



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 13, 2018

THE NEWS & OBSERVER

Vesey, Zuccarello lead Rangers to 6-3 win over Hurricanes

By SIMMI BUTTAR AP Sports Writer

March 12, 2018 11:06 PM

NEW YORK

Jimmy Vesey's first career hat trick came at a good time for the struggling Rangers.

Vesey scored three times, Mats Zuccarello had two goals and New York beat the Carolina Hurricanes 6-3 on Monday night.

"It's something you definitely want to accomplish," Vesey said. "I was just saying I remember it took me all four years in college to get one. It's nice to have one."

"Everyone dreams when they are a kid of scoring the big goal or scoring a hat trick. I think it's something I will always remember, so it's a great feeling."

Vladislav Namestnikov also scored for the Rangers, who ended a three-game losing streak and earned their first home win since Feb. 9. Pavel Buchnevich and Mika Zibanejad each had three assists.

Backup goalie Alexandar Georgiev made 41 saves for his second win of the season.

Georgiev made a key pad save on Sebastian Aho late in the third period to preserve the lead.

"I knew they were coming hard," Georgiev said. "It's just instinct how I stretched that pad."

Teuvo Teravainen, Lee Stempniak and Victor Rask scored for the Hurricanes. Scott Darling, who has struggled in his first season with Carolina, made 17 stops.

Tied at 3 in the third, Vesey took a loose puck at the left faceoff circle and wristed a high shot past Darling at 12:15.

"That's where I was going," Vesey said. "I had a shot from a similar angle in the first period and I kind of misfired and put it lower than I wanted. I was definitely trying to go high blocker and just fortunately it went in."

Zuccarello added an empty-netter at 17:23 for his 14th of the season and the 100th of his career, and Vesey capped his hat trick with an empty-netter in the final minute for his 15th goal this season.

The Rangers extended their home winning streak against Carolina to 15 games, dating to Jan. 5, 2011. The streak is the longest for the Rangers against one opponent in franchise history. The Rangers also have won 24 of their past 28 games overall against the Hurricanes.

The Hurricanes have struggled with three wins in their past 12 games as they fade from the Eastern Conference playoff race.

"We are in a hole right now," Stempniak said. "We still think we are going to make the playoffs and we believe we can, but it gets harder with each loss. We have to put this one behind us, get ready tomorrow for a very good Boston team, and start getting wins and collecting points."

It was Carolina's second game since Hall of Famer Ron Francis was moved from general manager to a new role as the team's president of hockey operations. New owner Tom Dundon plans to hire a new GM who will report directly to him.

With the Hurricanes on the power play, Rask tied it for the third time when he skated to a loose puck at the top of the zone and beat Georgiev for his 13th at 8:23 of the third period.

Tied at 2 in the second period, the Rangers took the lead with a quick power-play goal. Just 6 seconds after Noah Hanifin was sent off for slashing, Buchnevich had his shot from just inside the blue line deflected in by Namestnikov at 11:51.

It was Namestnikov's 22nd goal of the season and his second as a Ranger since coming over in the deal that sent Ryan McDonagh and J.T. Miller to Tampa Bay at the trade deadline.

Buchnevich also had a nice play earlier in the period. He won a faceoff deep in the Hurricanes' zone and drove to the net before sending a pass to Vesey, who scored on a wrist shot at 1:52.

"He (Buchnevich) didn't tell me anything," Vesey said. "So once I saw him go forward, their D's stick kind of stopped the puck a little bit and it was a quick 2-on-1. I just tried to get open and he made a great play."

The Hurricanes rallied again. Stempniak jumped on a rebound and beat Georgiev for his second goal of the season at 7:48.

The Rangers opened the scoring about halfway through the first period. Neal Pionk's shot from the right point missed the net and took a friendly bounce off the end boards to Zuccarello, who beat Darling stick-side at 9:06.

Zuccarello extended his goal-scoring streak to three games.

The Hurricanes answered 5 1/2 minutes later. Aho entered the Rangers zone and sent a quick pass to Teravainen, who immediately sent a return pass to Aho. Aho shot it on net and Teravainen sent the rebound past Georgiev for his 20th of the season.



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NOTES: The Hurricanes re-assigned F Valentin Zykov to the American Hockey League's Charlotte Checkers. The 22-year-old Zykov, who leads the AHL with 30 goals, did not appear in any games since his recall on Sunday. ... Zuccarello has a point in 15 of his past 19 games against Carolina. ... Rangers D Tony DeAngelo left because of an ankle injury. Coach Alain Vigneault said DeAngelo will get an MRI on Tuesday.

UP NEXT

Hurricanes: Host Boston on Tuesday night.

Rangers: Host two-time defending champion Pittsburgh on Wednesday night.



Gameday: Bruins vs. Hurricanes

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

2:30 AM

In like a lion.

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

The Hurricanes will not hold a morning skate coming off a game and travel the night prior. We'll chat with head coach Bill Peters in the early evening to get the latest.

Last updated: 2:30 a.m.

CANES, BRUINS CLOSE OUT SEASON SERIES

2:30 a.m.

The Carolina Hurricanes and Boston Bruins will close out their three-game season series in Raleigh on Tuesday.

The Bruins have taken the first two games of the series, both played in Boston, but the Hurricanes did snatch a point in the last meeting. Boston ran away in a 7-1 rout in the first week of January before then eking out a 4-3 overtime win on Feb. 27.

In the most recent meeting just two weeks ago, the Hurricanes scored three goals in the first period and took a 3-2 lead to the locker room. The Bruins tied it in the first half of the second period, and Charlie McAvoy scored the game-winner just 68 seconds into overtime.

"It was a good battle. Lots of good things. But it doesn't matter," [Sebastian Aho](#), who scored one of the three goals in the first period, said after that game. "We need wins. It's always tough when you lose a tight game."

Much of the same could be said about the Hurricanes 6-3 loss to the New York Rangers on Monday night. It was a game in which the Hurricanes never had a lead, but they thrice were able to answer Rangers' goals with goals of their own to even the score. In the third period, when [Victor Rask](#) tied the game at three with a power-play tally, it looked as if the Canes were going to seize the momentum and find a fourth goal. The Rangers beat them to that, though, and then added two empty-netters in the final minutes of the game to seal their victory and hand the Hurricanes their 15th straight defeat at Madison Square Garden (0-12-3).

"I thought we played pretty well. We got a big one on the power play in the third," said [Lee Stempniak](#), who scored his second goal of the season in the second period. "We had a lot of chances. It's a tough game to lose. They're all must-wins at this point given where we are in the standings. To come back, tie it up and then lose the lead again, it's a tough one to swallow."

"It seemed like we were chasing the game a lot. Every time we got it tied up, they would score in three, four or five minutes and we were chasing again," head coach Bill Peters said. "I thought it was coming. Tied it up on the power play, 3-3, and I thought we were in good shape there."

Now with just 13 games remaining in the regular season, the Hurricanes are going to need to establish an extended winning streak down the stretch if they want to keep their fading playoff hopes alive.

"It's surprising. It's frustrating to a certain degree, too," Peters said about the team's position in the standings. "Obviously there are degrees of disappointment there, too."

CANESPR NOTES: The Hurricanes are 11-7-1 against Atlantic Division opponents this season. ... The Hurricanes are 5-1-3 in their last nine games against the Bruins. ... The Canes have scored a power-play goal in three straight games and are 3-for-8 (37.5 percent) in that stretch.



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Recap: Canes Topped by Rangers

Teravainen, Stempniak and Rask score but Canes fall, 6-3

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

March 12th, 2018

NEW YORK - The Carolina Hurricanes dropped a 6-3 decision to the New York Rangers on Monday at Madison Square Garden.

[Teuvo Teravainen](#), [Lee Stempniak](#) and [Victor Rask](#) tallied for the Hurricanes, but Jimmy Vesey netted a hat trick for the Rangers, who exacerbated the final score with a pair of empty-net goals.

Here are five takeaways from tonight's game in the Big Apple.

One

Madison Square Garden is, for all intents and purposes, a haunted house for the Hurricanes at this point. The Canes are now winless in 15 straight games (0-12-3) at The World's Most Famous Arena, their last victory coming on Oct. 29, 2010. They've been outscored 54-20 in that stretch.

It's a streak that's a head-scratcher in ways - numerous iterations of Hurricanes and Rangers teams have faced each other in the last eight years - and one that will have to wait until the 2018-19 regular season to possibly end.

Two

The Hurricanes showed some resiliency, thrice trailing by a goal and thrice answering to tie the game. But the scoring pattern continued and the final horn sounded before the Canes were able to even the score for a fourth time.

[Derek Ryan](#) was stripped of the puck in the neutral zone, and the Rangers took it the other way. Vesey then wired a shot short side that beat [Scott Darling](#), and that was the difference in the game.

"To come back, tie it up and then lose the lead again, it's a tough one to swallow," Stempniak said.

"it seemed like we were chasing the game a lot," head coach Bill Peters said. "Every time we got it tied up, they would score in three, four or five minutes and we were chasing again."

Three

Can the Hurricanes extrapolate the positive from scoring to tie the game three times and not get buried in a multi-goal deficit? Sure. But points are at a premium at this point in the season, and moral victories are tough to accept.

"If you're really looking for positives, that's the positive. But we're in a hole right now," Stempniak said.

"It's a resilient group, there's no issue there," Peters said. "But there are no moral victories, especially at this time of year."

Here's a familiar refrain: the Hurricanes paced the Rangers in both shots, 44-23, and shot attempts, 86-41, but still come up empty in the win column.

"You want to get quality shots and make it difficult on the goalie. I thought we did that today," Stempniak said. "We had a lot of chances. It's a tough game to lose. They're all must-wins at this point given where we are in the standings."

"We haven't been able to break through," Peters said.

Four

Aho and Teravainen continue to be a dynamic wing pairing for the Hurricanes. The two Finns connected once again to get the Hurricanes on the board in the first period and tie the game at one. Aho's initial shot was knocked down in front, but Teravainen was there to smack in the puck for his 20th goal of the season. Teravainen joins [Jeff Skinner](#) (20) and Aho (24) in the Canes' 20-goal club through 69 games this season.

Aho and Teravainen have combined for 25 points (12g, 13a) in their last 15 games, and the two are at the top of this season's team scoring stats.

Five

Rask's power-play tally in the third period breathed new life into the Hurricanes. It was a quick shot, a bomb from the point, that pinged off the iron and into the net. From there, it seemed as if the Hurricanes would be able to build some momentum, but Vesey's second of the game, which would be the game-winner, smothered that.

"I thought it was coming," Peters said. "Tied it up on the power play, 3-3, and I thought we were in good shape there."

"I was trying to get a shot off. Luckily it went in," Rask said. "It's tough to lose one of these games, but we've just got to reboot and go for it tomorrow."

In the second period, the Hurricanes tied the game at two off a textbook play of going to the net and locating rebounds. Off an offensive zone faceoff win, Jeff Skinner curled with the puck to the middle of the ice and let a shot go from between the tops of the circles. Stempniak was parked alongside the net to clean up the rebound for his first goal since Jan. 14.

"Skinny gets shots through," Stempniak said. "Once he had some space I tried going to the net, and the rebound came right to me."

Up Next

The Hurricanes will host the Boston Bruins on Tuesday night in Raleigh to close out the team's 15th back-to-back set of the season.

"We've got to put this one behind us and come ready tomorrow against a very good Boston team," Stempniak said. "Start getting wins and start collecting points. Give ourselves a shot as the season winds down."



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NORTH STATE JOURNAL

Hurricanes' playoff hopes slipping away after road loss to Rangers

Jimmy Vesey registers a hat trick in New York's win

[March 12, 2018 Cory Lavalette Article, NHL, Sports](#)

Rangers center Ryan Spooner shoots against Hurricanes goalie Scott Darling during the second period at Madison Square Garden. (Brad Penner / USA TODAY Sports)

Jimmy Vesey scored a hat trick, including the go-ahead goal midway through the third period, and Mats Zuccarello added two goals to lead the New York Rangers to a 6-3 win over the visiting Carolina Hurricanes on Monday night in New York.

New York snapped a three-game losing streak with the win, while Carolina lost for the third time in four games.

Vesey scored the go-ahead goal with 7:45 left in the game, beating Scott Darling short-side for his 14th goal of the season. Vesey's goal came less than four minutes after a Victor Rask goal tied the score at three 8:23 into the period.

Zuccarello added an insurance goal for the Rangers five minutes later on an empty-netter off an assist from Ryan Spooner, and Vesey added his third on an empty-net goal with less than a minute left in the game.

Carolina's Lee Stempniak scored in the second period, sandwiched by two New York goals at the 1:52 and 11:51 marks, on goals by Vesey and Vladislav Namestnikov, respectively.

The Rangers got on the board first at the 9:06 mark of the first period as Zuccarello banged home a rebound past Darling to give him goals in three straight games and 13 overall on the season.

Carolina tied the score at the 14:32 mark of the first period on a Teuvo Teravainen's 20th goal with assists from Brett Pesce and Sebastian Aho.

The Rangers won the game despite being outshot 44-23 and committing 19 giveaways.

The Hurricanes return home on Tuesday for two games, starting with a battle against Boston before facing Philadelphia as they fight for a playoff berth.

New York remains home on Wednesday against Pittsburgh before heading on the road Saturday to face St. Louis.



SB NATION
CANES COUNTRY

Hurricanes Lose Must-Win Game to Rangers

The Canes lost to the Rangers in painful fashion on Monday night.

By [Brett Finger@brettfinger](mailto:brett.finger@brettfinger.com) Mar 12, 2018, 9:49pm EDT

With the end of the regular season nearing, the [Carolina Hurricanes](#)' playoff hopes are growing slimmer and slimmer by the day, and their loss to the tanking [New York Rangers](#) at Madison Square Garden on Monday night didn't do them any favors.

The Canes, still winless at MSG since 2010, dropped yet another game at the world's most famous arena and allowed

the [Panthers](#) and [Blue Jackets](#) to continue pulling away in the Eastern Conference playoff race.

After a back-and-forth opening half of the first period, it was the Rangers who got on the board first. An offensive zone faceoff resulted in a point shot that redirected off the end boards and right to [Mats Zuccarello](#), who wristed a sharp-angle shot home for his 13th of the season.

Just over five minutes later, the Hurricanes got one back, thanks again to the nation of Finland. Sebastian Aho set up [Teuvo Teravainen](#) for a chance in the slot and he managed to get it by rookie goalie [Alexandar Georgiev](#) and tie the game at one before the first intermission.



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Less than two minutes into the middle frame, a defensive zone faceoff win by [Derek Ryan](#) resulted in a go-ahead goal for Rangers forward Jimmy Vesey. Vesey jumped on a loose puck amid a lackluster group of Canes skaters and beat [Scott Darling](#) to make it 2-1.

At the 7:48 mark of the period, [Lee Stempniak](#) netted his first goal since January 14 as he hammered home the rebound from a [Jeff Skinner](#) shot from the top of the slot and tied the game at two.

Then, four minutes later, a centerpiece of New York's return for [Ryan McDonagh](#) and [J.T. Miller](#) gave them their third lead of the night. [Vladislav Namestnikov](#) got credited with a deflection goal on the man advantage.

Near the halfway point of the third period, the Hurricanes were presented with an important opportunity as [Zuccarello](#) was whistled for hooking, and [Victor Rask](#) registered the tying goal. Rask ripped a laser beam slap shot from the top of the zone off the post and into the Ranger net to tie the game yet again.

Just under five minutes later, the Rangers continued the game's alternating scoring trend. Vesey wired a sharp-angle shot over the shoulder of Darling for his second of the game and gave the home team another lead.

The Canes kept their foot on the gas, but [Georgiev](#) was terrific, keeping his team on the right side of the score.

Bill Peters pulled Darling for the extra attacker with three minutes to go and, almost instantly, Zuccarello netted his second of the game from the neutral zone. Vesey then scored New York's second empty net goal to make it 6-3, and the hats came raining down in honor of his three-goal performance.

That's how things ended. The Rangers, who were outshot 44-23 on Monday, have now won three of their four meetings with the Hurricanes this season. The two teams will meet again in Raleigh before the end of the season.

The Canes will have to move on from this demoralizing loss and shift their focus to tomorrow night's opponent. They'll host the scorching-hot [Boston Bruins](#) on Tuesday.



Hurricanes, Bruins face each other working through issues

The Boston Bruins ran into a rare recent glitch in their last game, but they are getting at least some of their parts back together going into Tuesday night's game at Carolina.

by [STATS](#)

9h ago • 2 min read Update 9h ago

The [Boston Bruins](#) ran into a rare recent glitch in their last game, but they are getting at least some of their parts back together going into Tuesday night's game at Carolina.

The [Hurricanes](#), on the other hand, will try to regroup quickly after suffering a 6-3 loss Monday night on the road against the New York Rangers.

For the Hurricanes, there's not an opportunity to be concerned about the Eastern Conference standings if they're not taking care of business.

"We have to worry about ourselves," Carolina coach Bill Peters said. "There's no sense in looking at what's going on above you or below you."

This will be Carolina's first home game since the front-office shakeup last week that resulted in general manager Ron Francis reassigned.

Boston, which has the second-most points in the conference, is in need of some slight roster massaging despite a surge.

The Bruins have dealt with a bit of a snag because of an injury to forward Brad Marchand, the team's leading scorer.

Coach Bruce Cassidy said the stress on the forwards should be eased because the Bruins will have right winger David Backes back for Tuesday night as he has served a three-game suspension.

The Bruins were without Marchand in Sunday's 3-1 loss at Chicago because of an upper-body injury. His 29 goals and 69 points are tops among the Bruins and he's listed as day-to-day.

"We'll see how he is for Tuesday," Cassidy said.

Cassidy said the injury apparently occurred during Saturday night's matchup with Chicago when Marchand collided with Blackhawks forward Anthony Duclair. The extent of Marchand's ailment wasn't realized until prior to Sunday's game.

Marchand's absence put the Bruins in a predicament with 11 forwards.

"A little challenge for the coach to keep the guys fresh," center David Krejci said.

Marchand has been on a hot streak, receiving [NHL](#) Second Star of the Week recognition with four goals and four assists in three games despite the time missed.

The Chicago result ended Boston's six-game winning streak, which began with an overtime decision against Carolina. The Bruins have won both previous meetings with the Hurricanes this season, also winning 7-1 in Boston.



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The Hurricanes ought to be in a desperate mood after failing to string together consistent outings and falling below the playoff line.

"Everyone has got more to give," Peters said. "Everyone has got to play. Everyone has to contribute. Everyone has got to make a positive contribution each and every night."

The final two goals allowed Monday night were in empty-net situations, so the margin is somewhat deceiving. The Hurricanes were tied with the Rangers with less than eight minutes to play.

Peters went with goalie Scott Darling in that game and he made only 17 saves. It's likely that Carolina will turn back to Cam Ward for Boston's visit.

For the Bruins, Tuesday's assignment marks the second game in a stretch of eight of nine games on the road.

This will be the lone home game for the Hurricanes during a 12-day span.



Vesey's hat trick lifts Rangers past Hurricanes

Zuccarello scores twice, Georgiev makes 41 saves for New York

by Dan Rosen @droseennhl / NHL.com Senior Writer

March 12th, 2018

NEW YORK -- [Jimmy Vesey](#) had his first career hat trick, and the New York Rangers defeated the Carolina Hurricanes 6-3 at Madison Square Garden on Monday.

"It took me all four years in college [Harvard University] to get one, so it's nice to have one [in the NHL]," Vesey said. "Everyone dreams when they're a kid of scoring a big goal or scoring a hat trick. It's something I'll always remember. It's a great feeling."

[Mats Zuccarello](#) scored two goals, [Pavel Buchnevich](#) and [Mika Zibanejad](#) each had three assists, and [Alexandar Georgiev](#) made 41 saves to help the Rangers (31-32-7) end a four-game home losing streak (0-3-1).

New York, which hadn't won at home since defeating the Calgary Flames 4-3 on Feb. 9, is nine points behind the New Jersey Devils for the second wild card into the Stanley Cup Playoffs from the Eastern Conference.

"The mood is always better when you win," Vesey said. "No one is going to take it easy on us just because we have a young lineup. We can't feel bad for ourselves. We have to go out and play with passion and pride every night. I think we've done a good job of that lately."

[Teuvo Teravainen](#), [Lee Stempniak](#) and [Victor Rask](#) scored, and [Scott Darling](#) made 17 saves for the Hurricanes (30-28-11), who have lost three of their past four games and are

seven points behind the Devils for the second wild card into the playoffs from the East.

Carolina coach Bill Peters was hopeful the Hurricanes could build off their 3-2 win at the Chicago Blackhawks last Thursday, and said it's surprising to him that they haven't been able to string together strong performances to climb the standings.

"It's frustrating to a certain degree, too," Peters said. "Obviously, there are degrees of disappointment there too."

Vesey scored on a short side, high blocker shot from the left circle off the rush at 12:15 of the third period to give the Rangers a 4-3 lead.

Zuccarello scored an empty-net goal at 17:23 to make it 5-3 before Vesey completed the hat trick with an empty-net goal at 19:36 to extend the lead to 6-3.

Zuccarello scored at 9:06 of the first period to give the Rangers a 1-0 lead.

Teravainen scored at 14:32 to tie it 1-1.

Vesey scored at 1:52 of the second period to make it 2-1. Buchnevich won the face-off in the right circle before passing across to Vesey, who kicked the puck to his stick and shot past Darling from in close.

Stempniak scored off a rebound at 7:48 to tie it 2-2.

[Vladislav Namestnikov](#) scored at 11:51 to make it 3-2 off a deflection from Buchnevich's shot from the point six seconds into a power play.



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Rask tied it 3-3 with a power-play goal at 8:23 of the third period.

"It seemed like we were chasing the game a lot," Peters said. "Every time we got it tied up they would score within three, four, five minutes and we were chasing again."

Goal of the game

Vesey's goal at 12:15 of the third period.

Save of the game

Georgiev's save on [Sebastian Aho](#) at 15:18 of the third period.

They said it

"We still think we are going to make the playoffs and we believe we can, but it gets harder with each loss. We have to put this one behind us, get ready tomorrow for a very good Boston team, start getting wins and collecting points." -- *Hurricanes forward Lee Stempniak*

"Tonight, you had what you get a lot in this league, the difference was goaltending. Their goaltender had a tough

night and our young goaltender had a good night. He made some timely saves and we got a couple of goals there that I'm sure their guy would like to have back." -- *Rangers coach Alain Vigneault*

Need to know

The Rangers have won 15 consecutive home games against the Hurricanes. ... Vesey's only hat trick in college came on Jan. 15, 2016, when he was a senior at Harvard against St. Lawrence University. ... Rangers defenseman [Tony DeAngelo](#) left the game with 12:28 remaining in the second period because of an ankle injury. Vigneault said he will get an MRI on Tuesday. ... The Hurricanes re-assigned Valentin Zykov to Charlotte of the American Hockey League prior to the game after recalling him Sunday.

What's next

Hurricanes: Host the Boston Bruins on Tuesday (7 p.m. ET; SN1, SNE, SNO, FS-CR, NESN, NHL.TV)

Rangers: Host the Pittsburgh Penguins on Wednesday (8 p.m. ET; NBCSN, NHL.TV)



Hurricanes Return Zykov To Charlotte

Written by Nicholas Niedzielski

Published: March 12, 2018

Valentin Zykov is headed back to Charlotte after being re-assigned Monday evening.

The forward did not appear in a game for Carolina after getting his first NHL recall of the season on Sunday.

Zykov leads the AHL in goals and became the first Russian-born 30-goal scorer in the AHL since 2008-09 over the weekend. He currently sits at 48 points (30g, 18a) in 57 games for Charlotte this season.

The Checkers return to action tomorrow to kick off a two-game set against the Wilkes-Barre/Scranton Penguins.

Hometown Weekly Report: March 12

Written by Nicholas Niedzielski

Published: March 12, 2018

The Checkers returned home last weekend and kept their winning ways rolling by sweeping the Hartford Wolf Pack in their last meetings of the season.

Week in Review

Team Statistics

- Overall record 35-24-3

- Home record 20-9-1
- Road record 15-15-2
- Last weeks' record 2-0-0
- Last 10 games 6-4-0
- Division Standings 4th
- Conference Standings 7th
- League Standings 11th



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Checkers 4, Hartford 3

Returning home for the first time this month, the Checkers rallied back to top the Hartford Wolf Pack. After falling into a 2-0 hole in the first, Valentin Zykov pulled Charlotte back into the contest with a pair of power-play goals to tie the game through 40 minutes of play. The visitors jumped back on top early on in the third, but the Checkers again pushed back. After Janne Kuokkanen ripped a one-timer from the right circle to even the score, Andrew Poturalski picked up the rebound of a Trevor Carrick-shot off the post and banged it home for what would stand as the eventual game winner. [Full recap](#)

Checkers 7, Hartford 3

In their final meeting of the season, the Checkers again got the best of the Hartford Wolf Pack. Charlotte roared out to a three-goal lead through one period of play, but a two-goal frame from the visitors tightened the contest heading into the second intermission. Warren Foegele opened the third with his franchise-best 25th goal as a rookie before Patrick Brown converted a shorthanded breakaway to push the Checkers back ahead by two. The Wolf Pack netted one more shortly after and then pulled their goalie for an extra attacker for one last rally attempt. That would backfire, however, as Nicolas Roy hit the empty net to extend the lead, then Alex Nedeljkovic became the 13th goalie in AHL history to score a goal and sealed Charlotte's 7-3 win. [Full recap](#)

Three Stars Of The Week

- **3rd Star Lucas Wallmark** 0g, 4a
- **2nd Star Trevor Carrick** 1g, 3a
- **1st Star Valentin Zykov** 2g, 2a

Notables

SNIPER BETWEEN THE PIPES

With the Checkers ahead by three and an empty net for Hartford in the waning minutes of Saturday's game, netminder Alex Nedeljkovic collected a loose puck to the side of the cage and flung it all the way down the ice and into the visitors net. That made Nedeljkovic the 13th goalie in AHL history to score a goal and just the 8th to do so with a shot.

That tally was actually Nedeljkovic's second pro goal, as the netminder scored for the ECHL's Florida Everblades last season as a rookie.

FRESHMAN PHENOM

Warren Foegele earned his spot atop the record books on Saturday as well. A slick wrap-around conversion in the third period brought Foegele's total to 25, breaking Lucas Wallmark's franchise record for goals by a rookie.

The 21-year-old leads all AHL rookies in goals this season, boasting a three-goal lead over the second place skater, and is tied for fourth in the league overall.

CARRICK PITCHES IN

Last weekend's series against Hartford saw Trevor Carrick deliver a big boost to the Checkers' production. The blue liner set a career high with three helpers in Friday's win, then pinched in to collect a rebound goal in Saturday's rematch.

Carrick now has 33 points on the year, putting him into a tie for eighth among all AHL defensemen. The fourth-year pro has especially excelled on the man advantage, as his 19 power-play assists are the second-most by blue liner in the league.

SOLID ADDITION

Carolina's trade deadline acquisition Greg McKeeg has made a big splash during his short time with the Checkers. The forward has picked up a point in four of the five games he's played for Charlotte, including his first goal with his new club in Saturday's win.

KUOKKANEN STAYS HOT

The reigning AHL Rookie of the Month continued his hot streak over the weekend, notching three points in the two-game series against Hartford. Kuokkanen's 25 helpers this season, which put him in a tie for fifth among all AHL rookies, are tied for the third-most in a single-season by a Checkers rookie, nine shy of the franchise record set by Zac Dalpe in 2010-11.

Ranks

- Valentin Zykov leads the lead in goals (30), power-play goals (16) and shooting percentage (29.4), is tied for second in game-winning goals and is tied for 14th in the AHL in scoring (48)
- Andrew Miller is tied for seventh in the AHL in scoring (51) and sixth in assists (36) despite missing the last nine games
- Warren Foegele leads all rookies and is tied for fourth overall in goals (25), is tied for second in the AHL in shorthanded goals (4), is tied for the league lead in shorthanded points (6), is tied for second in the AHL in game-winning goals (7), ranks fourth among league rookies in plus-minus (+18), ranks second among rookies in shooting percentage (18.7) and ranks seventh among league rookies in scoring (41)
- Trevor Carrick ranks second in the AHL in power-play assists, tied for eighth among league defensemen in scoring (33) and ranks fifth among blue liners in power-play points (21)
- Philip Samuelsson ranks second in the AHL in plus-minus (+31)
- Roland McKeown is tied for third in the AHL in plus-minus (+30)
- Alex Nedeljkovic leads the AHL in wins (27), ranks second in shutouts (5) and ranks third in minutes played (2,368)
- Aleks Saarela ranks fifth in among league rookies in goals (20) and is tied for second in power-play goals (9)
- Janne Kuokkanen is tied for fifth among league rookies in assists (25)



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INJURIES

- Andrew Miller missed nine games starting 2/18
- Jake Chelios missed seven games starting 2/24
- Marcus Kruger missed five games starting 3/2

Transactions

- **Incoming**
 - Mar. 11: (G) Callum Booth recalled from Florida (ECHL)
 - Mar. 8: (C) Lucas Wallmark assigned from Carolina (NHL)
- **Outgoing**
 - Mar. 11L (RW) Valentin Zykov recalled by Carolina (NHL)
- **Coming Up**
 - **Tuesday, March 13 at 7 p.m. - Checkers vs. Wilkes-Barre/Scranton**
 - **Wednesday, March 14 at 7 p.m. - Checkers vs. Wilkes-Barre/Scranton**
 - **Saturday, March 17 at 6 p.m. - Checkers vs. Binghamton**
 - **Sunday, March 18 at 2 p.m. - Checkers vs. Binghamton**

By the Numbers

CATEGORY	RECORD	AHL RANK	LAST WEEK
Power play	20.6%	4th	4th
Penalty kill	82.2%	t-21st	t-19th
Goals per game	3.37	3rd	4th
Shots per game	29.65	20th	t-18th

Goals allowed per game	2.90	t-16th	t-14th
Shots allowed per game	27.06	3rd	3rd
Penalty minutes per game	11.97	8th	8th

LEADERS

CATEGORY	LEADER(S)
Points	Andrew Miller (51), Valentin Zykov (48), Warren Foegele (41)
Goals	Valentin Zykov (30), Warren Foegele (25), Aleksii Saarela (20)
Assists	Andrew Miller (36), Lucas Wallmark (27), Trevor Carrick (26)
Power play goals	Valentin Zykov (16), Aleksii Saarela (9), Andrew Poturalski (6)
Shorthanded goals	Warren Foegele (4), Nicolas Roy, Clark Bishop (2)
Game-winning goals	Valentin Zykov, Warren Foegele (7), Andrew Poturalski (6)
Shots on goal	Warren Foegele (134), Trevor Carrick (126), Aleksii Saarela (120)
Penalty minutes	Trevor Carrick (81), Josiah Didier (60), Zack Stortini (55)
Plus/minus	Philip Samuelsson (+31), Roland McKeown (+30), Warren Foegele (+18)
Wins	Alex Nedeljkovic (27)
Goals-against average	Alex Nedeljkovic (2.53)
Save percentage	Alex Nedeljkovic (.904)

TODAY'S LINKS

- <http://www.newsobserver.com/sports/nhl/carolina-hurricanes/article204822154.html>
- <https://www.nhl.com/hurricanes/news/gameday-preview-boston-bruins-carolina-hurricanes/c-296896532>
- <https://www.nhl.com/hurricanes/news/recap-hurricanes-topped-by-rangers/c-296883688>
- <http://nsjonline.com/article/2018/03/hurricanes-playoff-hopes-slipping-away-after-road-loss-to-rangers/>
- <https://www.cbssports.com/nhl/news/hurricanes-bruins-face-each-other-working-through-issues/>
- <https://www.canescountry.com/2018/3/12/17112250/carolina-hurricanes-lose-must-win-game-new-york-rangers-scott-darling-bill-peters-ahoteravainen>
- <https://www.nhl.com/news/carolina-hurricanes-new-york-rangers-game-recap/c-296885592>
- <http://gocheckers.com/articles/transactions/hurricanes-return-zykov-to-charlotte>
- <http://gocheckers.com/articles/features/hometown-weekly-report-march-12>



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SportScan

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

1103292 Boston Bruins

Starting the playoffs on the road would be no problem for Bruins

By Fluto Shinzawa

MARCH 12, 2018

At their current pace, the Bruins will conclude the regular season in second place in the Atlantic Division. They will start the playoffs at TD Garden, most likely against Toronto. If so, Bruce Cassidy would have the last change in Game 1. Every coach likes to have this advantage.

