the North Division of the American Hockey League one point behind Syracuse (37-17-6). The Crunch lost to the Wilkes-Barre Scranton, 4-3, in overtime on Saturday night to maintain their edge over the Amerks.

The Amerks are 1-5 against Binghamton on the season with three more games remaining between the teams in the AHL regular season. Rochester will be home to Utica on Wednesday night before a two-game road series on Friday and Saturday at Charlotte.

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1135146 Buffalo Sabres

In battle of big hits, Jack Eichel offers some rare Sabres pushback

By Mike Harrington

Published Sat, Mar 9, 2019|Updated Sat, Mar 9, 2019

DENVER — Jack Eichel took a big hit and gave one back Saturday. He was still dishing out in the dressing room after the game, too.

The word has been out on the Buffalo Sabres for several weeks. Take them physically. Work Eichel and Rasmus Dahlin, in particular, to grind the Sabres down. There's not going to be a whole lot of response. Who on this roster, especially among the forwards, has that kind of grit and sandpaper in their game?



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 10, 2019

In the aftermath of Saturday's 3-0 loss to the Colorado Avalanche in Pepsi Center, it's clear that Eichel is getting fed up with his team's passive nature. The dressing room doors were closed a few minutes longer than normal and when they were open, Eichel was sitting and waiting for the media to get a few things off his chest.

After taking a high, late drilling into the boards from Colorado defenseman Nikita Zadorov in the first period, Eichel clobbered Avs center Carl Soderberg with an illegal check to the head late in the second period. It's conceivable Eichel could be facing his first career hearing with the NHL's Department of Player Safety.

Replays appeared to show Eichel "picking" Soderberg's head on the play in the neutral zone with just less than 5 1/2 minutes left in the second period. It's not unlike the play that resulted in a two-game suspension last month for Edmonton star Connor McDavid against New York Islanders defenseman Nick Leddy.

"You've just got to play physical," Eichel said. "I mean, it's a physical game, right? That's it. That's all it is. Finish your checks. Other teams like to do it to us. I don't see why we don't do it back. Everyone can finish a check and make it hard on the other team."

Sabres coach Phil Housley didn't think Eichel would get any look from the league on his hit.

Sabres hope to keep their secondary scoring moving in matchup with Avalanche FRI, MAR 8, 2019

"I'm not concerned at all," Housley said. "The first call against Zadorov, the whistle goes and it's a hit to the head and we only come out with a two-minute power play."

The Avalanche, of course, had their opinion as well.

"He comes from across the rink and all he gets was his head," Colorado coach Jared Bednar said of Eichel. The officials "are watching it live and some guys may be looking in the opposite direction. But now that I look at it, it's a bad hit. It's all head."

Eichel pleaded innocence on his hit.

"I thought he was just reaching. I don't know. I'd have to look at it, to be honest with you," Eichel said. "I'm trying to protect myself. It's a physical game. I think he's going to deliver a hit to me."

"It seems like they were taking runs a little bit at times. If I'm going to be at the forefront of it, I might as well push back a little bit. I've got to protect myself."

Eichel was aggravated by the hit he took along the boards from Zadorov, which was clearly after a whistle for offsides. Zadorov, the former Buffalo first-round draft pick traded here for Ryan O'Reilly in 2015, got plenty of head too and even punctuated it by ripping off Eichel's helmet.

"He hits me after they (bleeping), excuse my language, blow the whistle," a disgusted Eichel said. "That's whatever."

The closest player to Zadorov was Casey Nelson, who did his best Paul Gaustad impression by skating to Zadorov, standing in front of him and not doing much else. Credit, however, to the rest of the Sabres on the ice.

Marco Scandella charged over, grabbed Zadorov by the face and pulled him down. Sam Reinhart came flying in throwing punches in the pile and Jeff Skinner sprinted toward the fray as well but was cut off by Avs winger Mikko Rantanen, so Skinner engaged him briefly to earn a roughing call.

"I'm trying to get over there as fast as I can," Reinhart said. "The whistle clearly goes. Trying to get as many shots in on him as I can at that point."

"I really didn't like the hit," Skinner said. "Everyone on the ice didn't like the hit and there was a little bit of a scrum."

Housley didn't want to go into any deep discussion about the Sabres' physicality or lack thereof. But this really started in earnest with the 1-0 loss Jan. 30 in Dallas, as the Stars worked over Dahlin quite a bit. Oddly enough, Dallas comes to town Tuesday for the Sabres' next game.

Buffalo has to be better than it was in this one. There was no pushback generated by the Zadorov-Eichel hit. The Sabres had nine shots on goal in the first 53 minutes of play and were outshot for the game, 43-18, in one of their most moribund offensive showings of the season.

Nathan MacKinnon had a goal and two assists for Colorado, which played its first game without injured captain and 33-goal scorer Gabriel Landeskog.

"For sure it's frustrating, everyone should be frustrated," Reinhart said. "Everyone should be a little embarrassed at this point."

The Sabres fell to 30-29-9 overall and 2-8-2 in the last 12 games. Asked if there has to be an appeal to personal pride over what's left over a now-lost season, Reinhart didn't dispute the thought.

"You start talking there's 14-15 games left, it drags out in a hurry when things don't go your way," Reinhart said. "As narrow as you can keep your focus, just do what you can on any given day. As soon as you start viewing it as 14 games left, efforts like this add up in a hurry."

Sobering thought, indeed.

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1135147 Buffalo Sabres

Sabres Notebook: Offense takes the afternoon off

By Mike Harrington

Published Sat, Mar 9, 2019|Updated Sat, Mar 9, 2019

DENVER — Scoring hasn't been a problem for the Buffalo Sabres in recent games. But then came Saturday afternoon in Pepsi Center.

The Sabres endured their third shutout of the season in a 3-0 loss to the Colorado Avalanche, and this was a complete no-show at the offensive end.

The Sabres were outshot, 43-18, but most of their pressure came in garbage time, with seven shots on goal coming over the final 2:20 after goalie Carter Hutton was pulled for an extra attacker. The Avalanche doubled Buffalo in shot attempts, 76-38.

Buffalo had a paltry seven shots on goal over the first 44 1/2 minutes of the game, and three of those came from defensemen. The club record for fewest shots is 10, and the Sabres didn't reach that until there was 6:41 left on a routine Jack Eichel drive from just inside center ice.

At that point, the count was an eye-popping 36-9 for the Avalanche.

"Obviously you try to make adjustments, find ways to get in," said winger Jeff Skinner. "We didn't do a good enough job creating the forecheck."

"All they did was pressure us and we didn't execute," said coach Phil Housley. "Whether it was a breakout or set breakout, we couldn't gain zones, and it turns right back on us and they look like they were playing a fast game."

Colorado backup goalie Philipp Grubauer entered the game with a 3.20 goals-against average and .897 save percentage on the season, but the Sabres made it easy on him until the final flurries.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 10, 2019

Grubauer continued his career dominance against Buffalo from his days in Washington, improving to 5-1-2 against the Sabres — with a 1.15 goals-against average and .957 save percentage. He's given up just 10 goals in nine career appearances against the Sabres.

Grubauer's best save came on a Sam Reinhart breakaway in the first period, as Reinhart broke loose coming out of the penalty box and took a Zemgus Girgensons feed up the middle. Grubauer stayed with Reinhart's deke and made a skate save.

"I think if I just hold on to it another half a foot, it's a wide-open net," said Reinhart, who hasn't scored in six games. "It's frustrating when things don't go in when it's been a couple games. At that point, you just need to relax, settle myself down and get back to it."

The Sabres entered this game averaging 3.28 goals over their previous seven and with at least 30 shots on goal for 11 straight games, so a no-show like this was unexpected. But Reinhart said he sensed there were too many one-and-done possessions the last couple games and the team has to work harder at maintaining the offensive zone cycles.

No one is more frustrated right now than Skinner, who has been stuck on 36 goals for 11 games. He had no shots on goal Saturday for the first time since Dec. 8.

"It's part of my job to produce and obviously this last little stretch I haven't done a good enough job and we haven't been getting results," said Skinner, referring to Buffalo's 2-7-2 mark in the 11 games. "That's not a good combo I think.

"You try and find ways to get out of it. Maybe spend more time in the O-zone, but also more time around their net to get a greasy one and get off this slide."

The Sabres shifted defense partners, putting Rasmus Dahlin with Rasmus Ristolainen and Marco Scandella with Casey Nelson. They kept Zach Bogosian with Brandon Montour.

Bogosian led the club in ice time at 24 minutes, 15 seconds. Ristolainen was at 23:10, Montour 23:01 and Dahlin 21:14. Scandella (14:17) and Nelson (13:21) were held to third-pair minutes.

Dahlin was burned badly on Nathan MacKinnon's second-period goal that opened the scoring and finished at minus-2 as he was on the ice for Gabriel Bourque's empty-net goal.

Ristolainen was minus-1 to drop his NHL-worst rating to minus-34. He is minus-12 over his last seven games.

The Sabres scratched winger Tage Thompson and defenseman Matt Hunwick. Casey Mittelstadt spent most of the game at left wing for the first time this year, playing just 10:32 and collecting one shot on goal. It was his lowest ice time since Jan. 3.

Mikko Rantanen's third-period goal was his 30th of the season, giving the Avalanche a trio of 30-goal scorers in the same season for the first time since their 1995-96 Stanley Cup team. That club had four, led by Joe Sakic's 51-goal season.

MacKinnon's second-period goal was his 35th of the season and his three-point game gave him 87 points, allowing him to take over the team scoring lead from Rantanen (30-56-86). Injured captain Gabriel Landeskog has 33 goals this season.

Buffalo News LOADED: 03.10.2019

1135148 Buffalo Sabres

The Wraparound: Avalanche 3, Sabres 0

By Mike Harrington

Published Sat, Mar 9, 2019|Updated Sat, Mar 9, 2019

DENVER — Zzzzzz.

Not much of note took place Saturday in Pepsi Center.

The Buffalo Sabres lost another road game, dropping a 3-0 decision to the Colorado Avalanche. They had seven shots on goal through two periods and the final count was 43-18.

That pretty much shows how competitive the Sabres were in this one. Colorado goalie Philipp Grubauer didn't have much to do for his shutout at all until the final five minutes, when the Sabres finally forged some offensive pressure.

Colorado opened the scoring at 3:14 of the second period. All-Star center Nathan MacKinnon capitalized on a turnover by Rasmus Dahlin at the Buffalo blue line, went around the 18-year-old and burned Carter Hutton with a laser to the top corner to put the Avs in front for keeps.

