



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 13, 2019

THE NEWS & OBSERVER

Canes' Calvin de Haan expected to recover from eye injury

By Chip Alexander

Carolina Hurricanes defenseman Calvin de Haan, who sustained an injury to his right eye in Monday's road game at Colorado, is expected to recover, general manager Don Waddell said Tuesday.

Waddell, in a statement, said de Haan was treated and released from a Denver hospital and made the flight back to Raleigh with the team.

"At this point, his eye is responding as we would hope," Waddell said. "We are optimistic that he will make a normal recovery without restrictions to his ability to play hockey in the near future."

The Canes on Tuesday recalled defenseman Haydn Fleury on an emergency basis from the Charlotte Checkers of the AHL.

De Haan was injured in the third period of the Canes' 3-0 victory over the Avalanche when the Avs' Alexander Kerfott's stick blade caught de Haan under the helmet visor. De Haan left the game and did not return.

De Haan has played in 67 games in his first season with the Canes. Fleury has played 14 games for the Canes and 22 for the Checkers.

Earlier this season, de Haan took a stick under his helmet shield from William Nylander of the Toronto Maple Leafs, just missing his left eye and causing a gash under the eyebrow that took six stitches to close.



Canes Provide Injury Update on Calvin de Haan

De Haan sustained an injury to his right eye in Colorado

by Michael Smith

Don Waddell, President and General Manager of the Carolina Hurricanes, today provided the following injury update on defenseman Calvin de Haan.

"Calvin sustained an injury to his right eye last night, but was released from the hospital in time to make the flight home with the team," Waddell said. "At this point, his eye is responding as we would hope. We are optimistic that he will make a

normal recovery without restrictions to his ability to play hockey in the near future."

In the third period of Monday's game in Colorado, the errant blade of Avalanche forward Alexander Kerfoot's stick caught de Haan under his visor. De Haan left the game and did not return and underwent further evaluation at the hospital before flying back to Raleigh with the team later that night. The 27-year-old defenseman has played in 67 games with the Canes this season and totaled 14 points (1g, 13a).



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Mailbag: Hurricanes' playoff chances, Binnington's case for Calder Trophy

NHL.com's Dan Rosen answers weekly questions

by Dan Rosen

Here is the March 13 edition of Dan Rosen's weekly mailbag, which runs every Wednesday. If you have a question, tweet it to @drosennhl and use #OvertheBoards.

Do the Carolina Hurricanes get into the Stanley Cup Playoffs? Sub question: How much love can Sebastian Aho get for the Hart Trophy or Selke Trophy? -- @everytimeidavid

My answers are yes and some.

The Hurricanes are legit. They're tied with the Tampa Bay Lightning for the most wins (23) and points (48) in the NHL since Dec. 31, and have the second-most goals in the League (117) since then. Carolina lost 8-1 to the Winnipeg Jets on Friday, but bounced back with impressive road wins, 5-3 against the Nashville Predators on Saturday and 3-0 against the Colorado Avalanche on Monday. They haven't lost two in a row in regulation since Jan. 15 and 18. I don't see any let up, any signs that would indicate the Hurricanes are going to go into a late-season swoon. Their goaltending with Petr Mrazek and Curtis McElhinney is holding up well and their offense continues to produce at a winning rate. They've scored at least three goals in 18 of their past 22 games, going 16-1-1 in those games. I'd be surprised if they let up.

Aho might get some fourth- or fifth-place votes for the Hart Trophy. He won't top Tampa Bay Lightning forward Nikita Kucherov or Chicago Blackhawks forward Patrick Kane. He probably shouldn't finish ahead of Pittsburgh Penguins captain Sidney Crosby or Calgary Flames forward Johnny Gaudreau either. However, Aho's role in Carolina's season with 77 points (30 goals, 47 assists) in 69 games demands attention from the voters. He deserves votes for the Selke Trophy too. He faces some of the best lines in the League, kills penalties and entering play Tuesday, his 56.49 shot-attempts percentage is ninth among forwards who have played in at least 60 games. Aho also is plus-25.

What are your words of comfort to Buffalo Sabres fans for how our season has fallen apart? -- @EternalRhino15

It's one word. I don't think you want to hear it. You've probably heard it too often in the past six or seven years.

Patience.

Don't shoot the messenger, but it's all I've got. The Sabres are doing a rebuild of a rebuild, but they're closer to being contenders today than they were a year ago. They have core pieces in forwards Jack Eichel and Sam Reinhart, and defensemen Rasmus Dahlin, Rasmus

Ristolainen and Brandon Montour. It'll be even better if and when they re-sign forward Jeff Skinner. They have a foundation on the NHL roster, not just prospects who may or may not pan out. They've had some success too, like their 10-game winning streak in November that left them at 17-6-2 on the season. They were alone atop the League standings with 36 points on Nov. 27. That they've fallen out of the race is disappointing to them even if to many it was the expectation. That's actually a good thing. For too long it seemed like the Sabres were playing to their critically low expectations. This season, I think they've played to their reasonable expectations. They entered play Tuesday, their 69th game of the season, with five more wins and seven more points than they had all of last season. That's progress even if it's hard to see through the fog of what will be their eighth straight season missing the playoffs. It will be the longest drought in the NHL if the Hurricanes make it. That's hard to swallow, I know, but you've got to see the progress as a reason to believe next season will be better.

I was fooled by the Sabres' 10-game winning streak. I thought then that they were for real, a playoff team. I was wrong. It was too early. This season was too early for them. Next season should be better. It has to be or their problems go way deeper than I think.

Is Jordan Binnington a serious contender for the Calder Trophy? -- @STLBluesChirp

Vancouver Canucks center Elias Pettersson is still the favorite and the likely winner. He has 58 points (26 goals, 28 assists) in 58 games. He needs two points to tie the Canucks record for most points by a rookie, shared by Pavel Bure and Ivan Hlinka. Pettersson has slowed down lately and the Canucks have fallen out of the race, but he single-handedly changed the feeling about their future by the impact he had made this season. I also think Dahlin and Dallas Stars defenseman Miro Heiskanen deserve attention in the Calder Trophy race, but St. Louis Blues goalie Jordan Binnington would get my second-place vote if I had a vote.

Binnington's impact on the Blues this season should outweigh the fact that he was in the American Hockey League for most of the first three months of the season. St. Louis was 29th in the League standings (16-19-4) before Binnington made his first start. Since then, the Blues have the second-best record in the League (20-7-3). Binnington has won 16 of those games with a .928 save percentage, 1.81 goals-against average and five shutouts. Pettersson has been the best rookie all season, which matters in the voting, but Binnington's impact in the second half is enough for me to think of him as No. 2.



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Best assessment on how long it will take the Ottawa Senators to be a contender with players like Brady Tkachuk, Colin White, Thomas Chabot, Drake Batherson, Logan Brown, Rudolf Balcers, etc.? -- @NDeOreos

The hope in Ottawa is that the Senators will be ready to contend for a playoff spot again by the 2021-22 season. That's what owner Eugene Melnyk essentially promised last month, when he pledged in front of a group of mostly corporate sponsors and partners in Toronto that the Senators would spend close to the salary cap every season from 2021-25. That sounds terrific, but so much has to go right for the Senators to even get to the 2021-22 season with a belief that it's time to start contending again. It's an optimistic assessment right now. Don't be shocked if it takes longer.

Many of the draft picks the Senators received in trades for defenseman Erik Karlsson and forwards Mark Stone, Ryan Dzingel and Matt Duchene are not until the 2020 NHL Draft. That includes the likelihood of two picks in the first round and two more in the second round. Selections made in the 2020 draft can't reasonably be considered to be impact players for at least two or three seasons. That means the Senators must build a culture of accountability and winning before any of those future draft picks can turn into impact players. They'll have to do it knowing they're not going to be a top destination for unrestricted free agents until they can sell a promising direction to the players in the UFA market. They might not have enough evidence of that by the summer of 2021, which could push the rebuild into the 2021-22 season.

The good news is the players you mentioned in your question look like they should make up a chunk of the Senators' next core. Chabot (team-high 49 points) and Tkachuk (36 points) look like the real deal. That gives the Senators a defenseman (Chabot) and a winger (Tkachuk) to build around. White (35 points), a center, looks like he should be a significant part of it too. Batherson, a right wing, leads the Belleville Senators of the American Hockey League with 55 points (21 goals, 34 assists). He also has nine points (three goals, six assists) in 20 games with Ottawa this season. Those are good indications that Batherson could be an impact player too. Erik Brannstrom, the top defensive prospect the Senators acquired from the Vegas Golden Knights, should have a bright future too. The 19-year-old was the No. 15 pick in the 2017 NHL Draft. It's great that the Senators were able to get him in the trade that sent Stone to Vegas, but he could still be a year or two away from being an impact player. He had 28 points (seven goals, 21 assists) in 41 games with the Chicago Wolves of the AHL before the trade. He has one assist in five games with Belleville.

With Chicago and Arizona playing Monday for the first time since the Dylan Strome-Nick Schmaltz trade, what are your thoughts on who won the trade right now/in the long term? -- @hawkeystix88

It's unfair to judge the trade now. Schmaltz, who went from the Blackhawks to the Arizona Coyotes for Strome and forward Brendan Perlini, is out for the season with a lower-body injury. He was impactful in his 17 games with the Coyotes after the trade on Nov. 25, scoring 14 points (five goals, nine assists), but he hasn't played since Dec. 30. Strome has played in all 45 games with the Blackhawks since the trade and has been terrific with 41 points (14 goals, 27 assists). Perlini (don't forget him) has played in 34 games with the Blackhawks and has 10 points (nine goals, one assist), including a hat trick in the 7-1 win against Arizona on Monday, which gave him six goals in five games this month.

My long-term assessment of this trade has not changed since it was made. I thought it was good for each team in late November and I still think the same. Schmaltz is the type of center the Coyotes didn't have; an up-tempo, high-octane, speedy distributor and scorer who could thrive playing on the half-wall on the power play. I can see him playing with Alex Galchenyuk and Clayton Keller on his wings, creating a dynamic top line and top power-play unit. Strome is different. He's not as fast, not as good of a skater as Schmaltz, but he's an intelligent playmaker who thrives in a puck possession game and is excellent at going to the net. That's why he works with the Blackhawks, with either Patrick Kane or Alex DeBrincat. You don't need to be the fastest 200-foot player when playing with those guys because most of the time you're playing in the offensive zone. Strome has the skillset to play with them and help them. Schmaltz does too, but the Coyotes wanted a certain type of center, which is why they made the trade.

Do you think the New York Islanders will be involved in the Artemi Panarin sweepstakes in the summer? -- @ScottyPecs

I expect general manager Lou Lamoriello to put on the full-court press to get Panarin. He can entice him with cap space, the right coach in Barry Trotz, a dynamic center in Mathew Barzal, a winning culture and the New York market. The Islanders can also sell Panarin on being a package deal with goalie Sergei Bobrovsky. Even though goalies Robin Lehner and Thomas Greiss have been fantastic this season, Bobrovsky would give the Islanders more certainty in net for years to come. It will come at a significant cost, but the Islanders are one of the few teams that could realistically sign each. The Florida Panthers have the goods to do it too.