But if the Bruins trip over their skates, Cassidy has fewer worries than ever about starting the postseason away from home. And not just because the Bruins have dropped the fewest road games (nine regulation losses) of any team in the league.

Injuries are the variable that could alter Cassidy's projected lineup. It's possible that Patrice Bergeron and Charlie McAvoy, the team's best player and its best two-way defenseman, could be too lame to start the playoffs because of their foot and knee injuries.

But even without Bergeron and McAvoy, Cassidy is better equipped to handle the disadvantage of playing on the road and ceding the last change. The soft spots that once caused him concern no longer exist.

The primary reason general manager Don Sweeney acquired Rick Nash was to get more offense from David Krejci. So far, job done.

In the eight games Nash has worn Black and Gold, primarily as Krejci's right-hand man, the center has punched in five goals and two assists. It is a limited sample size, but Krejci's 0.88 points-per-game rate following Nash's arrival is better than the 0.7 he averaged when his current linemate was still a Ranger.

The Bruins believed Krejci's points would come also because he'd see more even-strength shifts, especially in the defensive zone. As much as Ryan Spooner improved away from the puck, there were times when the center-turned-right wing fought to shadow opponents and position himself correctly in the Bruins' end.

Spooner's presence was compounded by that of rookie Jake DeBrusk. As such, Cassidy was more comfortable distributing some of Krejci's five-on-five shifts to centers with more defensively responsible wingmen.

If DeBrusk and Nash start the playoffs on Krejci's flanks, Cassidy doesn't have to fret about letting his second line start shifts in the defensive zone. Nash is sturdy on the walls, strong on the puck, effective with his reach, and aware with his positioning to degrees that Spooner was not. Even if the opponent starts with the puck, Nash can help win it back.

So if DeBrusk, Krejci, and Nash are on a shift when the Bruins ice the puck, Cassidy won't have to panic about things going sideways.

"I think Nash changes the dynamic of Krejci's line," Cassidy said. "He's a guy who's killed penalties his whole career, most of it. Can close quickly. Long stick. Little more comfort level with a young left winger on the other side if they end up against a skilled line."

The same sense of calm extends to his defense pairings. Before McAvoy's injury and Nick Holden's acquisition, Torey Krug and Brandon Carlo skated together on the No. 2 duo. It was a partnership that sometimes chased the puck in the defensive zone. Cassidy was quick to deploy Chara and McAvoy against top offensive lines. He was not as eager to give Krug and Carlo such assignments.

Following McAvoy's injury, Cassidy has reunited Chara and Carlo. The captain negates some of Carlo's skittishness. Krug, meanwhile, has played with Holden moving to the right side. Or Krug has taken shifts with Adam McQuaid, his longtime partner. Based on his current setup, Cassidy isn't waving any of his pairings desperately off the ice when opposing big boys hop over the boards.

Cassidy, after all, is not ruled by matchups. He is a flow coach, one who likes it when his lines and pairings are rolling rhythmically and feeling good about their games. Cassidy does not prefer to start a shift with a defensively compromised line or tandem just to yank them off if another coach counters with a robust offensive unit. Such maneuvers do not build confidence. What works for matchup-heavy coaches like Mike Babcock and Randy Carlyle is not part of Cassidy's playbook.

The result is a balanced lineup that has gained Cassidy's trust. He does not mind feeding fourth-liners Tim Schaller, Sean Kuraly, and Noel Acciari full-length shifts against top threesomes. If a shoot-first right wing attacks Matt Grzelcyk, Cassidy has faith that the rookie will use his feet to close rapidly and flash a quick stick to choke off the rush. If Brad Marchand and David Pastrnak need breathers before looking for offense, Cassidy will tap his third line — David Backes between Danton Heinen and Brian Gionta is currently his preferred formation — to hunt the puck.

The deficiency Cassidy wants to address before the playoffs is faceoffs. In Sunday's 3-1 loss to Chicago, the Bruins won 22 draws while losing 35. They were especially lousy in the defensive zone, where they went 3 for 14 (21 percent) during five-on-five play.

They were better in their own end on the penalty kill (3 for 6). But the Blackhawks scored both of their power-play goals after the Bruins lost D-zone draws (Kuraly on one, Schaller on the other, both to Jonathan Toews).

A healthy Bergeron would help in that category. Just as he would everywhere else.

Boston Globe LOADED: 03.13.2018

1103293 Boston Bruins

Conroy: Bruins still have issues to work through as they churn toward playoffs

Steve Conroy Monday, March 12, 2018

RALEIGH, N.C. -- The Bruins are in the middle of their worst grind of the season. Between Tuesday night's game against the Hurricanes and the April 8 season finale versus the Panthers, the Bruins will play 15 games



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in 27 days. With his team ensconced in a playoff spot, seven points ahead of the Toronto Maple Leafs with two games in hand for home ice advantage in the first round, coach Bruce Cassidy's most important task from here will be managing his players' health while still maintaining a level of play with which they can still pick up some points.

To that end, presumably, Cassidy gave his charges the day off on a stormy Monday in Raleigh – schools were being let out early because there was just a threat of snow – and it's expected they'll get another one on Wednesday in Florida ahead of the Thursday tilt against the surging Panthers.

So while the Bruins recharge their batteries, here are a few notes and observations:

- Everyone has heard about the rookie wall, but what Danton Heinen is encountering right now has to look like that gargantuan, foreboding edifice from the Game of Thrones. Heinen has gone 15 games without a goal and has just two assists. With Brad Marchand out of lineup and the B's skating just 11 forwards in Sunday's 3-1 loss to the Blakchawks, he saw just 11:20 in ice time.

Heinen was too good for too long not to make you believe he'll break through at some point. He helped turn the team around when it was floundering in the early part of the season. But not much has worked in attempts to get him in gear. He has had his shifts cut and he was scratched for a game to give him a different perspective, but Heinen hasn't been able to regain his touch.

Could a trip back to Providence for a weekend do the trick? There's always a chance that a move like that could erode a player's confidence even more. But the B's are running out of time – and ways – to get him right before the playoffs.

- It's interesting that Cassidy has already voiced his desire to give Zdeno Chara a rest at some point down the stretch. He could not have done it on Sunday because of Marchand's late scratch due to an upper body injury and the Bruins' need to dress seven defensemen, but it would have been a good time.

The Bruins have two more sets of back-to-back games left – a home game against the Panthers and a roadie in Philadelphia on March 31 and April 1 – and the two home games to close out the season against Ottawa and Florida. Chara has had a remarkable season and there's been little sign of wearing down for the soon-to-be 41-year-old, but a rest in one or two of those four games could do him a world of a good.

- David Backes will return to the lineup on Tuesday against Hurricanes after serving his three-game suspension. He'll be welcomed back with open arms. In the three games the Bruins were without Backes and the injured Patrice Bergeron, the team's faceoff win margins were 37 percent, 39 percent and 46 percent. It was a trending in the right direction, but still, that's a lot of puck-chasing. For the season, the B's are currently at 50.9 percent.

- Marchand was named NHL's second star of the week for four goals, four assists performance in the three games last week. In the end, Marchand may not have enough production to make real run at the Hart Trophy. On top of that, some voters will have a hard time separating the positive things he brings from all the suspension-worthy offenses he's committed over the years. But he'll most likely be in the top five on my ballot. He's fourth in points per game (1.30), tied for second in plus/minus (plus-32) and tied for third in game winning goals (7).

- If Matt Grzelcyk can ever find a way to make his shot from the left point a real threat, the kid from Charlestown will be a very good player for a long time to come. His stickhandling in tight quarters and poise at both blue lines are impressive while his skating ability allows him to get to pucks you wouldn't think he could.

- Count me among those flabbergasted at what Brian Gionta has been able to do in his short time with the Bruins. When his Olympics were largely unproductive, it seemed as though he'd be a player that would serve a team as last-ditch depth. But he has stepped into the Bruins

lineup and been an immediate contributor (2-4--6 in six games). A nice long run in our town would add some nice symmetry to his career. His collegiate career concluded with him helping Boston College snap a 52-year NCAA championship drought.

Boston Herald LOADED: 03.13.2018

1103294 Boston Bruins

'Livin' on a Prayer' is about to cost the Bruins the Stanley Cup

By DJ Bean March 12, 2018 12:39 PM

The Bruins are the most exciting team in town right now, and that's without stars like Patrice Bergeron and Charlie McAvoy playing. Brad Marchand is one of the best players in the league, Zdeno Chara is still a top defenseman. Jake DeBrusk is already a fan favorite. Freaking Rick Nash is on the team.

But now this is happening:

The @tdgarden faithful was in sync this afternoon.
pic.twitter.com/ehV3e8J7Cf

— Boston Bruins (@NHLBruins) March 10, 2018

That's right: TD Garden has adopted "Living on a Prayer" as the Bruins' "Sweet Caroline." They play the song, turn it down for a singalong, the whole shebang. It's a thing that happened at Pats games during the playoffs, which was kind of forgivable given the Bon Jovi connection there.

And thus all of the magic of this exciting, great Bruins team is undone. I'm not kidding. I don't want to watch the games anymore out of fear of hearing it and dying of douche chills. It's a health concern.

This is probably an appropriate time to stress that I hate cynicism. I die on a lot of hills, but I don't think anyone should be in the business of telling someone not to have fun if they aren't hurting anyone. I'm just saying that if you want to have an in-game tradition, maybe go for something that isn't one of the most two tired songs in the history of the world (the other being "Don't Stop Believin").

The culprit here is the Garden for making this happen, but just as much blame falls on the shoulders of the fans for participating and thus perpetuating it for multiple games. They should know better.

And really, it's astonishing. Whether those are die-hards or just people who got tickets from work or something, nobody thinks higher of themselves than Bostonians. As such, it's astonishing that they would be on board with something so unoriginal, even if the song -- for as completely run into the ground as it is -- is great.

Chicago has their own thing with Chelsea Dagger. Minnesota made "Let's Go Crazy" its goal song after Prince died. The Sabres play "Let Me Clear My Throat." All cool and unique to them.

Know who plays "Livin' on a Prayer?" Every stadium and arena ever. It's the song you play between an icing call and the subsequent faceoff. You use that time to talk amongst your friends. Maybe say something like "oh these refs are tickin' me off." You know, sports stuff.

Nobody stops to sing along because "Livin' on a Prayer" is the free space on the bingo board of a sporting event. You can't make it "your thing" because it's everybody's, and quite frankly nobody should really want it to be their thing anyway.



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So by all means, have fun at the game. If you need to have a singalong, pick something else. Try to be as exciting as this team is, rather than dumping a big bucket of cliché on a season that deserves better.

Comcast SportsNet.com LOADED: 03.13.2018

1103295 Boston Bruins

Hags NHL Power Rankings: Lightning steady at the top

By Joe Haggerty March 13, 2018 12:51 AM

It's a wide open race for NHL Awards season with Nikita Kucherov and Evgeni Malkin certainly the front-runners with a number of other quality candidates like Taylor Hall, Nathan MacKinnon and Claude Giroux among others. You could probably also throw Brad Marchand in that conversation for the heck of it, but it sure doesn't feel like No. 63 is going to get heavy consideration this season between his suspension, his fine for embellishment and his complete willingness to tell the truth when he things the Bruins have been screwed by bad calls on the ice.

Certainly it feels like Kucherov is beginning to run away with it as the NHL's best player on the NHL's best team, but there is still plenty at play among a number of the major awards with little less than a month to go before the playoffs.

Anyway, without further ado here are this week's power rankings:

1. Tampa Bay Lightning (regular season record: 48-17-4, rank last week: 1) – Nikita Kucherov is powering toward a Hart Trophy, and the Lightning continue to win as they finish up strong in an impressive regular season. They're a tremendous 9-0-1 in their last 10 games, and aren't even giving an inch to the Bruins to catch up to them.
2. Nashville Predators (44-14-10, rank last week: 9) – Speaking of awards, PK Subban is teaming toward major Norris Trophy consideration while Nashville is once rolling with a deep, good all-around hockey team as the playoffs approach. You would like somebody perhaps bigger than Viktor Arvidsson as your leading scorer, but nobody is perfect.
3. Boston Bruins (43-16-8, rank last week: 2) – The Bruins had their six game winning streak snapped on Sunday in Chicago, but they were also missing Patrice Bergeron, Brad Marchand, David Backes and Charlie McAvoy from their lineup. The name of the game at this point is getting Bergeron and McAvoy back before the playoffs, and resting up everybody else while avoiding any big injuries.
4. Vegas Golden Knights (45-19-5, rank last week: 2) – What a season for William Karlsson with 35 goals and 61 points. What a job done by Gerard Gallant guiding the Golden Knights to such a Cinderella season. What a story it will be if Vegas can do some damage in a Western Conference playoff that's wide open after Nashville.
5. Winnipeg Jets (41-18-10, rank last week: 5) – Patrik Laine continues his ridiculous goal-scoring binge for the Jets, and they continue to be a team with increasing expectations as the season nears an end. It's 41 and counting for Laine.
6. Toronto Maple Leafs (40-22-7, rank last week: 7) – It's crazy that three of the top six teams in the NHL reside in the Atlantic Division right now, but that's about the long and short of it with the playoffs a month away. The Leafs, though, have definitely fallen off the pace of the other two teams and seem resigned to that third spot in the division behind Tampa and Boston.
7. Washington Capitals (39-23-7, rank last week: 10) – Congrats to Alex Ovechkin on the 600th goal of his NHL career as the gaudy numbers continue to pile up, and up, and up. One can only wonder if something

like that can catapult him into a different, better outcome this time around in the postseason.

8. Minnesota Wild (39-23-7, rank last week: 8) – A whopping 37 goals and 68 points in 69 games for Eric Staal, who is having an incredible second act to his NHL career after moving on from Carolina to Minnesota. He's given them exactly what they needed this season in Minnesota with Zach Parise really struggling with injuries.
9. Pittsburgh Penguins (40-26-4, rank last week: 13) – Evgeni Malkin is up there with Nikita Kucherov as a favorite for the Hart Trophy, and the Penguins are in position to once again at least give it a run during the playoffs. It looks like 40 goals and 100 points are well within range for Malkin, and those are some gaudy, gaudy numbers.
10. San Jose Sharks (36-23-9, rank last week: 10) – It's been an interesting mix between Evander Kane and the San Jose Sharks since his arrival at the trade deadline. He's been a point-per-game player in the short sample size since moving on from Buffalo.
11. Dallas Stars (38-25-6, rank last week: 9) – Is a successful Dallas Stars season that's built on Tyler Seguin playing good defense and a strong two-way game really sustainable thing? Yeah, I'll have to see it to believe it.
12. Philadelphia Flyers (35-24-11, rank last week: 15) – The Flyers have pushed their way into the playoff picture, and Nolan Patrick has really begun to come on strong in his rookie season. That's just adding another weapon to a star-studded offensive group in Philly that should be fun to watch come playoff-time.
13. Colorado Avalanche (36-24-8, rank last week: 17) – It's incredible that Nathan MacKinnon has exploded into a Hart Trophy-level candidate since Matt Duchene cleared out of Colorado. The Avs are right on the playoff bubble in the Western Conference with guys like MacKinnon helping to lead the way.
14. Anaheim Ducks (34-23-12, rank last week: 16) – Corey Perry and Ryan Getzlaf have combined for 24 goals this season. I remember when that would be little more than a half-season's worth of production for Perry alone. My, how times have changed for the Ducks.
15. Columbus Blue Jackets (37-28-5, rank last week: 19) – Seth Jones has really taken a huge step forward this season for the Blue Jackets, and is playing like a guy that wants to be in the Norris Trophy conversation. The Blue Jackets are right on the playoff bubble, but would be a handful for anybody that comes across them.
16. New Jersey Devils (35-26-8, rank last week: 18) – Taylor Hall has pushed his way into the Hart Trophy conversation after a long point streak, and the Devils are still hanging around in the playoff conversation as well. The Devils wanted to build up relevancy in Jersey again, and they're doing just that in Newark right now.
17. Los Angeles Kings (37-26-5, rank last week: 12) – Jonathan Quick may not end up being the Vezina Trophy winner at the end of it all, but he certainly deserves to be in the conversation as one of the Kings core players that's really helped hold them together this season.
18. Calgary Flames (34-26-10, rank last week: 14) – The Flames are 4-5-1 in their last 10 games and treading water in a spot where they've got to pick it up if they want to get into the dance. This team is too talented not to make it, but they could if they don't start stringing together some wins.
19. St. Louis Blues (36-27-5, rank last week: 11) – The Blues became sellers at the trade deadline despite being in the hunt for the playoffs, and predictably they've stumbled to a 2-7-1 record in their last 10 games around the trade deadline. Better luck next year for the Blues as they try to find some answers for next year and beyond.
20. Florida Panthers (34-26-7, rank last week: 24) – The Panthers are surging with an 8-1-1 record in their last 10 games, and Roberto Luongo is leading the way since getting healthy with a .930 save percentage this season. Florida is putting together something special late in the season in an area that needs some things to root for.



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21. Carolina Hurricanes (30-28-11, rank last week: 20) – The plot thickens for the Carolina Hurricanes as they shop for a GM in the middle of the regular season, and their new ownership begins exerting their influence over the organization. It makes for a weird in-season dynamic, but could be the very best thing long term for the Hurricanes.

22. New York Rangers (31-32-7, rank last week: 22) – Rick Nash is gone. Ryan McDonagh is gone. Nick Holden is gone as well. The Rangers have done well to build a collection of young players and prospects, and Ryan Spooner in particular is off and running with the Blueshirts. It will be interesting to see if they can be right back in the mix next season, or if this is a 2-3 year project.

23. Chicago Blackhawks (30-32-8, rank last week: 23) – The good news is that young guys like Nick Schmaltz, Alex DeBrincat and Erik Gustafsson are all taking a step forward this season for the Blackhawks. The bad news is that they're going to miss the playoffs in a move that should have longstanding consequences in the Windy City. Somebody is likely to be losing their job over all of this. It remains to be seen who it will be.

24. New York Islanders (30-29-10, rank last week: 21) – The Islanders are 2-4-4 in the last 10 games and plummeting out of a playoff spot, and that's certainly not going to work in their benefit as they try to lock things up with John Tavares. Garth Snow better watch out for those billboards.

25. Detroit Red Wings (26-31-11, rank last week: 26) – The Red Wings have lost six games in a row as they plummet toward the bottom of the Atlantic Division standings, and fade into oblivion again without any hope of the playoffs. It's tough times in Hockeytown.

26. Montreal Canadiens (25-32-12, rank last week: 25) – The knives are out in Montreal for Jonathan Drouin and Marc Bergevin among others as the Canadiens finally sputter their way to the end of the regular season while merely playing out the string. It seems that the Habs' misfortune knows no bottom this season.

27. Vancouver Canucks (25-35-9, rank last week: 27) – It's a tough end to a brilliant rookie season for Brock Boeser, who should still get some Calder Trophy consideration even though he's missing out on the final month of the regular season. He's got a brilliant future in Vancouver where they're going to build things up the right way now under Jim Benning.

28. Edmonton Oilers (30-34-4, rank last week: 28) – The word on the street is that everybody in Edmonton was not seeing eye to eye over who got the chance to play on Connor McDavid's line. And why not? Getting on that line means instant production and impact for a varying degree of skill levels up front. But it won't mean Hart Trophy consideration for McDavid while running out the clock for a terrible Oilers team this season.

29. Ottawa Senators (24-33-11, rank last week: 29) – It sure looks like the Ottawa Senators are in the last days of Erik Karlsson playing for their organization, and that really means a sea change for both the player and for the team. The Sens had better hope they've got a great plan for rebuilding things because it was a very unsteady situation with some of their players, and that goes double for any Senators player looking to get paid in the future by the organization.

30. Buffalo Sabres (22-35-12, rank last week: 30) – It's certainly even more of Jack Eichel's team this season now after the trade deadline than it was with Evander Kane earlier this season, but from a greater perspective it's just not a very good team at all beyond the obvious franchise-type player. Better luck next year with the Sabres for like the seventh year in a row as they're looking to finally get some traction one of these years.

31. Arizona Coyotes (22-35-11, rank last week: 31) – It's a good thing nobody handed out the Calder Trophy to Clayton Keller in the first couple of months this season when he was pacing the Coyotes offense, and putting up big names as a flashy, playmaking center. Keller has tailed off big time in the second half of this season, and has decent, but not

specular numbers, with 18 goals and 49 points in his first full year. That's a good rookie season, but it sure doesn't look like he's going to be taking home any hardware this summer.

Comcast SportsNet.com LOADED: 03.13.2018

1103296 Boston Bruins

Heinen working to get back in "a good place" amid second half struggles

By Joe Haggerty March 12, 2018 7:12 PM

After going through a first half of the season where everything went right for Danton Heinen, the Bruins rookie is in the middle of some late season adversity with the Black and Gold.

The 23-year-old winger has one point in his last 14 games and has been a healthy scratch during that stretch as well, and the offense isn't coming quite as easily for Heinen as it did in the first few months of the season. Some of it may be about new third line combinations with Tommy Wingels and Brian Gionta stepping in as his two linemates over the last few games, and longtime center Riley Nash instead filling in for Patrice Bergeron on the Bruins top line.

But it's more about Heinen fighting through some tougher sledding in the second half of the season where his legs haven't always been there, and when the intensity has elevated across the board for the first year player.

The bottom line is that Heinen is searching for his early season confidence when everything was going right, and it's just not consistently there for him right now.

"I've felt alright. You don't want to think about it, but naturally your mind goes there thinking that you haven't had a point in a while," said Heinen, who has watched a surging Jake DeBrusk catch him in the points department with 39 on the season that has both players still in the top-10 among NHL rookies. "It's a lot easier mentally when the team is winning, but I take pride in helping the team offensively. When it's not happening, you get hard on yourself and you want to help your teammates in that regard. You just keep working hard, you keep doing the little things and it will eventually work out."

Clearly it's not quite like the beginning of last season when Heinen was a non-factor on the ice and obviously not ready for the NHL, but he's also said some very quiet games over the last few weeks as well. He's registered zero shots on net in four of his last seven games, and total has only six shots on net in that stretch while still getting power play time and a regular third line shift.

Bruce Cassidy has seen flashes of a more confident Heinen during some recent games, but there have also been some games where Heinen hasn't been strong enough, responsible enough or confident enough with the puck on his stick.

"I think Danton is the type of kid where confidence will help him more than others, so after all of the success he had early he's probably doubting himself, or asking himself a lot of tough questions like 'why isn't it happening now?' Sometimes you need to just park that and play," said B's head coach Bruce Cassidy. "We've tried to encourage that, but by the same token he's also a human being that's got a lot of free time away from the rink. That's what happens with the young guys. You need to get them back into a good place."

After going through the entire weekend of a home-and-home series against the Chicago Blackhawks without a shot on net, the "good place" appears to be a little elusive for Heinen.



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Clearly the arrival of 39-year-old Brian Gionta has made it more of a challenge for Heinen to find his game quickly. The gritty, experienced Gionta has six points in his five games with the Bruins since signing ahead of the trade deadline, and is pushing for a spot in the lineup come playoff-time once the B's are fully healthy again. That will be the competition playing out over the final month of the season where the Bruins will be icing their best lineup in the playoffs. That means Heinen will have to recover his first half game if he wants to ensure that he's a part of it, and potentially shine in the postseason like he did as a prime time performer for the P-Bruins during their extended AHL playoff run last spring.

Comcast SportsNet.com LOADED: 03.13.2018

1103366 Philadelphia Flyers

Burrows prepares to hit what could be his last major milestone

Don Brennan

SUNRISE, Fla. — Alex Burrows will play his 900th NHL game on Tuesday in Tampa, and he's realistic enough to know that he may very well never reach 1,000.

In fact, less than a month from his 37th birthday, Burrows understands he might not get a chance to fulfil the final year of his current deal next season with the Senators, who could opt to buy him out.

"The body feels good," Burrows, who is scheduled to make \$2.5 million again in 2018-19, said before Monday's meeting with the Florida Panthers. "We'll see how things go.

"Obviously the last couple of months have been tough on the team, tough on myself. But we'll re-evaluate in the summer. Obviously it would be nice to get that magic number."

Burrows, who had four goals and nine points in 56 games heading into Monday, believes he still has some hockey in him.

"I feel I can contribute in some aspects," he said. "I understand the situation of the league. The league is getting younger. When I first came in, it seemed like there was a lot of late 30-(year-old) players playing in the league where now there's only a handful.

"I understand the business side of things, too. The cap era you've got to make sure you develop some young guys, especially in the situation we're in right now. If the organization is feeling they want to kind of rebuild or retool or whatever you want to call it, normally that goes with a lot of young guys. But for me, I still enjoy coming to the rink every day, and I still enjoy competing out there. Especially I enjoy watching these young guys coming in, trying to make a career out of playing hockey."

Reaching the 900-game mark was special for Burrows, who was never drafted.

"It means that I'm old, pretty much," he joked. "I've been around for a long time now. As a kid, I never thought I'd play one. My first goal was to play in the NHL, then my second goal was to play as long as I could. Once you start playing and become a regular, your ultimate goal is to win a Stanley Cup. So this is the second goal, I'm at 900 now. But still chasing that silver cup.

Philadelphia Inquirer / Daily News LOADED: 03.13.2018

1103367 Philadelphia Flyers

Flyers fall to Vegas on late goal

by Sam Carchidi, STAFF WRITER

The Flyers are making things difficult on themselves as they try to stay in the race for the Metropolitan Division title.

They played solidly Monday night but lost for the sixth time in seven games, dropping a 3-2 decision to upstart Vegas at the Wells Fargo Center.

Ryan Carpenter scored from the left circle to snap a 2-2 tie after Cody Eakin won a board battle behind the net and threaded a pass to the third-line right winger with 2 minutes, 40 seconds left in regulation.

"We've got to do a better job on the battles," right winger Wayne Simmonds said.

Radko Gudas, Andrew MacDonald, and Val Filppula were the Flyers behind the goal line.

Marc-Andre Fleury made 38 saves and became the 12th goalie in NHL history to register his 400th victory.

It was the second time in three games that the Flyers lost late in the third period. They allowed a goal with 22 seconds left in a 3-2 defeat in Boston on Thursday.

The lost points could be killers.

"We're letting these games get away from us. It's March, we can't be doing this," Shayne Gostisbehere said. "We need every point we can get."

"We have to refocus," Simmonds said.

The Flyers had a 40-29 shots advantage Monday, but you don't get points for shots.

"We played solid, but we didn't get the two points and that's what matters, right?" said Simmonds, whose team fell four points behind Metro-leading Washington.

Vegas was 2 for 2 on its power play, while the Flyers were 1 for 4.

"We played a good game, five-on-five," center Sean Couturier said. "Our [penalty kill] needs to be better. We have to move on and forget about this one as soon as possible."

The Flyers are six points ahead of Florida, which has three games in hand and is fighting to get into the last wild-card spot.

Simmonds tied the game at 2-2 by scoring from close range with 12:54 left in regulation, beating Fleury with a perfectly placed shot to the short side that went over the goaltender's right shoulder while the Flyers were on a power play.

The Flyers were in a 2-for-28 power-play funk before Simmonds converted a slick feed from Jake Voracek.

William Karlsson had given Vegas a 2-1 lead by scoring on a power-play rebound with 14 minutes left in the third period. The Golden Knights capitalized on a high-sticking penalty against defenseman Travis Sanheim.

Ten seconds before his penalty, Sanheim was robbed by Fleury, who gloved his ticketed shot from the high slot.

Claude Giroux's 10th goal in the last 16 games enabled the Flyers to tie the game at 1-all with 18:33 left in the second period.

Travis Konecny took the puck away from Shea Theodore near the offensive blue line, and Sean Couturier fed Giroux for a left-circle wrist



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shot that sailed over Fleury's glove for his 25th goal, three shy of equaling his career high.

About two minutes later, former Flyer Pierre-Edouard Bellemare leveled Nolan Patrick, and the rookie had to go to the locker room and be tested for a concussion. Patrick returned to the ice about five minutes later.

The Flyers were the stronger five-on-five team – holding a 9-4 shots advantage — but Vegas won the special-teams battle in the opening period.

Vegas had five shots on its power play, including a pass by Erik Haula that deflected off the stick of goaltender Petr Mrazek and into the net. Haula was at the goal line to the right of the net when he tried to throw a pass out front that Mrazek misplayed.

The Golden Knights, an expansion team that leads the Pacific Division and is setting many NHL records, got the power play when the Flyers were whistled for too many men on the ice, a call that infuriated Dave Hakstol, their normally placid coach.

Fleury made a key save on Couturier (redirection) in the first period, and made a glove save to rob Voracek from scoring on a left-circle drive with 8:38 left in the second. With a little over three minutes remaining in the second, he made consecutive point-blank saves on Patrick and the snake-bitten Oskar Lindblom (rebound).

Mrazek, Fleury's counterpart, denied Alex Tuch as he broke in alone early in the first period, and he stopped Haula after Vegas had a three-on-one following a MacDonald turnover with 15:26 to go in the second.

The Flyers controlled the second period, scoring the session's only goal and having a 16-8 shots domination against a team that was completing a five-game road trip.

But they faltered at the end and they are now just 17-12-6 at home — a big reason they are not atop the Metro standings.

Philadelphia Inquirer / Daily News LOADED: 03.13.2018

1103368 Philadelphia Flyers

Flyers winger Jori Lehtera finally feels he belongs; Brian Elliott returns to ice

by Sam Carchidi, STAFF WRITER

After failing to score a goal in his first 40 games, Flyers winger Jori Lehtera has made an impact in the last three weeks.

Lehtera has three goals in the last 11 games, including a shorthanded tally, and has done a solid job on the penalty kill.

"I've been feeling way better," the 6-foot-2, 212-pound Finn said after the Flyers' morning skate Monday at the Wells Fargo Center, where they were preparing for Monday night's game against visiting Vegas. "I've been on the roster for a long time now. I haven't been a healthy scratch for a while, so it gives me confidence. Scoring a couple goals brings confidence, and I know better now what the coach wants from me."

Acquired with a pair of first-round picks last June in the deal that sent Brayden Schenn to St. Louis, Lehtera said it took him a while to get acclimated to his new team.

"At the start, I didn't know my role and what the coach wanted from me," he said. "... It was frustrating because I didn't know what they wanted from me. Now it feels like I've found my spot and it's easier."

Lehtera, who lately has been on the Flyers' fourth line with Scott Laughton and Matt Read, said coach Dave Hakstol wants him to play

"steady defense and keep it simple and win the battles. Play smart in the defensive zone and on the PK."

Hakstol called Lehtera "such a constant presence in all the little things he does, the important areas of the game. It starts with his intelligence and his competitiveness. And when you add the consistency he brings, he's just a real effective player regardless of the combination of the forwards we have him with."

Goalie matchup

Peter Mrazek will face the Golden Knights' Marc-Andre Fleury, who is aiming for his 400th career win.

Fleury, 33, has been outstanding this season. The former Penguin is 24-9-3 with a 2.16 goals-against average and .930 save percentage. But he has struggled in his career against the Flyers, compiling a 2.89 GAA and .899 save percentage.

Mrazek, 26, has been up and down in his eight games with the Flyers, putting together a 4-3-1 record, 2.82 GAA, and .899 save percentage. He is coming off a strong effort in Saturday's 2-1 win over Winnipeg.

Bellemare returns

Former Flyer Pierre-Edouard Bellemare returned to Philadelphia for the first time since Vegas picked him in the expansion draft. After Vegas' morning skate Monday, Bellemare revealed that the Flyers told him before the draft that he was going to be exposed.

"I was 32 years old. ... I had eight points [last year], so it's not like I was a guy they couldn't replace," said Bellemare, who turned 33 last week. "I understand it. It doesn't mean I was happy about it because my life was in Philadelphia, but I knew it was a great opportunity."

"If they would have protected me, it would have been ludicrous. You have young guys [like Scott Laughton to protect]."

Bellemare, who still owns a home in Philadelphia, had dinner with some of his ex-Flyers teammates Sunday and said he was "excited" to return to the Wells Fargo Center.

Having broken into the NHL in Philadelphia, "this is a special place," he said.

Bellemare said it seems as if every time the Golden Knights play an away game, one of their players is returning to face his former team. That, he said, has helped the players rally together because they want to win the game for that player.