Mikko Rantanen's power-play goal at 10:13 of the third period, a screened shot from the right circle, put the game away. Gabriel Bourque hit an empty net with 1:10 left.

The Sabres fell to 0-3-1 in their last four games and 2-8-2 in their last 12. On the road, Buffalo is 0-7-2 in its last nine games and 3-15-4 in its last 22.

First period: Neither team scored in the opening 20 minutes as the Avalanche had 11 of the game's first 13 shots on goal and the count finished at 12-4.

Big hit: The game took a more sinister tone with 9:48 left in the first as Colorado defenseman and former Sabre Nikita Zadorov blasted Jack Eichel along the boards with a high hit that was also late and came after the whistle. Zadorov got a roughing call and Eichel was uninjured.

Casey Nelson was the first Sabres player to the scene but did not do much of anything to Zadorov. However, Marco Scandella and Sam Reinhart were quick to aid their captain and Jeff Skinner got engaged with Rantanen while trying to make his way there as well. Skinner and Rantanen also got roughing penalties.

Eichel's response: The Buffalo captain was nailed with a checking to the head minor as he clipped Colorado's Carl Soderberg at 14:48 of the second period. It would be no surprise if he hears from the NHL's Department of Player Safety for the infraction.

Best chance: Reinhart was foiled by Grubauer on a breakaway after coming out of the box following a holding penalty at 15:23 of the first period.

Offense hasn't been sleepy: The Sabres had 23 goals over their previous seven games, averaging 3.29 per contest. And they had at least 30 shots on goal for 11 straight games entering Saturday.

Next: The Sabres flew home immediately after the game and will take Sunday off. Their next two games are at home, Tuesday against Dallas and Thursday against Pittsburgh. It will be interesting to see if the NHL sits Eichel for one or both of them.

Buffalo News LOADED: 03.10.2019

1135149 Buffalo Sabres

Quick Sabres update: Dahlin with Ristolainen today, Landeskog out for Avs



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 10, 2019

By Mike Harrington

Published Sat, Mar 9, 2019|Updated Sat, Mar 9, 2019

DENVER — A quick shuffling of the defense pairs is on the docket today as the Buffalo Sabres play a 3 p.m. game against the Colorado Avalanche in Pepsi Center. As usual, it's on MSG and WGR Radio.

With the Sabres facing two of the NHL's top seven scorers in Colorado winger Mikko Rantanen (85 points) and center Nathan MacKinnon (84), they will be pairing Rasmus Dahlin with Rasmus Ristolainen on their top pair today.

In his pregame briefing, coach Phil Housley said Marco Scandella will move alongside Casey Nelson after spending the last few games with Ristolainen while the pair of Zach Bogosian and Brandon Montour will stay intact. Matt Hunwick and Tage Thompson will be scratches.

The Avalanche are facing a major loss today as captain Gabriel Landeskog (36-33-69) is out with an upper-body injury, believed to be to his shoulder, suffered in Thursday's 4-0 loss in Dallas when he collided with goalie Ben Bishop. Landeskog is likely to be out 4-6 weeks, so his season could be over if the Avs don't make the playoffs.

While the Sabres' playoff hopes are basically gone with the team 10 points out of an Eastern Conference wild-card, this is a huge game for Colorado. The Avs are just four points back of Minnesota in the West and holding a game in hand.

"Sometimes when somebody comes out of the lineup, the desperation becomes even more apparent. We understand that," Housley said. "They've tried to spread their lines around a little bit to find some balance so we really have to be aware when MacKinnon and Rantanen are on the ice. ... They like to play with speed, attack, bring their 'D' to get involved in the rush. Our rush coverage has to be good today.

The Landeskog-MacKinnon-Rantanen line has been one of the NHL's best this season but the remaining two members of the trio may be broken up today. In practice Friday, MacKinnon skated with Derick Brassard and former Sabres prospect J.T. Compher while Rantanen was with Carl Soderberg and Colin Wilson.

The series: Colorado posted a 6-1 victory over Buffalo Oct. 11 in KeyBank Center and a Sabres win today will give the teams a split of the season series for the fourth straight year. The Sabres won here last year, 4-2, and it snapped a six-game losing streak in Denver that dated to 2005. Buffalo is just 3-9-4 overall in its last 16 meetings with the Avs since 2007.

Semyon Varlamov stopped 30 of 31 shots in the October win in Buffalo, improving to 7-2-1, 2.30/.922 in 10 career games against the Sabres but Philipp Grubauer is getting the start today and has been dominant against Buffalo, going 4-1-2, 1.30/.954 against the Sabres

Carter Hutton, who made 41 saves Thursday in Chicago, will start today for the Sabres.

Something to note after 60 minutes today: The Sabres are 11-9 past regulation this year, including a 7-6 mark in overtime goals -- while the Avalanche are just 3-12 and are 2-11 when a goal is scored at 3 on 3. As you would expect, that's the worst record in the NHL as no other team in the league has dropped more than eight games in the five-minute session.

So if this one is tied, the strategy is going to have to be attack, attack and attack some more. And late in regulation, the Sabres might be a tad more conservative to simply get the game to OT and then take their chances there.

"We're not going to get that matchup we want to start out so we're going to have to plan accordingly," said Housley, referring to the Avs having the last change at home. "We're definitely going to have to be aware when

MacKinnon is out there. He's incredibly fast and he creates. You try to match up with the speed element of the game."

Buffalo News LOADED: 03.10.2019

1135150 Buffalo Sabres

Inside the NHL: 'Scoreboard Wars' is one area Sabres can make a move on

By Mike Harrington

Published Sat, Mar 9, 2019|Updated Sat, Mar 9, 2019

DENVER -- The Sabres played here Saturday under the watchful eyes of the Pepsi Center's massive scoreboard. Installed in 2013, it remains one of the behemoths of the league at 27 feet high by 48 feet long and was the first answer to Tampa Bay's 28-by-50 display that was erected in 2012 and has long been the league's gold standard.

As the Sabres ponder a laundry list of upgrades to KeyBank Center with the arena falling way behind its 1990s counterparts, replacing the current HD video board could be one quick way to generate some goodwill among patrons rightfully complaining about broken and dirty seats and mediocre, overpriced concessions.

Scoreboard Wars are heating up in the NHL and the Sabres would do well to join the party since their video display dates to 2007. The team is well aware of its needs around the arena, including on the technological end, but remains mired in study and funding mode while other cities are moving forward.

(And, of course, the upheaval on the executive levels of Pegula Sports and Entertainment in the last 10 months isn't helping either as deposed bigwigs like Russ Brandon and Bruce Popko were heavily involved in the potential upgrades of both the arena and Ralph Wilson Stadium.)

So Buffalo waits. Meanwhile, the arenas in Philadelphia and Washington that were also born in the '90s are in the midst of major renovation work and will be taking their video displays to the latest level of technology next season.

What's next for Buffalo's aging KeyBank Center?

Philly's Wells Fargo Center will be installing what's billed as the world's first Kinetic 4K center-hung board in time for the Flyers' and 76ers' 2019-20 campaigns. The \$15 million project is part of a three-year, \$250 million transformation of the facility that will be completed next season in a building that opened in 1996 -- the same year KeyBank Center opened.

What's unique is that the board is not just a standard fixed screen hanging from the ceiling. It will have what's billed as unprecedented ability to transform into a larger extended size measuring 28-by-62 as well as smaller size and will be complemented by 5-by-67 moving trusses that will also feature electronic displays and slide above or below the main board.

Wells Fargo Center to Introduce the World's First Kinetic 4K Center-Hung Scoreboard.

In Washington, Monumental Sports & Entertainment -- the Pegula Sports-like arm that operates the Capitals and Wizards -- has spent nearly \$60 million for things like replacing every seat and upgrading concessions (hint-hint). Its scoreboard, also dating to 2007, is going 4K as well and will feature a 360-degree screen rather than two large displays on the sides of the ice/court and two smaller ones on the end.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 10, 2019

It will also include a retractable LED ring at the bottom to enhance viewing for those essentially underneath it who sit by the glass or the court. An added twist is that the building will also be installing the first "SkyRing" display in an indoor arena, a 9,000 square foot LED board that will wrap around the roof line above the 400 level. It's similar to the circular board at the top of Atlanta's Mercedes-Benz Stadium.

In recent years, massive new boards have been installed in places like Toronto, Winnipeg, Montreal, St. Louis, Minnesota, Arizona, Florida, New Jersey and Anaheim in addition to the giant screens marking the new arenas in Edmonton, Vegas and Detroit.

It's time here. More than time. A shiny new scoreboard won't fix all that ails with KeyBank Center -- on the ice or off. And it won't be a great addition if the Sabres just use it to continue to "oversponsor" every element of the game like they do now. But you have to keep up with other cities. Fans demand it.

On Stone and Skinner

Action: Mark Stone signs his extension with Vegas for eight years and \$76 million or \$9.5 million per season if you're scoring at home. Reaction: Jeff Skinner and his agent have to be happy. Skinner is having his fourth 30-goal season while Stone has never had one.

Now, Skinner isn't likely to get Stone money in part because Stone is a better points producer and a much better defender who is Selke Trophy material. But you have to believe Stone's number is certainly going to be an added talking point as Skinner's representatives continue to chat with Sabres General Manager Jason Botterill.

It continues to be this corner's view that Skinner and the Sabres will reach a deal without much acrimony, with the final figure coming in at somewhere between \$68-\$72 million.

Perhaps Skinner could get a little more in free agency but he won't be playing two hours from home or on Jack Eichel's wing. Looking elsewhere simply doesn't seem to be on his agenda.

The Gospel of Hitch

It will be a sad day for notebooks and microphones across North America when Ken Hitchcock retires for good from NHL coaching. There is nothing in this league like a good 10-minute chatter session with the man everyone calls "Hitch."

We've heard Phil Housley talk about the Sabres "checking detail" or lack thereof all season. When Hitchcock was in town with the Oilers last week, he strongly backed up Housley's assertion that it might be the most important aspect of a team's game.

"All the teams that are playoff teams check really well. They're just relentless on it," Hitchcock said. "You look especially out West in the Pacific Division, those teams doing really well check us to death and then let their skill take over. We're starting to learn what type of focus is needed for that, the consistent performance, second and third effort necessary for that."

And while Sabres fans -- and perhaps certain media members -- are tired of hearing it, Hitchcock said an organization's patience is a major piece of the puzzle.