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SPORTSNET™

NHL Power Rankings: Every Team's MVP Edition

By Luke Fox

With only a dozen or so games remaining in the NHL regular season, we have a pretty decent grasp on which members of your favourite team have been doing the heavy lifting.

In our NHL Power Rankings: Every Team's MVP Edition, we single out the most valuable player on each of the 31 clubs.

Some were easy. Others were head-scratchers that we expect to hear about in the comments.

As always, the clubs are ranked below according to which ones scare us the most. The write-ups give some quick insight into why we chose the team MVP we did.

1. Tampa Bay Lightning

Nikita Kucherov is running away with the Art Ross and likely the Hart, but Tampa's scoring depth is so ridiculous, the Lightning may have been able to win their division without him. Take Andrei Vasilevskiy (.932 save percentage, 32-8-4 record, six shutouts) off the roster, and we're not so certain.

2. Boston Bruins

Brad Marchand just registered another 30-goal season, he leads all Bruins with 85 points and seven game-winners, plus he kills penalties and is fast becoming hockey's must-follow tweeter.

3. San Jose Sharks

Even the Erik Karlsson arrival hasn't changed the fact that San Jose is still revved by the engine that is Brent Burns, who tops all Sharks and all NHL defencemen with 73 points. Yes, he's a power-play wookie, but he also has five shorthanded points and five game-winning goals.

4. Calgary Flames

We'll give this one to Johnny Gaudreau — by a nose, over Mark Giordano — because he drives the Flames' top line from the wing and just registered career highs in goals (30) and points (84). How clutch is Johnny Hockey? He's scored three OT winners and six game-winners.

5. Washington Capitals

At age 33, Alex Ovechkin (46 goals) is set to win yet another Rocket Richard Trophy, reminding all these young shooters who's boss.

6. Toronto Maple Leafs

Toronto's high-scoring cadre of forwards would be having much less fun if Frederik Andersen wasn't leading the world in saves (1,551), again.

7. Pittsburgh Penguins

Without Sidney Crosby's 33 goals, 90 points, plus-23 rating and all-world defence and leadership, Pittsburgh would be at risk of missing the playoffs.

8. Winnipeg Jets

We'll force Mark Scheifele and Blake Wheeler to snap this trophy in half and share it. The Jets may be less dominant than they were at this time last year, but it's not on these healthy, productive stalwarts up front.

9. Carolina Hurricanes

Sebastian Aho — exploding for 30 goals, 77 points, seven game-winners, and a plus-25 rating — will be the reason Carolina snaps its nine-year playoff drought. Helluva platform year.

10. Vegas Golden Knights

With its score-by-committee offence, Vegas goes as franchise goaltender Marc-Andre Fleury goes. And with a 34-19-5 record, plus eight shutouts, Fleury still goes pretty good.

11. Nashville Predators

The year is 2019 and, believe it or not, we're still under-appreciating Roman Josi, a force on both special teams and driving a ridiculous amount of the Preds' offence from the back end.

12. New York Islanders

Can I pick Barry Trotz? The Islanders are such a everyone-pull-on-this-rope kind of team, it's tough to pick an MVP. New captain Anders Lee gets the nod, but that's mostly because we can't choose between two resurgent goalies, Robin Lehner and Thomas Greiss, with near-identical stat lines.

13. Columbus Blue Jackets

Seth Jones has developed into one of the NHL's best blue-liners, flashing offence (41 points) while logging big minutes and tough assignments.

14. Dallas Stars

The Stars' Big 3 forwards have all rallied through criticism for nice years, but not enough people are talking about Ben Bishop leading all starting goaltenders with a .932 save percentage. The big netminder's health is essential.

15. St. Louis Blues

Ryan O'Reilly is the Blues' leading scorer, top centremen, and plus-22 key to both special teams. This one is a no-brainer.

16. Montreal Canadiens

In a recent poll by The Athletic, NHLers were asked if they had to start one goalie to win Game 7 of the Cup Final, who would they choose? Carey Price.

17. Philadelphia Flyers

At risk of hurting Gritty's feelings, we'll side with the mascot's bestie, Claude Giroux. Enjoying another point-per-game campaign, hockey almost takes this guy's excellence for granted at this point.



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18. Arizona Coyotes

The unsung Darcy Keumper has only started 63 per cent of the Coyotes' games in net, but he owns 82 per cent of their wins.

19. Minnesota Wild

A healthy Ryan Suter has been a rock for the Wild. Not only is he still one of hockey's best defenders, but Suter also ranks third in team scoring (44 points). Leads all NHLers in ice time.

20. Colorado Avalanche

Nathan MacKinnon, a wonder on blades, has been the pivot point of one of the sport's most thrilling trios, elevating both Mikko Rantanen and Gabriel Landeskog to career years while still leading the club in scoring and plus/minus.

21. Chicago Blackhawks

With 98 points, seven game-winners and point streak we thought might never end, Patrick Kane is still the scariest American inside your blue line. Incredible that only nine of his 41 goals have come on the power play.

22. Florida Panthers

Aleksander Barkov hit 30 goals for the first time in his career and should set a new career high in points. Yet we find the fact he's only committed two minor penalties incredible considering he barely leaves the ice.

23. Edmonton Oilers

Connor McDavid is the man, of course, but Leon Draisaitl narrowed the gap this year.

24. Buffalo Sabres

Captain Jack Eichel does everything for this team. His fourth straight year setting a new career high in points, and another chance at the playoffs lost.

25. Vancouver Canucks

Although he's cooled of late, rookie Elias Pettersson is the best thing Vancouver has going for it — if you don't count the oceans, the mountains or the sushi.

26. Anaheim Ducks

Goalie John Gibson enjoyed a fabulous first half, but captain Ryan Getzlaf remains this franchise's heartbeat — its top scorer and most significant presence.

27. New York Rangers

Top centre Mika Zibanejad has grown into that role, leading his team in all major categories (goals, assists, points, power-play points, game-winning goals).

28. New Jersey Devils

With reigning league MVP Taylor Hall having his season chopped short due to injury, Kyle Palmieri has been the most reliable player on a star-starved team.

29. Los Angeles Kings

Captain Anze Kopitar may be passing his prime, but he can still be a force at both ends of the ice. Unfortunately, he no longer has the complementary pieces around him.

30. Detroit Red Wings

Centre Dylan Larkin has been a horse, leading all Wings in goals, assists, points, game-winners as well as both power-play and shorthanded production. For his sake, we hope the rebuild is a quick one.

31. Ottawa Senators

Who's left? Thomas Chabot. Thomas Chabot is left.



SB NATION
CANES COUNTRY

Hurricanes GM Don Waddell releases statement after Calvin de Haan high-sticking incident; Canes Recall Fleury

The 27-year-old defenseman is hoping to make a full recovery after Monday night's scary incident in Denver.

By Brett Finger

On Monday night, Carolina Hurricanes defenseman Calvin de Haan got hit in the eye with a stick blade on the follow-through of a shot from Colorado Avalanche forward Alexander Kerfoot.

De Haan left the game immediately and did not return. He went to a Denver-area hospital to receive further evaluation and treatment before flying back to Raleigh with the team.

Today, Hurricanes general manager Don Waddell released the following statement:

"Calvin sustained an injury to his right eye last night, but was released from the hospital in time to make the flight home with the team. At this point, his eye is responding as we would hope. We are optimistic that he will make a normal recovery without restrictions to his ability to play hockey in the near future."

De Haan is out indefinitely.

Signed as an unrestricted free agent on July 3, Calvin de Haan has skated in 67 of Carolina's 68 games this season. He has one goal and 14 points with a plus-3 rating with the Hurricanes. He is under contract through the 2021-22 season at an average annual cap hit of \$4.55 million.



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In a corresponding move, the club has recalled defenseman Haydn Fleury from the Charlotte Checkers on an emergency basis. The Hurricanes will close out their three-game road trip on Friday night against the Columbus Blue Jackets before hosting the Buffalo Sabres on Saturday night.

CANES RECALL FLEURY FROM CHARLOTTE

Defenseman has tallied five points in 23 AHL games this season

Don Waddell, President and General Manager of the National Hockey League's Carolina Hurricanes, today announced that

the team has recalled defenseman Haydn Fleury from the Charlotte Checkers of the American Hockey League (AHL) on an emergency basis.

Fleury, 22, has posted five points (2g, 3a) in 22 AHL games with Charlotte and one assist in 14 NHL games with Carolina this season. The 6'3", 208-pound defenseman has registered 34 points (11g, 23a) in 96 career AHL games and nine assists in 81 career NHL games. The Carlyle, Sask., native was drafted by the Hurricanes in the first round, seventh overall, of the 2014 NHL Draft.

Charlotte Checkers Corner: Counting Down the Games

The Checkers win streak is snapped but they immediately bounced back in a series split with Lehigh Valley.

By Justin Lape

The Charlotte Checkers' four-game win streak was snapped Friday as the Atlantic Division leading Checkers split their weekend series against the Lehigh Valley Phantoms. Charlotte holds a four-point lead over the rest of the American Hockey League. They now rank 5th best in goals allowed and 7th in goals for.

Weekend Recap

The Checkers win streak was snapped with a 3-2 loss to the Phantoms on Friday. Both teams were scoreless through the first period and then the Phantoms struck three times to take a commanding 3-0 lead. Aleksi Saarela was able to find the back of the net twice for his 19th and 20th goals but it wasn't enough to mount a complete Checkers comeback. Alex Nedeljkovic stopped 22 of 25 shots for the Checkers.

Alex Nedeljkovic led the way for the Checkers in Saturday's game with a 4-0 shutout win, stopping all 22 shots he faced. His third shutout ranks him 9th among goalies in shutouts. Tomas Jurco and Nicolas Roy each scored and Morgan Geekie added a pair of assists. Nick Schilkey had a multi-goal game. Nedeljkovic faced just three shots from the Phantoms in the third period.

Player of the Week

About Last Night: Mrazek's Magic Shines Again

Thanks to another outstanding performance in goal, the Canes left Denver victorious.

By Cody Hagan

The man, the myth, the legend, Mr. Petr Mrazek did it again.

This time he took center stage at Denver's Pepsi Center to a crowd of nearly 17,000 people. With the spotlight focused on his every move, Mrazek delivered another magical evening leaving fans of the Colorado Avalanche in utter disbelief. It was truly MRaculous.

While it may be hard to believe what Mrazek is doing night in and night out, there's no denying the amazing performance being displayed. For the Carolina Hurricanes, they have enjoyed that majestic performance the last six times Mrazek took the ice, and last night was no different.

Aleksi Saarela is this week's player of the week. He posted three points (two goals, one assist) in two games this weekend and has now reached the 20-goal plateau. Saarela ranks second on the team with 41 points. He has four goals in his last five games. It's the second time in his three-season AHL career that he's met the 20-goal plateau.