"Every night, we've been helping that guy win against his old team," Bellemare said. "Maybe that's also one of the reasons we've been so focused every night."

He said his teammates want to "help him win" Monday.

"Every night, we've had something that's added a little extra," he said. "There's has not been one night where we're like, 'Ah, we don't care about this one.' It's been working quite well."

In 59 games, Bellemare has five goals and 13 points, and he has been one of the team's top penalty killers.

Elliott on ice

For the first time since he had abdominal surgery Feb. 13, goalie Brian Elliott was on the ice before the Flyers' morning skate Monday. Flyers general manager Ron Hextall hopes Elliott can return to action before the end of the regular season.

Breakaways

The Flyers will use the same lineup that produced Saturday's 2-1 win over Winnipeg. ... The Flyers entered Sunday with a league-best 53.6 percent success rate in faceoffs. ... In the last eight games, the Flyers' power play is just 2 for 26 (7.7 percent) and their PK is 17 for 22 (77.4 percent).



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1103369 Philadelphia Flyers

With time short, Flyers still seek an identity | Sam Donnellon

by Sam Donnellon, STAFF WRITER

Over the last decade, a stack of statistics have been added to the various ledgers that account professional hockey, some more germane than others. Monday, as the Flyers prepared for their game against the Vegas Golden Knights and their fourth top-tier power play in as many games, Matt Read mused why there wasn't at least one more out there.

"When we have an opportunity to clear it, we're clearing it," said the veteran, a recent call-up. "I don't know if there is a stat out there that keeps track of that. But if you don't get that puck deep or out of the zone, that's when things get scattered. That's when you lose people. I think the last couple of games we've done a better job of not losing people."

The numbers that are crunched backed that up. In the three games prior to Monday night's, against the league's first, second, and fourth power plays, the Flyers' much-maligned penalty kill unit successfully defended nine of 11 power plays. It gave them at least a chance to grab a point in Boston (they didn't) and to hold onto two at home against Winnipeg.

The end of each game, however, foretold Monday night's 3-2 loss to the Knights, and underlined a basic truth: Like the Phillies of the early 2000s, and the current Sixers, the Flyers are a team in transition, streaking this way and that, undoing ugly plays with beautiful ones, and vice versa.

They lost to Boston on Saturday when Brad Marchand bull-rushed a puck into their net with 22 seconds left. They lost Monday night when Vegas scored inside of the final four minutes after the Flyers botched numerous chances to clear the puck from their own zone.

They also lost last night because they surrendered two power-play goals in two power-play tries, and coughed up another game-deciding late goal when their third line of Wayne Simmonds, Michael Raffl, and Val Filppula could not handle the forecheck of a mishmash of Vegas's third and fourth line, centered by our old friend, Pierre-Edouard Bellamare, who gained a second assist by keeping the puck from clearing the zone.

"We've seen this story before," said Flyers captain Claude Giroux, whose 25th goal tied the game at one early in the second period. "And it's frustrating. We played a hell of a game. We played the way we wanted to, and everybody was going. A couple minutes left and they find a way to put it in. It's frustrating.

"We're letting these games get away from us," echoed Shayne Gostisbehere. "It's March. We can't be doing this. We need every point we can get."

A quick glimpse of the standings tells you how true that was. It seems eons and not weeks ago that the Flyers rented first place in the Metropolitan Division for a day. Still in third, the Flyers hold a three-point lead over New Jersey for the last wild-card spot and have played one more game. And Florida, with three fewer games played, is just six points back and charging (despite a slip against Ottawa on Monday night).

It's convenient and misleading to pin this on a sudden slump. Yes, this team had a remarkable 10-0-2 streak in February, but toward its end, the errors that are proving toxic against a string of much better teams were often masked by the competition they sometimes played down to. They won ugly against the moribund Rangers and won ugly twice against the struggling Canadiens before Carolina delivered that 4-1 streak-breaking wake-up call at the start of the month.

That game marked the start of a string of measurement games against teams that were having either much better seasons than they are, or coming on strong — teams with characteristics that gained them points even on off nights. Tampa Bay beat them late. Florida swamped them. Pittsburgh beat them good, too.

The Flyers' most consistent characteristic this season has been effort. The power play that once looked so mighty has been, for quite a while, predictable and easily solved by opponents. The penalty kill, a ray of hope amid this lull that allowed them to hang with Boston and outlast Winnipeg, went AWOL On Monday night, one goal was actually knocked into the net by their own goaltender, Petr Mrazek.

"Your goaltender has to be your best penalty killer," Flyers coach Dave Hakstol had said earlier in the day.

He was not on that play.

So where do they go from here? Well, there's your silver lining of this uneven playbook. Columbus is Thursday's home opponent. Three of their next four opponents after that have announced they are rebuilding. They still have games with Pittsburgh, Washington, and Boston, but the final three games of their season are against teams on the outside looking in.

Then again, if the Flyers don't fix things soon, they might be out there with them. These games were supposed to be their mid-terms.

It's been so dismal, they may not be allowed to take even one final.

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1103370 Philadelphia Flyers

Rob Parent: Bellemare and his Vegas 'misfits' keep fairy tale going against Flyers

By Rob Parent, Delaware County Daily Times

HILADELPHIA >> Perhaps for the first several weeks of the season, surprised observers around the NHL figured that the early success of the Vegas Golden Knights was best characterized by the name of one of their city's iconic meccas — The Mirage hotel and casino.

By the time Vegas had risen to near the top of the league standings at the turn of the year, no one believed this was just an expansion team fantasy any longer. Coaches and players throughout the league were essentially crowning general manager George McPhee with an Executive of the Year award, and coach Gerard Gallant — whose NHL head coaching resume had listed rather short, mostly failed stints with Columbus and Florida — was being hailed as a miracle worker.

Oh, and Reilly Smith was being hailed as a star.

Before this year, Smith's most productive seasons had seen him compile 51 points with Boston in 2012-13 and 50 with Florida in 2015-16. Entering the Knights' game at Wells Fargo Center Monday, Smith was out with an injury, but he'd already put up 22 goals and 60 points.

Of course, the story with an expansion team is that for the first several expected tough seasons, somebody has to get the points.

Count Smith in, and well-traveled forward James Neal (24 goals, 40 points), too. But the reality is this expansion team is different from most or all the rest.

The Golden Knights are stocked with solid NHL vets such as defenseman Deryk Engelland and forwards David Perron and Cody Eakin. But there are also younger players like Erik Haua, who Monday



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night scored his 26th goal to give the Knights an early lead on the Flyers, Jonathan Marchessault (22 goals and 65 points) and Lars William "Wild Bill" Karlsson, a Columbus castoff (despite his marketable name) who had scored 15 goals in 162 games with the Blue Jackets the previous two seasons ... and Monday got his 36th of the season in the Knights' 3-2 win over the Flyers.

This team also has the one player selected from the Flyers' unprotected list for the expansion draft, 32-year-old Pierre Edouard-Bellemare, who would assist on Vegas' game-winning goal late in the third. Bellemare should have a couple of good years with this team before he's ready to settle down and join the Vegas marketing department.

"He was a good role player here, and a great guy," former teammate Matt Read said of Bellemare. "Can't say a negative thing about him. One of the friendliest guys I ever played with and I'm sure the fans will have some signs out there for him."

Other than bad signs by the Flyers on the ice — they have lost six of their last seven games, by the way — there weren't many to be seen for Bellemare.

After the Knights' morning skate at Wells Fargo Center, Bellemare spent time telling Philadelphia reporters about his fond feelings for the Flyers organization, and also talked about how it felt to be part of this feel-good first season with the NHL's team from the desert.

Along the way, Bellemare said, "... You have 23 guys that arrived here, all kind of misfits. If you're coming to Vegas it's because somebody in the organization you were in before, even if they wanted to have you, they didn't protect you. Somehow, you're here for a reason."

Granted, other expansion teams have felt the same. But before their season began, the emotions were ramped up by the Oct. 1 mass shooting in the city that left 58 people dead. Since then, the Golden Knights have been part of the public mission that is the city's recovery, immediately earning a fond place in the hearts of many.

They quickly became a hot ticket. The puzzling fact that they're also one of the best teams in the league has only added to the luster.

The Knights are 45-19-5, running away in the Pacific Division with the second-best record in the Western Conference.

"I was impressed with everything that they did," Flyers coach Dave Hakstol said Sunday of the Golden Knights, who were beaten by the visiting Flyers on Feb. 11. "Obviously their record speaks for itself. The substance of what we saw when we were out there a couple of weeks ago backs up everything that their record tells you about them."

Maybe so ... but it doesn't mean it's logical. The Golden Knights are no mirage, but they remain a mystery.

Sean Couturier is still the Flyers' leading goal-getter, although linemate Claude Giroux is closing fast with his 25th goal of the season against Vegas Monday.

Meanwhile, Couturier, who has 29 goals, has gone 12 games without one. What he did have was a terrific play in which he picked off a Vegas outlet and shoveled the puck over to Giroux, who rifled it past goalie Marc-Andre Fleury for a game-tying goal in the second period.

Couturier has been an offensive revelation this season, not coincidentally since he was paired with Giroux and was put at center to free Giroux to work on the wing.

It's worked wonders for both, as Giroux is having almost a career year and Couturier (now with 64 points in 70 games) is definitely having one.

But Couturier still has many of his old responsibilities, like being the Flyers' premier penalty killer and a player frequently double-shifted. With this streak of games without a goal then, there might be a natural assumption that Couturier is a bit weary. Especially since he skipped practice Sunday for a "maintenance day."

But then again...

"I don't know how I can be any more plain. I don't see fatigue in Coot's game," Hakstol maintained. "I see him playing really well. Teams might be checking that line with a little more purpose because of the success they had for a good stretch. But he's still playing really good hockey both ways.

"I don't see much difference in his game now than it was during the year."

General manager Ron Hextall seems to agree.

"You're going to go through your little ups and downs through a season, no matter who you are," he said. "Coots, I guess you could say, offensively he is a little down right now, but we're not concerned about it."

□

Meanwhile ... both injured Flyers goalies, Michal Neuvirth and Brian Elliott, have resumed skating. New goalie Petr Mrazek has played well the last few games but has been up and down. He should have had center Ryan Carpenter's game-winning shot late in the game Monday. All of this should make for an interesting situation in a couple of weeks for the Flyers' goaltending, which is always an interesting subject.

Delaware County Times LOADED: 03.13.2018

1103371 Philadelphia Flyers

Flyers need to get up to speed vs. surprising Vegas

By John Boruk | NBC Sports Philadelphia March 12, 2018 2:10 PM

Of all the headliners that can be found on the Vegas strip, who would have imagined the Golden Knights, in their expansion year, would be right up there with Cirque du Soleil, Inferno and Chris Angel?

They shoot, they score, they entertain, and most impressively, they win. Only Tampa Bay averages more goals per game than Vegas does this season.

Vegas coach Gerard Gallant has performed a miracle that's one part Herb Brooks, another part David Copperfield.

How can a coach bring together a collection of castoffs from across the league and build not just the best expansion team in league history, but one of the top hockey teams in the entire NHL, all while playing an uptempo, fan-friendly system?

"That's a good question," Flyers forward Jakub Voracek said. "They're just skating very well, all of them. Obviously it's hard to play against someone that's skating so well."

When these two teams played for the first time in Las Vegas in early February, the Flyers found out firsthand as they were outshot 39-18, the most lopsided shot total of any game this season, but were opportunistic in a 4-1 win.

Under Gallant, the Golden Knights have developed into one of the quickest puck-moving teams in the league and are constantly on the attack. Sean Couturier doesn't believe there's another team in the league that plays that style as well as Vegas does.

"I don't think so," Couturier said. "Not as good as they do. I think a lot of teams try and play like they do — spread the offensive zone, cycle the puck, control the play and get defenders out of position, but they're really good at it."

So if it works for the Golden Knights, why couldn't the Flyers adopt a similar system?



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For starters, Vegas general manager George McPhee was able to handpick his entire roster from a list of unprotected players — good players, at that. So if speed, puck control and skating ability were key attributes, then McPhee had the luxury of assembling that type of roster.

“What stands out when you watch them and when you play against them? Their speed presents a real challenge,” said Flyers head coach Dave Hakstol, whose team has 81 points, good for third in the Metro behind Pittsburgh (84) and Washington (83), and three points ahead of New Jersey (78). Washington hosts Winnipeg Monday night.

“You have to be ready to defend that and you have to be ready to counterattack against it.”

Secondly, the Golden Knights possess balance with no real “star power.” For most of this season, every line that Gallant has assembled has had to prove it’s worthy of ice time, including the current top line of leading goal-scorer William Karlsson (35 goals) at center and Jonathan Marchessault (22 goals) and recent pickup Tomas Tatar (17 goals), formerly of the Red Wings. That trio has combined 74 goals on the season. The Knights also have 20-goal scorers in Erik Haula (24), James Neal (24) and Riley Smith (22).

“The biggest part of it is to have 23 players here, all kinda misfits who were left unprotected. So when they came with a simple system, it has to be 20 guys every night. You can’t have one line hot and the other three coasting,” said former Flyers forward Pierre Edouard-Bellemare, whom Vegas plucked in the expansion draft last summer. “[Gallant] played the guys who were working the hardest, and that was the indicator for the other guys, it doesn’t matter who your name is.”

Which probably wouldn’t work for Hakstol if Voracek, Couturier or Claude Giroux didn’t exactly bring their best effort every game. Gallant has been dealing from the same deck all season, a “use-it-or-lose-it” philosophy, you could say.

Impressively, it’s the same approach Gallant took with the Summerside Capitals of the Maritime Junior Hockey League back in the mid-1990s.

“The way I coach is the same I coached in junior hockey,” Gallant said. “Come to the rink, have fun, work hard and be competitive. I don’t prepare my team much differently than anyone else does. For me, it’s having fun and having a good attitude and make sure your players are ready to play.”

Proof what happens in Vegas certainly shouldn’t stay there.

Comcast SportsNet.com LOADED: 03.13.2018

1103372 Philadelphia Flyers

Up next for Flyers prospect Cooper Marody, the NCAA Tournament

By Tom Dougherty | NBC Sports Philadelphia March 12, 2018 9:35 AM

Before this week begins, it’s time for our weekly check-in on the Flyers’ prospects.

Cooper Marody, C, 21, 6-1/185, Michigan (NCAA)

Marody did all he could, but it wasn’t enough to send Michigan to the Big Ten title game.

Still, the No. 11-ranked Wolverines are a near lock for the NCAA Tournament.

Saturday, Marody potted two goals against No. 6 Ohio State, but Michigan fell, 3-2, in overtime.

Michigan’s Cooper Marody with the #SCTop10 candidate.pic.twitter.com/0DHxvvsP6W

— NCAA Ice Hockey (@NCAAIceHockey) March 11, 2018

COOOP THERE IT IS! □ pic.twitter.com/BkZIZIMeFj

— Michigan Hockey (@umichhockey) March 11, 2018

The junior leads Michigan with 32 assists and 46 points in 37 games. His 14 goals are second on the Wolverines. Nationally, Marody’s 32 helpers are second-most and his 46 points are tied for seventh.

Pascal Laberge, C, 19, 6-1/162, Quebec (QMJHL)

Make it eight straight for Laberge.

Laberge extended his point streak to eight games last week, adding two assists Thursday and a goal and an assist Friday.

During his streak, Laberge has collected five goals and 13 points. Following a trade to Quebec, Laberge has started to find the consistency that’s been missing over the past two seasons.

In his last 27 games, Laberge has 11 goals and 15 assists — he was pointless in his first three games with the Remparts. On the season, Laberge has 17 goals and 46 points.

Morgan Frost, C, 18, 5-11/172, Sault Ste. Marie (OHL)

With the OHL season winding down, time is running out for Frost to regain the scoring lead.

But it’s still possible.

Frost’s point streak reached 11 games last week. During this streak, he has 11 assists and 19 points. In 64 games, Frost has 40 goals (fourth), 67 assists (second) and 107 points (second).

□ GOAL! □

WHAT a goal!! Individual effort all the way by @_morganfrost_10 to slip right through the entire OS line, finds the five hole on Lafreniere and we’re back within 2 after a STUNNER of a play! | #SOOvsOS pic.twitter.com/tzuX7fKcnQ

— xyz Soo Greyhounds (@OHLHoundPower) March 11, 2018

□ TIE GAME! □

What a goal! Who else but @_morganfrost_10 to tie the game at 5!! You heard it here first, NEVER count these boys out. | #SOOvsOS pic.twitter.com/qrVL1XfxoY

— xyz Soo Greyhounds (@OHLHoundPower) March 11, 2018

Not only does Frost’s plus-68 rating lead the OHL but it also leads all of the CHL.

The centerman trails Barrie’s Aaron Luchuk (110 points) for the OHL scoring lead.

Quick Hits

• OSU’s Tanner Laczynski picked up the primary assist on Matthew Weis’ OT winner Saturday.

Kick off the day with a look back at last night’s gamewinner over the Wolverines!

Buckeyes will play at Notre Dame Saturday for the Big Ten Tournament □. #GoBucks pic.twitter.com/30U7g2fLwH

— Ohio State M Hockey (@OhioState_MHKY) March 11, 2018

The Buckeyes will face No. 5 Notre Dame Saturday in the Big Ten championship game.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 13, 2018

• Isaac Ratcliffe had a goal and an assist in three games for Guelph, and while he did not score on this breakaway Saturday, he did flash some silky hands.

Merkley (2018) had a good game tonight. Here's his pass to spring Isaac Ratcliffe (PHI) that was just chef kissing fingers good.
pic.twitter.com/deDl2umj4r

— Corey Pronman (@coreypronman) March 11, 2018

• Matthew Strome had a two-goal game Saturday vs. Niagara. He leads Hamilton with 37 goals.

□ GOOOOALLL □ @Mstrome16 ties it up again with another assist from @RThomas_27! 2-2. pic.twitter.com/E92fOKST44

— Xy - Hamilton Bulldogs (@BulldogsOHL) March 11, 2018

• German Rubtsov is working with a point streak of his own, as the 2016 first-round pick had a goal and two assists in three games. He has seven points during his five-game point streak.

• Carter Hart's ridiculous 2017-18 season continued. He stopped 62 of 66 shots in two games. His six-game win streak ended Sunday night with a 2-0 loss.

• Phantoms center Mikhail Vorobyev added a goal and two more assists. He has four assists and seven points in his past six games.

• Owen Sound's Maksim Sushko tallied his 30th goal. Four of the Flyers' 2017 draft picks have reached the 30-goal mark this season. Sushko joins Frost, Strome and Ratcliffe in that club.

Comcast SportsNet.com LOADED: 03.13.2018

1103373 Philadelphia Flyers

Flyers 'can't keep doing this' ... but they do

By John Boruk | NBC Sports Philadelphia March 13, 2018 12:15 AM

The Flyers' margin of error is paper thin right now.

Against the Bruins last Thursday, it was a failure to clear the puck out of their zone in the final minute that set up the game-winning goal.

Facing the expansion Golden Knights Monday, all it took was losing one board battle late in the third period that led to another regulation loss and a 3-2 setback at the Wells Fargo Center (see observations).

"It was a scrum in the corner and they play a good triangle down low and we knew that before the game," defenseman Shayne Gostisbehere said. "We just needed a little winger support, and they made a great play."

Former Flyer Pierre-Edouard Bellemare fought off Wayne Simmonds, Valtteri Filppula and Radko Gudas to gain possession along the boards and behind the Flyers' net, which ultimately led to Ryan Carpenter's one-timer goal from the left circle that beat Petr Mrazek with 2:40 remaining in regulation.

"I felt like we controlled this one," head coach Dave Hakstol said. "We didn't get a puck out and that whole shift we didn't get the puck under control. We had an opportunity to push it out at the blue line, and then we got caught outside of our coverage down in the slot."

One mistake overshadowed another solid 60-minute effort in which the Flyers controlled possession and neutralized the Golden Knights' fast-paced attack, limiting Vegas to just 19 even-strength shots.

"We should have gotten a point obviously," Simmonds said. "We've got to be focused. We played solid but we didn't get the two points and that's

what matters. I guess it doesn't really matter here. We've just got to make sure we play the full 60. If it's not 60, it's not good enough."

And right now, as well as the Flyers have played recently, it simply isn't good enough. In seven of their last eight games, the Flyers have scored two or fewer goals.

"We're pretty pissed. We're letting these games get away from us right now," Gostisbehere said. "It's March. We can't keep doing this. We need every point we can get."

After racing to the top of the Metropolitan Division following a 1-0 shootout victory over the Canadiens on Feb. 26, the Flyers have mustered just three points (1-5-1) over their last seven games.

Golden Knights goaltender Marc-Andre Fleury came up with some spectacular saves to earn his 400th career victory. Perhaps the biggest was a sprawling glove save on rookie Travis Sanheim in the first four minutes of the third period.

The former Pittsburgh Penguin also beat the Flyers for the 28th time in his career, which ranks third all-time behind New Jersey's Martin Brodeur and New York Rangers great Henrik Lundqvist.

"We've had such a good rivalry," Fleury said. "I thought it was always intense games and tough games, tough place to win. The crowd is into it, too, usually. With this team, it's still fun to win here."

As for the Flyers, they need to discover that enjoyment rather quickly.

Thursday they host the Blue Jackets, who are now just two points behind the Flyers in the standings.

March is not a good time to be a bubble team, no matter what sport it is.

Comcast SportsNet.com LOADED: 03.13.2018

1103374 Philadelphia Flyers

Ovechkin scores a seat in an exclusive club

By The Associated Press March 12, 2018 10:30 PM

WASHINGTON -- Alex Ovechkin scored twice to reach 600 goals and Evgeny Kuznetsov had the overtime winner as the Washington Capitals returned to first place by beating the Winnipeg Jets 3-2 on Monday.

Ovechkin scored in each of the first two periods to get to 42 this season. The Russian winger became the 20th player and fourth-fastest in NHL history to 600 goals and is on pace to lead the league in goals for the seventh time.

Kuznetsov made it a night of celebration for Washington by scoring on a breakaway 4:11 into overtime.

Ovechkin's historic performance was crucial on a night when Jets winger Patrik Laine scored his 16th in the past 12 games to get to 41 this season. Nikolaj Ehlers also scored a 4-on-4 goal for Winnipeg, which got 40 saves from Connor Hellebuyck.

Capitals goaltender Philipp Grubauer stopped 26 shots in his third consecutive start (see full recap).

Jones, Blue Jackets continue to surge

COLUMBUS, Ohio -- Seth Jones scored two first-period power-play goals, and the Columbus Blue Jackets won their fifth straight, 5-2 over the Montreal Canadiens on Monday night.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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Nick Foligno, Boone Jenner and Ian Cole also scored, Alexander Wennberg had three assists and Artemi Panarin recorded two assists for Columbus.

Behind a run of eight wins in 11 games overall and a season-high six straight at home -- including a just-completed four-game homestand -- the Blue Jackets moved past idle New Jersey into the first wild-card position in the Eastern Conference. Columbus also edged within two points of third-place Philadelphia in the Metropolitan Division.

Down 4-2 until late, Montreal put Sergei Bobrovsky to the test in the third period. The two-time Vezina Trophy winner stopped all 24 shots the suddenly energetic Canadiens threw his way. He had 38 saves overall (see full recap).

Vesey, Zuccarello help Rangers down Hurricanes

NEW YORK -- Jimmy Vesey scored three times, Mats Zuccarello had two goals and the New York Rangers beat the Carolina Hurricanes 6-3 on Monday night.

Vladislav Namestnikov also scored for the Rangers, who ended a three-game losing streak and earned their first home win since Feb. 9. Pavel Buchnevich and Mika Zibanejad each had three assists.

Backup goalie Alexandar Georgiev made 41 saves for his second win of the season.

Teuvo Teravainen, Lee Stempniak and Victor Rask scored for the Hurricanes. Scott Darling, who has struggled in his first season with Carolina, made 17 stops.

Tied at 3 in the third, Vesey took a loose puck at the left faceoff circle and wristed a high shot past Darling at 12:15.

Zuccarello added an empty-netter at 17:23 for his 14th of the season and Vesey capped his hat trick with an empty-netter in the final minute for his 15th goal this season (see full recap).

Comcast SportsNet.com LOADED: 03.13.2018

1103375 Philadelphia Flyers

Flyers handed fool's gold by expansion power

By John Boruk | NBC Sports Philadelphia March 12, 2018 9:38 PM

The NHL's feel-good story of the year is leaving Philadelphia feeling a whole lot better.

Golden Knights winger Ryan Carpenter fired a snap shot past Petr Mrazek with 2:40 remaining in regulation to give Vegas a 3-2 win at the Wells Fargo Center Monday night. It marked Marc-Andre Fleury's 400th career win to become the 12th goaltender in NHL history to reach that milestone.

Flyers captain Claude Giroux extended his point streak to seven games after scoring his 25th goal of the season. That marked the fifth season Giroux has reached the 25-goal mark in a season.

Wayne Simmonds scored his first goal in nearly a month that tied the game at 2-2.

The Flyers outshot the Golden Knights, 40-29, including a 16-8 advantage in the second period.

The Golden Knights and Flyers split their two regular-season matchups with each team winning on the road.

• Sean Couturier has been so good on faceoffs, but he lost a crucial one in the defensive zone with 17 seconds remaining on the Knights' power play in the first period. That gave Vegas one last chance before time expired. The resulting draw led to Erik Haula beating Petr Mrazek from the goal line and a 1-0 Golden Knights' lead. Haula tried a centering pass that Mrazek attempted to poke check and instead it ramped up over his shoulder and into the net.

• In a game featuring two players that should receive a high number of votes for the Selke trophy, Couturier along with Travis Konecny set up the Flyers' first goal. They intercepted a pass in the offensive zone and gave it up to Giroux, who fired a snap shot that beat Fleury high and to the glove side. Once again, Giroux scored the Flyers' first goal and now has points in 15 of his last 17 games.

Look out, Giroux's coming through!

It's all tied up in the second period. pic.twitter.com/IVha2aBeDf

— NBC Sports Philadelphia (@NBCSPHilly) March 13, 2018

• The Golden Knights made it a perfect 2 for 2 on the power play when William Karlsson scored on a wide-open net after the initial shot from the point was blocked and then kicked aside reactively by Mrazek.

• Mired in a 2-for-28 slump, the Flyers' power play came through when it desperately needed it against Vegas. Shayne Gostisbehere lasered a perfect saucer pass to Simmonds down low, who roofed a shot after Fleury dropped into the butterfly position. For Simmonds, that was his first goal since Feb. 16.

Simmonds SNIPE ☐☐

It's all tied up in the third! pic.twitter.com/fIbA1WjsaR

— NBC Sports Philadelphia (@NBCSPHilly) March 13, 2018

• If I'm a good lip reader, then I could have sworn Flyers head coach Dave Hakstol said, "What the f--- are you talking about?" in regards to the too-many-men-on-the-ice penalty in the first period. Giroux and Hakstol clearly felt the Flyers didn't have a sixth skater out when the whistle was blown. Regardless, it's the most animated you'll see Hakstol on the bench challenging an official.

• There were shades of Fleury during his time with the Penguins on Monday night. Fleury was all over the place as he tossed his body around the ice in the first period. The Flyers had him out of his net on several occasions, but they couldn't capitalize. The goalie, who had a history of falling apart against the Flyers, finished with 38 saves.

• The Flyers survived a near catastrophe when Andrew MacDonald hung on to the puck too long just inside the Knights' blue line, which resulted in a turnover and a 3-on-1 chance. However, Vegas couldn't failed to take advantage and just settled for a shot that Mrazek saw all the way.

• Much like the game in Vegas between these two teams, the Golden Knights attempted to catch the Flyers leaky on those sharp-angled shots and get the goalie out of position with very quick east-west passes.

Comcast SportsNet.com LOADED: 03.13.2018

1103376 Philadelphia Flyers

Travis Sanheim way more confident in return to NHL

Dave Isaac, @daveisaac Published 5:12 p.m. ET March 12, 2018



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 13, 2018

PHILADELPHIA — His confidence shot from sitting in the press box for nine out of 10 games in the NHL, Travis Sanheim got a big role when he returned to the minors.

Last season he cut his teeth with the Lehigh Valley Phantoms and it appeared as though his days in the AHL were over when he made the NHL out of training camp. After 35 games with the big club, GM Ron Hextall sent Sanheim back down.

He was a shut-down defenseman playing alongside Phil Myers and still nearly had a point per game. Now he's back in the NHL thanks to an injury to Robert Hägg, who is out two weeks after blocking a shot with his left heel.

"I just went down motivated," Sanheim said. "I wasn't happy with how my play had been up here the last few games that I was in. To get back up here, I wanted to prove that I belonged here."

"Playing in all situations allowed me to develop all aspects of my game. I played so much defensively against top lines down there that could easily be third or fourth lines in the NHL, so I was getting to play against some top guys and try to shut them down defensively."

Wednesday the Flyers opened the doors of the renovated gym and nutrition areas of the team's practice facility to the media. Wochit

Sanheim, 21, hasn't had the smoothest rookie season. Toward the end of his NHL stint, he had trouble in his defensive zone and sometimes made the wrong reads on plays for the opponents.

He cleaned that up with the Phantoms while adding to their offense and had been playing like an NHLer the whole time. He certainly looked like he belonged in Saturday's win over Winnipeg, his first game back with the Flyers.

"Any reports that we heard (from the Phantoms) were all good," coach Dave Hakstol said. "He went down and he embraced the opportunity to play a specific role there. He did that I think day in and day out. I was asked about what's different with Sandy since he came back, I think he went there and recaptured his confidence and was playing the exact same game he was playing for a good portion of the year here. As things got a little tight and a little tense, some of those characteristics left his game. For him to be able to go back there and reset was really good for him."

Sanheim is up with the Flyers on an "emergency recall," meaning without him they'd have fewer than six healthy defensemen. Johnny Oduya is skating but is still considered day-to-day with a "lower-body injury." If he or Hägg returns the Flyers will have to either send Sanheim back or make him a normal recall, of which the Flyers have three left before the playoffs.

If he performs well, they'll keep him.

"The main message coming up here was to not try to do too much," Sanheim said. "The way I was playing down there is something they wanted me to bring up here and play that style of game. I was finding success down there with the way I was playing and if I am able to come up here and do the same thing I was doing down there, I'll help this team win hockey games and that's the main goal."

Bellemare returns with Vegas

The upstart Vegas Golden Knights have had somewhat of a ritual before every game. Because they're an expansion team, each game is a revenge match for at least one of their players who was cast off that team.

Monday they were all fighting for Pierre-Edouard Bellemare in his return to Philadelphia. The Frenchman started his NHL career with the Flyers when they signed him out of the Swedish Hockey League in the summer of 2014. That doesn't mean there's any bad blood, though.

"They had no choice and if they would have protected me it would have been ludicrous, I've got to be honest with you," he said. "I'm 32. They

have young guys. How long am I going to be in this league? How long are they going to be in the league? They made a choice. It's Vegas. You make a choice. You play. You gamble."

Elliott on ice

It looked like another coach out on the ice for the start of Monday's morning skate because he was in a track suit. The goalie stick was a giveaway that it wasn't. It was Brian Elliott, his first time on the ice since having abdominal surgery on Feb. 13.

The goalie was one of the Flyers' MVPs in the first half of the season and one of their more reliable veteran voices. Even seeing him out there offered a boost.

"Moose is such a big part of our dressing room," Hakstol said. "It's tough. When a guy is injured it's tough for him to continue to have that type of presence, but Moose certainly has that presence with us. We know that we'll get him back at some point in time and to see him in the room and around the guys is a step in the right direction."

Courier-Post LOADED: 03.13.2018

1103377 Philadelphia Flyers

Pierre-Edouard Bellemare opens up on Las Vegas, not being kept by Flyers

Dave Isaac, March 12, 2018

PHILADELPHIA — Expectations couldn't have been lower before the season began.

How on Earth could the Vegas Golden Knights be anything but the worst team in the league? They were an expansion team built from castaways of last year's 30 NHL teams. In Bovada's preseason odds, the Edmonton Oilers were 9 to 1 odds to win the Stanley Cup. Vegas was one of six teams paying off at 100 to 1.

Um, oops.

Edmonton won't make the playoffs and Vegas is now looking like a team of world beaters. Ex-Flyer Pierre-Edouard Bellemare has been there from the start, which couldn't have been much worse for the community.