"We're growing, Buffalo is growing. You feel like you've grabbed it and then it leaves you for a little while. You're trying to get to that aspect of your game," he said. "You look at all the good teams, they win all the games where they're tied for long stretches. The game is tied and then they end up winning it but they're in control of the game because the other team is getting nothing and eventually you crack and break.

"That's what we're trying to teach our guys is just to be patient. Being tied 1-1 halfway through the hockey game is a good thing, not something you should be nervous about."

Lindsay tributes all over

Teams spent all week paying tribute to late Detroit legend Ted Lindsay, who died Monday at age 93. "Ted 7" was painted on the boards at all corners of the league's 31 rinks through the weekend. It was interesting to hear how players were cognizant of Lindsay's contributions in helping to found the NHLPA in 1957.

The Ted Lindsay Award is given to the most outstanding player as voted upon by the players and Edmonton's Connor McDavid said it was an honor to meet Lindsay upon receiving the award in 2017.

"We all grew up playing this game, loving this game and you want to see how the game got to where it is today," McDavid said when he was in town last week. "He's obviously someone who played a huge role in it starting the PA and giving the players a voice. It's pretty special what he's done for the players."

Around the boards

*Yes, Bruins play-by-play man Jack Edwards is one of the worst homers in the league and might be a very acquired taste. But there's no denying he comes up with the verbiage while making the calls of big moments.

To wit, here's how he wrapped his call of David Krejci's overtime goal Tuesday night against Carolina, which was in town wearing its green Hartford Whalers throwback jerseys: "The Bruins come from two down, fend off Carolina and strip the Whale of its blubber. Burn 'em."

OK, it's obnoxious. But pretty original, too. Especially at the spur of the moment.

*Speaking of the Bruins, they beat the Panthers, 4-3, Thursday night as defenseman Matt Grzelcyk scored the tying goal with 37 seconds left in regulation and Patrice Bergeron got the winner with 7 seconds left. It marked just the 10th time in NHL history a team got the tying and winning goals in the final minute of regulation and the first time anyone has done it since Ottawa stunned Columbus on Oct. 22, 2011.

*The Devils might have opened the worst road trip of the year for any team in the league with Friday's 3-0 loss in Washington. They played Saturday in New York against the Rangers before heading West: Tuesday in Calgary, Wednesday in Edmonton, Friday in Vancouver and the caper on March 17 in Colorado.

Ten days out of town when you're fighting to stay out of 15th place in the East is bad enough. But when New Jersey finally returns home for games on March 19 and 21, who are the opponents? Washington and Boston. Yeesh.

Buffalo News LOADED: 03.10.2019

1135151 Buffalo Sabres

Mike Harrington's NHL Power Rankings

By Mike Harrington

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Through Friday's games. Last week's rankings in parentheses.

1. Tampa Bay Lightning. Remarkable current paces are 62 wins, 128 points and 317 goals. (1)
2. Boston Bruins. Dramatic two-goal rally in final minute stuns Panthers, extends point streak to 18 games. (3)
3. Calgary Flames. Eight of next 10 at home, starting with visit from Vegas on Sunday. (2)



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 10, 2019

4. San Jose Sharks. Despite nagging groin issue, Karlsson is "100 percent" he'll be ready for playoffs. (4)
5. Washington Capitals. Finally climbed over Isles to take lead in Metro. (6)
6. Toronto Maple Leafs. Were 32-0-0 when leading after two periods until OT loss in Vancouver. (7)
7. New York Islanders. Lehner listed as day-to-day after goalmouth collision. (5)
8. Winnipeg Jets. Still looking to win Central and catch Flames in West. (8)
9. Nashville Predators. Certainly want five points in this week's three-game California trip. (9)
10. Pittsburgh Penguins. Even if out for a day or two, don't seem to be in trouble in playoff race. (15)
11. Vegas Golden Knights. It's a Stone-cold lock at eight years, \$76 million. (12)
12. Montreal Canadiens. Bad time of the season for an 8-2 loss in Anaheim. (10)
13. Carolina Hurricanes. Niederreiter posts franchise-record minus-6 in 8-1 loss to Jets. (11)
14. St. Louis Blues. O'Reilly gets to career highs in assists (40) and points (66), and has plenty of time to add. (14)
15. Columbus Blue Jackets. Four goals, 1-3 record in first four games of March. (13)
16. Dallas Stars. Have huge game in playoff race Tuesday night in Buffalo. (16)
17. Minnesota Wild. Weird team, weird roadie: Blanked Bolts, pummeled by Panthers. (17)
18. Arizona Coyotes. An 8-2 record over 10 games is capped by Kuemper shutout of Flames. (21)
19. Philadelphia Flyers. Justin Bailey keeps riding the Allentown-to-Philly shuttle. (18)
20. Colorado Avalanche. Landeskog injury could be death knell to playoff hopes. (20)
21. Florida Panthers. Barkov cools Wild with franchise-record five assists. (23)
22. Buffalo Sabres. A stunningly meaningless March as playoff deficit hits double digits. (19)
23. Edmonton Oilers. McDavid joins Sharks' Thornton as only active players with three straight 60-assist seasons. (26)
24. Chicago Blackhawks. Even with four-goal night against him, Crawford improves to 10-0 against Sabres. (22)
25. New York Rangers. Early returns good on former Buffalo draft pick Lemieux, acquired in Hayes trade. (24)
26. Vancouver Canucks. Will quickly sign and play D Quinn Hughes when Michigan is ousted from NCAA contention. (25)
27. Anaheim Ducks. Four straight strong games, with three wins and last-second loss to Blues. (27)
28. New Jersey Devils. Started six-game roadie with shutout loss in Washington. (28)
29. Detroit Red Wings. Tributes pour in for Ted Lindsay. RIP. (29)
30. Los Angeles Kings. Held to one goal in back-to-back home losses. (30)

31. Ottawa Senators. Nice rookie year for Tkachuk with 15 goals and 34 points. (31)

Story topics: NHL Power Rankings

Buffalo News LOADED: 03.10.2019

1135152 BuffaloSabres

Having a winning blueprint is one thing, but following it proves tough for Sabres

By Joe Yerdon

Mar 9, 2019

DENVER — Going back to training camp, one of the teams the Buffalo Sabres wanted to use as a blueprint for how to get back to the playoffs sooner than later was the Colorado Avalanche. Last season, they went from being one of the worst teams in the NHL to reaching the NHL playoffs. This year's Sabres team hasn't copied that playbook, and on Saturday the Avalanche delivered another humbling lesson that climbing out of the basement doesn't always happen overnight.

When the Avalanche jumped into the playoff picture last season, they did it thanks to an MVP-level performance from Nathan MacKinnon. He had 97 points (39 goals, 58 assists) and finished second to New Jersey's Taylor Hall in voting for the Hart Trophy. Fittingly, the Devils were the other team the Sabres sought to emulate this season in their quest to push for the postseason.

This season, the Sabres have gotten great performances from Jack Eichel, Jeff Skinner and Sam Reinhart, but the Avalanche rolled with MacKinnon and Mikko Rantanen growing together as one of the NHL's dynamic duos. Colorado also had Gabriel Landeskog playing the heavy and scoring in big moments last season, as well as getting 57 points from defenseman Tyson Barrie and a solid 43-point rookie season from forward Alex Kerfoot. Overall, the Avalanche had 14 players who scored 20 or more points.

The Sabres have 10 players with 20-plus points, with Zach Bogosian (who has 17) close to making it 11. Consistent goal scoring has been an issue this season for Buffalo, and a good reason for that is a low shooting percentage. At 5-on-5, they're 22nd in the NHL with a 7.59 shot percentage. They're shooting the puck well enough (10th in shots on goal for at 5-on-5; 19th in attempts), but they're not going in.

By contrast, last season Colorado was seventh in the NHL in shooting percentage at 5-on-5 at 8.26 percent (according to NaturalStatTrick.com) and were last in shots on goal for and 29th out of 31 in shots attempted.

On Saturday, the Sabres had nine shots on goal until they were credited with two more shots with about 6:30 left to play in the third. They finished the game with 18 shots on goal, 13 of which came at 5-on-5. They lost 3-0 and are winless in four straight and have six points in the past 12 games (2-8-2).

"It wasn't our best (game)," Sabres coach Phil Housley said. "Just the start of the game, all they did was pressure us, and we didn't execute and whether it was a breakout or a set breakout we couldn't gain zones and it turns right back on us and they look like they're playing a fast game, but it was more about what we weren't doing."

Last season, the Avalanche also got tremendous goaltending from the tandem of Semyon Varlamov and Jonathan Bernier. Varlamov's .920 overall save percentage (.933 at 5-on-5) led the way, but Bernier held things together in a backup role with a .913 (.930 at 5-on-5). The tandem



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 10, 2019

was third-best in the NHL with a .932 save percentage, behind Nashville and Anaheim at 5-on-5.

Comparatively, the Sabres' duo of Carter Hutton and Linus Ullmark is 13th best in the league with a .919 save percentage at 5-on-5. At all strengths, Hutton edges Ullmark, .912 to .907. Against the Avs on Saturday, goaltending was the least of their problems as Hutton delivered a 40-save effort in defeat.

"I think that Hutts played great for us, and we hung him out to dry," Skinner said. "We have to bear down and play better and spend more time in the offensive end."

To rub salt in the wound, Saturday's game highlighted an issue that's come up already this season in how the Sabres respond to overly physical play. In a 1-0 road loss to the Stars after the All-Star break, the Sabres upped the physical play to set a tone that held up throughout the game. After a 6-2 loss at home to the New York Rangers, Housley said his team played soft.

Against Colorado, things took a nastier turn when former Sabre Nikita Zadorov hit Eichel after the whistle for an offside call and hit him up high. Reinhart and Skinner, who was hit from behind by Rantanen as the scrum developed immediately, responded while Eichel got up incredulous at how late the hit came.

"Just got to play physical, I mean, it's a physical game, right," Eichel said. "That's it, that's all it is. Finish your checks. Other teams like to do it to us, I don't see why we don't do it back. You know? Everyone can finish a check and make it hard on the other team."

"I mean, he hits me after they fucking blow, excuse my language, they blow the whistle, but that's whatever."

In the second period, Eichel responded with his own physicality when he caught Carl Soderberg in the head with a check. Eichel was given a minor penalty but could be looking at further punishment from the league.

"I thought he was just reaching, I don't know, I've got to look at it, to be honest with you," Eichel said. "I'm trying to protect myself, it's a physical game. I think he's going to deliver a hit to me. You know, it seems like they were maybe taking runs a little bit at times. If I'm going to be the forefront of it, I might as well push back a little bit. I've got to protect myself."