Thought of the Week

A personal life update in this week's column: I will no longer be able to provide recaps and live coverage of Checkers games. I am moving out of Charlotte for a job opportunity in New York with CNBC. What does that mean for me with Canes Country? Well, not too much change. Fortunately, our great site editor Brian LeBlanc is keeping me on. I'll still have the weekly podcast with Brett Finger but you may see more long form pieces from me along with Checkers Corner. I will be keeping tabs on the Checkers from afar now but will work my hardest to keep as keen an eye on them as possible. Thanks for reading along.

Looking Ahead

Charlotte hosts the first two games in their six-game homestand on Friday and Saturday. They'll take on the Rochester Americans in both games who currently rank at the top of the North Division and just sit a few points away from Charlotte. Rochester will come in having played already this week, with a match-up against Utica on Wednesday.

Leading his team to a 3-0 victory, Mrazek helped the Canes jump back in to third place in the Metro. But despite his outstanding outing, we would be remiss if we didn't mention the great work by his young assistant, Andrei Svechnikov.

The Good - Svech

Ah yes, the young assistant to the magician. The role of the assistant is the key to such a flawless performance. Without this important piece, the magician would have to worry about being absolutely perfect at all times fearing even the tiniest mistake that could ruin the entire show. But the assistant relieves some of that stress by giving the magician some room to work with and creating opportunities for the main star to take a breathe.

While it may be difficult to call Andrei Svechnikov an "assistant" on a night where he tallied three points, that was



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exactly the role he played last night. He gave Mrazek room to work with and the ease of knowing if he made a mistake it would not cost the team the game.

None of this is to take away from Svechnikov's game because it too was spectacular. He was a presence everywhere on the ice for the entire game and it was evident from the very beginning that he was bound for a huge night.

(Warning, the following video may not be suitable for children or those with a weak stomach. This video is absolutely sick, filthy, gnarly, and 100% NSFW. Viewer discretion is advised... especially in Colorado.)

Twitter Ads info and privacy

Another angle for good measure:

Twitter Ads info and privacy

As if Teuvo Teravainen's pass wasn't sick enough, that finish by Svechnikov is beyond words.

Don't forget this kid is only 18 years old!

While we have come to expect this type of play from the elderly players like Sebastian Aho, seeing this type of behavior from a teenager is hard to handle.

The best part? He gave everyone an encore on his empty netter.

Twitter Ads info and privacy

This my friends is the work of a top tier magician in the making. For the days of Svechnikov the assistant are nearly gone. Svechnikov the headliner is about to be a real thing. Tickets are going fast in Raleigh so get yours today! Don't miss out on your chance to see this act in person before it's too late.

The Bad - de Haan's injury

There's nothing bad to say about the product on the ice last night. So we will skip past that and get straight to the worst thing from the game.

Calvin de Haan took a high stick to the head during the game and had to leave the game immediately. After the game it was reported that de Haan was taken to a local hospital for further evaluation. With the team flying back over night that likely means he had to stay behind in Denver to be checked out.

There is no doubt how critical de Haan has been to the defensive group. His signing is the most underrated move from the off season without question. One can only hope that he is okay and can find his way back to the lineup soon.

The Great - Peeetttrrrrr Mrrrrrrrrrrraazzzeekkkkk

Last night Petr Mrazek didn't just show up to play. He shined bright like a diamond. Razzled and dazzled. Brought down the house and slammed the door shut.

We've all seen some great performances by Mrazek over the season but last night may have been his best yet. Earning his fourth shutout of the year, Mrazek said no quite a few times on numerous Colorado opportunities.

None better than this save that he barely got with his stick:

Twitter Ads info and privacy

Mrazek has now won six straight starts for the Hurricanes and is starting to take over the 1A spot in goal versus just a 50/50 split with Curtis McElhinney.

The energy Mrazek brings every night is that of a star. He wows with every performance and leaves you sitting on the edge of your seat with his flashy style. With his high quality of play there is no opponent that will want to face Mrazek as we go down the stretch. He is giving his team more than just a chance to win every night and that is exactly why the Hurricanes are in the thick of the playoff race.

Moral of the Story

It just doesn't get much better than last night. Mrazek showcased his magic once again and with a little help from young Andrei Svechnikov the Hurricanes have proven that Friday's game was a complete fluke.

The de Haan injury is one to be concerned about but, in the worst case scenario, we will see Haydn Fleury draw back in to the lineup. After breaking curses at Madison Square Garden, in Vancouver, and now winning for the first time ever in regulation at Colorado, this team is proving to be something special. So in the case that Fleury has to play in place of de Haan, it would only seem fitting for him to score his first NHL goal this year.

As we look forward it seems this team can play with anyone on any given night. The goaltending is giving them a chance every game and it's showing in the standings. Should Columbus lose tonight then the Canes will have a chance to go up six points on the Blue Jackets on Friday night with a game in hand. While that certainly wouldn't knock the Jackets out of the picture it would really elevate the Hurricanes already strong chance of breaking the ultimate curse.

Now that would be the best magic trick of them all.



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Haydn Fleury returns to Raleigh

by Nicholas Niedzielski

Haydn Fleury is headed back to the NHL as the Hurricanes have recalled the blue liner from Charlotte on an emergency basis.

The third-year pro appeared in two games earlier this month for Carolina – his first NHL action since January – bringing his season total to 14 games, picking up an assist along the way. He joins a Canes team in the midst of a playoff push

that will take them to Columbus on Friday before a home contest against Buffalo on Saturday.

Fleury, who served a one-game suspension on Sunday for a hit to the head of a Lehigh Valley player, has five points (2g, 3a) in 23 games this season for the Checkers. Charlotte hosts Rochester for a pair of games this weekend that kicks off a busy final few weeks of the season for the AHL's top team.

Weekly Report: March 12, 2019

by Nicholas Niedzielski

The Checkers came away from a hard-fought weekend trip to Lehigh Valley with a split.

WEEK IN REVIEW

TEAM STATISTICS

- Overall record

39-15-7

- Home record

18-6-4

- Road record

21-9-3

- Last week's record

1-1-0

- Last 10 games

7-3-0

- Division Standings

1st

- Conference Standings

1st

- League Standings

1stCheckers 2, Lehigh Valley 3

After a scoreless first period that saw the Checkers outshoot their opponent 13-3, the Phantoms broke through in the middle frame with three straight strikes – one at even strength, one on the power play and one shorthanded. The Checkers pushed back in the third with a pair of tallies from Aleksii Saarela, but the clock ran out before they could

complete their comeback and Lehigh Valley escaped with the victory. Full recap

Checkers 4, Lehigh Valley 0

The Checkers rebounded nicely in Sunday's rematch, with Alex Nedeljkovic turning aside all 22 shots he faced to stifle the Lehigh Valley attack. Nick Schilkey lit the lamp twice to lead the way offensively, while newcomer Tomas Jurco found the back of the net again and Nicolas Roy ripped a quick one-timer to round out the scoring for Charlotte en route to a lopsided victory. Full recap

THREE STARS OF THE WEEK

3RD STAR

Alex Nedeljkovic

1-1-0, 1.51 GAA, .936 SV%, 1 SO

2ND STAR

Aleksii Saarela

2g, 1a

1ST STAR

Nick Schilkey

2g, 1a

NOTABLES

NED STANDS TALL

Alex Nedeljkovic, who has started 12 of Charlotte's last 16 contests, took his spot in the net for both games against the Phantoms this weekend. Friday's tightly contested loss was the first time that the netminder allowed more than two goals in 11 games, surrendering three but keeping his team within striking distance late. To no one's surprise, Nedeljkovic bounced back in Sunday's rematch and pulled off his third shutout of the season, a 22-save display against a potent



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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Phantoms attack. In fact, Nedeljkovic has not recorded consecutive regulation losses all season.

The netminder is three shy of matching the franchise record for most wins in a single season, a mark that he set last season. Nedeljkovic is also chasing the franchise record for lowest goals-against average in a season of 2.29, set by Justin Peters in 2012-13.

SCHILKEY STAYS SCORING

Nick Schilkey has caught fire as of late and continues to add to his career year. The second-year forward, currently on a four-game point streak, has found the scoresheet in nine of the team's last 10 games and racked up 12 points (6g, 6a) over that stretch – more than any other Checker.

The Ohio State product now has 15 goals and 17 assists through 49 games this season, eclipsing both totals from his 48-game rookie campaign by 10.

CARRICK CONTRIBUTES

After going through a 10-game stretch that saw him record just one point, Trevor Carrick has regained his scoring touch as of late. The All Star – who has assists in each of Charlotte's last four games – has racked up eight point (1g, 7a) over the last eight contests, pulling himself into a tie with Jake Bean for the team's defensemen scoring lead.

With 15 games to play, Carrick is nine shy of matching his single-season career high in points – set last year – and six shy of his career high in assists – a mark he hit in 2017-18 and 2015-16.

POWERING UP

The Checkers' power play appears to trending in the right direction. With Nick Schilkey's dagger late in Sunday's win over Lehigh Valley, the Checkers have now notched a power-play in four consecutive games, their longest such streak since a five-game run in late October into early November.

Success on the man advantage has been key of the Checkers this season. The team has recorded a power-play goal in 34 games so far and logged a 26-5-3 record in those contests. On the flip side, they're 13-10-4 in the 27 games where they failed to score on the power play.

TOUGH ROAD

The Checkers have turned things around after a bumpy stretch of the season, winning six of their last eight contests. The schedule has been beneficial for Charlotte over the latest stretch of games, though, with seven of the team's last

eight wins coming against teams outside of the playoff picture.

Since the calendar flipped to the year 2019, 12 of the Checkers' 25 games have come against team's currently in a playoff position, and the Checkers have gone 4-4-4 against those opponents. Things don't get easier from here, as six of the team's nine games remaining in the month of March come against playoff teams.

Ranks

- Andrew Poturalski is tied for fourth in the AHL in scoring (57), is tied for 9th in assists (36) and tied for fourth in game-winning goals (6)
- Alex Nedeljkovic leads the league in wins (28), ranks second in minutes played (2380) and fifth in goals-against average (2.37)
- Martin Necas is tied for sixth among rookies in assists (26)
- Jake Bean ranks fifth among defensemen in goals (11) and ranks second among rookie blue liners in scoring (35)
- Trevor Carrick is tied for second among defensemen in game-winning goals and tied for 11th in scoring (35)
- Roland McKeown is tied for fourth among defensemen in plus-minus (+22)
- Dan Renouf is tied for eighth in the AHL in penalty minutes (111) and tied for fifth in major penalties (7)

INJURIES

- Janne Kuokkanen - Missed two games starting 3/8
- Spencer Smallman - Missed 48 games starting 11/11

TRANSACTIONS

Incoming

- Mar. 7: (C) Steven Lorentz - Recalled from Florida (ECHL)
- Mar. 5: (D) Haydn Fleury - Assigned by Carolina (NHL)

Outgoing

- Mar. 7: (G) Callum Booth - Assigned to Florida (ECHL)



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TODAY'S LINKS

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SportScan

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

1135648 Carolina Hurricanes

BY PAT GRAHAM AP SPORTS WRITER

MARCH 12, 2019 12:46 AM

Canes' Calvin de Haan expected to recover from eye injury

DENVER

BY CHIP ALEXANDER

Petr Mrazek got a piece of the shot with his pad, felt the puck trickling behind him and swiftly swung his stick around to knock it away.