On Oct. 1, only a couple hours after the Golden Knights' preseason finale at home, a shooter opened fire on a crowd at a music festival, killing 58 people and injuring more than 800 more.

"Then after what happened in Vegas, to be honest the first few meetings were about what kind of people they want in the locker room," Bellemare said. "Not especially that they want you to have a 50-point season. It was about what kind of players they wanted to have in the locker room and it kind of worked. We understand that and what happened Oct. 1 kind of helped us all mature to be able to play for the city and not for anything else really. When you build a foundation, as we did after that, there's no chance you are moving backward. As soon as the game is not the way it's supposed to be, we're all like, 'OK, this is not hard to play.' Because of that we have been able to win more games than we lost."

Here are some more snippets from Bellemare's chat with reporters after Monday's morning skate in Philadelphia, his first game back since he was a member of the Flyers.

On the players who were selected in expansion...

"I guess part of it is you have 23 players arrive here, all kind of misfits. If you're coming to Vegas it's because somebody in the organization you were in before, even if they wanted to have you, they didn't protect you.



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Somehow, you're here for a reason. Because if you had been better, you would have been protected. We were all kind of kidding around about that, but we know that's the case. When we came to Vegas, we all decided to be better. When they came with a simple system it was like, 'OK, if you want to win it has to be 20 guys every night.' You cannot have one line that is hot and the other three are coasting. It's a system that required a lot of skating and every night we've had a lot of people involved and it's tough to beat us."

On the Flyers not protecting him in the expansion draft...

"I had a talk with Hexy and Hak. I'm 32-years-old. I had eight points (last season). And even if they signed me to a way-too-good deal, to be honest I still had eight points. It's not like I was the kind of guy you cannot replace. When they talked to me about it and explained their thought, I understood it. It doesn't mean that I was happy about it because my life has been in Philly, but I knew there was an opportunity that it could happen. From that point, you guys know the way I am. It was all right. Move on and see what happens. That's what I told them when they called. I said, 'OK, we'll see what happens on Tuesday.'"

So the Flyers told you they were going to expose you?

"Yeah. I don't expect less. It's a good organization. They take care of their players. What happened to me is just part of the business. They had no choice and if they would have protected me it would have been ludicrous. I've got to be honest with you. I'm 32. They have young guys. How long am I going to be in this league? How long are they going to be in the league? They made a choice. It's Vegas. You make a choice. You play. You gamble. Any player you pick, it would have been a loss for them anyway. I'm in this situation but it could have been someone else. For me, it was a great opportunity. I come to a new franchise, staple myself into it, have an opportunity to talk to the young guys and have them understand my way to think and my way to work. Maybe if I touch one of those kids, he helps another kid later on. That's all you can do. At the end of the day when your career is over, it's like what have you done with your situation? I think it was a great opportunity for me."

On Marc-Andre Fleury going for his 400th career win...

"You know what, since the beginning of the year, because of the nature of our team and everybody comes from (somewhere else), every night somebody is playing against his old team. It has been a thing every night. We've been helping that guy. Maybe this has been one of the reasons we're so focused every night. It's easy. You go to Pittsburgh, Flower's going to play against Pittsburgh. We just want to win for him. And I know guys are going to try to do the same to help me win this game. Every night we've had something that's added a little extra. There hasn't been one game yet where we're like, 'Ah, we don't care about this one.' No."

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1103378 Philadelphia Flyers

Flyers 5 takeaways: Self-inflicted mistake costs points in playoff battle

Dave Isaac, @daveisaac Published 11:23 p.m. ET March 12, 2018

PHILADELPHIA — The sound you hear is footsteps, and the Flyers hear them too.

Two of their last three games have ended in heartbreak and no points when they could have had two but certainly deserved at least one.

"We've seen this story before," Claude Giroux said after a 3-2 loss to the Vegas Golden Knights. "It's frustrating. We played a hell of a game. We played the way we wanted to and everyone was going. A couple minutes left and they find a way to put it in. It's frustrating."

With the loss, the Flyers are three points shy of the Pittsburgh Penguins for second place and only three points ahead of the New Jersey Devils, who have the last wild card spot.

As was the case in Boston last Thursday, they Flyers got outmuscled in their own end and allowed a late goal.

This time it was Ryan Carpenter who scored with 2:40 left on the clock after Valteri Filppula failed to clear the zone and Wayne Simmonds got outworked by ex-Flyer Pierre-Edouard Bellemare along the boards.

"Obviously that sucks. We can't be doing that to ourselves," Simmonds said. "We fought back, tied it up and to lose that way sucks."

"We're letting these games get away from us right now," Shayne Gostisbehere added. "We can't be doing this. We need every point we can get."

Marc-Andre Fleury made 38 saves on 40 shots and got his 400th career win. The Flyers came back to tie the game twice and couldn't get themselves a lead.

They're not in danger of missing the playoffs yet. More nightmares like this however, and they may not be far off.

"We weren't back on our heels tonight," coach Dave Hakstol said. "We had one shift where we didn't do the job. That's just honest. I don't feel like there's any trend. The game in Boston, that's completely different. I felt like we controlled this one. We didn't get a puck out. That whole shift, we just didn't get the puck under control. We didn't get an opportunity to push it out at the blue line and then we got caught on the outside of our coverage down in the slot."

Here are four more takeaways from Monday's game...

Patrick's gotta keep his head up

Back in October the Flyers hosted the Anaheim Ducks and Nolan Patrick took a shoulder-to-shoulder hit from Chris Wagner and missed nine games with a concussion. He admitted he needed to be more aware on the ice and better positioned.

Same could be said Monday night.

The rookie ran right into Bellemare and stayed down on the ice for a while. He went to the locker room, presumably for concussion protocol, and later returned.

Nolan Patrick leaves the game after being hit by Pierre-Edouard Bellemare. pic.twitter.com/K8f4kQ54Vc

— Sons of Penn (@SonsofPenn) March 13, 2018

The positive, of course, is that he wasn't seriously hurt.

The learning experience is that he needs to be more aware still. Patrick had just cut to his left, so he was on his edges rather than standing upright and that likely played a factor. One thing to look for in seasons to come is that Patrick will have a full summer to add some weight (he didn't last summer after surgery) and should be stronger next season.

Special teams split

The Flyers' power play took a step forward and the penalty kill a step back.

Erik Haula got a gift of a goal when he tried to pass it across the goal crease to Colin Miller and Flyers goalie Petr Mrazek pokechecked it.

"I just tried to cut the pass. It hit my edge of the stick and went in," Mrazek said. "That was a bad bounce because so many times you want to cut the pass and it will hit your stick. But this just hit the piece ... the edge of the stick, and went in."

The Golden Knights only had two power plays and scored on both.

"The second one, again they scored in the last 30 seconds of it," Hakstol said. "We couldn't get the clear, we got ourselves under pressure and a



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high-tip off our goaltender and they were in the right spot for the rebound. Not gonna overreact to anything there.”

There was progress on the power play, though. The Flyers had been 2-for-28 before Simmonds backed up from the crease, took a pass and roofed a shot over Fleury.

“It was a big goal for us,” Gostisbehere said. “We were hot and we got another power play after that and couldn’t really capitalize. It’s tough. When we play that good of a game and that’s the end result, it’s tough for us. We’ve just got to take some positives and keep going.”

Lindblom’s cursed

More on Oskar Lindblom in Wednesday’s Courier-Post, but he’s played about as well as he can with nothing to show for it in his first 11 NHL games.

“I don’t know. I’m getting chances,” he said. “I just have to keep going here. I’m trying not to be too negative.”

That can be hard for a 21-year-old who is new to the league, but it sounds like his teammates and the coaching staff have picked him up enough to keep his confidence afloat.

Veteran presence

Hakstol has said several times this season that he values the work of his more tenured players and that’s why they see the ice in crucial situations.

He’s got to be close to rethinking that strategy because he continues to get burned by it.

Brandon Manning had some failed clears of his own and lost his coverage on the second goal. Simmonds and Filppula were beaten along the boards leading to the game-winning goal. Would the play of younger players make them any more vulnerable?

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GOLDEN KNIGHTS 3, FLYERS 2

Up next: vs. Columbus Blue Jackets

When: 7 p.m., Thursday

TV/Radio: NBCSP/97.5 FM

Courier-Post LOADED: 03.13.2018

1103354 New York Islanders

Gibson showing promise as Isles look to start winning streak

By Andrew Gross

Updated March 12, 2018 10:37 PM

A win was a start. A winning streak now is necessary for the Islanders to climb back into the playoff chase.

The Islanders, who traveled back from Calgary on Monday after snapping an 0-4-4 slide with Sunday’s 5-2 win over the Flames, must wait until Thursday night’s start of a home-and-home series with the Capitals at Barclays Center to build upon their first victory since Feb. 16.

But even if the just-completed 1-0-3 road trip ultimately was disappointing, a couple of areas of the team’s play can be considered promising as the Islanders play six of their next seven games at home.

Most important is 25-year-old Finnish goalie Christopher Gibson, who made 50 saves against the Flames and stopped 37 of 38 shots in the

final two periods. That followed his 35-save performance in Thursday’s 2-1 shootout loss at Edmonton. Gibson also started the trip-opening 3-2 overtime loss at Pittsburgh on March 3 by making 47 saves.

“Gibby, ever since he’s been in the organization, he’s been a great goaltender and tough to score on,” Anders Lee said. “So we always know the potential that these guys have. But when you come into the game and play as calm as he has, it’s a wonderful surprise.”

Gibson, who has played seven games for the Islanders — and in the NHL — since being acquired from the Maple Leafs on Sept. 17, 2015, as part of a package for Michael Grabner, is 1-0-2 with a 1.91 goals-against average and a .957 save percentage this season.

“He’s obviously coming off a year where he was injured,” Islanders coach Doug Weight said of Gibson, who played only seven games in 2016-17. “The way he’s playing, it’s a great thing for us. We have to play a little better in front of him. But it’s a big win.”

Gibson became the second Islanders rookie goalie to make at least 50 saves in a game, joining Hall of Famer Billy Smith, who made 55 saves against the Flyers on Nov. 22, 1972.

“He’s been playing really well,” defenseman Johnny Boychuk said. “When he’s been in net, he’s been stopping a lot of pucks. Even the one in Edmonton went off a stick and off his head and in.”

That was Connor McDavid’s equalizer at 18:10 of the third period.

Gibson likely also would like to have back Johnny Gaudreau’s shot from below the left faceoff circle that beat him over his right shoulder inside the near post to cut the Islanders’ lead over the Flames to 2-1 at 7:23 of the first period Sunday. Otherwise, he was essentially flawless.

Another good sign for the Islanders was the way they built their early two-goal lead over the Flames with goals 18 seconds apart from Boychuk and defense partner Nick Leddy.

The Islanders need their defensemen up on the attack more. They have been getting that lately, with Thomas Hickey getting the lone goal at Calgary.

Newsday LOADED: LOADED: 03.13.2018

1103430 Websites

The Athletic / Custance: The Top 10 assistant GMs ready for a promotion

By Craig Custance Mar 12, 2018

Sabres GM Jason Botterill just successfully navigated his first NHL trade deadline, the time of year where rumors are at the absolute peak. Names are thrown around constantly, speculated and debated. Occasionally there’s an actual trade.

It’s not fun for the players. Most will tell you that they’re thrilled when the deadline comes and goes. And on some level, Botterill can relate to it all.

When you’re an assistant GM on a successful team, like Botterill was for years in Pittsburgh, your name hits the rumor mill much like a player at the trade deadline. When a GM job opens, like one recently did in Carolina, a group of names gets thrown into the mix. For years, Botterill was one of the regulars in that lineup.

“Your name comes up for jobs more than the interviews you go through,” Botterill told The Athletic. “Your main focus has to be on your position and what’s going on with your job.”

Just like a player. Focus on the ice, and these things tend to take care of themselves.



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But the next few months have the potential to be especially distracting for the next wave of potential general managers. There's the Carolina opening. There's also going to be lots of speculation about who will get to run Seattle, as colleague Pierre LeBrun addressed so well here. And as James Mirtle points out, there are a ton of GMs on the hot seat.

And when those jobs open up, it's the assistant GM with experience who often gets the longest look. We've been putting together Top 10 assistant GMs lists for five years, and the initial list on ESPN Insider in 2013 ended up having eight future GMs on it. And for good reason. These are the executives who have gained experience. They have run AHL teams. They have been inside the war room.

Botterill is a great example — he learned from both Ray Shero, who is now the Devils GM, and Jim Rutherford before getting his own team.

"What I have witnessed behind the scenes and working with Ray Shero and Jim Rutherford — those are the guys who have helped me get to my position here," Botterill said. "I felt I was prepared because I had so much responsibility under both Jim and Ray. To me, that's the key."

So as the music starts to fade in for what could be a robust game of GM musical chairs, here's a look at this year's Top 10 Assistant GMs ready for a promotion:

1. Paul Fenton, Predators — Fenton was No. 1 on this list last season, and since then, the Predators have played for a Stanley Cup and emerged as a powerhouse again this season. One of the things the Predators have done well through the years has been drafting and developing with great patience. Fenton is the GM version of a prospect who has done everything he's needed to do at every level to earn his shot. You have to assume Fenton is the heir apparent in Nashville, but you can't assume GM David Poile is going anywhere anytime soon. "I just never think that David Poile is going to retire," said one NHL source. "Those guys still have the passion." According to LeBrun, Carolina has asked to talk to Fenton and if the Hurricanes are going to break through, it's going to be because of drafting, which is Fenton's expertise. That said, you could say that for any team looking to fill a GM hole. The Predators hit again with their first-round pick in 2017, with Eeli Tolvanen looking like a real steal late in the first round. In the case of Tolvanen, Fenton was quick to credit director of player personnel Jeff Kealty, along with amateur scouts David Westby and Tom Nolan for the find. The fact that Kealty is earning a reputation around the league as a great talent evaluator is a credit to Fenton and Poile for allowing their people to do their job. Shero worked with both of them in Nashville and sees that as a strength for Fenton. "He manages his staff well," Shero said. "He puts his trust and faith in a guy like Jeff Kealty. Paul runs the farm team. He's worked with David (Poile) a long time. He pushes David, David pushes him. He's been through expansion, he's been through rebuilds with one team and big trades. Paul is a strong candidate anywhere."

2. Julien BriseBois, Lightning — BriseBois has long been promoted as a young, up-and-coming future GM but quietly has never been in a rush to leave Tampa. For good reason. "He's in a great situation," said one NHL executive who didn't think BriseBois was going to be overly eager to leap at the first offer. BriseBois and Steve Yzerman have built a team that is set up for years of success, and it's been a great learning process for an executive who came up through a law firm rather than a playing career. He manages the Lightning's AHL franchise, which continually pumps out good, young talent for the big club. He also manages Tampa's salary cap and deserves credit for the foresight the organization had at the deadline last year and at other intervals that has helped keep the most important players around on this roster. The Lightning are proactive and progressive when it comes to roster construction, something BriseBois would undoubtedly bring to his next team. He's going to get his shot eventually and is smart enough to wait for the right opportunity. "They keep adding teams," said one NHL source. "A GM job is going to be there."

3. Tom Fitzgerald, Devils — While chatting about Fitzgerald, Shero reminded us that Fitzgerald also won a Stanley Cup as an assistant coach. Fitzgerald was on Dan Byslma's staff with Mike Yeo when the

Penguins won it all in 2009. So Fitzgerald has that experience under his belt. Shero also shared this tidbit: In Pittsburgh, with a front office staff that already included current Wild GM Chuck Fletcher at the time, Shero hired both Botterill and Fitzgerald on the same day. "Chuck refers to it as black Friday," Shero said, laughing. But it's a reminder how fertile that Penguins front office has been for producing future executives. Fitzgerald was given more responsibility with the move to the Devils and is more than ready to run a team. "He's so passionate," Shero said. "That's the best thing about Fitz, is he's not doing his job because he's chasing a GM job. If it happens, it happens. He's passionate about what he does and it makes an impact."

4. Bill Guerin, Penguins — Even with Botterill cherry-picked by the Sabres, the Penguins front office still has candidates for openings with Guerin the next in line to get a promotion. Since retiring as a player, he has impressed GM Jim Rutherford with his willingness to learn and develop young players, a big part of the Penguins recent Stanley Cup success. "He came into hockey ops as a character player with good leadership qualities and in a short period of time, he's learned how the hockey ops works," Rutherford told The Athletic. "He is doing a very good job on the development side, getting players ready, identifying free agents, college free agents and, of course, he's involved on all decisions — trades and different things like that." Rutherford also had high praise for Jason Karmanos, who was named assistant GM in June after three seasons as vice president of hockey operations. He's won Cups with Rutherford in both Carolina and Pittsburgh, with a degree from Harvard and fluency in analytics. "He is ready to take that next step," Rutherford said. "He's really good with analytics. He's good on contracts. He's good on the CBA. He played the game, understands the game and is good at evaluating talent."

5. Kyle Dubas, Maple Leafs — This could be a moot point. Dubas, as Mirtle wrote earlier this month, looks like the front-runner to replace Lou Lamoriello as GM of the Maple Leafs. He also got a long look from Colorado. Dubas got a lot of attention as a young hire in Toronto, something that rubbed some people in the game the wrong way since it was interpreted somehow as self-promotion. Also, people in hockey tend not to like anyone who receives attention before they're viewed as deserving it. Since his hiring, Dubas has quietly earned any promotion he's got coming his way, and those who know him argue that what truly drives Dubas is being around people he respects with a common goal and passion that he believes in. "That's a big driver for him," said Kyle Raftis, who replaced Dubas as GM in Sault Ste. Marie. "It's not about where he's going and his eyes on the future. It's in the moment." And in the moment, he's learning a lot from guys like Lamoriello and Mike Babcock. "I think he really does cherish his relationship with Lou," Raftis said. "Anytime I've talked to him, he's embraced talking about Lou and enjoys that relationship."

6. Mike Futa, Kings — Futa, as LeBrun first reported, is one of the early candidates for the Carolina job. He was also in the running last year for the Sabres' opening. When Rob Blake was promoted to the Kings' GM job after the firing of Dean Lombardi, Futa became the GM of Los Angeles' AHL affiliate, the Ontario Reign. It added another layer of experience to someone who has developed a reputation as having a strong eye for identifying young talent, but also has experience running teams both in the OHL and now AHL. "He's got two rings and he works hard," said one NHL source.

7. Bill Zito, Blue Jackets — Zito was another executive who got a long look for the Sabres' job and is highly valued by Blue Jackets GM Jarmo Kekalainen. Zito got into the business as an agent, where he built a successful agency by identifying overlooked talent like Tim Thomas, Brian Rafalski and John Madden. Along the way, he mastered the business side and contract negotiations while forging relationships with managers around the league, an important part of deal-making. He graduated from Yale and has a law degree from Wisconsin, but Kekalainen is quick to point out that Zito's hockey background is equally strong. "He's coached and he has a great eye for talent," Kekalainen told The Athletic. "The biggest mistake thinking about him is that he's not a hockey guy. He's been on all sides of the hockey operations side. ...



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He's done everything from contracts to minor league to running the pro staff." Also, this is probably a good place to point out the absurdity that someone feels like they have to defend an Ivy League-educated, builder of a multi-million dollar hockey agency with a law degree as having enough hockey-guy credentials to be the GM of a team. Fair or not, people still want to see the hockey pedigree, and Zito has it.

8. Kelly McCrimmon, Vegas – He seems like such a natural to get the job in Seattle. He's been George McPhee's right-hand man in Vegas, with the Golden Knights wildly exceeding every reasonable expectation. He has the blueprint to expansion success and could import it to Seattle seamlessly. But he should get consideration well beyond expansion teams. Before joining Vegas, he spent years in the WHL as Brandon's majority owner, coach and GM. He was pursued hard by multiple NHL franchises before ending up with the Golden Knights. "The thing that Kelly has is years of experience of being a true manager," said one league executive. "Give him two years with Vegas and he'll be ready."

9. Craig Conroy, Flames – The most qualified future GM on the Calgary staff under Brad Treliving is probably Don Maloney, who is vice president of hockey operations. But this is a list about assistants looking for their first job. The Flames have Brad Pascall and Conroy as assistant GMs who compliment each other well. Pascall runs the AHL team, does contract work and came up through Hockey Canada. Conroy is the big personality, grind it out pro and amateur scout who also has his hand in USA Hockey. I'm listing Conroy first only because of my bias towards Americans. If Calgary gets in the playoffs and makes a run, both of their profiles will rise. The Western Conference Canadian team with the best shot at making a run is in Winnipeg, and if that happens, the profile of assistant GMs Craig Heisinger and Larry Simmons will increase. Simmons quietly has done a fantastic job with the Jets' contracts, among other duties.

10. Pat Verbeek, Lightning – Yes, this makes two Lightning assistant GMs on the list and either one would be a strong hire. An NHL GM listed two reasons why he thinks Verbeek's name will start popping up on GM lists: "The success of Tampa Bay and his work ethic." One of the most impressive things Yzerman has done in Tampa is surround himself with a great front office team, much like he was part of in Detroit during the Red Wings' heyday. The Ken Holland family tree produced current GMs Yzerman and Jim Nill in Dallas. Among those still with the Red Wings, Kris Draper and Ryan Martin have popped up as future GM candidates, although Detroit's recent struggles have lowered their executive profiles. Verbeek has the best of both worlds. He was hired from Detroit as a pro scout and has now grown under Yzerman in Tampa where they've built a Stanley Cup contender with some longevity moving forward. "Pat is a really good scout," said one NHL executive. "If you're an owner and a smart guy, you might just go, 'I have somebody who can handle the CBA. I need somebody who can tell me how to go find a (Nikita) Kucherov.'"

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The Athletic / LeBrun: Exploring the timeline for Seattle and possible GM candidates

By Pierre LeBrun Mar 12, 2018

This column began as an idea to present some logical candidates for the Seattle GM job.

And I'll look at those options, but the more I got to thinking about things with the potential expansion team in Seattle, the more I realized I might be getting a little ahead of myself with the GM speculation.

For starters, they can't drop the puck in Seattle for a real NHL game until the fall of 2020, and that's if the major gutting, renovation and re-design of Key Arena go as scheduled (it is supposed to break ground by the end of 2018).

Let's run on the premise that it will indeed be ready for the fall of 2020.

Based on recent expansion team history, that would put the GM hire somewhere in the summer of 2019, if Seattle's ownership group wants to follow the same script — which perhaps it doesn't.

Take Vegas, for example. It officially got a franchise in June 2016 and hired George McPhee as GM in July 2016. The Golden Knights then dropped the puck for real this past October.

Nashville got a conditional franchise in June 1997, hired GM David Poile in July 1997 and played its first real game in October 1998.

As one Western Conference team executive told The Athletic on Sunday, why would the owners in Seattle want to pay a GM further out than one year before puck drop?

That is unless, perhaps, the owners believe waiting too long would make them miss out on a candidate they really want. That's certainly a possibility. And one industry source said Sunday that he believes the Seattle owners may want someone in the GM job earlier than Vegas, if indeed it's a guy they really want.

It's all speculation at this point.

Now the real key in all this is finding out when, exactly, the NHL's Board of Governors would vote and give Seattle its official stamp of approval to become the league's 32nd franchise. That has not been decided yet. The league still has a process to complete in terms of doing its due diligence on the bid.

Let's go on the premise Seattle meets all the criteria and background checks. There are some people who think the vote and official stamp could come as early as this June's Board of Governors meeting. And perhaps that will come to pass.

But I also get the sense that the league is in no rush given that there can't be hockey at Key Arena until the 2020-21 season at the earliest.

That doesn't stop the league from still going earlier on Seattle than it did for Vegas in terms of a timeline. There are no hard-fast rules.

Still, why not wait until next December's Board of Governors meeting? I mean, what is the rush, exactly?

Well, as one Eastern Conference team executive said Sunday, there is the issue of gobbling up that \$650 million expansion fee as early as possible.

Right. There is that.

And while we're having fun guessing away at the potential Seattle timeline, let's throw this wrench into the proceedings.

It just so happens that September 2020, a month before Seattle potentially could be hosting its first regular-season NHL game, is also the window where the NHL could have its next labor battle.

In September 2019, both the owners and the players each have the right to announce whether they want to opt out of the current CBA one year later instead of letting the agreement run its full course through the 2021-22 season.

From the CBA:

"Either party shall have the right to terminate this Agreement effective midnight September 15, 2020 ("early termination") by providing notice as specified hereafter.

(i) The NHL may exercise its option for early termination by delivery of written notification to the NHLPA of its election to do so on or before September 1, 2019.



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(ii) If the NHL has not already done so, the NHLPA may exercise its option for early termination by delivery of written notification to the NHL of its election to do so on or before September 15, 2019.”

Can't wait!

(An aside, after covering two NHL lockouts, remind me to book James Duthie's Turks and Caicos retreat spot and not return until the next potential labor battle is over.)

If the NHL is headed for a September 2020 labor war and knows as much by September 2019, would it want to delay the start of things in Seattle to the 2021-22 season? No idea. But I feel like you have to at least ask that question.

And from an NHL Players' Association perspective, would you be sensitive to the whole Seattle timing given that 23 of your members will be players there? Or in the greater scheme of things, is it a nice leverage tool for the NHLPA to try and get some of what it wants in the next CBA by playing off the Seattle season launch point and the league's eagerness not to mess with it?

We're getting way ahead of ourselves, but these are all things to chew on.

All of which are probably things that potential Seattle GM candidates are also chewing on as they potentially pass up opportunities in the next few months because they're eyeing Seattle, or they decide not to pass something up because the timing of Seattle remains unclear.

It will be a coveted gig to be sure, even though the first 12 months on the job you're going to be educating/convincing your market that what happened in Vegas in Year 1 was not normal. Managing expectations out of the gate in Seattle will be rather pressing.

In saying all that, and with the obvious knowledge that I might be premature in even attempting this, here's a list of GM candidates that might make sense as of today as far as I would see it (in no particular order):

Ken Holland: The veteran Detroit Red Wings GM is near the end of his current contract, although that doesn't mean he's necessarily going anywhere. That remains to be seen. But if you're Seattle, here's a veteran hockey man with Stanley Cup rings who also happens to spend his summers in his native British Columbia. If he's available in June 2019 or whenever Seattle goes ahead with its search, he'd surely be a candidate. And if Seattle is going to follow the route that Vegas took, it's worth remembering the Golden Knights went with a very experienced candidate in McPhee.

Dean Lombardi: Speaking of Stanley Cup rings, this is another veteran hockey mind. The sticky part would be that I don't think Lombardi and Tim Leiweke were on the same page at times when both were in Los Angeles together. Leiweke, of course, is part of the group that's charged with renovating Key Arena and one assumes might potentially stay on board in some role with the franchise. One Eastern Conference team executive on Sunday said he feels Lombardi is the perfect choice for Seattle. And again, he would fit the mold of the more experienced hand.

Kelly McCrimmon: My TSN colleague Darren Dreger has mentioned him more than a few times as a logical, potential fit and I whole-heartedly agree. Who better to know the ins and outs of building an expansion team than the guy who just did it as the assistant GM in Las Vegas? Not to mention he knows the Seattle market from his long tenure as owner, GM and coach in Brandon of the Western Hockey League over the years.

Laurence Gilman: The former Canucks AGM (who was contacted by Carolina for its GM search over the past week) still lives with his family in Vancouver. He'd be acutely aware of the market in the Pacific Northwest. If Seattle looked at him as a potential GM candidate, would they also want his old sidekick from Vancouver, Mike Gillis, to come in as a president of hockey-type? Food for thought.

Paul Fenton: The longtime Predators AGM (also in the mix for the Carolina GM job) has been there since Day 1 in Nashville, so he has first-hand knowledge of how to build a team from the ground up. He's been Poile's right-hand man for a long time, and the Predators' run speaks for itself. The Preds have developed players like few other organizations and Fenton, in charge of the AHL team, has been a big part of that.

Julien BriseBois: The Hurricanes, it's believed, have also reached out to Tampa Bay about this rising star. I'm just not sure whether BriseBois would be interested in that Carolina job. Is the timing right? He's put himself in a position with his work within the Lightning front office where I think he can afford to be selective about when it's time to finally jump into a GM job. For starters, I can't imagine he's in any hurry to leave Tampa where it's a darn good place to work and live. But if he's still in Tampa by the time Seattle begins its search, the expansion team would be crazy not to call.

Bill Zito: The Blue Jackets AGM got a good, hard look from the Sabres before they hired Jason Botterill as GM last summer. Zito has an AHL championship under his belt as GM of the AHL club. He's been four years in Columbus as AGM. His many years running his own player agency also fills out his knowledge of the industry. Some people certainly view him as a future NHL GM.

Mike Futa: The Kings AGM has already had a phone interview with the Hurricanes for their vacant GM job, and he's certainly a serious candidate for that gig. But if he decides to stay put, the longtime Kings executive has a strong scouting background and had a lot to do with the organization's two Cup championships. Seattle would be foolish not to call on him if he's still in L.A.

Pat Brisson: This is kind of a wild-card entrant because I always have a hard time believing one of the game's most successful agents would ever want to leave that gig to go run an NHL team. My pal Dreger brought his name up during our Insider Trading segment last week on TSN as a long shot candidate for Seattle. It makes sense on some level because Brisson is friends with Jerry Bruckheimer, one of Seattle's owners, and has a good relationship with Leiweke. Brisson has often been mentioned/rumored as a potential candidate over the years when past GM openings played out (Montreal, Pittsburgh) but again, is that something he'd really want?

There are lots of other names you could throw in here, and it's a list that I think will continue to fluctuate over the next year as we get closer to potentially seeing Seattle get its franchise. And again, some of these names might get snapped up before Seattle even has a chance to talk to them. But it's fun to think about it all. Because believe me, it's a hot topic around the league.

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The Athletic / How the Lightning took advantage of market inefficiencies to leapfrog the Canadiens and become an NHL power

By Marc Antoine Godin Mar 12, 2018

TAMPA – The Tampa Bay Lightning consistently bring the best out of the Montreal Canadiens. It is the sign of a healthy rivalry.

But if Claude Julien's troops might have been justified, after losing in a shootout Saturday, finding motivation by saying they are not that far off from a Stanley Cup contender, Canadiens management would be best served not allowing itself to be so delusional.



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Because the emotion that fuels players must not creep into the decisions made in the front office above them.

How is it that the Canadiens, who swept the Lightning in the first round of the 2014 playoffs, are now light years behind them? How has Steve Yzerman and his front office managed to drop the hammer into fifth gear and leave the Canadiens this far back in their rearview mirror?

First things first, before Yzerman arrived to take over as general manager in 2010, the Lightning used high draft picks to acquire a No. 1 centre (Steven Stamkos, No. 1 overall, 2008) and a No. 1 defenceman (Victor Hedman, No. 2 overall, 2009). A few years later, in 2012, Yzerman used the No. 19 overall pick to select a No. 1 goalie, Andrei Vasilevskiy, and he suddenly had a pillar at the three most important positions on the team.

But it is the way those three have been surrounded that says the most about the management of this team. When you look closely at the roster, it becomes clear how the team is built by taking advantage of market inefficiencies.

Whether it has been drafting smaller players, finding useful players outside the top two rounds of the draft, identifying talent among undrafted free agents or even having confidence in Russian players when other organizations were shying away from them, the Lightning managed to capitalize on players other teams didn't want.

Wayne Gretzky said that you need to go where the puck will be, not where it was. The same could be said of the best teams who go where hockey is going instead of trying to replicate models that are constantly changing.

The size of the forwards is one of the first things that jumps out about the Lightning.

In the 3-2 shootout win against the Canadiens on Saturday, Tyler Johnson became the fifth Lightning player to reach the 20-goal plateau this season. Among that group, only one player is taller than 5-foot-11, and that's Stamkos (6-foot-1, 194 pounds). It's important to note that Vladislav Namestnikov had also hit the 20-goal mark before being traded to the New York Rangers, making it six players who have scored 20 goals in a Lightning uniform, and that he too is under 6-feet tall.

"They look at talent, they look at hockey IQ and not so much at size," said Brayden Point, who the Lightning drafted in the third round of the 2014 draft, seven picks after the Canadiens opted for defenceman Brett Lernout.

Point has been a source of pride for the Lightning's scouts, a group where listening and sharing ideas is encouraged. Having said that, it is not as if the Lightning have hit home run after home run at the draft. You could even say it has not been one of the organization's greatest strengths.