We know how ugly things have been since the seemingly forever-ago win streak ended. We know they're inconsistent. We know they show glimpses of what could've been virtually every game. Saturday was a study in everything that can go wrong, and can go badly, can and did happen. With 14 games left in the season, the evaluation period for who will stay and who will go has likely been underway for a while. If there are more efforts like this one, the list of who will go will only grow.

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Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Oilers get up-close look at depth they crave in loss to superior Leafs

Mark Spector | @sportsnetspec

March 9, 2019, 11:22 PM

EDMONTON — We always say it, because it is always true: The players know.

The players always know first where another player fits in their midst. If he is a high draft pick who isn't ready, or if he's a solid pro whose skills are underrated. They know first, and they know best — no matter what the management, the media or some agent tries to tell you.

And they know when they've just played a team that is their superior. Just listen to Connor McDavid, asked about the Toronto Maple Leafs after losing twice to them in 10 days.

"They are a GOOD hockey team," he began. "They are solid all over. They are obviously skilled and they just come at you in waves. Our goalie was good — he held us in and gave us a little bit of a chance."

But McDavid knows. So do all the Edmonton Oilers.

"We played a good team," said Oscar Klefbom. "They are... five players everywhere. We played a really good team."

The Oilers held Auston Matthews and Mitch Marner off the score sheet Saturday night, in a game Toronto led 3-0 until a late Oilers push made the final 3-2. Kasperii Kapanen didn't manage a point, nor did Patrick Marleau.

Toronto, however, has this guy named John Tavares, whom you may have heard of. He had a goal and two assists, and was named the game's first star on a night where the score was not really indicative of the flow of play.

"Probably other than the last couple of minutes, we played a really good road game," Tavares said. "We didn't get rewarded as much as I think we could have."

No, this could have been far more lopsided than it was, and there isn't anyone involved in this eternal Oilers project who doesn't look at the Maple Leafs and realize the breadth of the chasm that exists between the two rosters.

This was Toronto's bottom six on Saturday: Kadri between Marleau and William Nylander, and a fourth line of Frederik Gauthier, Tyler Ennis (12 goals) and Connor Brown, a 23-point winger whom the Oilers made a pitch for at the recent trade deadline.

And this was Edmonton's bottom six: Colby Cave between Jujhar Khaira and Josh Currie, a trio that has combined for seven goals and 64 AHL games played this season. The fourth line had Kyle Brodziak (eight points) between Ty Rattie (11 points) and Tobias Rieder, who has played 54 NHL games this season and not scored a single goal.

Toronto's top two lines are a bear, but with McDavid, Leon Draisaitl and Ryan Nugent-Hopkins, Edmonton can at least compete. It is the depth of talent that tips this matchup in Toronto's favour, and becomes the nut that the new general manager will have to crack.

"It's a great game to evaluate on," admitted Oilers head coach Ken Hitchcock, who is well aware of every point we've made in this column thus far. "It tells you what you've got now and what you've got moving forward. And when you've got a team that can play at that tempo, especially through the middle of the ice, any mistakes get exposed. Any time that you decide on the ice to rest, you get exposed. And I thought we hung in there really well."

"But man, from an evaluation standpoint, this was really a rich hockey game. The two best players, for me, were both goalies, and then probably (Morgan) Rielly after that. They're a deep team and the competition's rich, so unless you were on top of your game every shift, you got exposed."

The Oilers never fell out of this one, the way they had the previous Wednesday in a 6-2 loss at Toronto. But as the evening wore on, the disparity became obvious and undeniable.

Toronto pushes offensively, generating second and third chances that — in their totality — break down an opposing team and goaltender.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 10, 2019

Edmonton flies in over the line, takes a rip on goal, and then the puck is on its way out just as fast.

The Oilers might have rescued this with a sharper power play, but alas, it went 0-for-4, including 37 seconds of 5-on-3 time.

"I don't think we get enough from the top," said Hitchcock of his power-play alignment. "So I think we're going to have to look at that dynamic. We don't make them turn and face their goalie enough."

Until the end of the game, of course, when the Leafs were patting Frederik Andersen on the head after another win.

These two teams have played six periods against each other in the past 10 days. Edmonton won one of them, and collected a couple of goals in garbage time Saturday.

The Oilers, with this roster, can't compete with a team as deep and good as Toronto.

Nobody knows that more than the players, we promise you that.

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 03.10.2019

1135288 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Leafs adopting playoff mentality, accepting reality of tough road ahead

Chris Johnston | @reporterchris

March 10, 2019, 12:15 AM

EDMONTON — This was as complete a road victory as the Toronto Maple Leafs have managed all season, the scramble last two minutes inside Rogers Place included.

Their stars shone and Connor McDavid was largely kept in check and the two points moved them up to fourth overall in the NHL standings. And yet... those points actually increased Toronto's odds of a first-round matchup with the No. 2-ranked Boston Bruins, who are riding a scorching 15-0-4 run and on pace for another 112-point season.

"Yeah, it's odd," said John Tavares. "It's odd."

Strange times, indeed.

The Leafs, Bruins and Tampa Bay Lightning have every reason to rue a divisional playoff format that will see at least two of them eliminated by the end of the second round.

It has made even a 2-0-1 swing through Western Canada feel ho-hum with a month to go in the season because the only thing the Leafs are playing for is home-ice advantage. And there isn't even consensus inside the dressing room on how important that really is, with Auston Matthews saying: "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."

All they have, really, is the process.

The concept Kyle Dubas built his season-opening address around when he spoke to players on the opening night of training camp in Niagara-on-the-Lake.

This victory in Edmonton ticked all of the boxes for a team unable to find much motivation from the Atlantic Division standings. It saw Matthews control 69 per cent of the adjusted shot attempts in a head-to-head matchup with McDavid and featured a goal and two assists for Tavares,

plus a strong showing from Nazem Kadri in his return from a concussion. Frederik Andersen was strong in goal. They killed all three penalties.

"I thought we controlled the puck, were heavy on the cycle, did lots of really good things," said coach Mike Babcock.

"I think we played essentially a pretty perfect road game," added Kadri, who hadn't played since Feb. 19. "Took away their speed, which is how they're most effective. It was pretty responsible with the puck and took advantage of our chances."

The Leafs owned 60.2 per cent of even-strength shot attempts overall — their fourth-strongest showing in 68 games this season and the best in a game played away from Scotiabank Arena.

(Although, to be fair, this was basically another home-away-from-home game, with boisterous chants of "Freddie! Freddie!" for Andersen. Let the record show: The Leafs brand is alive and well in Western Canada).

Understandably, the Toronto players are viewing everything through the prism of where it leaves them for the upcoming playoffs.

That is where this season will ultimately be measured. Tavares, who has already matched a career-high with his 38th goal, is looking forward to his fourth spring of playoff hockey and notes that you're never going to feel better than you do right now, in these final days of the stretch run and through the opening round.

"It's a long grind to get to where you want to get to," he said.

The grind will begin with Boston. They're making more peace with that reality with each passing day.

"You're going to have to beat some of the best teams in the league and play against some of the best players in the world and there's going to be tough matchups," said Tavares. "It's odd, but it is what it is."

Andersen was on the verge of a shutout before Edmonton pulled its goalie and scored twice with the 6-and-5 advantage. Zack Kassian nearly tied it, too, providing a brief shot of mayhem that sent Babcock straight to the video room.

"Obviously, I'd like to have the last two minutes back," he said.

Toronto was still full value, though.

"They're just," said McDavid. "They're a good hockey team, they are solid all over, they never make mistakes, obviously skilled, they just come at you in waves."

"So they're a good team."

The Leafs are starting to develop the swagger of one, too.

Even with the hiccup in Vancouver — where they blew a third-period lead for the first time all season and lost 3-2 in overtime — they're starting to develop some urgency. Boston never loses.

They know what's coming.

"I think if you look at the way our goalie's playing, you look at the way [Tavares is] playing, you know, I think you can really tell that there's guys that are at that point where it's playoffs and we're trying to amp it up," said defenceman Morgan Rielly. "I think that's good. I think that's what we need."

"So, yeah, I mean we're almost there."

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CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 10, 2019

Sportsnet.ca / Canucks' failure to evolve defensively exposed against faster, smarter Knights

Iain MacIntyre | @imacSportsnet

March 10, 2019, 3:01 AM

VANCOUVER — His team humiliated in Las Vegas six days earlier, Vancouver Canuck coach Travis Green said before Saturday's rematch against the Golden Knights that he expected his players to be much better.

"We're going to learn something about ourselves tonight," Green predicted.

Well, they did.

They learned in the wake of their dismantlement last Sunday that humiliation is even worse on home ice for the Canucks, who once again were the second-fastest, second-strongest, second-smartest team — luckily, the field was limited to two — in another beatdown, this time 6-2, by the Vegas Golden Knights.

It would have been better were the Canucks an expansion team four years ago because their rebuild since then still has them light years behind the second-season Knights, who in a span of six days outscored Vancouver 9-2 and outshot them 81-50.

Those totals would have been even more lopsided, but Vegas got bored Saturday after building a 5-1 lead in the game's first 14 minutes.

"We knew they were going to come hard," Canuck Bo Horvat said. "At the same time, we weren't ready for them... right off the get-go. Once they made it 3-0, we started to have a little pushback, but we have to start right at the drop of the puck.

"They win battles all over the rink, they're relentless, and they move pucks pretty quick. That's the team we've got to be."

The Canucks, whose failure to evolve and improve on defence like they have up front was starkly exposed by the Knights, hadn't surrendered five goals in the first period at Rogers Arena since March 8, 2004 — the night Todd Bertuzzi wrecked two careers when he attacked the Colorado Avalanche's Steve Moore.

Fortunately, no one was physically injured on Saturday, although it may take the Canucks a while to get over the psychological damage inflicted by the vastly-superior Knights.

Vancouver hopes to challenge for a playoff spot next season. Vegas hopes to win a Stanley Cup this one.

The abyss that separates the two teams was again most evident inside the Canucks' blueline.

"In Vegas, we just knew we didn't have an effort whatsoever," defenceman Alex Biega, elevated to a top-four role by injuries, said. "In spurts, I think we played well tonight. But at the end of the day, they were just all over us again.

"In front of the net, we have to have better sticks and we have to defend better. The breakdowns? You can look at the video any way you want, but at the end of the day it's really working and skating. They skate hard and they work hard and they get to those loose pucks. We have to find a way to get to those loose pucks and win those battles."

Quinn Hughes, the University of Michigan dynamo drafted seventh-overall last June, is expected to turn pro this week and travel to Vancouver to begin his National Hockey League career.