MARCH 12, 2019 03:22 PM

"Sometimes," the Carolina goaltender said, "those saves are lucky."

Carolina Hurricanes defenseman Calvin de Haan, who sustained an injury to his right eye in Monday's road game at Colorado, is expected to recover, general manager Don Waddell said Tuesday.

Only thing: He was doing that all night.

Waddell, in a statement, said de Haan was treated and released from a Denver hospital and made the flight back to Raleigh with the team.

Andrei Svechnikov had two goals and an assist, Mrazek stopped 38 shots and the Hurricanes earned a rare win at Pepsi Center by beating the Colorado Avalanche 3-0 on Monday.

"At this point, his eye is responding as we would hope," Waddell said. "We are optimistic that he will make a normal recovery without restrictions to his ability to play hockey in the near future."

"We won this game because of him," Svechnikov said of his goalie. "He's playing amazing."

The Canes on Tuesday recalled defenseman Haydn Fleury on an emergency basis from the Charlotte Checkers of the AHL.

Mrazek's fourth shutout of the season propelled the Hurricanes into a tie with Pittsburgh for third place in the Metropolitan Division. Carolina currently holds the tiebreaker.

De Haan was injured in the third period of the Canes' 3-0 victory over the Avalanche when the Avs' Alexander Kerfott's stick blade caught de Haan under the helmet visor. De Haan left the game and did not return.

"We have to keep grinding and keep working hard," Mrazek said.

De Haan has played in 67 games in his first season with the Canes. Fleury has played 14 games for the Canes and 22 for the Checkers.

Defenseman Dougie Hamilton also scored as the Hurricanes won in Denver for just the second time in 13 games since Colorado moved into its longtime home for the 1999-2000 season. It's the first time Carolina has won in regulation in this building.

Earlier this season, de Haan took a stick under his helmet shield from William Nylander of the Toronto Maple Leafs, just missing his left eye and causing a gash under the eyebrow that took six stitches to close.

"That's crazy. But I don't know how much it means to be honest with you," Carolina coach Rod Brind'Amour said. "None of those guys in there have probably been in the lineup for any of those, although I've been around for a lot of them. It's a big win for us this time of year."

News Observer LOADED: 03.13.2019

Colorado remains two points behind Minnesota for the final wild card in the Western Conference. The Wild lost earlier to San Jose.

1135649 Carolina Hurricanes

Philipp Grubauer turned back 30 shots. He was back in net over Semyon Varlamov after shutting out Buffalo on Saturday.

Svechnikov, Mrazek propel Hurricanes to 3-0 win over Avs

"We've got to capitalize on our chances," Grubauer said. "They're a really skilled team, very offensive oriented."

Hamilton scored his 13th goal of the season on a delayed penalty in the second period. Defenseman Erik Johnson tripped Svechnikov near center ice, with Justin Williams sending the puck over to Hamilton, who lined a shot over Grubauer's glove.



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The Hurricanes have proven nearly automatic with a lead going into the final period, improving to 28-1-2.

Svechnikov made it 2-0 7:08 into the third, which was plenty of cushion for Mrazek. His biggest save was robbing Colin Wilson of a goal midway through the third. Mrazek stopped Wilson's wrist shot with his pad and then reached behind to bat it away with his stick.

It was that sort of night for Mrazek, who made 13 saves in the final period.

"That was special," Brind'Amour said. "I haven't seen some of those saves in a game."

For his big game, Svechnikov credits taping his stick in a different fashion. That was on the advice of Hamilton, who wanted some of the credit.

"He changed it up and there you go. What can I say?" Hamilton said. "We hung out yesterday so we'll have to do that more."

Nathan MacKinnon had seven shots on goal to bring his total to a league-leading 304 this season. He joins Joe Sakic (339 in '95-96, 332 in '00-01) and Claude Lemieux (315 in '95-96) as the only Avalanche players to eclipse the 300-shot mark.

Carolina withstood two penalties in the first period, including a delay call on defenseman Calvin de Haan for knocking the net off its pegs. The Hurricanes nearly scored the game's first goal at 11:24 when Svechnikov skated in and sent a shot off Grubauer. On the play, he pushed Grubauer into the net as Jordan Staal lined in a rebound. The officials immediately disallowed the goal for incidental contact.

The Avs remain without captain Gabriel Landeskog, who is sidelined for at least a month with an upper-body injury.

"You can't replace him," defenseman Tyson Barrie said. "We owe it to him to get some wins and do everything we can to get in the playoffs and give him a chance to come back."

NOTES: De Haan took a stick to the face at 13:13 of the third period. He appeared to suffer a cut near his right eye. "We had to take him to the hospital. That's the big downer on the night. We hope he's going to be OK," Brind'Amour said. ... Carolina improved to 20-13-3 on the road this season. It's tied for third-most road wins in franchise history.

News Observer LOADED: 03.13.2019

1135658 Columbus Blue Jackets

Blue Jackets' offense finally produces, and it must continue

Staff Report

Posted Mar 12, 2019 at 11:45 PM Updated Mar 12, 2019 at 11:45 PM

Boone Jenner scored his first career hat trick a day after missing a game because of the flu — and that was probably the third or fourth bullet point on Tuesday night. The Nationwide Arena cannon was fired so many times, it nearly broke. Seriously. Brian Johnson screamed, "For those about to rock ..." and the stupid, glorious cannon didn't fire right on cue. I forget which goal.

Jenner scored short-handed, at even strength and into a net, and the Jackets beat the Boston Bruins 7-4. Yes, the Jackets scored seven goals. Of late, Jackets fans had been thinking that their team might never score again, not ever.

There were 16,554 souls at Nationwide. They were ready to order playoff tickets when the Jackets took a 5-1 lead eight minutes into the second period. They were ready for the NFL draft by the second intermission, at which point the Bruins had cut the lead to 5-4. They couldn't really process what they'd seen by the time the final horn sounded, and somebody fixed the cannon.

Boone had a hat trick? Sure. The two new guys — Matt Duchene and Ryan Dzingel — each had a goal in Union Blue. That's the first time they've each scored in the same game. Duchene and Dzingel played on a line with Josh Anderson, who had a goal and three assists. They marauded.

A Jackets defenseman scored his first goal since Dec. 31 — on the power play, no less. It was only the second power-play goal the Jackets have scored this month. They handed Bruins goaltender Tuukka Rask his first regulation loss since Dec. 23.

In the middle of it all, Artemi Panarin dropped the gloves and fought Bruins defenseman Charlie McAvoy.

"That was pretty exciting," Anderson said of Panarin's pugilistic pursuit. "I know he likes to watch UFC, so he had the left-hand-right-hand thing going. Exciting."

It was a decent scrap. McAvoy probably won on points — but he's a defenseman and he's supposed to win against a skinny dangler whose claim to fame, from a social-media standpoint, is having one of the cutest little doggies on the Scioto Mile.

As Bread sat down in the penalty box — Bread Box, anyone? — he smiled.

There was a lot of smiling. The cannon was blasting. That was the most important thing for this team.

For the past three weeks — or since the Feb. 25 trade deadline, pretty much — the Jackets have been vexed on so many levels. After giving their scouts the rest of the year off at the deadline, they hadn't gotten the desired offensive impact from their new recruits.

Generally speaking, they've struggled to score. The Jackets are the only team in the league with six 20-goal scorers and, it seems, all of them left the building all at once. Heading into the game against the Bruins, the Jackets had lost five of eight — and they'd been shut out three times in the process.

This, at a time when Sergei Bobrovsky was getting red-hot (2.17 goals-against average, .921 save percentage from Feb. 8 through Monday night's 2-0 loss on Long Island).

This, in the middle of March, amid a heated race for the playoffs.

Then there was Tuesday night. Afterward, everyone in the locker room said they could feel it coming. (Especially Zach Werenski: "Awesome. About time.")

Coach John Tortorella had a sense that his team was heading in the right direction. He said he admired his players for sticking with the system and, as he is wont to say, "staying above the puck" and minding their checking through their offensive drought.

They won't score seven goals every night, but if you are a Jackets fan, it was good to remember that it's possible. They have a dozen games remaining. Maybe they're loaded up now and ready to go. That is what it felt like after the final cannon blast Tuesday night, for whatever that's worth.

Columbus Dispatch LOADED: 03.13.2019

1135659 Columbus Blue Jackets



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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Blue Jackets' power play is misfiring again

By Brian Hedger

The Columbus Dispatch

@BrianHedger

Posted Mar 12, 2019 at 10:28 PM Updated Mar 12, 2019 at 10:28 PM

After revving their engine for a prolonged stretch, the Blue Jackets' power play stalled out again.

Before playing the Boston Bruins on Tuesday night at Nationwide Arena, the Jackets hadn't scored a power-play goal in four straight games and were 2 of 20 since the Feb. 25 trade deadline — after acquiring center Matt Duchene from the Ottawa Senators. But they did score a power-play goal late against Boston.

"I think we're impatient on the power play," coach John Tortorella said, before the Jackets allowed a short-handed goal by Bruins center Patrice Bergeron on their first power play. "I think we're forcing plays and we're not giving ourselves a chance."

Between Jan. 10 and Feb. 9, coinciding with the hiring of Martin St. Louis as a special-teams consultant, the Blue Jackets went from moribund to scorching hot. They scored on 10 of 31 power plays for a 32.3 percent rate of success and began to creep up the NHL rankings.

The fire burned out after about a month. Since Feb. 12, the Jackets had only scored a power-play goal in three of their previous 15 games, going 3 of 38 (7.9 percent) in that span.

"We may try a couple of different looks tonight to see if we can open ourselves up," Tortorella said. "I just think we're a little bit impatient. We've just got to keep our patience and let the puck do the work."

Fourth-line rotation

Tortorella hasn't been unhappy with the play of his fourth line, but also hasn't been thrilled. There is a surplus of bottom-six forward options, so he plans to shuffle them in and out of the lineup.

Against Boston, it was Oliver Bjorkstrand, Alexander Wennberg and Brandon Dubinsky who started out as the fourth line. Riley Nash, Boone Jenner and Nick Foligno formed the third line.

"I want to keep everybody involved," Tortorella said. "I don't think anybody has played poorly. No one has taken that position, but no one deserves to be out, so I might just rotate people in and out."

Tough assignment

Tortorella kept Josh Anderson on the right wing of the second line, playing with Ryan Dzingel and Duchene. He played another strong game, tying it at 1 in the first period with his 23rd goal, but his promotion left a hole at right wing of the third line.

Foligno filled it by skating with Nash and Jenner. Tortorella planned to match them up against Boston's top line, centered by Bergeron.