Under Yzerman, on top of Point, the Lightning drafted Nikita Kucherov at the end of the second round (No. 58, 2011), Ondrej Palat after the vacuum cleaners started running (seventh round, No. 208, 2011) and Cedric Paquette in the fourth round (No. 101, 2012).

But the Lightning have some serious flair when it comes to signing undrafted free agents out of the junior ranks. Four players on the current roster were signed by the Lightning after the entire NHL ignored them at the draft, Johnson and Yannick Gourde being the most successful examples.

"One thing our organization bases a lot of its decisions on is character," Johnson said. "They do a good job of trying to figure out what kind of person you are, not only what kind of player you are but your work ethic and everything. I think that makes our group very special."

"The scouting staff, the GM and everyone has done a tremendous job of doing their homework and talking to guys. Before I signed with Tampa, I spoke to a whole lot of different people in the organization and had conversations with them. They must have liked what they heard from me and I definitely liked talking to them. We just kind of clicked right away."

Speaking to other guys on the team, everyone had kind of the same experience."

It was director of amateur scouting Al Murray who first approached Johnson, after which he had several conversations with Yzerman and other members of his hockey operations department.

It paid off with Johnson and the team has continued in the same vein. It is that proactive nature that irritated so many in Montreal when, two weeks ago, the Lightning signed Alex Barré-Boulet, the leading scorer in the QMJHL, to an entry-level contract. There is no way to know if that signing will provide a payoff similar to Johnson, but the risk is minimal and the reward potentially great. Best case scenario is the Lightning signed the next Yannick Gourde, who had also led the QMJHL in scoring.

"It's great to hear," Gourde said. "I'm really happy for Barré-Boulet. He's shown in junior that he's an excellent player and I'm eager to see him at training camp."

Then, there are the Russians.

Remember, when Yzerman took over in 2010, the "Russia factor" was a real thing. An institutionalized devaluation of Russians in the NHL – fed in part by the uncertainty surrounding the willingness of young Russians to come to North America, and in part by a negative prejudice toward them – allowed the St. Louis Blues to draft Vladimir Tarasenko 16th overall and the Washington Capitals to get Evgeny Kuznetsov at No. 26.

But no organization ignored the "Russia factor" more than the Lightning, because no team has drafted more Russians since Yzerman was hired. Remember, Yzerman was captain of the Detroit Red Wings at the time of the Russian Five, so that might have been a factor in him refusing to discriminate against these prospects at a time when others were doing just that.

Of the eight Russians drafted under his watch, four have played at least 100 games with the Lightning, two are now part of the team's core (Kucherov and Vasilevskiy) and a third, Namestnikov, after playing centre on the first line for most of the season, helped the Lightning acquire Ryan McDonagh from the New York Rangers at the trade deadline.

The great majority of the players in the organization, aside from those acquired in a trade, have converged at one time or another on the team's farm club in the AHL.

That is where we can see another Red Wings influence on Yzerman, the one where you take great pains in making sure the farm team and big club are well aligned, much like the Grand Rapids Griffins have been with Detroit for years.

"I think we only have two players who never played in the American Hockey League (Stamkos and Hedman)," Gourde said. "Almost everyone has gone through our system. The organization looks for battlers, guys who work hard every game, and that starts with our captain."

Johnson is quick to point out that even if an NHL roster has 23 players, it often takes 30 or more players because of injuries or a variety of circumstances that can arise over the course of a season.

"The American league team is really part of the NHL team," Johnson said. "It was great for my development, it was great for a lot of guys on the team. We kind of learned together, grew up together and got to come up together. When you have that camaraderie coming in it just kind of makes that transition a little bit easier because everyone's going through that same thing. We went through that phase and now we have guys coming from the (AHL) and they're being developed the right way."

"Winning is part of our culture here and it's part of the culture down in Syracuse."

The Lightning didn't need to win a Stanley Cup to create a winning culture. An appearance in the final and success in the AHL definitely contributed to it, but that DNA is ingrained in the dressing room.



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A player like Point can easily make the transition from junior straight to the NHL last season because of that direct link between the farm team and the big club. Instead of feeling intimidated, a framework is in place to reassure the younger players.

"A guy like (Chris) Kunitz has won four Cups and a lot of these guys have been in a Cup final and Conference final and stuff like that, so you got a lot of guys that have tons of experience," Point said. "They're great for us to lean on for advice for guys like me, (Anthony) Cirelli, (Adam) Erne or Gourde."

It's easy to say that the sunshine and low tax rate make Tampa an attractive place to play, but the work environment has a lot to do with it as well.

"We love living here, I mean everyone just had such a great experience here and everyone wants to be a part of this team," Johnson said. "We got guys re-signed to contracts just for a little bit less so that they could stay here because we feel like we have a really good group. We feel like we have one of the best owners in all sports, a great GM, a great coaching staff, and the players are unbelievable. We're a family and it really is, from top to bottom. Everyone is together."

The Lightning has formed an organic whole that, on top of the roster on paper, is ready to contend for the Stanley Cup for seasons to come.

"There's no hiding behind it, it's the most skilled team I've been a part of," Hedman said. "The dedication and the work ethic are definitely there too. It's not always the best roster that wins, it's the best team. The team that we have in here is pretty special. We're very close in this room and hopefully that's going to benefit us in the playoffs."

Head coach Jon Cooper has an embarrassment of riches at his disposal. He can scratch a player like Braydon Coburn while in Montreal, Karl Alzner is forced to play 20 minutes a night. Cooper has a full deck and his biggest responsibility is to make sure everyone is comfortable with the role they are asked to play.

"I think internally that's the case for some guys, there's no question, that feeling of wanting to belong and that they're justified in belonging. There's no question about that," Cooper said. "But in the end, it's about the team game and what can you do to make the team win. And I think it's about defining roles for guys. When the guys know exactly what's expected of them, they don't try and do too much, they try and understand the relevancy of their role with our team and so far it's been working out for us."

Are those roles well defined on the Canadiens? Has the front office stuck to a plan, even if it wasn't necessarily the trend in the NHL at the time? Has talent identification led to good draft picks and benefitting from shrewd signings of undrafted free agents? Has the farm team supplied the big club with an adequate number of contributors?

Have the working environment and team culture been optimized?

Answering these questions shows to what extent the gap continues to grow between two teams that, not so long ago, were on equal footing.

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1103433 Websites

The Athletic / Four former goalies discuss why some of the NHL's biggest stars have struggled this year

By Eric Duhatschek Mar 12, 2018

Men are not machines and that is particularly true of the men who play goal in the NHL, though there are times — when swaddled in all that

equipment and head gear — they do look machine-like. And for most of the 2016-17 NHL season, Carey Price, Braden Holtby, and Cam Talbot all performed with metronomic, robotic efficiency.

Price won 37 games to lead the Montreal Canadiens to first place in the Atlantic Division while posting a 2.23 goals-against average and a .923 save percentage. The Washington Capitals won the Presidents' Trophy as the top regular-season team, behind Holtby's 42 wins, 2.07 GAA and .925 save percentage. Talbot played the most minutes of any goalie, got into 73 games, won 42 times, and helped the Edmonton Oilers unexpectedly make the playoffs.

Many years, any of those performances would have been good enough to win the Vezina Trophy which last year went to someone with equally glossy numbers — the Columbus Blue Jackets' Sergei Bobrovsky (41 wins, 2.06 GAA, .931 SP).

Still, Price, Holtby and Talbot finished second, third and fourth in the Vezina trophy balloting, which is done by NHL GMs and goes to the goaltender "adjudged best at his position."

But 2017-18 has not been very kind to all three — or a handful of other established starting goaltenders (such as the Ottawa Senators' Craig Anderson, the New York Rangers' Henrik Lundqvist, the St. Louis Blues' Jake Allen or the San Jose Sharks' Martin Jones), all of whom have had significant down stretches this season.

All of which led me to wonder, what are the factors that go into an off year for an NHL goalie? Is it: Injuries? Personal distractions? Team not so good anymore? General malaise? Crisis of confidence? Bad luck? An overall uptick in NHL scoring? Something else?

To ponder the question, The Athletic asked a quartet of former NHL goaltenders, all working nowadays as commentators, to offer their ideas and interpretations. Here's what Darren Pang (Fox Sports Midwest), Kevin Weekes (NHL Network), Jamie McLennan (TSN) and John Garrett (Rogers Sportsnet) came up with.

Duhatschek: I've long believed that once they get established as NHL starters, you cannot discuss goaltenders in terms of who's good or who's bad. Instead, it's more accurate to talk about who's running hot and who's running cold. Because once you reach a certain point in your career when you've become a reliable, consistent option, then it's fair to conclude you're a good goalie — good technique, good work habits, exceptional competitive drive. But some years are better than others and once in a while, over the course of a career, you'll see an off year sprinkled in there. Is there any way to rationally explain away that phenomenon?

Darren Pang: I've put a lot of thought into that question myself lately. Why does Carey Price go through a month or three weeks of poor play? Why did Henrik Lundqvist do the same thing? I've seen it here in St. Louis with Jake Allen two years in a row. I've seen Braden Holtby go through something similar — where you could say, 'they're all doing the same things wrong right now.' I'm like you. I go to practice every day. I watch goalie drills every day. In an era gone by, when there were mandated practices — where you actually had hockey practices every day that you weren't playing — the goaltenders could get out of a rut more easily because the drills you did in practice were real hockey drills. They were three-on-twos, five-on-fives, three-on-threes that complemented what you were going to face in a game.

Nowadays, a lot of practices are optional. There are three-on-oh rushes. Five-on-ohs. One-on-ohs. Flow drills. No stopping in front of the net. And the goalies just go through this, where they face the shot, slide, stay on their knees — and habits get bad. Those habits that you develop in these practices, with all these European flow drills, where there's less battle and concentration and compete, those same types of bad habits are showing up in games for these goalies.

Kevin Weekes: I see a lot of personnel changes on the teams you mention, especially on defence. Sometimes, as a goalie, you don't understand what the difference in personnel can mean to you. At



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different times, I played with Glen Wesley and Sean Hill and Pavel Kubina, some unheralded guys that are not exactly jumping off the page at you, but were really good pros. They were good down low. They'd communicate with you. If they told you, they've got the back door, nine out of 10 times they had the back door. So, with Washington, they lose Karl Alzner, a steady-Eddie old-school type of defenceman, and without him and other moves on their blueline, the Caps are a different team. Let's look at Ottawa. It doesn't look like the same Craig Anderson, but they also lost Marc Methot, who was great with Erik Karlsson. I know Karlsson had the ankle injury, but Methot last year helped him to elevate his game. Quietly, they had one of the best defence corps in the league last year.

Montreal, with Carey Price, knowing Price, he was at his peak confidence level during PK Subban's last year there. Even when Shea Weber first came and the way Shea played last year, Shea was all-world as well. Now with Shea being out, (Andrei) Markov and (Alexei) Emelin being gone, and their most consistent two-way forward in Alexander Radulov being gone, it's a different team. Sometimes teams undervalue those unheralded guys. That's why Nashville had Emelin in their mix. I don't know if there's a blueline decimated by change the way Montreal's has. That's a whole different back end. Then in Price's case, you can mix in some injury issues and some mental hiccups along the way.

John Garrett: Injuries to the team in front of you, especially to key players, can really set you back. I remember one year, when I was playing in Hartford, Mark Howe went down with a serious injury when he ran into the goalpost – and Mark was by far our best defenceman. We made the playoffs one year when nobody thought we would – Vegas beat our record for home wins just the other night — but when you lose a key player like Mark Howe, your whole team game goes downhill.

Last year, the Oilers had 11 guys that played all 82 games. This year, Andrej Sekera misses the first half of the season. All of a sudden, the Oilers bring in some new guys and it's not the same. Talbot played 73 games last year; he got on a roll, and everything went extremely well. But if you then get off to a rocky start, all of a sudden, you don't trust the guys you're playing with and you're second-guessing yourself, then the confidence you had such an abundance of the year before is gone. Look at Holby. You lose all the defencemen they did – and then (goalie coach) Mitch Korn retires. He's an advisor now and not there every day. And for a guy like Holby, it has an effect when you lose the calming influence of your goalie coach – and Mitch isn't there anymore.

Jamie McLennan: When you have an off year, it's almost always because you're trying to overthink it — and when you overthink it, you usually try to do too much. If there's not a lot of trust on the ice, you try to get ahead of pucks. You worry about that potential shot on the back door. There are so many soft spots in the defensive zone that it affects your positioning and your mindset. You play six inches deeper in the net because you want to get ahead of a puck on the back door – and then you get beat on a straight shot, and then that's on you, and not on the team playing in front of you.

If you look at guys who are having great seasons, it's almost as if everything falls into place for you. The team playing in front of you is giving you goal support. You make the big save at the right time. You play as if there's a force field around you. When your team has a breakdown, you lock it down. Your confidence stems from the play of the group. When you trust the team playing in front of you, you don't give up too many east-west chances or back door plays, so you just play your position, stop pucks, limit holes between your body and just play very confidently.

Duhatschek: Let's delve deeper into confidence, which is a funny thing – how it comes and goes, even for the best athletes in the world. Presumably, goalies can face the same crisis of confidence that shooters sometimes do when they go into a slump.

Pang: Years ago, players wanted their goalies to feel confident and so they did drills that built them up. They didn't shoot pucks at their ears in every situation – or try to blow shots by them. And coaches didn't do five-

on-oh drills that were ridiculous, unrealistic drills that you never see in a game. I mean, there are so many little things I see in the game now that frustrate me to no end. For example, when a goalie makes a great save and no one goes back and taps him on the pad. Or a goalie gives up a bad goal and nobody goes on taps him on a pad. At the end of a period, a goalie stands on his head – or maybe he plays poorly – but the whole team just leaves the ice and the goalie is at the far end and he's coming in and he's all alone. I just don't remember that happening in my era.

I think everybody just takes it for granted that the goalie's going to be fine. Well, he's not fine. He takes 600 shots in the head and the shoulders during practice. He's trying to find his game and yet no one's allowing him to find his game. I've watched Jake Allen for two years. The goalies that are struggling – a shot comes from the point and it's going wide. The goalie slides halfway out of his net – I don't know why. To put his body behind a shot going three feet wide? And so, when they slide, they have to stop on their pads, use their edge and push back into the net that they've already vacated. Carey Price goes through that, Braden Holby goes through that, Jake Allen goes through that. They all mirror one another when they're struggling. Maybe it takes discipline to stay on your skate blades. Maybe it burns your quads a bit more. Maybe it takes a little more patience. But once those habits creep in, boy, I find goalies have a very difficult time getting out of them.

Duhatschek: Goal-scoring is marginally up this year to roughly 5.92 goals-per game and we've seen a lot of those fun, crazy 1980s-style games this season. Is that a function of goalies struggling or is there just an across-the-board emphasis on greater offence?

Weekes: You know and I know, every one of those guys expects to stop every puck they see. These guys are not looking for excuses. It starts with them. But the league is more explosive. I'll go into locker rooms after games and Henrik (Lundqvist) is just shaking his head. He's going, 'Weeks, I don't know what to say. It's just different hockey.' It's more-wide open. Guys are allowed and encouraged to make plays. It's not just the top six guys anymore, the way it was in years gone by.

Duhatschek: Nowadays, teams rarely speak about injuries or go into any detail about them. Mike Smith in Calgary was listed as day-to-day after he got hurt but was out for three weeks. I understand the distinction teams make – there's a difference between playing hurt (which you can do, even if undermines performance) and playing injured (which you can't do, because you run the risk of aggravating the problem, and if it's an injury, you're not going to be any good anyway). But how often do you think a slumping goaltender is just trying to gut it out for the greater good of the team, but the fact that he is playing at less than optimal health undermines performance?

Pang: For sure that happens. It's the best league in the world. You cannot play at your highest level when you're hurting. No. 1, you're deficient because you're hurting physically. No. 2, you can't play a game that's instinctive when you're cautious and thinking about an injury. I remember I had tendinitis in my shoulder on my glove side one year. Well, the glove side was my bread-and-butter. Without that confidence in my glove side, boy, I had trouble. Now I was a small goalie with a bad glove. That's not a good combination. I remember coming back from my torn ACL. I had had the surgery and I was wearing a brace and every time somebody drove to the net, going to the post, I bailed out. I was timid – and you can't play timid. That's no way to play. Whether it's me playing goal or Tiger Woods playing golf with a bad back, you can't do it.

Duhatschek: It's probably not a coincidence that except for Washington, the teams we're talking about are out of playoff contention and just playing out the string right now – Edmonton, Ottawa, Montreal.

McLennan: You look at some of these goalies now on teams that are out of the playoffs and it looks like they're on a death march. They're like Zombies playing – and it's not just Cam Talbot or Craig Anderson. They haven't been great, but their teams haven't been great either. So that's the mental part, where you get away and get excited about hockey again and get refreshed. These guys are mentally tough enough to handle it.



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They'll say, 'ok, last year wasn't great, but next year, I'm going to be fine.' They have the ability to block it out. Other guys don't. I'll readily admit, I was a guy that allowed things to get to me. I would wear goals. I was a thinker – which sometimes can be your worst enemy when you're a goaltender, the tendency to overthink things and overanalyze. Sometimes, you just have to be able to move past it and have sports amnesia.

Duhatschek: Sports amnesia — now there's a concept you can wrap your head around. A lot of times, you hear goaltenders say 'I'm not worried about the last one, I'm only worried about the next one' – but that always struck me as something that's easier said than done. Now Grant Fuhr, when he played, was good at letting the last one go, on the grounds there was nothing you could do about it once it was past you and in the net. I always admired that in Grant – because it's difficult to get to that place in your head. And, by the way, that doesn't just apply to goaltending. That's a life lesson. You can't worry about the last story you wrote if it wasn't any good. You can only worry about making the next one better.

McLennan: Yeah, Grant was a guy who had a fire inside, though outwardly, you never saw it. But he was a guy who was able to look ahead and not behind. The best players have always had the ability to do that. I played with one of the best at that – Miikka Kiprusoff. He could just block things out – good, bad or indifferent. The top goaltenders – Talbot, Price, Anderson, Holtby – that's the type of forensic audit they'll have to do on their own games.

Skill sets don't go away. They erode a bit, but they're still high end. Carey Price has an elite skill set that's not going to go away. As he gets older, he's going to have to adapt some things, like Roberto Luongo has. Roberto's a prime example of someone, where you see more of his personality now. It was always there, but I think he enjoys the process a lot more now at 38 than when he was 28 – or 23. That's a mental maturity – and then knowing your body. In having been around these guys, that's the consistent theme – how they're able to bounce back mentally; because physically they know what to do.

Duhatschek: It sounds as if what we're talking about here is that thought attributed to Henry Ford: 'Whether you think you can, or you think you can't, you're probably right.'

Weekes: Think about the positive aura and belief around Ottawa last year. It was just a different squad. Personnel aside, the team was vibrating on a different level last year. It's a way different vibe. That's the challenge that happens for NHL general managers. When you've got things going in your favor, you can't tamper with the chemistry too much. It might not be a guy that jumps off the page in terms of stats. It could very well be a glue guy. Look at Matt Hendricks. He was an important guy in that Edmonton room. Now, you plug him into Winnipeg. They have stars and superstars and future stars in that group, but a guy like him, on the penalty kill, in the lineup, in the dressing room, those guys, come the second half of the season, those guys are so important to a team. Look at Flower (Marc-Andre Fleury). Flower's presence – just his presence – around that Vegas team, that's hard to quantify.

Duhatschek: John what would you consider your best season – the last WHA year with Minnesota? I ask because I want to know what the other half of the equation feels like – when things are humming along seamlessly for a goalie and you get into a good groove?

Garrett: The year the team folded (1975-76), I had 26 wins my third year there and they folded with a month and a half left. I could have maybe won 40 that year, because we were pretty good. What happens is, if you get on a team that can't score, you think every mistake you make is going to cost you the game. Whereas, if you're on a good team that can pile up some goals, then you think, 'oh well, I let in a bad one, but the guys'll come back.' You get such confidence when you play on a stable team, where you have four lines and six defencemen who stay healthy and can play. In goal, you sit back there and you read off what's in front of you – and if it's constant, it's so much easier to play.

Look at the Bruins this year when Tuukka Rask went on that roll: Every night, it was the same guys playing well in front of him. Jonathan Bernier, in Colorado, won 10 in a row when Nathan MacKinnon caught fire. If you're the goalie and you know MacKinnon is going to get two or three points per night, you know 'I can make the odd mistake and still win.' And when you're a goalie and you're on a roll, shots hit the post and stay out. Shots you don't see will hit you. You try and ride it as long as you can, because once the seeds of doubt start to creep in, it's hard to get back to that feeling.

Duhatschek: There is a pinball element in terms of the way a lot of goals are scored nowadays. Teams constantly talk about putting pucks at the net in the hopes of getting a favorable right-place, right-time kind of ricochet. From the perspective of a goaltender, how do you handle the randomness of that? Furthermore, is there a way to shrug them off? Sometimes, the body language of a goaltender – if you have enough of those types of goals go in on you – doesn't look good. If there's enough of them go in on him, it may have a cumulative effect over time.

Weekes: No question, the margins are ever so slight. It's literally a razor's edge – and I mean a razor blade, not a whole razor that you hold in your hand. It's an eighth of an inch. If Carey Price's shoulder is rotated an eighth of an inch to the middle, that's a puck going in on a shot by Matthew Tkachuk. That's how fine a line it is, and that's just with goalie-shooter. Then you bring in goalie-shooter-deflection off a shin pad.

What's interesting about that is, when a team's going well, you get more of those in your favor than otherwise. I know it's hard to officially quantify, but I know, speaking from experience, on teams that I've been on, when we were going well – like the Rangers that year coming out of the lockout – the puck might hit Marek Malik on the glove and go harmlessly into the corner. Or the puck would just hang long enough on the goal line, so you could dive back and get it with your glove. Sometimes hear coaches say, 'you make your own luck.' Part of that is true. When a team is going well, the aura around a team is so just much more positive, like it was in Ottawa last year.

Duhatschek: Last one: How do you make sure last year's struggles don't spill into next year's performance?

McLennan: To me, in the offseason, I don't think Carey Price is going to do anything except, with his goaltender coaches, go over some video when he was really strong and times when he was off, insofar as his timing, and look at the difference. That's the sort of stuff now, where goalies do so much sports specific drills. They'll do save selection drills – around the crease, on the post integration, all those things, he'll clean it up from a technical standpoint, so he goes into next year 100 per cent sharp.

Then he'll manage the body. He's had a year with a lot of injuries, so rehab is important. That's his doctors getting your physical body healthy so you're ready to perform at a high level again. Then also being in shape – in peak physical condition, managing your flexibility, managing your weight. Nowadays, the trainers are so good they'll pinpoint that and not have an issue with it.

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The Athletic / Bourne's notebook: Goalie interference, the Islanders defense, the streaky Flyers and more

By Justin Bourne Mar 12, 2018



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Once again it's time to dig into the ol' notebook as the random thoughts and tidbits have piled up. Let's get the complainy portion out of the way first, shall we?

Goalie interference

This weekend Pittsburgh's Brian Dumoulin had a goal called back, after he beat Toronto's Ron Hainsey wide and cut across the front of the net with Hainsey leaning on him, before stuffing the puck in the far side.

GOALTENDER INTERFERENCE. PIC.TWITTER.COM/YADLGQAETW
— PITTSBURGH PENGUINS (@PENGUINS) MARCH 11, 2018

His arm clipped Andersen on the way by ... clipped-ish, I'd say, but sure, there was contact – so the goal was called back. Bah.

I don't know exactly what the solution is to the NHL's issue with goaltender interference — there may not be a good one — but watching that play I do know one thing: that's gotta be a goal. There's a famous line from a United States Supreme Court Justice used when trying to define what would constitute "pornography," a simple, "I know it when I see it," and that's how I feel about goals. But, it's that subjectivity that makes this such a challenge. Video review has really complicated matters.

But man, when a guy drives wide, sticks his leg in, cuts in hard and stuffs one far side ... that's basically every good thing every player has ever had every coach tell them to do. We're at the point where even some goaltenders have seen enough. Take it away Byron Dafoe!

THE BIGGER ISSUE NOW IS GOALIES WILL START TO WORK ON THEIR ACTING SKILLS AND EMBELLISH ANY POTENTIAL CONTACT AND NOT EVEN WORRY ABOUT STOPPING THE PUCK. ALREADY HAPPENING. WHEN WILL WE SEE THE FIRST UNSPORTSMANSHIP CALL AGAINST A GOALIE? NO DIFFERENT THAN A PLAYER DIVING. [HTTPS://T.CO/VJCGGEHXAA](https://t.co/VJCGGEHXAA)

— BYRON DAFOE (@BYRONDAFOE34) MARCH 11, 2018

I understand that's a dangerous area of the ice, and goaltenders need to be protected. But if offensive players can't cut across the front of the net it's gone too far. If nothing else, goaltenders might want to ask their defenders to stop pushing players into them trying to save face after getting roasted, maybe? That even might make for an easier stop for Frederik Andersen if Dumoulin is able to make his cut higher, as opposed to keeping Andersen pinned so deep in his crease with Hainsey shoving him in.

The Isles hand out shots like a bartending academy

I wrote about the Islanders defensive woes a month back, which you can read here. But it's really pretty incredible just how badly they get peppered, and it ain't gettin' better. They actually won the game on Sunday against Calgary, but they surrendered 50 shots for the sixth time this season. Check out how rare those games are:

THAT IS THE 6TH TIME THIS SEASON THE ISLANDERS HAVE GIVEN UP 50 SHOTS IN A GAME.

SINCE THE START OF THE 2015-16 SEASON (NEARLY THREE FULL SEASONS!) NO TEAM IN THE LEAGUE HAS HAD MORE THAN THREE SUCH GAMES.

AMAZING.

— ADAM GRETZ (@AGRETZ) MARCH 12, 2018

WHAT'S EVEN CRAZIER IS ALL 6 GAMES WITH 50+ SHOTS ON GOAL ALLOWED FOR THE #ISLES HAVE HAPPENED ... IN A SPAN OF 25 GAMES SINCE JAN. 15.

— COREY MASISAK (@CMASISAK22) MARCH 12, 2018

No team has ever had it happen seven times in one season. You can do it, fellas!

Amidst all this, somewhat remarkably, they could still conceivably make the playoffs. As I wrote in that longer systems breakdown, to my eye it's a combination of personnel and a lack of attention to detail, which you would generally look toward the coaching staff to fix. And for those of you about to suggest maybe they just give up lower quality, perimeter shots – yeah, nope. They give up more scoring chances per 60, and high danger attempts against than any other team in the league.

The Flyers are ... weird

Calling the Flyers streaky is like calling a Brad Marchand "unpopular with opponents." Like, juuust a bit.

So far this season they've **deep inhale** lost 10 straight games(!), followed immediately by a six-game win streak. They had two four-game win streaks in January, a four-game and a six-game win streak in February, then they opened up March with five straight losses. That's seven streaks of four-game runs or more.

Imagine losing streaks of five and 10 games in the same season ... and somehow still finding your squad just three points behind first in your Division. How is that even possible? (Oh, the Metro kinda sucks? Right, right, that.)

But really, what a crazy streaky team. I guess if you're heading into playoffs, that's not necessarily a bad thing. Just gotta flip the switch at the right time.

Malkin makin' mad moves

Don't look now, but over the past week Evgeni Malkin has put up some points. In those four games:

Vs. Calgary: 1+2 for three points

Vs. Philadelphia: 1+1 for two points

Vs. Toronto: 1 assist

Vs. Dallas: 1+1 for two points.

He's on a six game point streak that's seen him add 11 points, meaning he now sits one point behind the league leader (Nikita Kucherov). His goal Sunday night has him one goal behind Alex Ovechkin and Patrik Laine for the league lead. This, below, is a great point by Ian:

MALKIN WINNING RICHARD, ART ROSS AND HART THE YEAR AFTER THE TOP 100 SNUB WOULD BE SO NICE.

— IAN MCLAREN (@IANCMCLAREN) MARCH 12, 2018

When he's on, I don't know if there's a player not-named Connor McDavid who's better. Huge, smooth, smart, can shoot it. That's a decent package I guess. He has a real chance to do something special as an individual this season.

Not Luuuusing often

The Roberto Luongo situation down in Florida is pretty impressive. He's been injured multiple times, and hasn't really got a chance to get in much of a rhythm. He also turns 39 in a few weeks. And yet somehow he's second in the entire NHL in save percentage, rocking a .930 through 25 games, winning six of his past seven starts. He's a huge reason the Panthers, once presumed dead, have skyrocketed up the standings and appear to be a team that'll sneak into the post-season.

And all of this is to say nothing about his incredible work in the aftermath of the tragedy at Parkland's Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School. His speech was powerful and moving and couldn't have been easy to do.

Between the great play and the support for his city, his success at his "old for hockey" age, or even just his Twitter account, it's really hard not to be a fan of the guy.

Rules are stupid

This goal was called back:



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CHEESIEST DISALLOWED GOAL /OFFSIDE CALL OF THE YEAR. STRADDLING THE LINE HAS BEEN IN OUR GAME FOREVER. HOW MANY GOALS IN @NHL HISTORY WOULD HAVE BEEN DISALLOWED WITH THIS VIDEO REVIEW, 10,000? PLEASE LET'S GET RID OF THIS #ASAP. @PENGUINS @DALLASSTARS PIC.TWITTER.COM/TLTLJGN52Z

— NICK KYPREOS (@REALKYP) MARCH 12, 2018

What sucks is that, by the way the rule is called, it actually was offside — he was on his right blade (offside) while his left was still in the air. But I'm with Kypreos here — you have a player making a clear effort to stay onside, he is onside (at least his body is), but by the book ... nope. This seems like something we'll clean up with technology over time — hell, we can tell if a squashed tennis ball nicked a line or not in a matter of seconds — but until we get there, I guess this is what we're stuck with.

And finally,

Tigermaniaaaa

While I'll stay away from a review of Tiger Woods the man, I grew up watching his greatness as a golfer at a time when I myself was a young teenager at peak obsession with the game of golf. He was must-see TV. You'll find a lot of hockey players — most from cold weather climates who have summers off — share that passion. Having him in the mix yesterday on the back nine on a Sunday, just weeks before the Masters, OH BUDDY. Get excited, folks!

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The Athletic / College free agents who could soon impact the NHL

By Corey Pronman Mar 12, 2018

The college season is ending for some, and soon we will start to see contracts handed out — and due to my tardiness, some of that has already transpired. Today, I will look at undrafted free agents who can sign right after the season and drafted players who can become free agents. This is not an exhaustive list, rather just a selection of the players who I think are notable and have information on.

Undrafted free agents

Daniel Brickley, D, Minnesota State

There is no question that Brickley is the top undrafted free agent in this college class. Some fans might remember him from when he played briefly last season with the U.S. at the World Championships. He's avoided the national spotlight, though, playing for Minnesota State and some fans might not be familiar with him, but he's a talented defender with size. He has solid puck skills, moves the puck well, has a good shot and can make stops in his own end using his frame, reach and positioning. His biggest issue currently is his footspeed. He has the potential to be a top-four defenseman in the NHL and could step in right away.

Early on in the season, I clipped a few of his shifts in a game against Boston University.

First, here's an example of how he uses his long reach to give the oncoming forward little room and closes with his body to separate the puck:

Next, we see him close on his man and make another clean stop, pick up the puck quickly, make a nice move to evade pressure and generate a clean zone exit:

In the offensive zone, after getting a shot blocked and regaining possession, instead of forcing a second shot into the opposing forward's legs, he shows the poise and skill to hold onto the puck for an extra second, wait for support and move it to an open man:

Finally, we see Brickley read a turnover, step up immediately into the play and fire a wrist shot home:

Zach Whitecloud, D, Bemidji State (signed by Vegas)

Whitecloud has some intriguing elements. He's 6-foot-2, is strong, skates fine, moves the puck fine and defends decently, but he's a rather bland player. He doesn't stand out to me at either end and it's why I have a hard time seeing him as more than a tail-end of the roster/depth defenseman in the NHL for the Golden Knights. There's enough offense in his game as a puck-mover that he could be competent making a first pass in the NHL.

Bobo Carpenter, C, Boston University

That's right, his name is Bobo, deal with it. And no, he's not a clown, he's BU's top center. His upside isn't super high, but he's got some skills, plays hard and can be a useful two-way center. The big thing with Carpenter is he used to be an ugly skater. He's no Patrick Marleau, but he gets up the ice OK now, but playing at a pro pace will be the thing to watch with him.