But the imminent arrival of another potential cornerstone player raises a couple of questions: What, exactly, will the reeling Canucks be bringing him into? And, how much more will Vancouver need next season beyond

Hughes to build a defence capable of getting the puck out of its own zone against fast, powerful teams?

The defence the Canucks iced on Saturday, albeit missing injured regulars Ben Hutton and Chris Tanev, could have as many as four players who aren't NHL regulars next season.

We understand defending is a five-man strategy. But the acquisition of the puck by forwards is made difficult when the blueline group so often looks overmatched on speed, size and net-front presence.

The Golden Knights may be the best team in the NHL at the moment. They are 6-0 since the trade-deadline acquisition of Mark Stone from Ottawa, and last year's stunning Cup finalists shouldn't surprise anyone in May if they win the Western Conference again.

But the Knights are hardly outliers in the way they play. They're quick and direct and attack with speed and power, backed by an active defence. The Canucks, however, have struggled to exit their zone against a lot of teams this season.

Lately, they've been especially poor at the start of games, seemingly unable to make a pass under pressure. Shifts get extended in the Vancouver zone and goals ensue. Shots were 11-2 for Vegas halfway through the first. It was 3-0 after 8 ½ minutes.

The Knights' first five goals, including Stone's first for his new team, were scored from inside the hashmarks as the Canucks were unable to either move or box out Knights forwards.

Hughes, who is five-foot-10, should help the puck retrieval and puck movement, and may occasionally simply skate the puck out of trouble. He'll help the power play. But he alone isn't going to give the Canucks a defence they can win with.

"For me, honestly it's our starts," veteran centre Jay Beagle said of the problems. "I don't think our starts haven't been good in... I don't know how long. And that's on everybody. We leave our goalie out to dry at the start and if he stands on his head and keeps us in it, all of a sudden we get going. But we can't play like that."

Starting goalie Jacob Markstrom went from standing on his head last Sunday in a 45-save, 3-0 loss to falling on his face on Saturday. For the first time in 52 games during his breakthrough season as a No. 1, Markstrom was hooked after allowing five goals on 16 shots.

Alex Tuch led the Knights with a goal and two assists, and all four Vegas lines got on the scoresheet. Horvat and Brock Boeser scored for the Canucks, who are 1-4-1 in their last six games and have plummeted from the playoff race by going 4-10-3 the last five weeks.

"To lose the way that we did is unacceptable," Beagle said. "The group knows that. Going forward, this is the time of year where you grow as a team. We're obviously in a lot of adversity right now. But to be where we want to be as a group in the future — next year, the year after — you have to know what it takes to win at this time of year."

They're learning how little it takes to lose.

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 03.10.2019

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Sportsnet.ca / Oilers CEO Bob Nicholson says new GM search will be long process

Sportsnet Staff | @Sportsnet

March 9, 2019, 10:02 PM



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 10, 2019

Bob Nicholson, the Edmonton Oilers CEO, is in no rush to hire a new, full-time general manager for his team.

After relieving Peter Chiarelli of his duties in January, Nicholson seems content to take his time with the process.

"The best way to put it is that Bob Nicholson is still in information-gathering mode," said Sportsnet's Chris Johnston during the 'Headlines' segment of Hockey Night in Canada. "Down at the general managers meetings he had some lengthy conversations with various people in hockey and it sounds like, if anything, his list is growing instead of shrinking at this point in terms of potential candidates."

Among the list of applicants Nicholson could be mulling over is Keith Gretzky, the man he currently has at the helm of the Oilers on an interim basis. Gretzky has appeared to impress so far and figures to be a big piece of Edmonton's future.

"I think the organization is very comfortable with where they're at with interim GM Keith Gretzky," said Johnston. "Don't be surprised if this goes on for some period of time while they work through all the various things that have to happen before they make a full-time hire."

Added Elliott Friedman about Gretzky: "I think he will be part of this process and I think the organization does consider him to be a very valuable piece of where they're going."

And in case there was any fear that Nicholson might decide to jump ship while the Oilers once again go through a period of transition, have no fear about that, Friedman says — he's dedicated to righting things in Edmonton.

"There were some rumblings that he was going to potentially move on, maybe look for another position within international hockey," said Friedman. "He said that that's not the message he wants to send. He believes this is an important time to be part of the organization and that he wants to be part of the solution. He's not looking to go anywhere."

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1135291 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / NHL, NHLPA have continued to meet to find solution to escrow issue

Sportsnet Staff | @Sportsnet

March 9, 2019, 11:04 PM

Though focus has now shifted to the post-season on the ice, off it representatives from the league and the Players' Association have met privately to try to find a solution to an issue that will always be a point of contention in collective bargaining agreement discussions: Escrow.

"The NHL and the NHLPA have continued to meet quietly in small groups, and I understand that they are really trying to grind to see if they can try to find a solution for the escrow issue," said Sportsnet's Elliott Friedman during the 'Headlines' segment of Hockey Night in Canada Saturday. "I think everybody realizes that's the No. 1 thing that has to get worked on here and other things can fall into place. I understand they are having serious discussions at ways to handle this."

Just as a quick reminder, escrow is, in essence when applied to the NHL, a portion of a player's salary that gets deducted from each paycheque and then put into a fund that can't be touched until the end of the season,

when the league knows what its revenue for the year was and can then calculate how much escrow can be handed out to the players and how much teams get.

This is an extremely contentious issue for the players as it can feel like an additional league tax on them, as there have been cases where that money that gets withheld actually ends up in lost salary.

This current escrow system was put in place to create a 50-50 split in hockey-related revenue between the teams and the players, but also, sometimes, at the cost of lost salary for the players.

The current CBA isn't scheduled to expire until after the 2020-21 season, but both the NHL (Sept. 1) and NHLPA (Sept. 19) can choose to opt out of it this year, meaning getting ahead on negotiations so as to avoid a potential lockout is still very important business.

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1135292 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Quinn Hughes expected to sign with Canucks this week

Sportsnet Staff | @Sportsnet

March 9, 2019, 9:44 PM

The Vancouver Canucks' promising youth movement is about to see another dazzling name added to the mix.

With 20-year-old phenom Elias Pettersson already dominating the 2018-19 campaign in Canucks colours, after seeing Bo Horvat and Brock Boeser do the same in recent years, the next highly-touted prospect to join the fray will be defender Quinn Hughes.

"University of Michigan was eliminated today from their Big Ten playoffs, which paves the way for Quinn Hughes, Vancouver's first-round pick in 2018, to join the hockey club as early as this week," Sportsnet's Nick Kypreos said Saturday during the 'Headlines' segment of Hockey Night in Canada.

"Look for Quinn Hughes to sign a three-year deal where the first year will be burned by the end of this season."

The 19-year-old blueliner has been turning heads since being drafted seventh overall by Vancouver in 2018. He's already amassed five goals and 33 points in 31 games for Michigan so far this season, after posting 29 points through 37 games last season. Hughes also earned a gold medal with the U.S. national team at the 2017 IIHF U18 World Championship, posting five points through seven games, before claiming two bronze medals with Team USA in 2018, as well as a world juniors silver in 2019.

While it appears Hughes is on the cusp of making his NHL debut for Vancouver, it appears his contributions for the big club will be limited, so as to avoid risking his inclusion in the impending expansion draft.

"There's talk of, if he plays 10 games this season, it would make him eligible for the Seattle expansion draft in 2021. And barring a late unexpected playoff push, I don't think Vancouver will let that happen," Kypreos said.

The Canucks faithful held their breath Friday when news broke that Hughes was injured during one of Michigan's final games of the season. It's unclear whether or not that could throw a wrench into the Canucks' plans of getting their star defensive prospect into the lineup.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 10, 2019

"Could he play as early as Wednesday? That's a possibility," said Kypreos. "But he did block a shot the other night on his ankle, which could jeopardize that start."

The Canucks currently sit nine points out of a playoff spot, with 14 games left to play in 2018-19.

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 03.10.2019

1135293 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Quick Shifts: Maple Leafs' Rasmus Sandin excelling 'beyond his years'

Luke Fox | @lukefoxjukebox

March 9, 2019, 8:23 AM

A quick mix of the things we gleaned from the week of hockey, serious and less so, and rolling four lines deep.

1. Rasmus Sandin had never endured one significant injury, much less two.

The Toronto Maple Leafs 2018 first-round pick's pro career got off to a rocky start this fall.

He'd impressed NHL coach Mike Babcock in pre-season, to the point where the teenager earned himself a nickname. "Oh, the Sandman there? CEO of the Sandman Hotels," Babcock smiled.

But then he got his thumb stuck in the sweater of an opponent he was trying to push away, box out, and the digit twisted backwards, delaying his AHL debut.

Once he was healthy enough to play, he looked fantastic for an 18-year-old defenceman battling grownups and earned an early spot on Sweden's world junior entry — and suffered another injury, to his elbow, hyperextending his arm.

"I hadn't been through that before," Sandin told me of this season's health trials, which made him unavailable for Sweden's elimination game. "Playing world juniors has always been a dream. It's huge back home."

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

Sandin turned 19 this week, and he scored a sweet overtime game-winner to celebrate.

He'd like to return to the worlds next winter, but that decision — like the one to make him a Marlie, instead of keeping him in the OHL or letting him skate pro back home with Rogle — is up to the franchise in whom he has entrusted his future.

"It's pretty special, to be honest. I've never been with an organization this big before. It's great for me as a young player to have all this on my side when working on all the small-area things I need to do," Sandin says.

"I'm just trying to listen to everyone. I mean, I'm the youngest one on the team."

The youngest, sure, but also the one GM Kyle Dubas refused to trade away for a defenceman that could help the Leafs contend immediately.

Marlies coach Sheldon Keefe saw aspects right away, especially defensively, in Sandin's game that most junior players never grasp. The way he used his five-foot-11, 183-pound frame stood out.

"He's not the biggest or strongest guy, but positionally he puts himself in really good spots, his angles are really good, and he's competitive," Keefe says.

"He gets involved physically. He uses what he has extremely well. That same sense helps him with the puck as well. He preserves space very well so he can skate out of tricky situations very well. He plays calm. There's a poise and confidence well beyond his years."

Keefe has seen injuries damage a rookie's psyche, particularly if he's never had a setback.

In Sandin's case, however, the missed games have been a blessing in disguise. Had he been at full health, Sandin would be grinding through three or four games a week; off-days would be needed for rest.