Columbus Dispatch LOADED: 03.13.2019

1135660 Columbus Blue Jackets

Blue Jackets 7, Bruins 4 | Boone Jenner hat trick highlights big night for offense

By Brian Hedger

The Columbus Dispatch

@BrianHedger

Posted Mar 12, 2019 at 9:47 PM Updated at 4:56 AM

The cannon got a workout Tuesday night at Nationwide Arena, courtesy of a resilient bunch of Blue Jackets.

After failing to score Monday in a 2-0 loss at the New York Islanders — the third time they had been shut out in six games — the Jackets upended the Boston Bruins 7-4 to split a key road/home back-to-back with an impressive performance.

"We just had to keep on trying to play and trying to get a result," coach John Tortorella said. "We got a result tonight."

It was a big one, too.

The win helped the Blue Jackets maintain their hold on the Eastern Conference's second wild card. They moved to 81 points and still have that spot thanks to a regulation/overtime win tiebreaker over the Montreal Canadiens, who beat the Detroit Red Wings 3-1.

Just as important was the jolt of confidence the Jackets gained from scoring seven goals for the fifth time this season (fourth on home ice).

Josh Anderson, Zach Werenski and Boone Jenner led the charge.

Anderson and Werenski had four points each on a goal and three assists, while Jenner — who scored his 100th career NHL goal — scored into an empty net with 47 seconds left for the first career hat trick.

"It's just funny how it works sometimes," said Jenner, who missed the game Monday while sick. "I think when you go through a little bit of a stretch like that, where you're not scoring, I think you can get caught up in it and you're just thinking about it too much."

They didn't have to ponder too long against the Bruins, despite allowing the game's first goal 4:00 into the first on a short-handed shot by Boston's Patrice Bergeron.

Anderson responded 3:19 later with his 23rd goal, extending his career-high, and that lit the fuse for the Blue Jackets and the cannon.

The Jackets' two biggest acquisitions before last month's trade deadline also got into the scoring act, as Matt Duchene and Ryan Dzingel (one goal, two assists) each scored.

Prior to this game, the Blue Jackets had scored 14 goals in eight games since the deadline, for 1.75 goals per game. They had been outscored 24-14 in those games and had a 3-5-0 record, putting them on the playoff bubble.

After breaking out against the Bruins (42-19-9), who have lost two in a row since a 15-0-4 stretch ended Sunday in Pittsburgh, the Jackets improved to 5-0-0 in games in which they have scored seven goals, and 17-1-1 in games in which they have reached at least four.

>> Read more: Struggles return for Blue Jackets' power play

Boston made it interesting, cutting into a 5-1 deficit with three straight goals in a span of 5:30 late in the second, but the Blue Jackets held firm. Werenski scored at 12:21 of the third on a power play to make it 6-4, and Jenner's empty-netter completed the scoring.

"A little scary there the second period, when it was a close game, but we believed in ourselves," Anderson said. "We were playing good hockey, stuck to what we knew was best and got the job done."

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CAROLINA HURRICANES

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1135661 Columbus Blue Jackets

On Zach Werenski, the end of a slump and the tale of a 'lucky ducky'

By Tom Reed

Mar 13, 2019

COLUMBUS, Ohio — Zach Werenski was badly in need of some puck luck. It arrived Tuesday night in the form of a tiny yellow rubber duck that sat on a shelf in his locker nestled between two elbow pads.

Hours before the Blue Jackets outlasted the Bruins, 7-4, in a chaotic game filled with goals and wacky moments, Werenski and Ryan Dzingel had a chat about their scoring droughts. The newly acquired winger hadn't registered a goal in his previous nine games, dating to his time with the Ottawa Senators.

Werenski's skid read like some twisted New Year's resolution. He had gone 30 games without a goal. His last coming on Dec. 31.

And so prior to Tuesday's contest in Nationwide Arena, Dzingel handed the defenseman the rubber duck.

"He gave me his 'lucky ducky' before the game and told me it had brought him luck in the past," Werenski said.

The Indians of "Major League" fame have Jobu. The Blue Jackets of the NHL have a toy duck.

Hey, whatever gets you two points in a tight playoff race, right?

Werenski delivered a power-play goal and three assists for the first four-point game of his career. His third-period tally at 12:21 restored a two-goal lead and allowed everyone in the arena to breathe a sigh of relief on a night all sports psychologists in Columbus were standing by to offer counseling.

The Blue Jackets were on the verge of blowing a 5-1 second-period advantage. A regulation loss would have dealt a major blow to their postseason hopes. But Werenski ripped a shot past goalie Jaroslav Halak, who had replaced starter Tuukka Rask, to make it 6-4.

"I guess the duck was lucky tonight," Werenski said after scoring his 10th goal of the season and first in the calendar year.

Turns out it brought good fortune to the player who gifted the rubber toy, as well. Dzingel scored his first goal as a Blue Jacket and added a pair of assists.

In a game where the home team nearly squandered a four-goal lead, its most skilled player threw haymakers in a wild fight and the Blue Jackets failed to put five guys on the ice for a faceoff that led to a Bruins' goal, Dzingel's decision to farm out his "lucky ducky" was well down the list of strange occurrences.

When it was over, the Blue Jackets had maintained their grip on the final playoff spot and, in the process, got one of their best players feeling good about his offensive game again.

"I didn't think that (shot) was going in," Werenski said. "Sometimes, you just need one like that to get yourself going. It felt really good to get that one."

Werenski had accepted a diagonal pass from Artemi Panarin in the offensive zone. At first, he worried the puck might bounce over his stick. The Blue Jackets had given up a first-period shorthanded goal and, just seconds before Werenski scored, nearly yielded another.

Not wanting to take any chances, the defenseman decided to shoot quickly from the top of the left circle, firing the puck just inside the near post. As Werenski turned to the crowd, he reached to his back and appeared to throw something into the stands.

There was symbolism behind the celebration.

"I thought of it just today," he said. "I thought, 'If I score a goal, I've got to do something — it's been so long.' The first thing I thought of was getting the monkey off my back."

Werenski scored 16 goals last season while playing most of it with a badly damaged shoulder that required surgery to repair. At the time, he never imagined this campaign would be just as challenging.

While Werenski tallied nine goals in his first 39 games, his defensive play had become a serious concern for coaches. John Tortorella removed him from the top pairing with longtime partner Seth Jones and told him to focus on correcting his deficiencies behind the red line.

The budding star, who scored 36 goals in his first 196 NHL games, began to siphon risk from his offensive approach. Although his assist rate has improved, he's down 1.32 shots per game at even strength, according to naturalstatstrick.com. That multiplies to just over three shots per 60 on the power play. Werenski also is generating about one scoring chance fewer per game when skating at even strength.

Compounding the problem is Jones' lack of goal scoring. The perennial All-Star has nine on the season with just two coming since Jan. 5. On a team suddenly struggling to score — it had been shut out three times in its previous six games — the Blue Jackets desperately need Werenski and Jones to rediscover their offense.

On a night when goals came in bunches, Werenski's breakout performance might be the most encouraging sign.

"I think it's been kind of up and down in terms of when I was being more offensive or being more defensive and learning more of the defensive side of the game," he said. "I think I'm kind of finding that balance right now and it's the right time to find it."

A season ago, Werenski endured a similar slump. He went 25 games without a goal from Dec. 29 to March 2. The defenseman rallied to score five times over the final 17 games to help the Blue Jackets reach the playoffs.

"I have been getting chances, the puck just wasn't going in for me," Werenski said. "I would have been a lot more worried if I wasn't getting chances. I just haven't been scoring. I have been missing the net with shots and just not getting any puck luck. None of us have."

Enter Dzingel's rubber duck.

The Ohio State product spoke to the media after the game but said nothing of his offering to Werenski. His 23rd goal of the season tied a career high.

"My dad and my brothers are baseball guys," Dzingel said. "It's the law of averages, ya know. You either can stay in the dumps or you can keep playing the way you play and eventually they're going to go in somehow. (I'm) thankful that one went in. Law of averages. If you're a .300 hitter, you're a .300 hitter. That's what you're going to be."

Neither Dzingel nor Werenski has likely played in a game as bizarre as this one.

With about seven minutes remaining in the second period, Panarin took exception to a slash from Charlie McAvoy and decided to fight the Bruins defenseman. Panarin is a fan of mixed martial arts and did Dana White proud during an entertaining lightweight bout in which each combatant landed serious blows.

Just prior to a defensive zone faceoff, Panarin was released from the penalty box. The crowd of 16,554 fans erupted in applause. On the bench, Panarin was greeted to a hero's welcome.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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In all of the excitement, one of the Blue Jackets forwards forgot to hop over the boards to take part in the faceoff. The home team had four skaters on the ice. Werenski was one of them. He realized the mistake just as the linesman was dropping the puck.

"I turned around to tell (Riley Nash) we were going to go weak side, and usually I tell two forwards and when I turned around it was like, 'Is (the other forward) behind me?' ... I've never seen that before. Probably won't ever see it again."

The Bruins won the draw and Brad Marchand, using Werenski as a screen, scored to cut the Boston deficit to 5-4 late in the second period.

With the fan base fearing the worst, the Blue Jackets played a solid third period, including killing a big penalty. As Werenski has regained the coaches' trust, he's been deployed on one of the league's top penalty-killing units.

In the absence of injured Ryan Murray, he's also been reunited with Jones to play heavy minutes in the Blue Jackets' playoff push. Werenski responded Tuesday with his best game of the season.

"I think he's worked on the defensive part of his game," Tortorella said. "I think he's improved there. But as we fight to score some goals, it's nice to get him to chip in."

Maybe history repeats itself and Werenski finishes the season with a flurry of goals. He's not above taking a little help when he can get it, however.

After concluding his postgame media obligations, Werenski walked from his corner stall to the adjacent changing room. The little yellow duck was still on the shelf between his elbow pads.

The Athletic LOADED: 03.13.2019

1135662 Columbus Blue Jackets

Blue Jackets survive mental mistake and Bruins' late rally as offense finally comes to life

By Aaron Portzline

Mar 12, 2019

COLUMBUS, Ohio — The prevailing concern in Nationwide Arena at the start of Tuesday's game between the Blue Jackets and Boston Bruins was simple: Can the Blue Jackets finish enough of their scoring chances to beat the Bruins? Or, failing that, would they awaken offensively soon enough to salvage a playoff berth?

Coach John Tortorella praised his club for not letting their scoring woes lead to impatience and a general unraveling of their all-around game. But how much longer could that be the case for the Blue Jackets, who had been shut out in three of their previous six games?

It didn't take long for all of those worries to be allayed, replaced by a bounty of storylines in one of the wildest games of the season.

The Blue Jackets scored five unanswered goals, then watched a 5-1 lead turn into a 5-4 sweatshop before pulling away with a gutsy third period. The final was 7-4.

"You just know when it's 5-1, with so much game to be played, you knew it wasn't going to be that easy," Tortorella said. "That Boston team, they've lost a couple (of games) now, but they didn't win or tie 19 in a row just out of luck. They play hard."