Colton Poolman, D, North Dakota

The brother of Winnipeg's Tucker Poolman has generated NHL buzz playing at the same school. Colton isn't as highly thought of as Tucker was, but he's a 6-foot-1 defenseman who can skate, win battles and make a decent first pass. He's a depth guy at best and only a sophomore, so he might go back to school, but teams are watching.

Max Veronneau, RW, Princeton

NHL scouts have been making rare trips to see Princeton this season due to Veronneau. I have not seen him play this season, so this report is based purely on discussions with sources. "He's a world-class skater," said one NHL scout. Another scout pointed out that he likes Veronneau's skill and ability to make plays, although his physical and defensive game leaves room to be desired. Some sources believe he's a top-flight free agent who will play right away or soon. I have talked to some teams who feel he's not dynamic enough offensively to play in the NHL.

Jimmy Scholdt, D, St. Cloud State

Scholdt logged huge minutes on the best team in the country, and scouts have noticed the impact he's had. He doesn't have many standout attributes, but he's a reliable two-way defender. He's smart moving the puck, skates fine and plays hard in his own end. His skills might limit him from being a NHLer long-term, but he's smart enough to where he might have a chance.

Mason Jobst, C, Ohio State

The 24-year-old Jobst has been one of the better players in the country the past two years. Realistically, as a 5-foot-7 forward without dynamic skills, he's probably a AHLer; but Jobst can skate fine, has good hands, can make and finish plays, can win battles despite his size, and could project to chip in on both special teams units as a pro.

Drafted free agents

Dylan Sikura, LW, Chicago

The most intriguing drafted free agent this season is Sikura, whom colleague Scott Powers has written about many times. He's been a heavily scouted target by other NHL teams, as he's been one of the best players in college this season. He was ranked within my top 50 NHL prospects, which includes a scouting report. The Blackhawks will put on the full-court press to get this done, as they expect he'll be an important part of their team going forward, but he's been hesitant to commit to them. Chicago signing his brother recently is no coincidence. If I was a betting man, I say he ends up in Chicago.



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Christian Wolanin, D, Ottawa

I'm sure some Ottawa fans' eyebrows will raise at this one, but there is belief in the industry that Wolanin will probably leave North Dakota this summer to become an NHL free agent. He can do this despite only being drafted three years ago. According to CBA section 8.6 (c) (5), if he withdrew from school this year, he would be a free agent after 30 days, since he was drafted in his third eligible draft season (he's a 1995 birthdate, and the 2015 draft was the first eligible year for the 1997 birthdates).

If Wolanin does decide to leave, he will have a lot of NHL interest. The 22-year-old defenseman leads North Dakota in scoring. He's 6-foot-1, skates very well and can move the puck. He's been a much better defender than in past years, although as a pro his calling card will be his offense.

Louis Belpedio, D, Minnesota

Some World Junior fans might remember Belpedio from his appearance with the USA two years ago. I was a big fan of his as a teenager, but he hasn't taken a huge step forward, as I hoped. Still, he's a mobile defenseman who works hard and can win battles despite being smaller, and can move the puck fine. Minnesota wants to sign him, but I haven't been able to narrow down where he's leaning.

Jake Evans, C, Montreal

I discussed Evans in detail earlier this season. In a thin Habs' system, he's been a bright spot this season and has potential in the pros as a playmaking two-way center, but he will need AHL time. When I talked to him, he wouldn't commit to signing with the Habs, but my belief is he's leaning that way.

David Pope, LW, Detroit

I have not seen Pope play recently, but Craig Custance did a good story on him a few weeks ago. I expect he will sign with the Wings.

Brian Pinho, C, Washington

Pinho has been better the past two seasons, lately playing as an all-situations center for Providence College. He can make plays, has fine stick skills and works hard to win pucks. His two-way game has improved in college. I'm not completely sold on him as an NHL player in terms of how high-end his abilities are, and he'll be a guy I'll want to see in the AHL first. According to several sources, they believe Pinho will test free agency on Aug. 15.

Nolan Stevens, LW, St. Louis

Stevens has been a part of one of the best power plays and offensive teams at Northeastern. I like Stevens puck skill for a big forward. Stevens is a hard-nosed player but doesn't take many penalties playing that style. He could be a solid two-way forward as a pro and get to the NHL if he gets a little bit quicker. I believe he will sign with the Blues.

C.J. Suess, C, Winnipeg

Suess is the leading scorer on one of the better teams in the country in Minnesota State. He's not a high-end talent, but he's a hard-working, two-way forward who goes to the tough areas, wins battles, can PK and has decent touch around the net. I'm not sure if he's an NHL guy right away, but he can provide good depth to an organization if they need a fourth-line center at any point. I expect he signs with the Jets.

The Athletic LOADED: 03.13.2018

1103436 Websites

The Athletic / Wild let assistant Darby Hendrickson surprise son, watch him win state title

By Michael Russo Mar 12, 2018 11

Chuck Fletcher and Bruce Boudreau knew how tough it was for assistant coach Darby Hendrickson to be on the road with the Wild instead of being a hockey dad last weekend.

Hendrickson didn't say it, of course, and he never asked to stay behind.

But the general manager and coach could see on Hendrickson's face how hard it was to not be in Minnesota while his oldest child, Mason, made the state hockey tournament with Minnetonka's boys hockey team.

Tonka was even playing at Xcel Energy Center, the place Hendrickson scored the Wild's first home goal in team history five months before Mason was even born.

The problem?

Hendrickson and the Wild left for Vancouver on Thursday morning, the same day the tournament started.

So, the 1991 Minnesota Mr. Hockey winner missed the Skippers' quarterfinal win over Hill-Murray on the Wild's off-night and then their semifinal win over Centennial, a game that took place at the same time the Wild were playing the Canucks on Friday.

Hendrickson is the Wild's eye in the sky, so while he kept tabs on the Minnetonka score during the Wild's game — the Skippers had to rally from a 2-0 deficit — he was able to stream the Skippers' game between periods.

After the Wild's victory over the Canucks, when Fletcher overheard a reporter congratulate Hendrickson for the Skippers advancing to the championship game that next night against Duluth East, the classy GM got to thinking: Maybe Hendrickson flies home from Vancouver the next morning to attend Saturday's title game rather than hop on the team's charter in an hour for Saturday's game against Edmonton.

Fletcher posed the idea to Boudreau, who liked the gesture and offered that chance to Hendrickson.

"It was pretty special," Hendrickson said. "Bruce kind of called me over, and I didn't know if he was serious. He goes, 'What do you think about going home to see your son?' I just said, 'That'd be awesome.'"

Hendrickson checked himself into a Vancouver hotel while the Wild left for Edmonton. He hopped on a 6:30 a.m. flight from Vancouver to Minnesota on Saturday morning and never told Mason, a 17-year-old junior centerman, or his wife, Dana, that he was coming home until he walked through the front door to surprise them after noon Saturday.

Mason and Darby Hendrickson, after the state title game. (Courtesy Darby Hendrickson)

Later that night, the Skippers went on to beat Duluth East for their first boys hockey state championship in school history.

Mason, a fourth-liner who should get more ice time next year because the Skippers graduate eight seniors, did something his father was never able to do — win it all. Hendrickson actually went to the state tournament once in 1991 with Richfield High. Coincidentally, it was Duluth East that beat Hendrickson's school in the first game.

"It was fun to be a dad and be a fan and see two really good teams," Hendrickson said. "Duluth East beat them earlier in the season, so we knew it was going to be a good game. ... It was something I'll never forget just being there with my son. The state tournament is like a wedding or something. It was fun to be a parent. Those are moments that we can never get back, so the fact that they let me do that was unbelievable.

"It was fun to be with the family and be around it. There's nothing like it."

Boudreau said Hendrickson didn't want to leave at first because he felt guilty that he wouldn't help coach the Wild during an important game at the Oilers.



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"But once he had time to think it through, it's a once, maybe, in a lifetime thing, to see your son win the state championship in Minnesota," Boudreau said. "I was very happy for him, he was very happy in the end, so it all worked out."

Boudreau, paused, and then added with a chuckle: "Except the outcome of our game."

Avenging Avalanche losses

After being outscored 14-3 in consecutive losses this calendar year in Denver, the Wild hope to make amends Tuesday night when Colorado comes to town.

Prior to the Wild's last two losses in Colorado, they were 17-4-3 in their previous 24 visits to Pepsi Center.

"Whether we think we owe them or not, we know we need to win," Boudreau said. "It wouldn't matter if a team had beaten us by 30 goals each game, if there's an opponent in front of you, at this stage of the year, you've got to just come out and play."

Asked what the Wild need to do better against the Avs, who currently sit eighth in the West, Boudreau said, "Play harder. I don't think we played anywhere near as hard as we could in the two games in Colorado. But we know they're going to play hard too because this is very important for them. We just got to play to our capabilities and whatever the outcome is, I'll be happy with it."

Nathan MacKinnon, a Hart Trophy contender, ranks tied for fourth in the NHL with 81 points. Eight have come against the Wild in the previous two meetings.

Historically, MacKinnon eats the Wild up at home and is missing in action on the road.

In 15 games against Minnesota in Denver, including the 2014 playoffs, MacKinnon has seven goals, 16 assists, 56 shots and is plus-7. The Avs are 9-5-1. In 13 visits to Minnesota, including the playoffs, MacKinnon has two goals, three assists, 31 shots and is minus-6. The Avs are 3-9-1.

"They have some pretty effective players, a lot of speed, their defense jumps up in the play, it makes it tough," defenseman Ryan Suter said. "I don't know why we've struggled the last couple games in there. Tomorrow, we just have to make sure we're on and ready to go."

Seeler practices

It'll be interesting to see if tough rookie defenseman Nick Seeler is thrown into Tuesday's lineup after only one practice with the team.

Seeler missed the previous three games with a strained right biceps.

"We're going to talk about it and see how he feels," Boudreau said. "He's been skating all week here (in Minnesota) but this is the first time he's practiced with a group of guys."

Forwards Zach Parise and Matt Cullen missed Monday's practice because they attended a funeral.

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1103437 Websites

The Athletic / Reduced minutes for Blue Jackets' top defensive pair reflects growing trust in others

Tom Reed Mar 12, 2018

Defenseman Seth Jones, who leads the Blue Jackets in ice time, played a shade more than 21 minutes Friday night in a game they were desperate to win and never led by more than two goals.

Jones was not hurt and, already having scored two second-period goals, he certainly wasn't being benched.

So why did coach John Tortorella, with his team locked in a tight race for the postseason, play his two-time All-Star three minutes less than his average? Because Tortorella has gained a new level of confidence in all his defensive pairings.

The arrival of Ian Cole at the Feb. 26 trade deadline has solidified a blue line that had been depleted by injury and hindered by uneven play.

Cole and David Savard look like they have been playing together for two years, not seven games. Jones and Zach Werenski have been point-producing monsters as of late. Despite some dicey moments Friday against the Red Wings, Jack Johnson and Ryan Murray have been in relatively good form during the team's 5-2-0 stretch.

"With Cole coming in here, I think that's rejuvenated Savvy a bit," Tortorella said Sunday. "... For the most part, (the ice time) deserves to be flattened out a little bit."

If Tortorella can maintain the plan, it could help keep Jones (24:47) and Werenski (22:54) fresh down the stretch and, potentially, into the playoffs. Don't forget, Werenski is playing through an undisclosed upper-body injury.

The six-man defensive unit is in such a groove that Tortorella won't make any changes for Monday night's home game against the Canadiens despite lineup regular Markus Nutivaara coming off the injured reserve list.

Think back to the Blue Jackets' first playoff run of 2008-09. Ken Hitchcock relied so heavily on his top pair of Mike Commodore and Jan Hejda that he ground the defensemen into the ice. The duo had almost nothing left when the first-round series against the Red Wings opened.

Tortorella is trying to avoid a repeat of that exhausting scenario.

Jones has played less than 22 minutes in three of the seven games since the trade deadline. The reduction of Werenski's ice time is even more dramatic. The second-year player has been under 19:30 in five of the last seven games.

As they did a season ago, the coaching staff is starting to take Werenski off the ice in late-game situations in which the Blue Jackets are protecting narrow leads. It happened again in the 3-2 win over the Red Wings.

The diminishing minutes are not having an adverse impact on the scoresheet. Quite the opposite. Since the deadline, Jones has five goals and four assists, and Werenski has gone for three goals and three assists.

It's hard to overstate the impact of Cole's presence. The stay-at-home defenseman has added toughness around the net, a calmness in the face of pressure and nonstop chatter on the bench and on the ice that is becoming infectious.

Tortorella has witnessed other players starting to talk more since the arrival of Cole, who won two Stanley Cups with the Penguins.

"The thing we like about Colesy, and it's grown within our team, is he's always communicating and talking and he makes a decision and goes with it," Tortorella said. "... I think the other defensemen see it's easier to play in certain situations when you are talking to one another. Him and Savvy don't shut up on the ice.

"I hear that from (assistant coach) Brad Shaw 50 times on the bench: 'Keep talking, boys, you gotta talk, boys.' ... It's gotten better, and we want it to keep growing."



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Tortorella confirmed Sunday he plans to use Cole, an outstanding shot-blocking, penalty killer in Pittsburgh, more often in that role with the Blue Jackets. If true, it could further reduce the minutes load on defensemen such as Jones.

In recent games, the coach said he's also looking to match his top defensive pair less frequently against an opponent's top lines. That's the level of trust the group has earned with the coaches.

Playing with a lead or the score tied obviously helps Tortorella in distributing minutes more evenly.

A well-rested duo of Jones and Werenski could pay big dividends in the final frantic weeks as the Blue Jackets play 13 games over the next 27 days.

And, maybe, deeper into April.

The Athletic LOADED: 03.13.2018

1103438 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Yet another loss proves Brock Boeser is beating Hart of Canucks

Iain MacIntyre | @imacSportsnet March 13, 2018

OK, so Brock Boeser isn't going to win the Calder Trophy. Maybe he should be considered for the Hart.

In four games since Boeser's season ended with a fracture in his lower back last week against the New York Islanders, the Vancouver Canucks are 0-4 and have been outscored 11-3. Half of those losses are against the Arizona Coyotes.

The Canucks actually played about as well as they could Monday against the Los Angeles Kings, but Vancouver couldn't get any of its 35 shots past goalie Jonathan Quick and the Canucks' goalless streak stretched to 152 minutes and nine seconds.

Without Boeser, the attack just isn't dangerous. And now, as is often the case in these situations, the problem is becoming as much about confidence as ability.

Daniel Sedin hit the post in the second period with Quick badly beaten and a lot of net showing, and Sam Gagner missed an open net – albeit from a slightly sharp angle, but with the puck on his forehand – when set up by Brandon Sutter.

The Canucks' annual death trudge isn't likely to get any cheerier when the team ends its three-games-in-four-days road trip Wednesday against the Anaheim Ducks. And Boeser will still be missing.

SHRINKING GOALIE

Yes, it's an oversimplification – we in the media are fond of those – but when six-foot-six Canucks goalie Anders Nilsson plays to his size, he is difficult to beat. When he shrinks, pucks pour past him. It's a matter of physics (we think).

After starter Jacob Markstrom was beaten 1-0 Sunday in Arizona, Nilsson got the chance to play in L.A. He made some excellent saves and was not the reason the Canucks' lost.

But when Tyler Toffoli made it 1-0 on a second-period breakaway with Ben Hutton caught, Nilsson was as low to the ground as a catcher fielding a pitch in the dirt. When Tanner Pearson made it 3-0 in the third – Hutton turnover, Pearson free behind him – Nilsson lunged forward and down as the King patiently cut across the top of the crease and waited for the goalie to disappear.

Nilsson has lost 13 of 14 starts since November and, yes, you read that correctly. His save percentage for the season is .901. It's clear to everyone that the Canucks can't come back next season with the same two goalies. Markstrom still has to prove he can start in the NHL, and Nilsson has to prove again he can play in it.

THE WAIT IN GOLDIE

Well, that's another game Nikolay Goldobin will never get back. Of all the Canucks floundering down the stretch, no forward looks as lost as Goldobin, who is just about out of time to prove he belongs in the NHL. At least with Vancouver.

It's not only that a bunch of prospects have either passed him or look likely to do so, it's that Goldobin has failed utterly to demonstrate at this level what are supposed to be his strengths: puck skills, creativity, finish.

A healthy scratch last Friday against Minnesota, Goldobin on Monday logged his 49th NHL game – his 38th in just over a year since the Canucks acquired him from the San Jose Sharks for Jannik Hansen. He has eight goals and four assists in these 49 games. And just 55 shots on goal. To be fair, his three shots against the Kings matched his season-high – and tripled his output from the previous two games.

It's not Goldobin's deficiencies away from the puck that are going to sink him but his failed offensive game. Since his last recall from minor-league Utica a month ago, Goldobin has had chances to show what he can do playing mostly with Henrik Sedin or Bo Horvat. He has two goals and one assist in his 12 games, and been held shotless three times.

He's not a threat to score. Nor stick with the Canucks after this season.

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SEDINS FADING AWAY

None of the last three months has gone the way the Canucks planned. Injuries in December crushed their season, but even when they were healthy again (briefly) it was obvious the mojo and sharpness from their 14-10-4 start were gone. Then more injuries, much more losing, and another garbage-time March when the only ramifications of Vancouver's team performance are its lottery odds.

This is a desolate landscape Daniel and Henrik Sedin never thought they'd see again. Many things about twins are underrated, and their raw competitiveness is among them. Losing eats away at them like acid, and the last five weeks seem to have hollowed them considerably even though they had been scoring.

It is naïve to think something as basic as winning and losing won't be a factor when they decide whether to retire after this season.

But not all developments lately are bad for the Canucks.

Five weeks ago, Darren Archibald was just a mid-career guy on a minor-league contract. And three weeks ago, Brendan Leipsic was a name far down the Vegas Golden Knights' depth chart. Both these players have excelled for the Canucks and must, at this point, be projected into their lineup next fall.

That's good news. But it, like the losing, could also dissuade the Sedins from returning. The twins have always been keenly aware that at some point they could represent a road block to younger players. They don't want to be in the way. Their stock answer has always been that they'd have no trouble stepping aside as long as the players' replacing them "earn it."

The Sedins' retirement looks a lot more likely now than even a month ago, when they told general manager Jim Benning they'd let him know after the season if they wanted to keep playing.

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Sportsnet.ca / Don't expect Maple Leafs' Matthews back until next week at earliest

Chris Johnston

There is some encouragement to be found in the sight of Auston Matthews on the ice at practice with his Toronto Maple Leafs teammates. But until they're allowed to hit him, any talk of his return remains highly speculative.

Matthews needs to feel comfortable with contact before we see him in a game again.

There's no reason to believe that will come any sooner than next week after Matthews donned the dreaded red sweater at Monday's practice. The team skates again Tuesday, but likely won't hold another full practice beyond that until after a three-games-in-four-days stretch against Dallas (Wednesday), Buffalo (Thursday) and Montreal (Saturday).

Once Matthews reaches the point where his healing shoulder is ready to be bumped, some of that work can be done in 1-on-1 sessions with the strength coach. But Mike Babcock has also made it clear that he's looking for his top centre to be a fully engaged participant in contact drills at practice before his hopes get raised about a return.

That points to next Tuesday's visit to Tampa as the earliest No. 34 might play, and even then, there's an argument to be made about the wisdom in holding him out for road games against the Lightning and Nashville Predators on March 22.

It's not like the Leafs are doing anything more than getting ready for Boston in Round 1 at this point. And sitting Matthews through the end of that mini-trip would give him four-plus weeks to heal and start building back strength in the shoulder.

His overall conditioning should be good since he's been able to skate during the recovery period – unlike the absences he had for a concussion and back issue earlier in the season – but the 20-year-old will likely have to wear a shoulder harness and deal with some degree of discomfort even after he's medically cleared to play.

It could make this the toughest of those three ailments to work through, especially with the physicality due to be dialled up for the playoffs.

Something worth keep an eye on with the Matthews situation is the status of a potential \$2-million "Schedule B" performance bonus. While there's no reason to believe it will have any bearing on the decision-making around a return from either the club or player's perspective, it could have ramifications for both if Matthews struggles after he's activated from injured reserve.

He needs to finish among the NHL's top-10 forwards in goals per game to cash in for a second straight year, and currently sits in position to do so with 28 in 53. However, were he to return next week and, say, score twice over the final 10 regular-season games, it could drop him outside the money window.

Matthews is already assured of maxing out his \$850,000 "Schedule A" bonus – Mitch Marner and William Nylander should both do the same – which means the Leafs will once again carry an overage into next season.

In an ideal world, they'll get a healthy and productive Matthews back for the stretch run and see their cap carryover top out at \$4.55 million – money well spent for the best odds at beating the Bruins in April.

However, if the big centre's production dips while working his way back from the shoulder injury, the Leafs could be left with more cap room entering 2018-19.

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A DIFFERENT TUNE FOR WILLIE

When looking to motivate, a coach can either use the carrot or the stick. Babcock has never been shy about giving William Nylander the stick.

So it was interesting to hear him sound an optimistic tone when asked how the Swede had adapted to playing centre since Matthews was injured – a stretch where he's put up four assists in six games, and saw a healthy dose of the red-hot Evgeni Malkin in Saturday's win over Pittsburgh.

"I don't think Willy's off it at all," Babcock told reporters Monday. "Actually, I think he's playing really well."

Where Nylander plays long term is as a fundamental question for an organization that is deep on wingers, but only has Matthews and Nazem Kadri currently signed as centre options for next season.

The fact Babcock has seen some growth is worth noting. His forward lines are going to look a lot different next fall than they do this spring.

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.

TIME FOR A NEW FORMAT?

The Leafs entered play Monday with the NHL's sixth-best points percentage at .630. Their reward? An almost certain first-round matchup with Boston, which owned the league's third-best mark at .701 – behind only Tampa (.725) and Nashville (.721).

It's almost the exact same scenario that played out last year in the Metropolitan Division, when Columbus went on the road to face Pittsburgh in Round 1 despite a franchise-best 108-point season.

The divisional playoff format may not be a hot-button issue among teams just yet, but if this keeps happening, it won't be too long before it is.

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Sportsnet.ca / Oilers defenceman Klefbom's health, play 'an abject disappointment'

Mark Spector | @sportsnetspec March 12, 2018, 5:39 PM

The problem with Oscar Klefbom's shoulder is, it wasn't injured badly enough.

So he played through the 2017-18 season at a level far below what a healthy Oscar Klefbom would have given the Edmonton Oilers, and as the exit interviews near in Edmonton, his season is much like his team's season.

An abject disappointment.

"The shoulder is so black or white," Klefbom, 24, said Monday. "If I say at Christmas, 'OK, let's do something about this,' I know that in the playoffs, if we're going to turn this around, I'm not going to be there."

Whatever it is that ails Klefbom's shoulder, clearly the surgery to fix it would have been season-ending. So he took a cortisone shot around



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New Years, and that helped a bit. His last 20 games have been reminiscent of the game he gave the Oilers last season, sort of, but it is all too little and too late.

Now, Klefbom is not a bonafide No 1 defenceman around the NHL, like a Drew Doughty or a Victor Hedman. But he is Edmonton's No. 1 defenceman, and the Oilers count on him as much as the Kings and Lightning count on their top defencemen.

Klefbom hasn't been able to deliver at anywhere near the level expected of him, the first domino in a series of declining performances throughout the roster. Now partner Adam Larsson isn't as steady, when Klefbom can't carry his weight; now the chances are far tougher and more numerous for goalie Cam Talbot, and his confidence struggles as pucks fly past he had no chance to save; now the powerplay lacks the only real shooter it had, and as it struggles so do several key forwards lack the confidence a strong powerplay can provide.

"Me and Larsson played a hell of a season last year. We showed everyone we are a (pairing) to count on. When we play good hockey we can get within a game of a Conference Final," Klefbom said. "I want to get back to that, but then I have to be 100 percent. I can not go back (next season) and be 75 percent, stay out of battles, and wait. I have to be 100 percent."

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

Head coach Todd McLellan said this week that Klefbom had "a small procedure" done on his shoulder that would keep him out of two games, including Tuesday in Calgary. Then what?

"The procedure will dictate ... what will happen," McLellan said Monday. "He and his agent, and everyone else will participate in the decision. There's nothing written in stone. There's a real good chance he'll play the rest of the season, training the summer and come back."

So those were Klefbom's choices, after injuring the shoulder early in the season. Quit on the year, or fake his way through.

"You want to be on the ice, to help the guys, and you don't want to be, 'I'm a little banged up. I can not play.' The toughest thing, really, is being smart," he said. "With the season we had last year — we had a lot of expectations, we want to make the playoffs, I played a lot of minutes (22:22 per game) — if I'm going down, it's, 'Oh, I don't care about this season.'"

Two seasons ago he took a shot off the leg that opened up a cut. That cut turned into a Staph infection that limited Klefbom to 30 games, a very serious injury that happens by fluke, really.

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So, in his three seasons between the ages of 22 and 24, the Karlstad, Sweden native has given his team one healthy year. But Klefbom was so good that season that his seven-year, \$29 million deal (AAV of \$4.167 million) became known as "a value contract" by many in the business.

Of course, it's only good value if the player is healthy. It is pretty clear that the team and the player are in the process of vetting the path ahead: whether that means surgery or rehab.

We'll likely know in the next few days.

"Last year was very fun to show the real Oscar Klefbom, show people how good I can be when I'm healthy, playing a lot of minutes for 82 games," he said. "I'm in good shape, having some great numbers in the gym. I'm one of the fittest guys in testing. It's not like in bad shape."

"It's been very, very frustrating not to be able to show what I can do when I am 100 percent."

Not just for you, Oscar. You've got plenty of company.

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1103441 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Down Goes Brown Weekend Wrap: Can flatlining Flames recover?

Sean McIndoe | @DownGoesBrown March 12, 2018, 11:12 AM

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

Opening faceoff: Round and round we go

The NHL played some games this weekend, so needless to say we're all angry about goaltender-interference reviews.

That's been a recurring theme through most of the second half (as opposed to the first half, when we were all angry about offside reviews). The latest chapter came on Saturday in Toronto, when a controversial interference call may have cost the Penguins the game. With the Leafs leading 3-0, Brian Dumoulin appeared to cut the lead to 3-1. But referee Dan O'Halloran ruled that Dumoulin had interfered with Frederik Andersen and awarded a minor penalty, wiping out the goal and sending the Leafs to the power play. Toronto scored to make it 4-0, then held on to take a 5-2 final.

Saturday's controversy didn't actually involve a review, which is part of the problem. If a referee simply waves off a goal, the play can be challenged, but if a penalty is issued then there's no review allowed. So the Penguins were out of luck, even as replays showed that the contact was minimal and that Dumoulin may have been directed into the crease by Ron Hainsey. Would a review have resulted in the call being overturned? Probably not, but we didn't get a chance to find out.

It's the latest flare-up in the never-ending interference debate, and having this one come on a Hockey Night in Canada game between two high-profile teams ensured that everyone would be weighing in. It comes just a few days after another controversy that also featured the Leafs, when a Sabres goal following what appeared to be far more blatant interference on Andersen was allowed to stand on Monday.

That had Mike Babcock ominously warning that when it came to interference, the league "better get it solved" before the playoffs. Penguins coach Mike Sullivan largely echoed that sentiment on Saturday. Everyone seems to agree that this is a mess, and that the league needs to fix it.

Except for one problem: They can't. There is no fix, because these calls are largely subjective. You can tweak the rules and interpretations and where the line is drawn as much as you want, but you're never going to get anywhere close to a situation where everyone is on the same page.

Instead, it's becoming clear that the league made a major mistake by making goaltender interference subject to replay review in the first place. There's a reason why pro sports leagues have traditionally limited replay review to calls that should be black and white, and leave the judgment calls to the officials in real time. We're seeing it now.

You could make the case that both of this week's Maple Leafs calls were correct based on the rulebook. The Buffalo goal came on contact just outside the crease, while Dumoulin's lighter nudge was clearly in the blue paint, so the rules for the two plays work differently. Years ago, fans may have simply shrugged off the two calls as the sort of grey-area decisions that can go either way in a specific game but tend to even out over the course of a season. But not anymore, because by subjecting interference calls to review in the name of "getting it right," the NHL raised the bar. Now, fans expect a level of consistency that we don't see on any other



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judgment calls. When a referee makes a subjective call we don't like for holding, or roughing, or cross-checking, we complain a little here and there and then get on with our lives. But with interference, we've been trained to break every play down frame-by-frame, searching for an obvious answer that just isn't there.

You want to solve this? Get rid of interference review entirely and let the referees do their job. Will there still be controversial calls? Of course. Will there be calls that are outright wrong? Sure, sometimes. That's life in pro sports. We used to be able to live with it. Now we have a system that's slow and confusing, and nobody is the slightest bit happier about the calls it's churning out. So get rid of it. Ride out the season, pray to the hockey gods that we don't see a playoff series ruined by one of these things, and then scrap the review altogether in the off-season.

Instead, the NHL has apparently decided to respond to the problem by telling everyone to stop complaining. Good luck with that, guys.

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Road to the Cup

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

5. Vegas Golden Knights (44-19-5, +46 true goals differential*): Vegas flu advisory; after tonight's game in Philadelphia, they're home for eight of the next 10.

4. Boston Bruins (43-16-8, +53): Brad Marchand missed yesterday's game with an injury, but escaped any supplemental discipline for this collision with Anthony Duclair.

3. Pittsburgh Penguins (40-26-4, +18): Evgeni Malkin had two more points in last night's win over the Stars, and now has 51 in his last 30 games to move to within one of Nikita Kucherov in the Art Ross race.

2. Nashville Predators (44-14-10, +50): Tomorrow night brings another showdown with the Jets, where a Nashville win all but ends the race for top spot in the Central.

1. Tampa Bay Lightning (48-17-4, +58): The Predators and Lightning are turning this into a two-team race, with both teams taking 19 of 20 points in their last 10.

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

—

There's really no nice way to say it: Last night was a disaster for the Calgary Flames.

We covered their fading playoff hopes last week, as they'd dropped four points back of the wild-card race. But the schedule served up some help with a week's worth of easy matchups, and the Flames took advantage by banking road wins against the Sabres and Senators. Last night seemed like more of the same, as the Islanders arrived in town riding an eight-game losing streak.

Instead, the Flames ended up dropping a 5–2 decision, leaving two crucial points on the table. To make matters worse, last night's effort wasted the return of Mike Smith, who was making his first start since injuring his groin exactly a month ago against these same Islanders. If anything should have provided an emotional boost to a team that could use one, you'd think Smith's return would do the trick, especially with the Islanders starting Chris Gibson, a guy with six career appearances to his name. Instead, the Flames came out flat and trailed 2–0 before the game was even three minutes old.

After that rough start, the Flames were actually the better team for most of the night. They had 52 shots on goal, and nearly as many that went wide. They dominated possession, and had the better chances. None of it mattered.

With 94 shots at the net tonight, Flames scored on just 2% of their shot attempts. This really does sum up their season in a lot of ways.

— Kent Wilson (@Kent_Wilson) March 12, 2018

So sure, the Flames deserved a better fate. But this deep into the season, that hardly matters. There's no such thing as an easy two points in today's NHL, but when you're life and death to make the playoffs, you've got to be able to find a point or two against a team that's dropped eight straight. The Flames couldn't do it, and the results could be disastrous — by one estimate, that single loss dropped their already-shrinking playoff hopes by more than 11 percent.

The good news is that the Stars lost in regulation, too, so there are still four teams holding down playoff spots within four points of the Flames, and only the Kings to leapfrog to get to them. But all of those teams hold two games in hand except for the Ducks, who hold one, so there's more ground to make up than it looks like. The Flames' remaining schedule still features two games against the Sharks and one against the Ducks, so they have some control over their fate. And it also includes two each against the Oilers and Coyotes, which should be very winnable games against teams without much to play for.

Then again, winnable games don't count for much until you win them. The Islanders reminded us of that fact last night. The Flames can't afford many more lessons the rest of the way.

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Road to the lottery

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

5. Detroit Red Wings (26-31-11, -32): Make it six straight losses, as the Wings make a late charge for the bottom.

4. Vancouver Canucks (25-35-9, -39): With Brock Boeser out, there isn't much left on the current roster for fans to get excited about. But headlines like this have to help a little.