Being out of the lineup may have hurt the Marlies' in the win-loss column, but it's permitted the Leafs' development squad to drill down on skills and skating and improve Sandin's situational play.

"He's not only coming back healthy but a better version of himself," Keefe explains.

The first-year pro already has 14 points in 30 games. Used to living by himself because he's done so since age 15 in Sweden, Sandin recently moved out of a Toronto hotel and into a downtown apartment, and he's been able to lean on countrymate and D partner Timothy Liljegren for tips on and off the ice. (Sandin's parents also made two visits to Canada this season.)

Sandin loves "everything" about his new city, particularly following the Blue Jays and Raptors, and lights up talking about watching the Golden State Warriors take on the Raps from a suite this winter.

"I'm more professional in how I take care of myself on and off the ice. Just do everything tougher, quicker, harder. You have to do it because you're playing against men this year," Sandin says.

"It's fine. It's a bigger challenge, obviously, because they're bigger guys, quicker guys, but I don't think it's overwhelming at all."

Toronto won't rush a good thing, and Sandin is precisely that.

2. Braden Holtby played 66 games for Washington in 2015-16 and 63 games in 2016-17. The Capitals won two Presidents' trophies and zero Stanley Cups those seasons.

Then, in 2017-18, Holtby's workload dropped to 54 appearances. He was fresh and fantastic during the post-season, backstopping his franchise to its only championship.

With Toronto's heavily used Frederik Andersen on my mind, I asked Caps coach Todd Reirden how big of a deal it was to monitor Holtby's minutes last year.

"That was a huge part of our success. [Then backup] Philipp Grubauer did a phenomenal job for us," Reirden said. "Looking back on the impact Phil had by coming in and winning games was something we knew we had to replace. I think Pheonix [Copley, the Capitals' current backup] has come in and done a good job, but to your point, it's very important we continue to manage his games."

Even though Copley hasn't performed as well as Grubauer did last season, Holtby is once again on track to make fewer than 60 appearances (58). The plan for Andersen, meanwhile, is a third consecutive campaign of 60-plus starts.

The lifters of the past four Cups, we'll remind you, needed starts from both their netminders to reach the summit. Among the NHL's upper echelon, the Lightning, Bruins, Islanders and Flames — for different reasons — have excelled at not exhausting their No. 1.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 10, 2019

"It becomes a really long year, and if you ride one goalie for too long, it's something that, in particular, our team hasn't had success with in prior years here in Washington. Not many other teams have had if you look at the prior Stanley Cup winners. A lot of teams have had a mix of two goaltenders. Look at Pittsburgh and how they did it [with Matt Murray and Marc-Andre Fleury]. So it's important how you manage that, especially with a guy who can have such a huge impact like Braden Holtby."

Or Frederik Andersen.

3. In a related story, Leafs coach Mike Babcock retracted his suggestion that backup Garret Sparks might see an uptick in starts down the stretch.

A segment of Toronto's fans and critics have called for an upgrade at the No. 2 goalie position, but GM Kyle Dubas, who rode Sparks to an AHL title, re-signed the seventh-rounder to a one-year deal worth \$750,000 for 2019-20.

Sparks's numbers in Andersen's relief are fine: 7-5-1, .902 save percentage, one shutout.

I like the deal.

Sparks is only 25. He can get better, and he's dedicated. We've watched him stick around long after the practice whistle has blown to help the Leafs' shooters put in extra work.

The past few Canada Days have brought a mad game of musical chairs for a free-agent backup. Why not beat the rush and limit the risk? Why not stick with the guy you know and have developed?

Dubas needs to save every penny he can to squeeze Mitch Marner (and Kasperii Kapanen and Andreas Johnsson) under the cap.

A decent young backup who loves being a Leaf for less than \$1 million? Sign 'em up.

4. Seeing Vancouver's Josh Leivo score a key goal Wednesday against his former team brought to mind a conversation with Sparks months back, when Leivo was still a Leaf.

I asked the goaltender which shooter impresses him in practice. His answer wasn't the one I was expecting.

"Josh Leivo. I don't know if it's technique or just raw skill. Release? Instinct? I don't know what you call it, but it's just really hard to pick up," Sparks said. "It's not always about velocity or hardness. Sometimes it's about placement and ability to get it off in tight spaces.

"Placement, speed, release, amount of time it's on his stick, angle he's shooting from in relation to his body — all those things make it deceptive."

After all those healthy scratches, good on Leivo for burning his old team in the only game he got to play them in the year he was traded away.

5. What percentage of this year's memorable coach-press meetings have featured John Tortorella? Fifty? More?

"Get rid of the shootout," Tortorella pleaded this week, speaking my mind, and maybe yours too. "Just play the 3-on-3 until a team dies."

I want to see the Blue Jackets get it together and make the playoffs and embark on a run for two reasons that have nothing to do with Artemi Panarin's dangles: (1) So more general managers embrace the bold move and push all-in like Jarmo Kekalainen did, and (2) so we get more big-stage Torts quotes.

6. New Leaf Nic Petan has a good sense of humour.

After scoring in his Toronto debut last Saturday versus Buffalo, the five-foot-nine forward suggested to the scrum's cameramen that they might wish to angle their lens downward. And he caught himself from cussing on national TV when explaining how a player of his stature could body the gangly Rasmus Ristolainen.

"I just stuck out my as—uh, hip," Petan caught himself.

By way of his game-winning one-timer that night, Petan gave all the credit to fourth-line mate Trevor Moore and his own vocal chords.

"I was just yelling super, super loud. When we got to the bench, he said, 'Good yell.' And it was a phenomenal pass," Petan said. "I didn't think much. I just smacked it, and it went in."

John Tavares on the new kid's insta-impact: "Anytime anyone comes to a new environment, you're trying to settle in and find your way. It's good to get rewarded, to get some good feeling and some positivity. To get a big goal like that goes a long way."

Petan was a stud for Canada during the 2015 world junior championships, scoring a hat trick en route to a gold medal at Scotiabank Arena.

"Memory lane," he smiled.

7. Ted Lindsay was before my time, and there are many wonderful pieces about the man already out there to read.

I met him, briefly, at the 2015 NHL Awards. I was working the red carpet for Sportsnet and tasked with shooting some Instagram clips.

The way modern players, two generations removed, revered the man — small in stature, gigantic in presence — was striking. A cool moment when I caught an honoured P.K. Subban meeting Mr. Lindsay. Rest in peace:

8. Big week for Brad Marchand, social-media maven.

First, Marchand won Twitter by chiming in on Mitch Marner's next contract in what Dubas called "a master troll job." A virtual face lick, without the hepatitis risk of course.

Marner (RW) should be lining up head-to-head opposite Marchand (LW) when the Bruins and Leafs battle in Round 1 of the playoffs. Might as well get a head start on the mind games.

Then Marchand launched a new Instagram account to the tune of 38,000 immediate followers and began firing chirps back at Torey Krug. "If you are looking for good entertainment," Marchand writes, "be sure to follow."

What makes Marchand a lovable villain is that he can be self-deprecating, too:

9. If Marner's next contract doesn't meet Marchand's projections, he can supplement it with some nice freelance work.

This week, Marner became the first Canadian athlete to have his face featured on his own signature Red Bull can. (He chugs the stuff for a second-intermission boost.)

Marner's campaign with Intact Insurance has also been extended, with a second run of ad spots and a promotion from intern to "head of reassurance." (The Patrick Marleau cameo is a nice touch.)

10. I sat down with John Matisz this week for his Puck Pursuit podcast, and we chatted about who we think we'll see squeeze into the East and West wild cards and how Erik Karlsson's free agency might shake out. I also explain some of my theories heading into awards season.

Like Gerard Gallant at this time last March, Barry Trotz looks like a Jack Adams lock. He's moulded a bad team into a good one. But I find this award tends to undervalue the coach guiding a good team to greatness. That's Jon Cooper.

11. Good on the NHL Alumni Association for being progressive enough to partner with NEEKA Health Canada and start investigating the efficacy of cannabinoids as a treatment for post-concussion neurological diseases in former NHLers.

Roughly 100 ex-players have enrolled in this unprecedented study, set to begin this summer and wrap up in the summer of 2020. If the results are positive, why wouldn't the NFL's alumni follow suit?



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 10, 2019

"NHL alumni gave everything they had during their careers, but the physical consequences after they hang up their skates can be devastating for both players and their loved ones for the rest of their lives," NHLAA executive director Glenn Healy said.

"This study offers alumni the promise of help and hope, and we are excited to participate in what could become a true game-changer in allowing these professional athletes to finish strong."

It's one thing to pursue money in damages; it's another to start searching for a solution.

12. Trying to remember if I've watched this clip a million times or a zillion times...

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 03.10.2019

1135294 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Stanley Cup Playoff Push: Columbus turns back to Bobrovsky for huge game

Rory Boylen | @RoryBoylen

March 9, 2019, 1:24 PM

It's a 12-game slate Saturday chock full of implications that will shape the playoff picture over the next week.

Among the East's top storylines are Columbus turning back to Sergei Bobrovsky for the biggest game of their season, Carolina looking to recover from a terrible loss Friday, and Boston hoping to extend their point streak to 19 games.

In the West, we're keeping an eye on Arizona and, to a lesser extent, Edmonton as they cling to playoff hopes over these last stages of the regular season, while a big injury to another bubble team has put them in a precarious position.

Here is your playoff outlook heading into Hockey Night in Canada Saturday:

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.

EASTERN CONFERENCE

If the regular season ended today...

(A1) Tampa Bay vs. (WC2) Montreal

(A2) Boston vs. (A3) Toronto

(M1) Washington vs. (WC1) Carolina

(M2) NY Islanders vs. (M3) Pittsburgh

Team of interest: Carolina Hurricanes

No, not because of the storm surge — the Canes play on the road Saturday. We're interested in how they respond to their worst loss of the season Friday night. The Hurricanes were listless and, dare we say, reminiscent of the team we've come to know over the past nine playoff-less seasons. The Winnipeg Jets, who themselves were coming off a one-sided defeat to Tampa Bay, had a 3-0 lead before the first period was even half over and cruised to an 8-1 win with backup Laurent Brossoit in net. Tonight, the Hurricanes play the Central's other big hitter

in Nashville. The last time they met, Carolina chased both of Nashville's goalies en route to a big win.

Here's what the Eastern Conference standings look like today:

What'd I miss? The idle Tampa Bay Lightning became the second-fastest team to clinch a playoff spot in the salary cap era, getting the 'x' in game No. 68, tying the 2008-09 San Jose Sharks. Only the 2009-10 Washington Capitals clinched faster (67). Perhaps a bad omen for the Lightning: neither of the Sharks or Caps advanced past the first round in those seasons.