There were individual achievements ...

Boone Jenner had the first hat trick of his career, while Zach Werenski (1-3-4) and Josh Anderson (1-3-4) had the first four-point games of their careers, and Ryan Dzingel (1-2-3) had his first three-point game.

... rarely seen gaffes and bloopers ...

The Blue Jackets took a faceoff with only four players on the ice — no, they were not shorthanded because of a penalty — that led directly to the Bruins' 5-4 goal late in the second period. Tortorella refused to discuss this after the game.

... and an added bonus for fans of the fight game.

Blue Jackets star winger Artemi Panarin and Bruins defenseman Charlie McAvoy, after a fracas behind the play, engaged in a welterweight scrap that McAvoy clearly won, but that sent a charge through both teams.

Where to begin?

There were signs early that the Blue Jackets' snakebitten offense had found a cure.

The 2-1 goal was scored by Dzingel at 14:18 of the first after he gathered a puck off the end boards and fired at Bruins goaltender Tuukka Rask from below the goal line. The puck shot back to Dzingel, who corralled it with a whack out of the air, then batted off Rask's shoulder and into the net.

Those bounces have been missing for the Blue Jackets for weeks now.

The Blue Jackets scored two more goals (Matt Duchene, then Jenner) off passes from below the goal line to players in front of the net, the kind of bang-bang goals that have been spoiled by opponents' skates and sticks in recent weeks.

"This is fun," Anderson said. "This is what it's all about, playing hockey and scoring goals and winning games."

The Jackets led 5-1 at 8:09 of the second, and it looked like a get-well night for all of their struggling offensive players.

Then it got interesting. The Bruins scored three goals in the span of 5 1/2 minutes to make it 5-4, and the Blue Jackets needed to be saved by the second-period bell.

But the 5-4 goal — scored by Brad Marchand just seconds after the faceoffs — was a head-scratcher.

If the Jackets had lost this game there would have been hell to pay for somebody, either Tortorella for not noticing how many guys were (or weren't) on the ice, or for a player (Nick Foligno?) for not knowing that his line had gone over the boards.

Tortorella shot down the question before it was fully asked, but Werenski described the scene. He was on the ice with fellow defenseman Seth Jones, while Jenner took the faceoff and Riley Nash was on the left hash.

The right hash — which would seem to be Foligno's spot, as those are his linemates — was vacant. (The puck was dropped on the far end of the ice from the Blue Jackets' bench, up against the bench-side wall, making it harder for the Jackets' bench to see their personnel.)

Also, Blue Jackets players could be seen welcoming Panarin back to the bench after he'd served his fighting major seconds before the puck was dropped. Foligno was giving Panarin a proper head-mauling.

"I realized it right as the puck was being dropped," Werenski said. "I turned around to tell Nash we were going to go weak side, and usually I tell two forwards. When I turned around, I was like, 'Is he behind me?' I thought he was maybe following me."

"Once I realized it, the puck was down and the puck was in our net. I've never seen that before. Probably won't ever see it again. It happens, I guess."



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The Blue Jackets went into the second intermission clinging to a 5-4 lead, but they took the time to get composed.

"We just played," Tortorella said. "We moved right by it in between periods, didn't talk about anything. Just wanted to get back to attacking. We felt we had some really good success as far as getting through the neutral zone and playing in behind their net.

"A period like that, some of the crazy things that went on with it ... the biggest thing I talked about is we just can't be tentative. I don't care if we make more mistakes in the third period, but it has to be through us being on our toes. I thought (Sergei Bobrovsky) made a couple of really key saves early in the third period."

Werenski picked a perfect time to end his 30-game goal drought. He scored a power-play goal at 12:21 — his first goal since New Year's Eve — to give the Blue Jackets a 6-4 lead and some much-needed breathing room.

Jenner sailed home the empty-net goal with 46.1 seconds remaining.

Jenner had scored two goals in a game eight times before Tuesday. Remember, he missed Monday's game on Long Island because he was sick, but the Blue Jackets learned in the late morning that his fever had broken and he was ready to play, Tortorella said. But he still wasn't feeling 100 percent, which is why Tortorella had extra players out for warmups just in case. "Yeah, I'm sure he's not dead-on (healthy) right now."

A quick Q&A with Jenner: AP: "Are you 100 percent or still playing through some stuff?" BJ: "Feeling good." AP: "You wouldn't admit it even if you were sick, would you?" BJ: (smiling) "Feeling good."

Here's Tortorella on Jenner: "It's a huge boost for us. We talk about big-name players that are out of the lineup, Jens is just a guy that you pull for. He just doesn't know how to do it any other way than to just simply work hard. I really respect how he's handled himself. It was certainly a big boost for us tonight."

The way Anderson has played lately — big, nasty, dangerous — he could make any forward line better. Since the third period on Monday on Long Island, he's played with newcomers Duchene and Dzingel. On Tuesday, they totaled 3-5-8 with 10 shots on goal.

Here's Tortorella: "Josh just fits there, it seems, right now. I'm not going to give Josh all the credit ... all three of them just play well together right now. How long it lasts? I hope it's forever. I just don't know what's going to go on. You could see when we changed it last night and put Josh there, it was immediate, an immediate impact on that line."

Here's Dzingel on Anderson: "He's north-south, always skating. Makes it easy for us. When you see him on the forecheck, nobody wants to go back and get pucks."

This was Panarin's first fight with the Blue Jackets, but his second in the NHL. While playing for Chicago, he had a scrap with St. Louis' Scottie Upshall on Nov. 9, 2016. Here, let's watch, shall we?

Here's Jenner on the Panarin scrap: "I didn't really expect that. You could see it kind of coming with them, battling a little bit early in the shift. I think they both had enough. It was a great fight by Bread, and obviously, we were really sparked by it."

Here's Anderson: "He's a pretty tough kid. I watched his first fight (vs. Upshall) a couple of years ago. He did really good. He's not the biggest guy, but he's pretty strong and built. Nobody really realizes that when they're going up against him."

Here's Tortorella: "It's great for the bench. You could see everybody was excited. He threw (with) both hands. Yeah, it's good for our team. I think it's good for Bread. I think it's good for Bread with his teammates. That stuff really helps as far as the camaraderie. He's a competitor. We've all seen him play. He's a competitor. I'm glad he stood right in there. He took a couple of shots and gave a couple of shots."

The Blue Jackets needed the win to stay "above the bar" in the Eastern Conference because Montreal held serve with a 3-1 win over Detroit. The Jackets currently hold the second wild-card spot, two points behind Carolina. The next game for both the Jackets and Hurricanes is against each other on Friday in Nationwide Arena. That's a big one.

Tuesday's game marked the fifth time this season the Blue Jackets have scored seven goals in a game: Oct. 25 at St. Louis (7-4), Nov. 15 vs. Florida (7-3), Nov. 26 at Detroit (7-5), and Jan. 13 vs. the New York Rangers (7-5).

It was, on the whole, a strange night for Foligno. With 1:04 remaining in the first period, Foligno had the stick whacked out of his hands along the wall, just as the puck skidded around the boards and in front of him. He started to go for his stick, then realized the importance of getting the puck out of his zone and reached for it with his glove, flinging it well into the neutral zone on the fly. He was called for closing his hand on the puck, a minor penalty.

Jenner's first goal, the rebound put-back off Anderson's shot, was the 100th of his NHL career. He's sixth on the franchise's all-time list now with 101 goals.

Pierre-Luc Dubois has gone seven games without a point, the second-longest streak of his young career. Hard to imagine, isn't it, that the Blue Jackets would score seven goals and the No. 1 line — Dubois, with Panarin and Atkinson — would total one point, an assist by Panarin.

Panarin's assist ended a four-game streak without a point, which matched the longest of his Blue Jackets career.

The Blue Jackets are off Wednesday. They're back at it on Thursday at 11 a.m.

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

In a crazy contest, the Jackets — with a little help — deserved the two points. According to naturalstatrack.com, in 5-on-5 play, Columbus earned 50.78 percent of shot attempts, 59.25 percent of scoring chances and 61.71 percent of high-danger attempts. And where does the help come in? Money puck.com had the expected-goal total at 4.04 to 3.54 in favor of Boston, but Tuukka Rask, who let in five goals against, was 8.38 percent below his expected-save percentage, meaning he allowed 2.43 more goals than he should.

Speaking of letting in goals, Bobrovsky allowed four, but that's not a number to be judged in and of itself. Where Rask faltered, Bobrovsky was stronger. Tortorella cited, in particular, a few key saves to start the third. All in all, based on the shots he faced, Bobrovsky's save percentage was 2.79 percent below expectations, translating to 1.2 goals more than expected.

Jenner got the first hat trick of his NHL career off his only three shot attempts of the night. With that kind of quality, his individual offense equated to 25.74 percent of the Jackets' expected goal total. Anderson was second with 16.09 percent.

Seth Jones and Werenski looked like the threat they can be, tilting the ice more than any other Jackets skaters. The team was plus-10 in both shot attempts and scoring chances when they were on the ice.

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Second consecutive shutout loss leaves Sabres searching for answers

By Lance Lysowski



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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If this regression of puck luck is bothering Jeff Skinner, he is not showing it. The Buffalo Sabres' leading scorer smirked late Tuesday night when asked of his 12-game goalless drought, despite hitting the post twice in KeyBank Center.

He had a more difficult time describing how the Sabres were shut out for a second consecutive game, a 2-0 loss to the Dallas Stars with Jack Eichel out of the lineup because of a two-game suspension.

"Just couldn't seem to find one," Skinner lamented.

The Sabres (30-30-9) have lost 11 of their last 13 games, including five straight, and have not scored a non-shootout goal since last Thursday in Chicago, a span of 137 minutes, 40 seconds. They are 12 points back of the second wild-card playoff spot with only 13 regular-season games to play.

Despite Eichel's absence, the Sabres had more shots (35-27), shot attempts (61-37) and 5-on-5 scoring chances (18-8) against the Stars (36-28-5), who own the first wild-card playoff spot in the Western Conference and had allowed only three goals over their previous four games, including two shutouts by goalie Ben Bishop. They lead the NHL with only 172 goals allowed through 69 games.

"It's not a good feeling, but at the same time you have to stick with it and create some more," Skinner said when asked of his season-high slump. "A couple nice plays on those chances. Just got to stick with it and they'll start going in."

The first post Skinner hit in the second period would have broken a scoreless tie. Alexander Nylander's one-timer from near the slot moments later went wide of the net, and Tage Thompson could not capitalize on a breakaway after he stripped a Stars defenseman of the puck.

The performance was in stark contrast to Saturday in Colorado, when the Sabres had only 18 shots on goal in a 3-0 loss.

"I think throughout the whole game we had our fair share of opportunities to score," Thompson said. "It's just one of those nights where the puck's not bouncing your way sometimes. ... I thought our effort was there, I thought our compete was there. As long as you're getting those chances, I think you're doing things right."