3. Ottawa Senators (23-33-11, -47): Mark Stone is out after suffering a leg injury against the Flames, and could miss significant time.

2. Arizona Coyotes (22-35-11, -53): After a relatively quiet year, we could be on the verge of some new off-ice drama in Arizona, as Andrew Barroway reportedly explores the possibility of adding investors as the team gears up for an arena fight.

1. Buffalo Sabres (22-35-12, -58): After hanging tough against the Knights, they're off until Thursday, when they kick off a five-game homestand by hosting the Maple Leafs.

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The New Jersey Devils have been one of the league's best stories. All but written off before the season even began, they charged out to a 9-2-0 start and have stubbornly hung around the playoff picture ever since. Recently, Taylor Hall's scoring streak pushed him into the crowded Hart Trophy conversation, and first-overall pick Nico Hischier looks like the real deal. For a team that finished dead last in the East just a year ago, missing the playoffs by 25 points in the process, their post-season push has capped off what's been close to a dream season.

There's just one problem: They may not make it after all.

Lost in the hype around Hall's scoring streak was the fact that it wasn't translating into all that many Devils wins. Since the new year, the Devils have gone just 13-16-2, one of the worst records in the league. To put their slump in perspective, their 28 points in 2018 matches the Sabres and trails the Coyotes.

All of that lent a sense of urgency to Saturday's matchup in Nashville, as the Devils faced the hottest team in the league. The Predators came in riding a ten-game win streak, and they took the lead just a minute into



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the game. But goals by Sami Vatanen and Brian Boyle gave the Devils a 2-1 lead heading into the third, and while Ryan Johansen tied it with a minute left, New Jersey managed to escape with a shootout win.

Those two points could be huge, and at least temporarily slipped New Jersey back into the East's first wild-card spot, with a three-point cushion over the Panthers. But Florida holds three games in hand and the ROW tie-breaker, so the Devils' position is still tenuous.

That game kicked off a brutal road trip that sees them head to Vegas next, then complete the dreaded three-game California swing and stop in Pittsburgh before they return home, where the Lightning will be waiting for them. It's not hard to imagine them getting to the end of that stretch and not just being outside the playoff race, but having been left behind entirely.

Or maybe not – with the Islanders imploding and the Hurricanes wobbling, it's looking like the Devils will need to fend off only one of the Panthers or Blue Jackets to earn a spot. And of course, even a near-miss would still ultimately feel like a win for a team resetting expectations. And as an added bonus, a miss would get them into the lottery, which they'd be guaranteed to win because they have Mr. Lottery on the roster.

So maybe it's a no-lose situation for this team. But it won't feel that way if they miss the playoffs after being in the hunt all season long. They're certainly headed in that direction, and the schedule isn't doing them any favours. If they can hold on the rest of the way, they'll have earned it.

Fantasy Hockey Pool

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Quick shifts: 10 more notable moments from around the league

- More bad news for the Flames: they lost Matthew Tkachuk late in last night's loss after he went hard into the boards. There's no word yet on how much time he might miss, if any.
- Just in case we were getting a little caught up on all this complaining about goalie interference calls, last night's Penguins/Stars game provided a nice reminder that offside review is also still terrible.
- Saturday's win was a franchise-record 10th straight at home for the Maple Leafs.
- The Blue Jackets are hanging tough in the last Eastern wild-card spot thanks to four straight wins. They'll try to make it five when they host the Canadiens tonight. Montreal has lost four straight.
- It's easy enough to forget given their apparent trade-deadline surrender, but the Blues are still hanging around the Western race. After smoking the Kings 7-2 on Saturday, they're just three points back of a wild card. That was only their second win in their last 11, but with games against the Ducks and Avs this week, they're still in this thing.
- Henrik Lundqvist reached the 800-game milestone in Saturday's shootout loss to the Panthers. He's the first European goaltender to reach the mark.
- The Jets suffered the first loss of their road trip on Saturday, dropping a 2-1 decision to the Flyers. Patrik Laine scored his 40th in a losing cause to move into a tie with Alex Ovechkin in the goal-scoring race.
- The Oilers' win over the Wild was their third straight. Oddly, that makes them the only team in the conference riding a streak of either kind longer than two games.
- Things got heated between the Avalanche and Coyotes on Saturday, with Oliver Ekman-Larsson of all people getting it started.
- Finally, we had a goalie goal in the AHL, where Charlotte's Alex Nedeljkovic buried one in a 7-3 win. Consider that the first bit of good news the Hurricanes organization has had from one of its goalies all year.

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Sportsnet.ca / Many questions surround Flames ahead of pivotal clash vs. Oilers

Eric Francis | @EricFrancis March 12, 2018, 5:07 PM

CALGARY — As if the recent string of home losses hasn't been painful enough for Calgary Flames fans, the stage is now set for the ultimate kick in the teeth.

A visit from the Edmonton Oilers on Tuesday opens up the very real possibility the Flames' playoff hopes will be all but officially dashed by their hapless, hated provincial rivals. At home, nonetheless.

Such an indignity certainly wouldn't come as a shock to Flames faithful, who have watched the team lose seven straight to the Oilers and win just one of their last 11 home dates in regulation.

Frustration is certainly mounting in Calgary where the NHL team is simply too good to be in this predicament. So said Mike Smith after the team's latest setback Sunday when the Islanders rolled over the Flames 5-2 to end an eight-game losing skid.

After making his first start in a month, Smith lit a fire under his teammates for yet another uninspired start that saw the hosts down 2-0 less than three minutes in. He said the team's problem of late is between the ears, where he insists everyone has to decide to start contributing more.

"Every guy has got to play out of their comfort zone," said Smith, who admitted he was a tad nervous and certainly not 100 per cent in his return from a lower-body injury.

"Our top guys have got to do the little things it takes to win and block shots and chip pucks, and our bottom-six guys have got to contribute offensively and do the little things also. We can't have any passengers if we're going to right the ship here and make a big push."

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It's well documented his team's bottom-six forwards have been a massive disappointment this season, but Smith raised eyebrows suggesting the team's snipers need to get grittier.

With 78 points, 12 games left and all their challengers holding games in hand, it's generally agreed the Flames will need to win eight or nine of their remaining tilts, which is especially daunting given seven are at home where the team is a humiliating 14-16-4.

While the general consensus is that the team has trouble scoring at home (witness the 50 saves Henrik Lundqvist made here last week and the 50 stops Islanders upstart Chris Gibson made Sunday), a dive into the stats shows it's the goaltending that's been the problem at home.

Despite allowing four shots less a game on Flames goalies at home, their save percentage at the Dome sits at .896 this year. Not playoff material.

On the road, Flames goalies have stopped 92.1 per cent of all shots, which goes a long way towards explaining the team's 20-10-6 road mark.

Why they can't bring their road intensity home has been baffling all season, prompting Gulutzan to interrupt their 20-minute practice on Monday with choice words followed by the question, "How are we going to start tomorrow's game?"

It will be fascinating to see the answer. And that's where the Flames are at these days, with more questions than answers.



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The coach is clearly sick of being asked about the team's inability to start better, play well at home or respond favourably to the pressure and immediacy of the situation.

He's getting testy, uncharacteristically challenging reporters and their questions.

The task at hand might be made even harder without Matthew Tkachuk, a player who has built his reputation on doing all the little things it takes to win games. Tkachuk missed practice Monday after his head crashed heavily into the boards Sunday night after getting tangled with Mathew Barzal and falling backwards with five minutes left.

He didn't return due to concussion protocol and was nowhere to be seen Monday. Gulutzan said Tkachuk's status would be updated Tuesday, along with Mikael Backlund and Sean Monahan who also missed practice for "maintenance."

Terrifying times for the coach, the Flames and their fans, who all sense the rocky month they've experienced without Smith could ultimately be their undoing.

Truth is, it's what they do from this point on that is far more important — a message the coach can't seem to hammer into the lads forcefully enough.

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Sportsnet.ca / Maroon's personality aiding transition to Devils locker room

Ryan Dixon | @dixononsports March 12, 2018, 4:47 PM

In a post-practice NHL dressing room, chirps tend to fly right alongside discarded towels and tape balls.

The words John Moore used last Wednesday weren't actually biting, but his tone telegraphed the fact he was teasing new teammate Patrick Maroon when he bellowed from one side of the New Jersey Devils room to the other: "You had the best play of practice."

Maroon failed to immediately fill the air with a reply, so Moore continued on, drawing out the anecdote: "Wall play, spin off, backhand sauce."

No doubt sensing the somewhat backhanded nature of the compliment, Maroon piped up: "I did that yesterday during the game!"

The contest Maroon referred to was a 6-4 win over the Montreal Canadiens and Moore quickly conceded that, yes, the big winger can bust out sweet plays both in the loose setting of practice and during the high-stakes pressure of the game. Maroon actually potted his first goal as a Devil versus the Habs on March 6 and the synchronicity he's experienced with his new club has made a sometimes-difficult transition that much easier.

New Jersey bench boss John Hynes got his first look at Maroon more than a decade ago when the former was part of the U.S. National Team Development Program coaching staff and the latter was playing with the St. Louis Bandits of the North American Hockey League. Hynes recalls a teenaged Maroon being a big, bruising player with nifty hands.

"And [he] kind of always had this gregarious personality," Hynes says.

All those elements remain to this day and the fact Maroon worked hard along the way to improve his skating means there's still very much a place for him in the go-go NHL. Of course, his contract status — Maroon is eligible to become an unrestricted free agent July 1, less than three

months after his 30th birthday — was a huge factor when it came to him losing his spot on the struggling Edmonton Oilers only one season after he netted a career-best 27 goals playing left wing beside Connor McDavid.

New Jersey picked him up in a deadline swap with Edmonton and Maroon has made a fantastic first impression, registering one goal, four assists and five points in six outings as a Devil. Three of those points have come on the power play, where Maroon has been a fixture on the first unit. In fact, he's averaging 3:19 of man-advantage ice time per game, more than anybody on the club.

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Even if his pace of production is bound to slow, the Devils are justified in their belief Maroon can be an important complimentary piece for their playoff push. Hynes' familiarity with Maroon also includes coaching against him for a number of years in the American Hockey League and having him on his own bench when both men — as well as New Jersey general manager Ray Shero — were part of the U.S. entry at the 2016 World Championship.

Hynes says Maroon is the kind of player who elevates his performance when the temperature of a game spikes. And while much of his goal explosion a year ago can be traced to McDavid, it's important to not overlook what the six-foot-three, 225-pounder brings to the equation. All jokes aside, the man has a very specific and valuable skillset.

"His touch around the net, his board play in the offensive zone, his ability to protect plays and make plays under pressure have been very good," Hynes says.

A few people in the Devils room already knew what to expect. Maroon was originally acquired by Edmonton two years ago at the 2016 trade deadline and spent a couple months as a teammate of Taylor Hall's before Hall — presently the subject of "MVP!" chants in Newark — was acquired in the signature move of Shero's tenure with Jersey. Maroon's first handful of NHL seasons came with the Anaheim Ducks and because that organization has also done some business with the Devils, he was immediately able to rekindle friendships with Kyle Palmieri, Ben Lovejoy and Sami Vatanen.

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Ultimately, the success or failure of Maroon's time with the Devils will be determined by whether or not he can continue to generate offence. The odds he will are at least slightly enhanced by who he is away from the action.

"When you have the type of personality he does, maybe it's easier to matriculate in, particularly off the ice," Hynes says. "And lots of times, that off-ice feeling helps your on-ice performance and comfort level."

While Maroon likely has the ability to make friends fast, he was immediately thankful — upon hearing of the trade — that he didn't have to start a social circle from scratch.

"I was like, 'Wow, that's exciting' because I'm not going into a locker room where I don't know anyone," he says. "Familiar faces make you feel welcome."

Most often, we assume, with a couple jokes at your expense.

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TSN.CA / Timeline for Matthews coming into focus



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Mark Masters

TSN Toronto reporter Mark Masters checks in daily with news and notes from Maple Leafs practices and game-day skates. The Leafs practised at the MasterCard Centre on Monday.

Auston Matthews was on the ice for Toronto's entire practice on Monday. It's the first time he's stayed out for a full session since sustaining a shoulder injury on Feb. 22. However, the 20-year-old was still wearing a red no-contact sweater and he did not skate in his regular spot. Matthews did rotate in at times during the line drills even taking a few reps as a defenceman to stay in the flow of things.

"I would expect that he's going to be pushing not for the Dallas game (Wednesday), but after that some time," said head coach Mike Babcock.

"He looks good," observed centre Nazem Kadri. "Mats is a special player so it doesn't take much for him to regain his strength and regain his momentum."

Matthews is expected to miss a seventh straight game on Wednesday when the Maple Leafs host the Dallas Stars. Toronto will then play in Buffalo on Thursday before returning home to face the Montreal Canadiens on Saturday night.

"He's obviously feeling way better," Babcock said. "I noticed when we were doing the contact stuff he didn't do as much of that and didn't dive right into it. I didn't talk to anybody, that's just what I noticed."

Matthews, who sat out a battle drill at the end of practice, was one of the last players on the ice Monday putting in some extra work long after most of his teammates had departed. There's a belief this injury absence will leave him feeling energized for the playoffs.

"It will help him for sure," Babcock said. "And, we've made a point, he's done some skating. He'll be in better shape than he was when he left just because (with) his two previous injuries he couldn't skate during that (initial recovery) time. I think that's important for him."

Mitch Marner missed time with an upper-body injury last season and can relate to what Matthews is going through now.

"You can do all the bikes and sprinting and all this stuff but, for some weird reason, the game is very different than all those things," Marner noted. "You think you got the cardio and then you play a game and that first 10 minutes is deadly on you. After that you get back in the rhythm."

"It sucks," Marner added. "I mean, it's a weird (injury). Your shot obviously comes back slowly and slowly and gets better."

The Leafs are now 8-6-2 without Matthews in the lineup this season (2-2-2 during the most recent absence) and are trying to keep things as close to business as usual as possible.

"It's way easier for me when he's in so we don't have to talk about it so much, you know what I mean?" Babcock said to laughs. "This is what I would tell you, it doesn't matter who's in the lineup we expect to win."

Good to see Matthews last the full session today?

"I didn't even notice it was (his first) full practice, to be honest," said Morgan Rielly with a smile. "But, yes, very happy."

Usually players who take part in a full practice are available to the media, but Matthews did not address reporters today. Per the team's media relations staff, Matthews likely will not speak publicly until it's clear he's ready to return.

Leafs Ice Chips: Matthews goes through full practice, but out Wednesday

Auston Matthews stayed out for a full practice on Monday for the first time since sustaining a shoulder on Feb. 22. However, the star centre was still wearing a red jersey. Head coach Mike Babcock did note that

Matthews could return at some point following Wednesday's game against the Dallas Stars.

Leafs Ice Chips: Matthews goes through full practice, but out Wednesday

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We got a reminder about why a red sweater is necessary for injured players during Monday's practice as forward Dominic Moore and defenceman Connor Carrick, who have both been in and out of the lineup this season, got heated at one point exchanging shoves at the end of a drill.

"As an athlete I don't think you want to be wearing that red colour jersey, but it's just a precautionary thing," Kadri said. "You want to make sure he's just 100 per cent before guys know that you can actually be physical. In practice things can get pretty competitive so it's just a precautionary thing."

The Leafs are going through a stretch where they play just once in eight days and that has led to several longer-than-usual practices with Monday's workout lasting about 55 minutes with a conditioning skate at the end.

—

In 22 games since Jan. 20, Marner has 14 goals, tied for fifth in the league in that stretch. Always known as a prolific playmaker, the former London Knight wanted to make defenders respect his shot more this season and he appears to be doing just that. Marner has fired 69 shots on net in the last 22 games. That's 3.1 per game. He averaged just two shots per game in the first 47 outings of the season. Last season, he averaged 2.3 shots per game.

"I think he's more conscious about his shot," observed Kadri, who has also tried to improve that aspect of his game in recent years. "I've been trying to tell him to get that shot off. It's not necessarily about how hard you shoot it, it's the release and how quick you get it off. Sometimes you can surprise goaltenders and pucks that shouldn't go in end up going in the back of the net."

Kadri points out that Marner's power-play goal against the Penguins on Saturday is a perfect example of what he's been doing more of.

"Shoot it knowing it probably won't go right in, but it hits a couple shin pads and it's in the back of the net," Kadri said. "He now knows if he shoots more and more consistently he's going to score more goals."

Mitch Marner!

Off of the D-man and through the 5-hole. 4-0 Leafs!
pic.twitter.com/owmMO0gnwE

— Flintor (@TheFlintor) March 11, 2018

"I've noticed a lot of pucks going off people and in," Rielly quipped. "So, I don't know whether or not that's on purpose (chuckle). No, he's playing great."

During this 22-game surge, Babcock has rewarded Marner by playing him about a minute more than his average early in the season. One of the coaching staff's directives to Marner at the outset of the season was about shooting more.

"I thought he had two really good cracks last game," Babcock noted. "He hit the bar on one and the top of the pad on the other one. I believe he can shoot the puck and shoot it well. He's just got to use his momentum and he's working on it constantly and he's getting better."



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Marner's shooting percentage has ticked up this season from 10.8 per cent as a rookie to 11.5 as a sophomore. He believes success of the power play has been a key, especially of late.

"Just trying to get it to the net more," he explained. "That's one reason why our power play (group) is working so well, we're getting pucks to the net from all angles: Bozie, Mo, James doing a great job in front and Naz is always there for backdoors or those three-foot ones. It's a battle, but we just have to keep getting the puck to the net and when that starts to happen your shot gets more confidence, you get more confidence in your head and I think that's the way I'm thinking right now."

By injecting a little calm and a lot of confidence into his game, Mitch Marner has turned into the #Leaf's most potent offensive weapon: <https://t.co/qSb09lqZRP>

— Kristen Shilton (@kristen_shilton) March 12, 2018

Marner is third on the team with seven power-play goals. He has six points on the man advantage in the last six games as the top unit featuring him, Kadri, Rielly, Tyler Bozak and James van Riemsdyk, has started to heat up. Those five players have combined for 27 power-play goals this season, representing 66 per cent of Toronto's output. This despite the fact the power play ice time has been divided quite evenly between the units.

"Our power play has been real dangerous on one group and not as good on the other group," Babcock said. "We got to get that fixed. You need two balanced units with fresh guys going out there to do a job. We feel we have the depth to do that and so we have to come up with a scheme and work ethic and execution that makes that happen. That'll happen more when Matty's back, but in the mean time we still need goals out of that second group."

The second unit, featuring William Nylander, Matthews, Patrick Marleau, Jake Gardiner and injury replacements Leo Komarov and Josh Leivo, has combined for just 11.

Nylander was second on the team with nine power-play goals last season while Matthews was third with eight. So, what's hampering that group this season?

"That's a good question," Babcock said with a smile, leaving it at that.

Has red-hot Marner finally shed the pass-first mentality?

Mitch Marner started the season slow sparking concerns that he may be suffering from a sophomore slump. But in 22 games since Jan. 20, Marner has 14 goals, tied for fifth in the NHL in that stretch. So, has he finally scrapped the pass-first mentality? Marner has fired 69 shots on net in the last 22 games. That's 3.1 per game. He averaged 2.04 shots per game in the first 47 games of the season.

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—

Nikita Zaitsev, who unexpectedly missed Saturday's game due to an illness, was absent from Monday's practice.

"Obviously, he didn't bounce back the way we expected so he's seeing the doctor today," Babcock said. "Just think it's the flu, but (it) wasn't done as quick as we expected."

—

Babcock was asked if he's leaning toward inserting Matt Martin back into the lineup for Wednesday's game.

"I wouldn't try reading my mind," the coach said with a smile. "I don't even know what's going on in there."

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TSN.CA / Statistically Speaking: McDavid finishing fast

Scott Cullen

McDavid keeps rolling; Rielly, Schwartz, Rantanen, Gustafsson, Boychuk and more in Scott Cullen's Statistically Speaking.

HEROES

Connor McDavid – Edmonton's superstar centre scored two goals and added an assist in Saturday's 4-1 win over Minnesota. He has 13 points (6 G, 7 A) during a seven-game point streak and sits four points behind Nikita Kucherov for the scoring lead. It's forcing people to address the notion of whether a player needs his team to make the playoffs in order to be considered for the Hart Trophy as Most Valuable Player.

Morgan Rielly – Toronto's puck-moving blueliner recorded three assists in Saturday's 5-2 win over Pittsburgh, giving him six assists in the past five games. He has a career-high 41 points this season.

Jaden Schwartz - The Blues winger put up a goal and two assists in Saturday's 7-2 win at Los Angeles. He has seven points (2 G, 5 A) in the past five games and has better than a point per game, with 49 points in 48 games.

Mikko Rantanen – The sophomore Avalanche winger tallied a goal and two assists in Saturday's 5-2 win against Arizona; he has 16 points (5 G, 11 A) in the past 10 games, and a nice 69 points in 67 games for the season. Linemate Nathan MacKinnon added a couple of assists against the Coyotes, and has 20 points (8 G, 12 A) in the past 10 games.

Erik Gustafsson – The Blackhawks blueliner, who received a contract extension last week, had a goal and two assists in Saturday's 7-4 loss at Boston then added two assists in Sunday's 3-1 win over the Bruins. He has six points (2 G, 4 A) in the past four games.

Johnny Boychuk – The Islanders defenceman put up a goal and two assists in Sunday's 5-2 win at Calgary, matching his production from his previous 23 games.

ZEROES

Jean-Gabriel Pageau – The Senators centre struggled (13 for, 25 against, 34.2 CF%, 6-18 scoring chances) and was on the ice for both goals against in Friday's 2-1 loss to Calgary.

Derek Forbort – The Kings blueliner had a rough game (13 for, 17 against, 43.3 CF%, 5-10 scoring chances) and was on the ice for four goals against in Saturday's 7-2 loss to St. Louis.

Thomas Hickey – The Islanders defenceman was stuck in his own end (7 for, 35 against, 16.7 CF%, 5-10 scoring chances) during Sunday's 5-2 win at Calgary.

Tristan Jarry – Pittsburgh's rookie netminder allowed four goals on 16 shots before getting pulled from Saturday's 5-2 loss at Toronto. He has a .888 save percentage in his past 11 starts.

VITAL SIGNS

Mike Smith – The Flames netminder returned to the lineup Sunday after missing a month with a lower-body injury.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 13, 2018

Ryan McDonagh - Acquired from the Rangers at the trade deadline, the veteran blueliner finally made his Lightning debut after missing more than a month with an upper-body injury.

Mark Stone - Ottawa's star winger suffered a leg injury in Friday's 2-1 loss to Calgary.

Oscar Klefbom - The Oilers defenceman didn't play Saturday and will miss at least one more game as he recovers from a minor procedure. There has been widespread feeling that he's been playing injured for much of this season.

Anthony Duclair - The Blackhawks winger suffered a knee injury after a collision Saturday with Bruins winger Brad Marchand, who also missed Sunday's rematch with an upper-body injury.

SHORT SHIFTS

Jonathan Toews is scoring down the stretch for the Blackhawks.

Blackhawks C Jonathan Toews accumulated three assists in Sunday's 3-1 win against Boston, and has nine points (3 G, 6 A) in the past six games...Blackhawks RW Patrick Kane added a goal and an assist, giving him 11 points (3 G, 8 A) in the past 10 games...Penguins C Evgeni Malkin had a goal and an assist, while C Sidney Crosby added two assists in Sunday's 3-1 win at Dallas. Malkin has 24 points (9 G, 15 A) in the past 13 games and sits just one point behind Nikita Kucherov for the scoring lead. Crosby has 16 points (6 G, 10 A) in the past 14 games...Islanders LW Anders Lee scored a pair of goals in Sunday's 5-2 win at Calgary, and has five points (3 G, 2 A) in the past four games...Islanders D Nick Leddy added a goal and an assist, after posting two assists in his previous nine games...Islanders centres John Tavares and Casey Cizikas both chipped in a couple of assists. Tavares had three points (1 G, 2 A) in his previous eight games and Cizikas had one assist in his previous 10 games...Flames LW Johnny Gaudreau had a goal and an assist in Sunday's 5-2 loss to the Islanders. He has six points (1 G, 5 A) in the past four games.

Nazem Kadri and Mitch Marner have been clicking together over the past 20 games.

Maple Leafs C Nazem Kadri scored a pair of goals and RW Mitch Marner added two assists in Saturday's 5-2 win vs. Pittsburgh. Kadri has 22 points (12 G, 10 A) in the past 20 games and Marner has 24 points (13 G, 11 A) in the past 20 games...Canadiens LW Charles Hudon assisted on both Montreal goals in Saturday's 3-2 shootout loss at Tampa Bay. He has six points (1 G, 5 A) in his past seven games...Bruins C David Krejci scored a pair of goals in Saturday's 7-4 win over Chicago and assisted on Boston's only goal in Sunday's 3-1 loss at Chicago; he has seven points (5 G, 2 A) in the past seven games...Bruins rookie LW Jake DeBrusk added four helpers in those two games against Chicago, giving him nine points (2 G, 7 A) in the past seven games...Bruins RW Brian Gionta and C Sean Kuraly both contributed a goal and an assist. Gionta has six points (2 G, 4 A) in five games since joining Boston. Kuraly had no points in his previous 13 games...Bruins LW Brad Marchand chipped in a couple of assists Saturday, giving him 11 points (5 G, 6 A) in a five-game point streak...Coyotes RW Richard Panik had a goal and an assist in Saturday's 5-2 win at Colorado, giving him four points (2 G, 2 A) in the past five games.

Avalanche D Tyson Barrie, RW Blake Comeau and C Carl Soderberg each contributed a goal and an assist in Saturday's 5-2 win vs. Arizona. Barrie has 15 points (5 G, 10 A) in the past 10 games, Comeau has six points (1 G, 5 A) in the past six games, and Soderberg has eight points (4 G, 4 A) in the past six games...Blues C Ivan Barbashev, C Kyle Brodziak, D Alex Pietrangolo and RW Vladimir Tarasenko each had a goal and an assist in Saturday's 7-2 win at Los Angeles. Barbashev had two goals in his previous 11 games, Brodziak had two assists in the previous nine games, Pietrangolo has four points (3 G, 1 A) in the past five games, and Tarasenko has five points (3 G, 2 A) in the past five games...Kings C Anze Kopitar contributed two assists in Saturday's 7-2 loss to St. Louis, giving him 10 points (2 G, 8 A) in the past seven games.

Panthers LW Jonathan Huberdeau produced a goal and an assist in Saturday's 4-3 shootout win over the Rangers, and has eight points (4 G, 4 A) in the past nine games...Panthers C Vincent Trocheck added a couple of assists, and has nine points (4 G, 5 A) in the past nine games...Rangers C Ryan Spooner picked up a pair of assists in Saturday's 4-3 shootout loss at Florida; he has 12 points (2 G, 10 A) in seven games since he was traded to New York...Oilers LW Ryan Nugent-Hopkins contributed a goal and an assist in Saturday's 4-1 win against Minnesota. He has four points (2 G, 2 A) in four games since returning to the lineup.

Columbus' Seth Jones is on a tear.

Blue Jackets D Seth Jones scored two goals in Friday's 3-2 win at Detroit, and has 10 points (5 G, 5 A) in the past eight games...Stars C Tyler Seguin added two assists in Friday's 2-1 win against Anaheim and one more assist in Sunday's 3-1 loss to Pittsburgh; he has 14 points (7 G, 7 A) in the past nine games...Wild C Matt Cullen and RW Charlie Coyle both had a goal and an assist in Friday's 5-2 win at Vancouver. Cullen has seven points (5 G, 2 A) in the past 11 games. Coyle also scored a goal in Saturday's 4-1 loss at Edmonton, giving him six points (2 G, 4 A) in the past seven games.

Sabres forwards Zemgus Girgensons and Jason Pominville had a strong showing (22 for, 5 against, 81.5 CF%, 8-0 scoring chances) in Saturday's 2-1 shootout loss to Vegas...Canadiens D Brett Lernout was called up from the AHL and had a solid game (21 for, 5 against, 80.8 CF%, 14-2 scoring chances) in Saturday's 4-3 shootout loss at Tampa Bay.

Marc-Andre Fleury is a huge part of the Golden Knights' success this season.

Golden Knights G Marc-Andre Fleury saved 32 of 33 shots in Saturday's 2-1 shootout win at Buffalo and has a .929 save percentage in his past six starts...Sabres G Robin Lehner turned away 33 of 34 shots in Saturday's 2-1 shootout loss to Vegas; he has a .946 save percentage in his past three starts...Oilers G Cam Talbot saved 32 of 33 shots that he faced in Saturday's 4-1 win vs. Minnesota, giving him a .928 save percentage in his past 11 starts...Blackhawks G Anton Forsberg turned away 31 of 32 shots in Sunday's 3-1 win over Boston. He had a .875 save percentage in his previous four games...Flames G David Rittich stopped 29 of 30 shots in Friday's 2-1 win at Ottawa. He had a .864 save percentage in his previous five games...Blues G Jake Allen had 38 saves on 40 shots in Saturday's 7-2 win at Los Angeles; he had a .876 save percentage in his previous eight games...Maple Leafs G Frederik Andersen stopped 38 of 40 shots in Saturday's 5-2 win against Pittsburgh. He had a .860 save percentage in his previous four starts...Devils G Keith Kinkaid turned away 34 of 36 shots in Saturday's 3-2 shootout win at Nashville, and has a .934 save percentage in his past eight starts...Canadiens G Antti Niemi saved 32 of 34 shots in Saturday's 3-2 shootout loss at Tampa Bay, giving him a .932 save percentage in 13 games since he was acquired by Montreal.

FIRSTS

Matthew Highmore - The Blackhawks winger scored his first NHL goal, in his sixth game, Saturday's 7-4 loss at Boston.

FIRST NHL GOAL FOR CHICAGO'S MATTHEW HIGHMORE! 4-3 HAWKS! pic.twitter.com/Bzbi9zFQcl

— NHL Daily 365 (@NHLDaily365) March 10, 2018

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TSN.CA / Snapshot: Predators stay on top

Scott Cullen



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 13, 2018

The Nashville Predators remain at No. 1 in this week's edition of Snapshot, ahead of the Tampa Bay Lightning and Boston Bruins.

Moving up this week, the Anaheim Ducks, Columbus Blue Jackets, and Florida Panthers are headed in the right direction.

On the other hand, the New Jersey Devils and Philadelphia Flyers are sliding down the rankings.

(Snapshot is a continuation of the analytically-based Power Rankings that I've been doing on TSN for many years. They are generated using statistics and individual player grades, which allows for ranking flexibility based on player availability due to injuries, suspensions, coaching decisions etc. and are used for the model being measured, with others, here.)

NASHVILLE PREDATORS (44-14-9)

THIS WEEK: 1 LAST WEEK: 1

GF: 3.21 GA: 2.46 SA CF%: 52.5

NET PP/60: +7.19 NET PK/60: -5.45

Such as the depth of the Predators defence that even when losing someone like Roman Josi to injury, they can give more ice time to Ryan Ellis, who has put up 12 points (3 G, 9 A) in the past 10 games, all of which were Nashville victories.

Key Injuries: D Roman Josi (upper body).

TAMPA BAY LIGHTNING (47-17-4)

THIS WEEK: 2 LAST WEEK: 2

GF: 3.60 GA: 2.75 SA CF%: 52.6

NET PP/60: +8.33 NET PK/60: -6.77

The Lightning have gone beyond 60 minutes six times in the past seven games, but they have won eight of nine, with the only loss an inexplicable effort in a 2-1 overtime loss at Buffalo.

Key Injuries: LW Ondrej Palat (lower body), D Ryan McDonagh (upper body).

BOSTON BRUINS (42-15-8)

THIS WEEK: 3 LAST WEEK: 3

GF: 3.31 GA: 2.51 SA CF%: 54.2

NET PP/60: +6.46 NET PK/60: -4.89

Even while the Bruins have some significant injuries, they've won five in a row, and Brad Marchand has thrown the team on his back, putting up 12 points (7 G, 5 A) in the past seven games.

Key Injuries: C Patrice Bergeron (foot), D Charlie McAvoy (knee).

WINNIPEG JETS (41-17-9)

THIS WEEK: 4 LAST WEEK: 5

GF: 3.34 GA: 2.61 SA CF%: 52.0

NET PP/60: +8.66 NET PK/60: -5.49

Winners of four straight, the Jets have the hottest goal-scorer in the league, sophomore winger Patrik Laine, who has scored 14 goals in the past 10 games, but they've also lost top centre Mark Scheifele to injury, again.