Fun fact: We know the Boston Bruins are in the midst of a wild run of success, earning a point in 18-straight games — the second-longest run in team history, equaling an identical stretch accomplished last season. But in their most recent win, a 4-3 decision over Florida, the Bruins became just the 10th team in NHL history to win a game in regulation after trailing in the last minute of play.

In a rematch of Thursday's 3-0 Pens win, the Blue Jackets are just a little more desperate this time. Head coach John Tortorella made the controversial decision to start Joonas Korpisalo in the last meeting and didn't even dress Sergei Bobrovsky, who watched from the press box. The Blue Jackets still haven't beat the Penguins in a regular season game since February of 2019 and now face their chief rivals while sitting two points out of the playoffs.

Tortorella decided to turn back to Bobrovsky for Saturday's key showdown, but that choice comes with its own concerning trend. The Columbus netminder has lost 10 of his past 11 games versus the Penguins with a 3.38 GAA and .880 save percentage. Goaltending was not the problem in Thursday's loss — that continues to be the dried-up offence. The Blue Jackets have just 10 goals in six post-trade deadline games and just one primary assist between their two biggest acquisitions, Matt Duchene and Ryan Dzingel. Columbus may have two games in hand of Montreal, the team they're chasing, but they also have one of the toughest finishing schedules in the league. After Pittsburgh, Columbus plays the Islanders, Bruins (twice), Carolina and Calgary in their next five games.

WESTERN CONFERENCE

If the regular season ended today...

(P1) Calgary vs. (WC2) Minnesota

(P2) San Jose vs. (P3) Vegas

(C1) Winnipeg vs. (WC1) Dallas

(C2) Nashville vs. (C3) St. Louis

Team of interest: Arizona Coyotes

Don't look now but with a win, at home, against the lowly Los Angeles Kings Saturday Arizona would move to within one point of Minnesota for the second wild card spot, and still have a game in hand. With eight wins in their past 10 games, the Coyotes' defence and strong goaltending has helped them stick around. Darcy Kuemper, acquired in a 2018 deadline trade from Los Angeles, has been a great find — he's allowed more than three goals in a game just once in the past month. Even further, looking at opponents' points percentage the rest of the way, the Coyotes have one of the five easiest schedules remaining.

Here's what the Western Conference standings look like today:

What'd I miss: The Colorado Avalanche suffered a huge blow with the news captain Gabriel Landeskog will be out the next four-to-six weeks following a collision with Dallas' Ben Bishop Thursday night. With lack of scoring depth already a crucial flaw with the roster, they'll now be without their second-highest goal scorer (33). With this news, more of the spotlight will be on trade deadline pickup Derick Brassard, who has a goal and an assist in six games as an Av.

Fun fact: Ben Bishop is making a late push for the Vezina Trophy and is currently running with a 144:20 shutout streak. But unfortunately, unless



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 10, 2019

something goes horribly wrong, we won't see him try and extend that Saturday night. On one hand it's a bit of a curious choice to start Anton Khudobin with Bishop playing so stellar and with Dallas' next game not coming until Tuesday night. But head coach Jim Montgomery has split his goalies fairly evenly, which is what's really hurting Bishop's Vezina case. And though Khudobin has been steady and strong through most of the season, he has allowed 20 goals in his past six appearances.

You could make an argument that these are the two best teams in the Central and Pacific divisions right now and that the possibility exists Saturday's game is a Western Conference final preview. And while neither of these teams will miss the playoffs, there are still post-season implications here.

The Sharks are now just one point back of the suddenly snake-bitten Calgary Flames, and since they're idle tonight, San Jose could take over the division lead with a win. St. Louis, meantime, currently has two games in hand of Nashville, which sits five points ahead of them for second place in the Central and home-ice advantage in the first round. The Blues are looking to cap off a perfect California road trip, while the Sharks are aiming to complete a perfect four-game homestand.

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1135295 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Assessing Maple Leafs forward Mitch Marner's market value

Andrew Berkshire

March 9, 2019, 11:06 AM

In the midst of a blistering hot streak with 11 points in his last five games, Mitch Marner is back on pace for 100 points this season if he plays every game, after a stretch that started in February where he was "cold" with a dismal... nine points in 13 games.

Nine points in 13 games is a 59-point pace, not far off from the 69 he put up last season or the 61 he put up before, and the fact that it was seen as a cold streak for Marner should illustrate how much the goalposts of expectations have moved for the soon-to-be 22-year-old Maple Leafs forward.

Marner's spectacular season has come at the perfect time for him and his agent, with an impending contract battle with the Leafs looming this summer. After Toronto managed to sign William Nylander and Auston Matthews, Marner is the last major piece they need to get under contract to keep this core intact, and the speculation has been all over the place.

Since last season, there has been a \$10M per season number floated around concerning Marner, with Bruins forward Brad Marchand recently trolling the Leafs on twitter suggesting Marner should get as much as \$12M.

Ironic, considering Marchand is on one of the most team-friendly deals of any star player in the league.

Marner is having a great season, but even a \$10M cap hit would be an unprecedented number for a winger not named Alex Ovechkin or Patrick Kane, with the highest-paid winger in the NHL outside of those two this season being Corey Perry at \$8.625M. Nikita Kucherov and Mark Stone are coming up next year at equal cap hits of \$9.5M in a salary cap expected to be around \$83M.

Marner is a phenomenal talent, coming into this season I had him ranked as the eighth-best right wing in the game, and he'll certainly move up that

list after this season, however I think the Leafs will be a lot more hesitant to commit a salary that large to Marner than most people suspect. That doesn't mean I think there's any chance at all that a trade is made, only that this contract negotiation shouldn't be easy.

For back-to-back seasons now Marner has been one of the best goal-drivers on the power play in the NHL, so I don't have any hesitancy in saying his production there is to be expected and will probably continue, but at even strength, there are a few... let's not even say red flags, there are some yellow flags.

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This season Marner has the eighth-highest 5-vs-5 PDO in the NHL among players with 500 or more minutes played, fourth highest among forwards, and most of the reason for that is a sky-high 12.05 per cent on-ice shooting percentage, which is the second highest number in the NHL for forwards behind only Alex Ovechkin.

While Marner has exhibited some ability to impact on-ice shooting percentage, during his first two seasons he averaged a 9.29 per cent on-ice shooting percentage, way below what he's posted this season. So while Marner has certainly made improvements to his game this season, playing with Tavares and the puck bouncing his way have been big influences on going from 2.1 points per 60 minutes at 5-vs-5 over his first two NHL seasons to 3.1 this season, the third-best mark in the league.

Comparing Marner to his contemporaries on the wing, you get names like Nikita Kucherov, David Pastrnak, Johnny Gaudreau, and Mark Stone. So how does Marner compare to those players in terms of the underlying plays that create goals at even strength?

Mitch Marner's 5-vs-5 Offence vs. Contemporaries

Overall, Marner compares pretty well to this group, he creates more chances for his teammates than Pastrnak, who is more of a finisher on the NHL's best line, is about equal to Stone, but trails Kucherov and Gaudreau.

What's impressive to me about Marner is that he's vastly increased his shooting rate from the slot over previous seasons, but at even strength he isn't the game-breaking playmaker that he is on the power play, he's just very good.

It's important to note that Marner is younger than all these other wingers who recently signed long-term deals, and it's entirely fair to expect him to take further steps in his development at just 21-years-old, especially considering the vast improvements he's made to his game on the defensive side in the last calendar year, however when looking at potential contracts, you also have to consider that all these players, save Pastrnak, had fewer restricted free-agent years left when they signed, so their salaries should be higher.

Taxes are a complication that the Leafs have to face compared to the Tampa Bay Lightning and Vegas Golden Knights, but looking at the contract as percentage of the cap at the time of the contract kicking in, the rumoured numbers for Marner start to look a little crazy.

Salary Cap Hit Percentage at start of contract

Even at \$10M per season, Marner would be the highest cap percentage of any recent elite winger to sign a contract, and at \$12M, it would be the seventh-highest contract signed by cap percentage that currently exists in the NHL according to cap friendly; comparable to Sidney Crosby and Evgeni Malkin.

The Auston Matthews contract certainly changes the landscape for players coming off of entry level deals, and I get why many fans believe Marner is the superior player even if it's clearly not the case. Let's put this in context a little bit though.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 10, 2019

This season Marner is creating just over seven scoring chances for his teammates per 20 minutes at 5-vs-5, that's very good, but it ranks 48th in the NHL among forwards. Matthews ranks 18th with 8.28, and John Tavares ranks 15th with 8.33. Marner is clearly a top-line player, and a fantastic power-play quarterback, but at even strength he's closer to a mid-tier first liner. That isn't bad, but teams who pay elite player money for power-play production can get burned.

Marner is a great hockey player, but based on his accomplishments, his underlying numbers, the good luck he's been fortunate enough to have this season with one of the NHL's best centres, and his contemporaries, the rumoured numbers circulating for his next contract strike me as completely unrealistic.

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1135296 Websites

TSN.CA / Andersen returns to form in Leafs' win over Oilers

Kristen Shilton

The Edmonton Oilers nearly overcame a three-goal third period deficit against the Maple Leafs on Saturday, but Toronto held their hosts off for a 3-2 victory that completed a season sweep of the Oilers. The Leafs got goals from Morgan Rielly, John Tavares and Jake Muzzin in the victory that ended a three-game road trip through Western Canada with five of a possible six points for Toronto. The team now moves to 42-21-5 on the season, still four points back of the Boston Bruins for second place in the Atlantic Division.

The Maple Leafs capped off their annual three-game swing through Western Canada with a solid win over the Oilers, bookending a trip that started with a resounding 6-2 win over Calgary, and then dipped with a blown two-goal lead and subsequent 3-2 overtime loss to the Vancouver Canucks in between.

But to come away with at least a point in every game on the road trip, Toronto focused on getting off to a good start against the Oilers and, when recurring lapses threatened to derail victory in the third, the Leafs managed this time to avoid a collapse.

Toronto was also able to welcome Nazem Kadri back for the tilt in Edmonton too, after he had been sidelined since Feb. 19 with a concussion. Mike Babcock adjusted to his return by moving William Nylander from centre back to the wing on Kadri's line, bumping Connor Brown to the fourth line, and removing Trevor Moore out of the lineup all together.

Both the Leafs and Oilers are known to thrive in transition, but there wasn't much room through the neutral zone on Saturday for either side to work with in a first period that was almost goalless to the end.