Still, the Sabres failed to score on three power-play opportunities, including two in the first period, and could not protect their own net in important moments. Stars winger Roope Hintz scored both of their goals in a span of five minutes, 43 seconds during the second period.

Neither Rasmus Dahlin nor Zach Bogosian challenged Hintz's shot from below the right faceoff dot, allowing Hintz to shoot the puck over Linus Ullmark's shoulder for a 1-0 lead at 7:29 into the period. Hintz then scored on the power play when Ullmark was unable to see the shot through a screen.

"Just stay the course," coach Phil Housley said. "I mean, we just got to keep digging in here and working. We're going to break through. ... It's just right now this is where we're at as a group. We've got to find a way to make it tougher on the goalies."

Skinner hit the post with a backhanded shot for a second time during a power play with 10:29 remaining in regulation, and the Sabres did not allow a shot on goal in the final three minutes, 49 seconds in the third period.

They allowed less than three goals for the first time in eight games and those tasked with handling a heavier workload because of Eichel's absence fared well.

The Sabres took one step closer to becoming only the second team in NHL history to miss the playoffs in the same season in which they won 10 consecutive games, and they have earned the second-fewest points since the winning streak.

Buffalo went 49 games without being shutout -- from the season opener against Boston to a 1-0 loss in Dallas on Jan. 30 -- only to be held without a goal twice in three days, and have scored the sixth-fewest goals in the league since that memorable November run.

"If you have zero goals you can always do more," Skinner added. "We had some looks, but I thought we could have done more, and we'll keep working at it."

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The Wraparound: Dallas Stars 2, Buffalo Sabres 0

By Lance Lysowski

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The response was everything Phil Housley could have hoped for. With Jack Eichel beginning to serve a two-game suspension, seemingly every player in the Buffalo Sabres' lineup created scoring chances while filling a more prominent role and receiving additional ice time.

The result, though, left much to be desired. The Sabres were shut out for a second consecutive game, losing to the Dallas Stars, 2-0, Tuesday night in KeyBank Center.

Buffalo (30-30-9) has lost 11 of its last 13 games, including five straight, and has been outscored 5-0 over its last two games. It has not scored since Kyle Okposo's third-period goal in a 5-4 shootout loss last Thursday in Chicago.

Roope Hintz scored both Dallas goals in a span of five minutes, 43 seconds during the second period. The Stars (36-28-5) kept control of the Western Conference's first wild-card playoff spot. Linus Ullmark, starting for the first time in three games, made 25 saves for Buffalo, which had 35 shots on goal.

Opening salvo: Lax defense cost the Sabres again. Hintz skated through the right circle and toward the net, where neither Rasmus Dahlin nor Zach Bogosian chose to challenge him. Hintz lifted a puck over Ullmark's shoulder for a 1-0 lead at 7:29 into the second period.

Another one: With Alexander Radulov parked in front of Ullmark, Hintz scored his second of the game and seventh of the season with a wrist shot from the high slot at 13:12 into the second period for a 2-0 lead.

Close call: Buffalo seemed destined to breakthrough at the start of the second period, when Jeff Skinner hit the post with a backhanded shot. Alexander Nylander and Tage Thompson would also have scoring chances around Dallas net before Hintz broke through.

Streak continues: Dallas goalie Ben Bishop won his 12th consecutive start against the Sabres, including two shutouts this season alone.

Dallas Stars 2, Buffalo Sabres 0

Penalties galore: The Sabres were called for consecutive delay of game penalties within the game's first seven minutes because Marco Scandella and Bogosian mistakenly cleared the puck over the glass. The Stars were then called for back-to-back penalties, though neither led to a goal.



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The first period took approximately 40 minutes to play because of penalties, offside and icing calls. The Sabres outshot the Stars, 13-10, during the game's first 20 minutes.

Like a glove: Ullmark bailed out the Sabres during their second penalty kill with a remarkable glove save on Stars winger Jamie Benn following a cross-slot, backdoor pass by Tyler Seguin.

Injury: Bogosian did not return to the ice for the third period because of an undisclosed injury late in the second, finishing with just 13 minutes, 32 seconds of ice time.

100: Sabres winger Tage Thompson appeared in his 100th career NHL game.

Lineup: Defenseman Casey Nelson and winger Zemgus Girgensons were healthy scratches for the Sabres, while Matt Hunwick drew back into the lineup on their blue line. Defenseman Taylor Fedun, who was traded by Buffalo to Dallas in November, was among the Stars' healthy scratches.

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Sabres Notebook: Casey Mittelstadt back at center after left-wing experiment

By Lance Lysowski

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Habits die hard. Or not at all. When Casey Mittelstadt was thrust out of his comfort zone by having to play left wing Saturday in Colorado, the Buffalo Sabres' 20-year-old rookie center caught himself skating in the middle of the ice a few times.

"I thought to myself, 'Yeah, I should probably get out of here,'" Mittelstadt joked following the Sabres' optional morning skate Tuesday.

The experiment was short-lived. With Jack Eichel serving a two-game suspension, Mittelstadt was back in the middle of the ice and centering the Sabres' top line Tuesday night against the Dallas Stars in KeyBank Center.

Mittelstadt could see time on the wing in the final 12 regular-season games after Eichel returns, however, his goals over the final three weeks revolve around his play in the middle of the ice.

"I think it's important to just keep progressing," Mittelstadt added. "I've made good progress in areas I've needed to. Keep moving forward and getting better. ... I think that will put me in a good spot for next season."

Drafted eighth overall in 2017, Mittelstadt had 10 goals among 21 points with a minus-10 rating in 64 games entering Tuesday. He had one shot on goal in 11 minutes, 14 minutes during a 5-4 shootout loss in Chicago last Thursday.

Mittelstadt practiced at left wing in Denver the following day, a move coach Phil Housley said was fueled by curiosity.

The hope was a move to wing would allow Mittelstadt to use his skills to create more offensively since he would not have to worry about the additional defensive responsibilities of playing center.

It did not go as planned. Mittelstadt played only 10 minutes, 32 seconds in a 3-0 loss to the Avalanche. He was moved to Eichel's wing with the Sabres facing a two-goal deficit but finished with only one shot on goal.

"I was just trying to find a spark, something different," Housley said. "I didn't mind the way he played. He wasn't very involved in the play. That's why we tried to put him up with Jack, just to try to get a spark while we were down two."

The concepts of playing wing aren't foreign to Mittelstadt. A center must also make plays along the wall. While there are fewer defensive responsibilities with playing wing, Mittelstadt embraces the challenge of being down the middle.

He has made progress defensively, though consistency remains an issue. Mittelstadt added he has grown more comfortable in the faceoff circle, despite his 39.8 winning percentage entering Tuesday. Repetition has helped, but he also credited the advice of Vladimir Sobotka, whose 52.6 faceoff winning percentage is the best among qualifying Sabres.

"My numbers haven't been that good in the circle, but I feel way more comfortable," he said. "Rather than getting beat clean there are a lot of 50-50s, which is a good place to start. Other than that, defensive-zone stuff, which has been a pretty big topic all year. Those are areas I feel like I'm doing better. Keep progressing and keep getting better next year."

While Housley could experiment with Mittelstadt on the left side again, the Sabres' long-term plan is unlikely to change. They lack depth down the middle after trading Ryan O'Reilly to St. Louis, and are hopefully Mittelstadt will flourish with more NHL experience.

Defenseman Casey Nelson was a healthy scratch Tuesday night against Dallas, a decision Housley said was "mainly" performance based. However, Housley acknowledged there was a conversation with Nelson about how the 26-year-old responded following Colorado defenseman Nikita Zadorov's hit on Eichel.

While Nelson did not aggressively attack Zadorov, Sam Reinhart and Jeff Skinner scrambled to try to defend Eichel.

"I'm not going to get into that," Housley said when asked if he was displeased with Nelson's response. "We had a discussion with him, and we'll just keep that in house."

Defenseman Taylor Fedun, whom the Sabres traded to Dallas for a conditional seventh-round draft pick in November, was a healthy scratch for the Stars Tuesday night. Fedun, 30, has three goals among 10 points with a minus-1 rating in 43 games since the trade.

He was the odd man out on a crowded roster in Rochester and has helped the Stars survive a number of injuries on their blue line. Dallas coach Jim Montgomery credited Fedun, Miro Heiskanen and Roman Polak with having "really saved our season."

"What allows Taylor to be so effective for us is his hockey sense, his compete and his understanding positionally of how we want to play," Montgomery said. "And he's a great teammate in the locker room."

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Sabres vs. Stars: Five Things to Know

By Lance Lysowski

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CAROLINA HURRICANES

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Jack Eichel won't be on the ice to help the Buffalo Sabres push back. With Eichel serving a two-game suspension, the Sabres are hosting the Dallas Stars tonight at 7 p.m. in KeyBank Center.

Remember, the Stars (35-28-5), who control the first wild-card playoff spot in the Western Conference, used brute-force to wear the Sabres down in a 1-0 win in Dallas on Jan. 30. That showed the rest of the NHL that finishing checks is a simple strategy to beat Buffalo (30-29-9).

Eichel spoke passionately Saturday in Denver of the Sabres needing to dish out the same treatment, and his teammates will try to deploy that plan to open this two-game homestand.

"We know the position they're in," coach Phil Housley said of the Stars following the optional morning skate. "They know the position we're in. We know this team likes to finish checks. They like to play in your face. They don't give you a lot. I believe they're third overall in 5-on-5 goals against, so we're going to have to scrape and claw for everything we get tonight."

1. The lineup: Eichel won't be available to play tonight or Thursday against Pittsburgh as the result of a two-game suspension for his hit on Colorado's Carl Soderberg in Denver.

That led the Sabres to recall Alexander Nylander, who will make his season debut against the Stars. Nylander, 21, had goals in four consecutive games with Rochester prior to the promotion and is expected to skate on a line with Evan Rodrigues and Conor Sheary.

Oddly enough, Sam Reinhart was moved down to the Sabres' third line, and Jeff Skinner will remain on the top line with Casey Mittelstadt and Jason Pominville. Winger Zemgus Girgensons and defenseman Casey Nelson will be the healthy scratches, with Matt Hunwick drawing into the lineup.

Housley acknowledged there was a conversation with Nelson about how he responded following Nikita Zadorov's hit on Eichel in Denver but added that the decision was "mainly" about Nelson's recent play.

"I'm not going to get into that," Housley said when asked about Nelson's response. "We had a discussion with him, and we'll just keep that in house."

2. Ullmark's net: Linus Ullmark will start against Dallas, despite Carter Hutton having a solid performance against Colorado. Ullmark, who was pulled after two periods in his last start for Buffalo, stopped 26 of 27 shots in Dallas on Jan. 30.

Ullmark, 25, is 16-19-5 with a .912 save percentage this season. Ben Bishop (22-14-2, 2.13, .930) is expected to start in goal for Dallas.

3. Skinner slump: Skinner has not scored a goal in a second-high 11 consecutive games, recording only five assists and a minus-8 rating during that span. With Eichel out, the Sabres could use two big games from Skinner, whose 36 goals are tied for eighth in the NHL.