Key Injuries: C Adam Lowry (upper body), D Jacob Trouba (ankle), C Mark Scheifele (upper body).

VEGAS GOLDEN KNIGHTS (43-19-5)

THIS WEEK: 5 LAST WEEK: 4

GF: 3.40 GA: 2.72 SA CF%: 52.4

NET PP/60: +6.59 NET PK/60: -5.82

It should come as no surprise that the Golden Knights have stumbled a bit, as they have some injuries and their goaltending was due to regress. Marc-Andre Fleury has a .915 save percentage in his past nine starts, which is fine, but he was running .933 before that.

Key Injuries: RW James Neal (lower body), D Luca Sbisa.

PITTSBURGH PENGUINS (39-25-4)

THIS WEEK: 6 LAST WEEK: 6

GF: 3.26 GA: 2.99 SA CF%: 51.8

NET PP/60: +9.41 NET PK/60: -5.63

While the Penguins have won three straight, Wednesday's win at Philadelphia was their only regulation win in the past six games. Yes, they miss Matt Murray.

Key Injuries: G Matt Murray (concussion).

DALLAS STARS (37-24-6)

THIS WEEK: 7 LAST WEEK: 7

GF: 2.85 GA: 2.60 SA CF%: 51.9

NET PP/60: +5.90 NET PK/60: -5.57

One regulation win in the past six games isn't ideal, especially when five of those games were played at home but, after one more home game, they will hit the road for a six-game trip.

Key Injuries: C Martin Hanzal (back), G Ben Bishop (lower body).

WASHINGTON CAPITALS (37-23-7)

THIS WEEK: 8 LAST WEEK: 9

GF: 3.00 GA: 2.97 SA CF%: 48.3

NET PP/60: +6.75 NET PK/60: -7.00

With a mediocre 9-9-4 record since mid-January, the Capitals have been on the wrong side of shot differentials all season, but a slump from goaltender Braden Holtby (.882 SV% in his past 15 GP) brings those problems home to roost.

Key Injuries: None.

TORONTO MAPLE LEAFS (39-22-7)

THIS WEEK: 9 LAST WEEK: 8

GF: 3.19 GA: 2.84 SA CF%: 50.4

NET PP/60: +6.60 NET PK/60: -4.41

Winless in four, the Maple Leafs obviously miss Auston Matthews, and a sudden slump from G Frederik Andersen reveals some vulnerability. No worries, though, it's only Pittsburgh up next on Saturday night.

Key Injuries: C Auston Matthews (shoulder).

ANAHEIM DUCKS (34-22-12)

THIS WEEK: 10 LAST WEEK: 14

GF: 2.76 GA: 2.65 SA CF%: 48.6

NET PP/60: +5.79 NET PK/60: -4.39

7-2-1 in the past 10 games, the Ducks are a dangerous team when their best players are playing well, and the top line duo of Rickard Rakell and Ryan Getzlaf are dragging them along.

Key Injuries: RW Patrick Eaves (Guillain-Barre).



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 13, 2018

LOS ANGELES KINGS (37-25-5)

THIS WEEK: 11 LAST WEEK: 11

GF: 2.88 GA: 2.48 SA CF%: 49.7

NET PP/60: +6.83 NET PK/60: -4.91

The Kings have won four of five, and the return of Jeff Carter is their big late-season addition, and he's scored goals in each of those four wins.

Key Injuries: None.

SAN JOSE SHARKS (36-22-9)

THIS WEEK: 12 LAST WEEK: 10

GF: 2.90 GA: 2.70 SA CF%: 51.4

NET PP/60: +7.99 NET PK/60: -4.27

The Sharks are hanging around, but they'd be hanging along a little better if they could score on the power play. Thursday's power play goal against St. Louis snapped a 12-game drought with the man advantage.

Key Injuries: C Joe Thornton (knee), RW Joel Ward (shoulder).

COLUMBUS BLUE JACKETS (35-28-5)

THIS WEEK: 13 LAST WEEK: 16

GF: 2.63 GA: 2.75 SA CF%: 51.7

NET PP/60: +4.01 NET PK/60: -8.18

The Blue Jackets have won three straight, and they've needed to in order hang on to the last playoff spot. However, a two point advantage over a Florida team that has played three fewer games isn't a great spot to be.

Key Injuries: None.

STATISTICALLY SPEAKING: Jones and Werenski among the best on the blueline; Eakin, Cirelli, Spooner, Yandle, Luongo, Hellebucyk and more. <https://t.co/chrEpoHXwv> @TSNAnalytics [pic.twitter.com/SJKvPuqrAx](https://t.co/SJKvPuqrAx)

— Scott Cullen (@tsnscottcullen) March 9, 2018

FLORIDA PANTHERS (30-25-6)

THIS WEEK: 14 LAST WEEK: 17

GF: 3.02 GA: 3.09 SA CF%: 49.2

NET PP/60: +6.33 NET PK/60: -5.56

No regulation losses in the past eight games puts the Panthers right in the playoff picture, though they're still trying to catch up in the games played department. Aleksander Barkov leads the way, but the supporting cast – Vincent Trocheck, Jonathan Huberdeau, Evgeni Dadonov, and Nick Bjugstad – are pulling their weight too.

Key Injuries: RW Denis Malgin (knee).

STATISTICALLY SPEAKING: Bobby Lu offers fantasy value for the stretch run. <https://t.co/nojzf9R6dK> [pic.twitter.com/6JhptnzDnw](https://t.co/6JhptnzDnw)

— Scott Cullen (@tsnscottcullen) March 7, 2018

MINNESOTA WILD (38-22-7)

THIS WEEK: 15 LAST WEEK: 15

GF: 3.09 GA: 2.84 SA CF%: 47.8

NET PP/60: +7.28 NET PK/60: -6.04

The Wild have only two regulation losses in the past 10 games, and that's moved them into third place in the Central Division.

Key Injuries: None.

NEW JERSEY DEVILS (34-26-8)

THIS WEEK: 16 LAST WEEK: 13

GF: 2.90 GA: 2.97 SA CF%: 48.8

NET PP/60: +6.42 NET PK/60: -5.11

LW Taylor Hall's 26-game scoring streak is over, the Devils have lost four of the past five games and are on the road for the next six. Their playoff position could be rather precarious at this point.

Key Injuries: LW Marcus Johansson (concussion).

PHILADELPHIA FLYERS (34-23-11)

THIS WEEK: 17 LAST WEEK: 12

GF: 2.93 GA: 2.87 SA CF%: 49.4

NET PP/60: +5.57 NET PK/60: -8.60

Winless in five, the Flyers haven't exactly been saved by G Petr Mrazek, who has a .889 save percentage in his seven starts since arriving from Detroit.

Key Injuries: G Brian Elliott (core muscles), G Michal Neuvirth (lower body).

COLORADO AVALANCHE (35-24-8)

THIS WEEK: 18 LAST WEEK: 18

GF: 3.12 GA: 2.97 SA CF%: 47.7

NET PP/60: +6.18 NET PK/60: -4.93

The Avs are winless in three, but have one regulation loss in the past nine games, to climb within one point of a playoff spot. Hanging around the playoff race with top defenceman Erik Johnson injured is quite the feat.

Key Injuries: D Mark Barberio (lower body), D Erik Johnson (upper body).

CALGARY FLAMES (33-25-10)

THIS WEEK: 19 LAST WEEK: 19

GF: 2.81 GA: 2.87 SA CF%: 52.9

NET PP/60: +5.69 NET PK/60: -6.32

4-6-2 in a dozen games without starting goaltender Mike Smith, the Flames are still on the edge of the playoff race, three points behind Los Angeles while playing one more game, but if Smith can't make it back soon, it may not matter.

Key Injuries: LW Kris Versteeg (hip), G Mike Smith (lower body).

NEW YORK ISLANDERS (29-29-10)

THIS WEEK: 20 LAST WEEK: 21

GF: 3.15 GA: 3.53 SA CF%: 47.3

NET PP/60: +5.79 NET PK/60: -7.93

It's been eight games without a win for the Islanders, whose defensive woes have finally caught up to them.

Key Injuries: D Calvin De Haan (upper body), D Scott Mayfield (lower body).

ST. LOUIS BLUES (35-26-4)

THIS WEEK: 21 LAST WEEK: 20

GF: 2.64 GA: 2.66 SA CF%: 51.2

NET PP/60: +4.20 NET PK/60: -6.26



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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The Blues have one win in the past 10 games, and have scored a total of 10 goals in the past eight games.

Key Injuries: RW Robby Fabbri (knee), D Joel Edmundson (forearm), D Jay Bouwmeester (hip).

CAROLINA HURRICANES (30-27-11)

THIS WEEK: 22 LAST WEEK: 22

GF: 2.62 GA: 2.99 SA CF%: 54.1

NET PP/60: +6.09 NET PK/60: -8.39

A late-season slide, which includes three wins in the past 11 games, has the Hurricanes looking up at a playoff spot, and it appears to have cost GM Ron Francis his job. While the Hurricanes haven't made the postseason with Francis as general manager, it's hard to be overly critical of the results given the club's bargain-bin payroll. Maybe the new GM will be able to extract a little more investment from new owner Tom Dundon.

Key Injuries: None.

NEW YORK RANGERS (30-32-6)

THIS WEEK: 23 LAST WEEK: 27

GF: 2.78 GA: 3.13 SA CF%: 45.6

NET PP/60: +6.69 NET PK/60: -5.34

The Rangers are continually getting outshot, giving up 222 shots in the past five games (44.4 per game!), but they are also 3-2-1 in the past six games. King Henrik can slow down the tank, it seems.

Key Injuries: D Kevin Shattenkirk (knee), LW Chris Kreider (head).

CHICAGO BLACKHAWKS (29-31-8)

THIS WEEK: 24 LAST WEEK: 23

GF: 2.81 GA: 2.91 SA CF%: 53.4

NET PP/60: +4.91 NET PK/60: -6.29

It's hard to get used to the Blackhawks playing out the string, and they have one regulation win in the past six games.

Key Injuries: G Corey Crawford (upper body).

EDMONTON OILERS (29-34-4)

THIS WEEK: 25 LAST WEEK: 25

GF: 2.76 GA: 3.27 SA CF%: 50.6

NET PP/60: +4.17 NET PK/60: -8.00

The Oilers have won back-to-back games, but have one regulation win in the past nine games. It looks like there is going to be some big work ahead trying to rebuild the supporting cast around Connor McDavid for next season.

Key Injuries: None.

DETROIT RED WINGS (26-30-11)

THIS WEEK: 26 LAST WEEK: 25

GF: 2.55 GA: 3.01 SA CF%: 48.4

NET PP/60: +5.43 NET PK/60: -6.68

The Red Wings have one regulation win in the past 10 games, and are on the road against five teams in the playoff hunt for their next five games.

Key Injuries: C Frans Nielsen (upper body).

MONTREAL CANADIENS (25-31-11)

THIS WEEK: 27 LAST WEEK: 27

GF: 2.52 GA: 3.07 SA CF%: 50.4

NET PP/60: +6.12 NET PK/60: -7.37

3-6-5 in the past 14 games, the Habs are fading fast and the upcoming schedule – Tampa Bay, Columbus, Dallas, Pittsburgh, Toronto, Florida, Pittsburgh again – isn't going to be kind.

Key Injuries: RW Ales Hemsky (concussion), D Shea Weber (foot), G Carey Price (concussion), LW Max Pacioretty (knee).

ARIZONA COYOTES (21-34-11)

THIS WEEK: 28 LAST WEEK: 30

GF: 2.41 GA: 3.17 SA CF%: 47.7

NET PP/60: +4.51 NET PK/60: -7.24

9-2-2 in the past 13 games, the Coyotes are finally winning games, and it's hard to discourage that, but it may not be best for the long-term outlook.

Key Injuries: G Antti Raanta (lower body).

VANCOUVER CANUCKS (25-33-9)

THIS WEEK: 29 LAST WEEK: 28

GF: 2.70 GA: 3.22 SA CF%: 47.1

NET PP/60: +7.23 NET PK/60: -7.32

One regulation win in the past eight games, coupled with a growing list of injuries, including star rookie Brock Boeser, leaves the Canucks in a tough spot to finish the season.

Key Injuries: RW Derek Dorsett (neck), LW Markus Granlund (ankle), D Chris Tanev (leg), LW Loui Eriksson (rib), LW Sven Baertschi (shoulder), RW Brock Boeser (back).

OTTAWA SENATORS (23-32-11)

THIS WEEK: 30 LAST WEEK: 29

GF: 2.70 GA: 3.39 SA CF%: 46.9

NET PP/60: +4.83 NET PK/60: -7.79

The Senators do have points in three of the past four games, but also have one regulation win in the past nine games.

Key Injuries: LW Clarke MacArthur (concussion).

BUFFALO SABRES (22-35-11)

THIS WEEK: 31 LAST WEEK: 31

GF: 2.40 GA: 3.25 SA CF%: 46.1

NET PP/60: +4.18 NET PK/60: -5.56

The Sabres have won five of the past eight games, though they've been outscored by four goals in that time and the injury list continues to grow.

Key Injuries: D Zach Bogosian (hip), D Jake McCabe (thumb), C Jack Eichel (ankle), RW Kyle Okposo (upper body).

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TSN.CA / Calm, confident Marner thriving for Maple Leafs



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 13, 2018

Kristen Shilton

TORONTO – Inside the Maple Leafs' dressing room, Mitch Marner is known as an Energizer Bunny of sorts, full of boundless, enthusiastic energy for his craft.

So it's ironic that what lifted Marner out of an unexpected sophomore slump and turned him into one of the Leafs' most dangerous offensive weapons was injecting an element of calmness into his game.

"I think at the start of the year I was just jumping too much. As soon as I got the puck, I wanted to get it out of my hands," Marner said after practice on Monday. "The confidence wasn't really there. I [stepped back and] realized that I do have the confidence to play with the puck, and when I realized that I did have the puck more in my hands and started making plays with it. That's been the biggest difference."

As a rookie last season, Marner proved he was capable of generating consistent offence and being a driving force behind the Leafs' success. Despite missing five games with an upper-body injury and battling a late-season bout of mononucleosis, Marner finished third on the Leafs with 61 points (19 goals, 42 assists).

That, coupled with earning a silver medal with Team Canada at last spring's IIHF World Championships, set the bar high for what Marner would accomplish his second year.

And at first, he failed to meet it. Marner scored just two goals in his first 34 games this season, going through stretches of five and seven games at a time without a point. But those struggles feel like a long way off now.

Since Mike Babcock shifted Marner to the Leafs' checking line with Nazem Kadri and Patrick Marleau on Jan. 24, the 21-year-old has 13 goals and 11 assists over 19 games. In that span he's gone without a point in consecutive games only once, and even when he's shifted away from Kadri to play elsewhere, Marner has remained unstoppable.

"He got back to work," said Babcock of the change in Marner. "The biggest thing is that if you work all the time, you don't have to worry about much. As soon as you don't do it right, [they're] coming to get you; the league is too good."

Lately Marner has taken his talents to the Leafs' top scoring line with William Nylander and Zach Hyman as Auston Matthews remains sidelined with a shoulder issue. At this point, Marner has played on all four of the Leafs' lines with almost every player on the roster. He's fought to have an impact at every stop, by way of his own success or facilitating for others.

"My whole life I've just always wanted to make people around me better," Marner said. "That's a big thing I focus on. When I get out there with other people just knowing what they want to do and knowing the plays they want to run. There are guys who have a reputation for being grinders, but realistically they have a lot of skill in their body; you just have to get it out of them. When I get on lines, I try to bring that out of them, make them realize they have the confidence and talent to make plays."

That selfless attitude made Marner a prolific playmaker with the OHL's London Knights for three seasons, but branded him initially as one-dimensional in the NHL. Marner has made a well-documented effort to use his shot more, but it took more time than he expected to consistently tap into the required confidence to do so.

"I'm trying to get to the net more. It's a battle, but we all just have to keep getting the puck towards the net," said Marner. "When that happens you're getting more confidence in your shot and more confidence in your head and that's what I'm thinking right now."

"If everyone knows you're going to pass, they don't have to worry about you very much," Babcock said. "I believe he can shoot the puck and shoot it well, he just has to use his momentum. He's working on it all the time and he's getting better."

So far, Marner's progress is paying dividends for the Leafs, who need his contributions more than ever. Matthews had been Toronto's leading scorer before this third injury of the season cost him six games (and counting) on top of the 10 he previously missed.

Marner has used the absence as motivation to continue elevating his game. He now leads Toronto in scoring with 56 points (19 goals, 37 assists.) In the last six games Marner has tallied nine points – four more than the next closest forward (Kadri).

"That's the thing about this team, if we lose someone important everyone takes things up a notch," Marner said. "This team has so much character to it. It's a brotherhood in here and we try and protect each other. When one of us goes down, we all step up and try to fill that void."

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TSN.CA / Statistically Speaking: Jones, Werenski among the best on the blueline

Scott Cullen

Jones and Werenski lead Columbus to victory; Eakin, Cirelli, Spooner, Yandle, Luongo, Hellebuyck and more in Scott Cullen's Statistically Speaking.

Columbus' star blueliners led the way to a 5-4 overtime win against Colorado.

Seth Jones scored the winning goal in overtime and added two assists, with a dozen shot attempts (7 SOG), giving him eight points (3 G, 5 A) in the past seven games. Jones' partner, Zach Werenski added a goal and an assist against the Avalanche, and has six points (3 G, 3 A) in the past five games.

They have a decent argument to be considered one of the best defence pairs in the league this season. Here are some of the top pairs that have been together for at least 700 5-on-5 minutes this season:

Giordano-Hamilton	Calgary	1047:42	58.5	8.3	54.2
57.9					
Werenski-Jones	Columbus	1087:57	56.1	6.0	57.9
54.1					
Lindholm-Manson	Anaheim	716:36	52.5	4.9	60.3
54.5					
Chara-McAvoy	Boston	801:59	55.1	1.5	65.5
55.8					
Lindell-Klingberg	Dallas	866:29	53.6	2.7	59.7
57.7					
Ryan-Burns	San Jose	713:07	53.4	3.4	51.0
53.6					
Slavin-Pesce	Carolina	799:46	54.5	0.7	49.2
55.4					
Morrissey-Trouba	Winnipeg	714:03	51.5	0.9	52.5
54.6					
Dumoulin-Letang	Pittsburgh	877:45	54.6	4.0	42.5
54.9					
Gardiner-Zaitsev	Toronto	749:08	49.2	-0.6	54.6
51.4					



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Ekman-Larsson-Demers	Arizona	846:43	52.1	5.3
47.3	50.9			
Suter-Spurgeon	Minnesota	865:51	50.6	4.8
41.4	58.0			
Orlov-Niskanen	Washington	894:27	49.3	1.7
55.9	46.6			
Hamhuis-Pateryn	Dallas	859:06	50.5	-0.6
53.6				49.2
Emelin-Subban	Nashville	707:54	48.3	-4.3
47.2				57.1

HEROES

Cody Eakin - The Golden Knights centre tallied two goals and an assist in a 4-0 win at Detroit, matching his production from his previous 29 games.

Anthony Cirelli - Tampa Bay's rookie centre, playing in his fourth NHL game, scored a goal and added two helpers in a 5-3 win against the Rangers. He has five points (2 G, 3 A) in those four games, after scoring 37 points in 51 AHL games.

Ryan Spooner - Although his Rangers lost 5-3 at Tampa Bay, Spooner put up a goal and two assists, and now has 10 points (2 G, 8 A) in six games since he was traded to the Rangers.

Keith Yandle - The Panthers blueliner earned three assists in a 5-0 win against Montreal and has 20 points (2 G, 18 A) in the past 18 games.

Roberto Luongo - Florida's veteran goaltender posted a 40-save shutout in a 5-0 win against Montreal, and has a .938 save percentage in his past 19 games.

Connor Hellebuyck - The Jets netminder stopped 41 of 43 shots in a 3-2 win at New Jersey, giving him a .925 save percentage in his past eight starts.

ZEROES

Brandon Saad, Jonathan Toews and Patrick Kane

Saad and Toews had the worst Corsi games of their career tonight. Saad had a career-worst 14.29 Corsi percentage. Toews had a career-worst 15.63 percentage. Kane's 18.18 percentage was the fourth worst of his career.

— Scott Powers (@ByScottPowers) March 9, 2018

David Desharnais and Cody McLeod - The Rangers forwards were stuck in their own end (4 for, 20 against, 16.7 CF%) and on the ice for two goals against in a 5-3 loss at Tampa Bay.

Tyler Myers - Winnipeg's towering blueliner had a tough game (15 for, 30 against, 33.3 CF%, 5-16 scoring chances) and was on the ice for both goals against in a 3-2 win at New Jersey.

VITAL SIGNS

Chris Kreider - The Rangers winger left the game at Tampa Bay for precautionary reasons, but passed concussion tests.

Kyle Okposo - The Sabres winger suffered an upper-body injury after a collision with Senators winger Bobby Ryan.

Trevor Lewis - The Kings veteran returned to the Kings lineup, and scored a goal in a 3-1 win against Washington, playing for the first time in four weeks after suffering an upper-body injury.

SHORT SHIFTS

Sam Reinhart has upped his game in the second half of the season.

Senators LW Ryan Dzingel buried a couple of goals in a 4-3 shootout loss against Buffalo, matching his production from the previous nine

games... Sabres RW Sam Reinhart had a goal and an assist in a 4-3 shootout win at Ottawa, giving him 256 points (10 G, 15 A) in the past 24 games... Bruins RW David Pastrnak contributed a pair of assists in a 3-2 win over Philadelphia and has 11 points (1 G, 10 A) in the past seven games... Jets LW Nikolaj Ehlers had a goal and an assist in a 3-2 win at New Jersey, giving him 12 points (5 G, 7 A) in the past 10 games... Devils rookie C Nico Hischier recorded a goal and an assist in a 3-2 loss to Winnipeg, snapping a five-game scoreless streak.

Avalanche C Carl Soderberg tallied a pair of goals in a 5-4 overtime loss at Columbus; he has six points (3 G, 3 A) in the past five games... Avalanche RW Mikko Rantanen chipped in a couple of assists and has 13 points (4 G, 9 A) in the past nine games... Blue Jackets LW Thomas Vanek scored two goals in a 5-4 overtime win against Colorado, his first points in his fifth game since he was traded to Columbus... Blue Jackets LW Boone Jenner contributed a goal and an assist, after managing two assists in his previous seven games... Blue Jackets rookie C Pierre-Luc Dubois added a couple of helpers, and has 14 points (5 G, 9 A) in the past 15 games... Golden Knights RW Alex Tuch scored a pair of goals in a 4-0 win at Detroit. He had three points (1 G, 2 A) in the previous 13 games... Lightning LW Chris Kunitz had a goal and an assist in a 5-3 win over the Rangers, and has seven points (4 G, 3 A) in the past 10 games... Lightning rookie D Mikhail Sergachev added a couple of assists, snapping an eight-game scoring drought... Rangers C Kevin Hayes produced a goal and an assist in a 5-3 loss at Tampa Bay, giving him 14 points (8 G, 6 A) in the past 14 games.

Evgeni Dadonov is on a tear for streaking Panthers.

Panthers LW Evgeni Dadonov and C Vincent Trocheck both had a goal and an assist in a 5-0 win over Montreal. Dadonov has 20 points (10 G, 10 A) in the past 13 games and Trocheck has 12 points (8 G, 4 A) in the past 13 games... Panthers C Aleksander Barkov contributed a pair of assists, giving him 14 points (5 G, 9 A) during an eight-game point streak... Predators RW Viktor Arvidsson and C Ryan Johansen both had a goal and an assist. Johansen added a fight for a Gordie Howe Hat Trick. Arvidsson has 14 points (7 G, 7 A) in the past 10 games and Johansen has 10 points (4 G, 6 A) in the past 12 games... Ducks LW Rickard Rakell scored two goals in a 4-2 loss at Nashville and has 10 points (8 G, 2 A) during a five-game point streak... Ducks C Ryan Getzlaf added a pair of assists and has 11 points (1 G, 10 A) in the past four games... Hurricanes RW Justin Williams produced a goal and an assist in a 3-2 win at Chicago, giving him six points (4 G, 2 A) in the past five games... Hurricanes C Elias Lindholm added two assists, matching his production from the previous 11 games... Kings C Jeff Carter contributed a goal and an assist in a 3-1 win against Washington; he has five points (4 G, 1 A) in the past five games.

Oilers C Connor McDavid had one goal on 13 shot attempts (9 SOG) in a 2-1 shootout win over the Islanders... Devils RW Kyle Palmieri scored a goal on 13 shot attempts (7 SOG) in a 3-2 loss to Winnipeg... Blue Jackets C Alexander Wennberg had outrageous shot differentials (18 for, 1 against, 94.7 CF%, 10-1 scoring chances) in a 5-4 overtime win against Colorado... Lightning D Jake Dotchin had a strong game (24 for, 4 against, 85.7 CF%, 13-1 scoring chances) in a 5-3 win vs. the Rangers... Hurricanes LW Jeff Skinner had nothing to show for 13 shot attempts (9 SOG) in a 3-2 win at Chicago.

Golden Knights G Marc-Andre Fleury stopped all 28 shots that he faced in a 4-0 win at Detroit. He had a .906 save percentage in his previous eight starts... Islanders G Chris Gibson turned away 35 of 36 shots in a 2-1 shootout loss at Edmonton and has a .953 save percentage in two starts... Blues G Jake Allen stopped 34 of 35 shots in a 2-0 loss at San Jose, after posting a .852 save percentage in his previous seven games... Predators G Pekka Rinne saved 31 of 33 shots in a 4-2 win vs. Anaheim, giving him a .942 save percentage in his past eight starts... Oilers G Cam Talbot stopped 30 of 31 shots in a 2-1 shootout win against the Islanders, and has a .924 save percentage in his past 10 starts.

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TSN.CA / Predators appear to be peaking for postseason run

Travis Yost

Perhaps the most exciting part of the 2017-18 regular season has been the establishment of multiple teams as legitimate Stanley Cup contenders.

In years past, there have been spots where we have put the prohibitive Stanley Cup odds on two or three teams. The field feels a bit more open this year. I think it's fair to say that five teams – Tampa Bay, Boston, Nashville, Winnipeg and Vegas – have positioned themselves as championship hopefuls, with another batch of teams not far behind.

Of this group of five, there are two teams that have really stepped on the accelerator down the stretch. Boston has blitzed the entire Eastern Conference, playing to a 128-point pace over their last 25 games. You might think that's insanely high and that the Bruins are easily the league leader in point accumulation over the measured interval. You would be wrong.

Nashville has played to a 131-point pace over same that period, running roughshod over the competition. The scary part is that the wins they've picked up over this stretch are completely legitimized by how much they've improved from earlier parts of the season to become a dominant team today.

If you take a look at some key team performance metrics over a 25-game average, you can see how the Predators have upped their game. Below are three measures on this front – the percentage of shots they are getting versus their opponents, the percentage of expected goals they are getting versus their opponents and the percentage of actual goals they are getting versus their opponents. (Data via Corsica)

That is just insane linear growth from the first couple of months of the season through today. The thing to keep in mind here isn't just that they've consistently improved with each passing game; it's that the numbers they are now posting on a routine basis are the type of numbers you always see from Stanley Cup contenders.

Over the last 25 games, that means 55 per cent of the shots and expected goals, and 61 per cent of actual goals. With that type of performance, it's virtually impossible to lose.

One of the things I was curious about though is what, if anything has changed in Nashville during the season. The roster is generally the same as last year, though the Kyle Turris acquisition in November was a notably impactful move. And it's not as if the team was dreadful in the first couple months of the year – they just weren't performing with nearly the same level of competency that they are now.

I went and looked at ice-time variances from the first 25 games of the season to the last 25 games of the season to get a quick snapshot of personnel changes in Nashville. I think the more compelling story is on the defensive side, so we can start there:

The two big numbers are unexpected but noteworthy – the return of Ryan Ellis from off-season knee surgery has been huge for the Predators. He's now one of four guys on the Nashville blue line playing more than 18 minutes of 5-on-5 time a night. Ellis has 57 per cent Corsi% and 66 per cent Goal% splits in his last 25 games. Not only is he playing big minutes, he's dominating in them. (Girard's ice time swing is the result of him being traded to Colorado as part of the Kyle Turris package.)

As a very brief aside, the other thing that surprised me a bit is how the majority of key Nashville blueliners have seen ice time increases over the

interval. Nashville is actually spending more time lately at 5-on-5 and away from killing penalties, which is generally great news for them and bad news for their competition.

Since the start of the year, they have seen a 35 per cent reduction in penalty-kill time per game. The more time the Predators spend at even strength, the more chances they have at grinding you down into submission. They are just that good at evens.

You'll note this is also true for the forward group, more or less. Here's how their ice-time breaks out:

Ryan Hartman and Mike Fisher are very recent additions for the Predators – Hartman acquired at the trade deadline, and Fisher returning from retirement to play down the stretch. Both guys give a team that's already flush with depth another layer, though they are playing reasonably far down the lineup.

But look at the incremental minutes Nashville has been able to allocate to some of their best attackers. Kevin Fiala, Viktor Arvidsson, Ryan Johansen, Craig Smith, Calle Jarnkrok, and Filip Forsberg have added anywhere from two to four additional shifts per game individually. Add that up and you have a handful of more minutes per game where Nashville's speed and depth continue to create matchup problems.

One note – the two guys that Nashville has managed out over this time period are Frederick Gaudreau and Cody McLeod. Gaudreau (49 per cent Corsi% and 36 per cent Goal%) looked a bit out of place in a defensive-minded role to start the year and the results were, in all fairness, killing Nashville's performance. McLeod's numbers are hardly worth referencing, as they were as dismal as you could find around the league. McLeod was waived in January and claimed by the Rangers.

To me, all signs point to a talented Nashville roster elevating its game at the right time. The lineup has constructed in a way that's optimizing performance across both skater groups, and in the few instances where they have had underperforming players, they've either managed them back into their developmental team or out of the system entirely.

Add that to the fact that Nashville appears to be playing a much more disciplined game on the penalty front, and you have the emergence of a real Stanley Cup favourite.

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USA TODAY / Five NHL players who can look forward to playoffs as second chance to return to form

Kevin Allen, USA TODAY Sports Published 6:32 p.m. ET March 12, 2018

NHL players acquire fame or notoriety during the regular season. They earn their reputations through playoff performances.

Here are five players who should have a greater impact in the playoffs than they had in the regular season:

T.J. Oshie, Washington Capitals: Undermined by a concussion, Oshie has gone from 33 goals last season to 12 goals now. He has netted one goal in his last 32 games. Oshie's hard-to-the-net style has always served him well in the postseason when there is less room to navigate. He has 10 goals and 22 points in 25 playoff games for Washington.

Jason Spezza, Dallas Stars: Spezza posted 13 points in 13 playoff games the last time the Stars made the playoffs in 2015-16. Coach Ken Hitchcock will be looking for that Spezza, not the Spezza who has seven goals in 68 games this season. Spezza has only scored two goals since Dec. 11. To thrive in the playoffs, the Stars will need their second and



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third lines to find the net, and Spezza will be looked at to drive that part of the offense. He is shooting a career-worst 5.8 percent, so luck could come his way in the playoffs.

Kyle Turriss, Nashville Predators: General manager David Poile acquired Turriss in November to fill a hole at No. 2 center as lack of center depth hurt the Predators in the Stanley Cup Final last season. Turriss looked like a perfect solution at first, but he only has four goals and 10 points in his past 25 games. The Predators are the team to beat in the Western Conference. They will need him to be more productive in the playoffs. Turriss has 13 goals in 46 playoff games.

Zach Parise, Minnesota Wild: Parise didn't start his season until Jan. 2 because of back surgery. While he has seven goals in 30 games, three have come in his past four games. If this is a sign that his timing is returning, this could be a major boost for the Wild entering the playoffs. Parise has scored 29 or more goals seven times in his career, and he has 32 goals in 94 playoff games. He could be a difference-maker in the postseason.

Ryan Kesler, Anaheim Ducks: Kesler's season began Dec. 27 because of offseason hip surgery, and it has taken him time to find his rhythm, with six goals and nine points in 31 games. But he should be ready to be his usual beastly presence in the postseason. Few players, if any, are more difficult to play against. Kesler has 24 goals and 63 points in 97 playoff games.

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