Trading chances on Frederik Andersen and Anthony Stolarz yielded nothing until the final seconds of the opening frame, when Rielly gave the Leafs a 1-0 lead with a blast from the point snaking high and over top of Stolarz just as Toronto's second power play of the game was winding down.

The Leafs maintained that score while the second period unfurled uneventfully, right up until Tavares got Stolarz to bite on a fake shot and then put the puck over the goaltender to extend the Leafs' lead to 2-0.

That was Tavares' 38th goal of the season, scored in his 68th game of the year, and matching his previous career-high in goals after 82 games

in 2014-15. He finished Saturday's game with three points (goal, two assists).

Toronto then survived a push by the Oilers early in the third period long enough to turn the tide back in their favor. Tavares got loose near the Edmonton blue line and snuck a puck to Nylander, who hopped into the rush with Jake Muzzin and fed the defenceman for a shortside strike to make it 3-0 Toronto.

The Leafs faced a tough challenge when both Rielly and Muzzin were sent to the box midway through the third, giving Edmonton a 5-on-3 power play for 37 seconds, but Toronto killed it off and were still ahead by three until less than two minutes remained in regulation.

That's when the Leafs became inexplicably sloppy, giving up quick goals to Ryan Nugent-Hopkins and Oscar Klefbom and suddenly holding on desperately for two points. Toronto made it across the finish line thanks to a couple timely finishing saves from Andersen to head home with five of a possible six points from out west.

Andersen didn't get the ending he (or the Leafs) wanted on Wednesday in Vancouver, blowing a two-goal third period lead and then ceding the overtime game-winner to lose a crucial road point.

With two days off in between to reset, Andersen was back on form against the Oilers, with a tight, efficient showing to backstop Toronto to his 33rd win of the season, tied for most by a goalie in the NHL.

For the second straight outing, Andersen was perfect through two periods in Edmonton, turning aside all 19 shots he faced. The Oilers' big guns didn't go easy on Toronto's goalie though, with both Connor McDavid and Leon Draisaitl challenging Andersen with sharp-angle shots he had to juggle.

Andersen made a series of scrambling saves late in the second period that started with a hard shot from McDavid ricocheting off the goalie and creating some second chance opportunities. But Andersen stood tall and calmly sent play back the other way, bringing another chorus of "Fred-die" chants that have followed him throughout this Western Canada swing.

Toronto's goalie was great on the third period kill that would help define its victory as well, being aggressive on his attack and closing posts in tight. Like the rest of the Leafs, he looked relatively unbeatable until the final minutes, when Nugent-Hopkins and Klefbom sliced through him with ease and made Andersen look suddenly shaky.

In a bend-don't-break situation for Toronto, Andersen made the last two saves he needed to deliver at the final buzzer. He finished with 31 saves and a .939 save percentage in his 104th win as a Leaf, taking possession of sixth place on the franchise's all-time wins by a goaltender list.

One of the Leafs' most important forward groups hasn't been playing as well of late, and Auston Matthews, Kasper Kapanen and Andreas Johnsson have faced plenty of questions as to why.

On the ice Saturday, that trio tried to put into action what Matthews said on Friday would create a more winning formula - stop being one and done in the offensive zone, use their speed to advantage and be stronger on the cycle.

For much of the game against Edmonton, Matthews' group did just that. They were the Leafs' best line in the first period, looking shot out of a cannon as they attacked Stolarz with 13 shots attempts at even strength, all while being matched up primarily against McDavid's line with Nugent-Hopkins and Zack Kassian.

Matthews was the driver of his line, going into the tough areas of the ice, winning puck battles, and getting to the front of the net looking for tips. But as he so relentlessly searched for a goal, Stolarz was there to stone him from in front and on wraparound chances.

In the end, Matthews and company left the game with six combined shots on goal and without any points, extending Matthews' and Kapanen's goalless streaks to six games and Johnsson's to five. But they did



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 10, 2019

produce a team-high 68 per cent possession, and held McDavid's line to no points at even strength.

They were out for Klefbom's goal, a 6-on-5 strike that McDavid assisted on, but for the most part, Matthews' unit did a fine job challenging the Oilers' top line, even if they were stymied again on the scoresheet in the process.

In the Leafs' last two games, four of their combined five goals have come from defencemen (two from Rielly, one each from Ron Hainsey and Muzzin). And throughout Saturday's game, Toronto's blueliners were a major part of the team's offensive push.

Rielly, who happened to be celebrating his 25th birthday on Saturday, swung momentum Toronto's way with his timely late-period goal, the Vancouver native's second goal in as many games and 18th of the season. It also extended Rielly's point streak to four games, his longest stretch with at least a point since mid-December.

The defenceman also showed off his playmaking skills against Edmonton, like jumping into the rush and perfectly reading Patrick Marleau headed towards the net with an expertly-placed pass. If not for a great save by Stolarz, Rielly would have had his second point of the game, but the play itself was exactly what Rielly's been able to produce as this season has gone on, using his smarts and skill to up the ante for Toronto offensively.

While Rielly has been the Leafs' best defenceman all season, Muzzin has had a difficult time finding a groove with Toronto since being traded there in late January. In Edmonton, though, Muzzin looked more at ease, and played one of his best games in weeks.

Even before he finished off a fantastic set of passes by Tavares and Nylander to score his second goal of the season for Toronto, Muzzin was playing well in the defensive zone, executing plays and showing more confidence.

With Jake Gardiner (back) and Travis Dermott (shoulder) still out for weeks, the Leafs' blueline has to continue striving for consistency and cohesion, two things that looked more and more intact in Saturday's win.

The last strong game Toronto had on the power play was its first meeting of the season against Edmonton, at Scotiabank Arena on Feb. 27. The Leafs went 3-for-5 on the man advantage in that outing, a major factor in the 6-2 victory.

In the four games after that, Toronto went 1-for-8 on the power play, looking towards Saturday as the night to get that number back on track.

The Leafs top power play unit had scored twice in its previous seven games, once when Nylander scored against the Oilers last month. That group found the marker it was looking for on their second try of the first period, when Rielly sent a long shot through traffic and past Stolarz.

It was a goal the Leafs needed not only to get them rolling in Saturday's game, but turn the middling power play back in the right direction. Toronto had been goalless with the extra man in five of their previous eight games with at least one power-play try, and consistency has been a struggle all season.

And special teams ended up being a major difference-maker in the game - Toronto finished 1-for-2 on the power play, while Edmonton went 0-for-4 with the extra man in a game decided by a single score.

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1135297 Websites

TSN.CA / Canucks vs Golden Knights gameday preview

Jeff Paterson

VANCOUVER -- The Vancouver Canucks (28-31-9) open a three-game homestand when they host the Vegas Golden Knights (37-26-5) tonight at Rogers Arena.

The Canucks return to action following a 3-2 loss in Edmonton on Thursday. Jay Beagle and Alex Edler had the Vancouver goals, while Thatcher Demko made 31 saves in his third start of the season. Edler appeared in his 800th National Hockey League game and scored for the second night in a row after netting the overtime winner in a 3-2 victory over Toronto on Wednesday night.

Starting with last Sunday's 3-0 loss in Vegas, the Canucks have dug themselves too many early holes lately. They were down 3-0 to the Golden Knights, they trailed Toronto 2-0 and fell behind 3-0 in Edmonton. The Canucks have surrendered the game's first goal in eight of their last 10 outings and a league-high 42 times in 68 games this season. The Canucks are 19-5-2 when they open the scoring, but 9-26-7 when allowing their opponents to score first.

After watching from the bench Thursday, Jacob Markstrom returns to the Canucks net tonight. He made 28 saves in goal and added his second assist of the season against the Leafs on Thursday. With the result, Markstrom set a new career high with his 24th win of the season. The victory also moved him into a tie for fifth with Gary Smith on the franchise all-time wins list with 72.

Brock Boeser had a couple of assists on Thursday, but has gone eight games without scoring. Elias Pettersson picked up his first point in five games with a helper against the Oilers. However, the Canucks scoring leader - and NHL's top rookie point producer - has gone nine games without a goal and has just one in his last 13. Despite a slowdown in his production, Pettersson still has a 20-point lead over Buffalo's Rasmus Dahlin in the NHL rookie scoring race.

With 57 points on the season, Pettersson needs just three more to tie the Canucks rookie scoring record shared by Pavel Bure and Ivan Hlinka. Trevor Linden had 59 points in his first season in the NHL.

The Canucks will welcome Jake Virtanen back to the line-up. The big winger missed 10 games after breaking two ribs in a collision with Ryan Getzlaf in Anaheim on Feb. 13. Virtanen is fifth on the team with 12 goals. Markus Granlund comes out of the line-up to make room for Virtanen. Chris Tanev was also injured in Anaheim. The veteran defenceman took part in this morning's skate with his team, but will not play tonight. The Canucks will go with the same six defencemen they have used for the past two games.

The Golden Knights arrive in town on a five-game win streak having given up just one goal in their past three outings. They beat Calgary 2-1 on home ice on Wednesday after blanking the Canucks and Anaheim. Defencemen Shea Theodore and Deryk Engelland had the Vegas goals against the Flames while Marc-Andre Fleury stopped 33 of 34 shots.

Fleury has been the busiest goalie in the league this season. He leads the NHL with 57 starts (and appearances), 33 wins and eight shutouts. He will get the start tonight and may get a night off tomorrow when Vegas visits Calgary.

Shea Theodore rides a four-game point streak into action tonight, one goal and four assists during that time. William Karlsson has four points in his three-game streak.

The Knights' current win streak coincides with the arrival of Mark Stone at the NHL trade deadline late last month. The winger's new eight-year, \$76 million contract extension was finalized yesterday. In five games with his new team, Stone has yet to score, but has a pair of assists and 18 shots on goal.

While Vegas is one of the top teams in the league on home ice (21-10-4), the Knights are 16-16-1 on the road. Last year, they finished 22-14-5 away from T-Mobile Arena.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 10, 2019

With 14 games remaining on their schedule, the Golden Knights appear to be locked into a third place finish in the Pacific Division. They are 10 points behind Calgary and nine back of San Jose, and are eight ahead of fourth place Arizona.

Tonight marks the conclusion of the four-game regular season series between these teams. Vegas is 2-0-1 against Vancouver, while the Canucks are 1-2 in their head to head showdowns. Max Pacioretty has four goals in the three games while Bo Horvat and Brock Boeser each have a pair of goals. Vegas is 3-0 at Rogers Arena since joining the league last season and 6-0-1 in the franchise's seven games against the Canucks.

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