Skinner is not the only Sabres player slumping, either. Rodrigues has gone 15 consecutive games without a goal and Reinhart has failed to score in six games. The problem goes beyond an inability to put the puck in the back of the net.

"Eichel is such a dynamic player and he's someone who can take over the game like he did in the third period against us at home, by himself," Dallas coach Jim Montgomery said. "Obviously it would be like us losing [Tyler] Seguin. You lose Seguin, you lose your highest scorer and your player who gets most of your goals and makes most of your plays. With that, in a one-game scenario, we expect to see a high compete level from the Buffalo Sabres."

4. Power-play shakeup: Eichel's absence will disrupt the Sabres' power play, which had at least one goal in five of six games prior to the road trip. Housley overhauled his two units by splitting up Reinhart and Skinner. The former will skate on the top group with Rodrigues, Sheary, Rasmus Dahlin and Rasmus Ristolainen.

Skinner is on the second power-play unit with Mittelstadt, Nylander, Kyle Okposo and Brandon Montour.

The Sabres' power play ranks 10th in the league at home, compared to sixth-worst in the league on the road.

5. By the numbers: The Sabres are 2-8 in their last 10 games against the Stars but hold a 56-50-17 advantage in the all-time series. ... Buffalo is 10-4-1 in its last 15 regular-season home games against Dallas dating back to the beginning of the 1995-96 season. The Stars are seeking consecutive wins in Buffalo for the first time since they won three straight from Feb. 7, 1992 to Feb. 13, 1994. ... The Sabres' .636 points percentage at home ranked ninth in the NHL before Monday's games. ... Bishop recorded 31 saves against Colorado on Thursday for his second consecutive shutout and his fifth of the season. He has a 2.13 goals against average and .930 save percentage in 39 games this season.

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Travis Yost's Sabre Metrics: Where to start in fixing the Sabres?

By Travis Yost

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Travis Yost has been involved in the world of hockey analytics for a decade and is part of TSN's Hockey Analytics team. Prior to joining TSN, Yost was a contributor at the Ottawa Citizen, the Sporting News and NHL Numbers, and he has been a consultant for an NHL franchise. He will be contributing breakdowns on the Buffalo Sabres for The Buffalo News this season. Follow Yost on Twitter: @travisyost.

"Where are the goals being lost?"

That is the first question I try to answer as part of any postmortem, and unfortunately for the Buffalo Sabres, their autopsy is right around the corner. Barring a Herculean effort down the stretch, the Sabres will miss the postseason for the eighth consecutive year.

One of the quick ways to isolate on problem areas as it relates to roster construction (primarily a function of the general manager) and deployment (primarily a function of the coaching staff) is to understand how Buffalo's hierarchy of talent delivered value. It's important to grade on a curve for each player, too – we shouldn't have the same expectations for performance for a first-line forward as a fourth-line forward, for example.

With that in mind, I went and pulled out each Buffalo skater's on-ice goal differential (per-60 minutes of hockey) at 5-on-5. I then compared those numbers to what we would expect to see from your average skater in the same deployment slot. So Jack Eichel – Buffalo's No. 1 forward at even strength – is being compared to No. 1 forwards for every other team in the league. And we iterate that across every slot on the 23-man roster.

Here is what those numbers look like:

Why did I call Buffalo top heavy for so much of the season, especially within the forward group? This chart summarizes that pretty well. Buffalo's core four forwards – including Eichel, Jeff Skinner, Sam Reinhart and Conor Sheary – were reasonably competitive with their peers around the league from an on-ice goal differential perspective. (Eichel and Sheary were slight negatives, but that's more than offset by Skinner and Reinhart beating expectations.)



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The problems really come from the rest of the lineup, especially Buffalo's middle six. Some of those numbers are downright appalling. Vladimir Sobotka was one goal worse (every 60-minutes of play) than the average No. 6 forward on a National Hockey League team. And although his number is the most appalling of the forward groups, it's not as if Evan Rodrigues, Johan Larsson or Kyle Okposo were much better.

Quite frankly outside of Jason Pominville – whose numbers were, I would argue, a bit skewed having played third wheel on that Skinner/Eichel line during parts of the season – there is nothing to like about the depth of this forward group and it should remain a priority for overhaul on two fronts.

The first, of course, would be Jason Botterill finding talent internally or externally to give head coach Phil Housley more roster flexibility. The second would be Housley executing on that displacement and ensuring that players with limited skill sets are fit into appropriate roles.

Let's take a look at the defense now, which was a targeted area of improvement for this group heading into the 2018-19 season:

Let's get Rasmus Dahlin out of the way first. He's clearly a star and he's clearly capable of handling more minutes. Dahlin looks fantastic relative to a No. 4 defenseman, but he would compare favorably against No. 1 defensemen, too. Whether the 18-year-old Dahlin is ready for Ryan Suter, Drew Doughty and Seth Jones minutes (as three quick examples) is debatable. What's less so is the fact that 73 defenders around the league see more even-strength ice time per game. That's something that has to change heading into 2019-20.

And it's not as if the Sabres are getting so much more from the rest of the lineup that the moves are defensible. I mentioned names such as Suter, Doughty and Jones earlier – these are the players whom Rasmus Ristolainen is being compared to and, for the umpteenth year in a row, he looks out of his element.

The Ristolainen discussion has been beaten into the ground twice over by this point, but it's still perplexing how a player with 414 NHL games is seeing this much utilization. At least in prior years the excuse of there not being better options to displace those minutes was in play. Relatively speaking, that's no longer true.

What may be most concerning is there hasn't been much of a change in this usage as the season has progressed. Since February, Dahlin is still the team's fourth-most utilized defender at even strength, and Ristolainen is still number one.

Also, one quick note on Brandon Montour: I showed his performance across both Anaheim and Buffalo because I think he's going to be integral to this team's future, especially in 2019-20. Results suggest he's something of a second-pairing guy, and I think that's what Buffalo had in mind when they targeted him at the trade deadline. It's another competent body and at the very least offers Housley and the coaching staff some more flexibility to right-size minutes. (The team has already started doing that with Marco Scandella, who is really going to be fighting for a roster spot going forward.)

On-ice goal differential is just one way to measure the value respective skaters are adding to their team's position in the standings, and further investigation is required on a case-by-case basis. But if you are of the opinion that this is still a fairly limited roster with too many holes further down the lineup – well, I can't say I disagree.

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1135726 Pittsburgh Penguins

Kevin Gorman: Spotlight shines on Evgeni Malkin as Penguins star scores 1,000th point

KEVIN GORMAN

Wednesday, March 13, 2019 12:19 a.m

TribLIVE's Daily and Weekly email newsletters deliver the news you want and information you need, right to your inbox.

Even after his milestone moment, Evgeni Malkin expression was more of relief than reward, more exasperation than celebration.

Scoring the 1,000th point of his NHL career had become more burdensome than anything for the Pittsburgh Penguins center, who prefers to play in the shadows instead of the spotlight but was a shining star in the 5-3 victory over the Washington Capitals on Tuesday night.

"I feel overwhelmed, like, 'Finally,'" Malkin said. "These last couple weeks, I was a little bit nervous. Finally, over 1,000 and I can breathe normally."

Although it wasn't pretty, there was something poetic about the way Malkin made history. He entered the game Tuesday night with 998 points, so Malkin and the Penguins were trying to get two points against their first-place Metropolitan Division nemesis.

The importance of the opponent should be underscored. For all of his magical play, Malkin has been something of a mystery to the hockey world, his career overshadowed by two superstar contemporaries. One is his teammate, Penguins captain Sidney Crosby, the other his countryman and counterpart, Capitals captain Alex Ovechkin.

"He doesn't get the credit that he deserves outside of Pittsburgh in the hockey world," Penguins coach Mike Sullivan said. "He has been one of the elite players in this league for a decade-plus, and he deserves more attention for that. His body of work speaks for itself, with what he's accomplished."

Even though Malkin has won three Stanley Cup championships and a treasure trove of trophies — from Conn Smythe to Hart to Art Ross (twice) to Calder to the Ted Lindsay Award — it's an insult he wasn't named one of the NHL's top 100 players of all time.

"That top-100 player thing, that was pretty outrageous, in my opinion, that he wasn't part of that," said Capitals defenseman Brooks Orpik, who spent his first 11 NHL seasons with the Penguins. "He'll say he doesn't care. I'm sure he cares a little bit about that kind of stuff. I know the guys who've always played him appreciate what he does."

Ovechkin has reigned as Russia's greatest star, so it only made sense that his closing in on 1,200 points coincided with Malkin going for his 1,000th. This time, Malkin overshadowed Ovechkin while joining him, Sergei Fedorov (1,179), Alexander Mogilny (1,032) and Alexei Kovalev (1,029) as the fifth Russian to crack the NHL 1,000-point mark.

Never mind both points came on secondary assists. More important is both came on the power play, which Sullivan had tried to jolt by moving Malkin and Phil Kessel to the second unit Sunday against Boston and to start the game against Washington.

The first assist helped set up the tying goal, as Malkin passed from the high slot to the goal line, where Kessel fed Crosby in the right circle to give the Penguins a 3-2 lead at 14:25 of the second period.

Malkin scored his 1,000th point on what proved to be the winner, passing from the right circle to defenseman Justin Schultz for a slap shot from center point that Kessel poked in on the rebound at 11:56 of the third. When the goal horn sounded, the PPG Paints Arena crowd responded with a roaring ovation. Malkin got a group hug from his teammates.

"I don't know if he thought I might have touched that," Crosby said. "I'm just glad that I didn't, and he got that. It's a special moment. You don't see that happen very often. To be teammates this long and to be on the ice when he got it was just really special."



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 13, 2019

What was really special is Crosby has factored into 303 points with Malkin, the most of any teammate, and Kessel ranks second with 151 points. They are the Penguins with whom Malkin forever will be associated, especially Kessel as a linemate. They have shared struggles this season, so it was fitting they got to share this memory.

"He wants that," Malkin said. "We talked before and he said, 'I hope I score your 1,000th point.' He's unbelievable. It's special for him, too. We've played a long time together. It's not an easy year for him, too. We try to play better every game. I'm glad he scored and gave me a chance to get 1,000 points.

"It's a huge goal for him and huge point for me."

This is the biggest point for Malkin: Reaching the milestone should allow him to stop pressing and start playing the way he can, with highlight-reel plays that make opponents marvel at his talent and a touch envious of his effortless approach to making it appear so easy.

"Now I hope I breathe normally, am able to relax and play a little bit better," said Malkin, who has 21 goals and 70 points this season. "It's been a tough year for me, but every game the team plays better and I feel like my game gets back. I feel so much better every night. My confidence is back."

So is his scoring touch. His two points led the Penguins to two points on a night when Malkin escaped the shadows and shined in the spotlight, when he wasn't the biggest-name superstar but was deserving of the first star. Crosby had a two-goal game, Ovechkin scored his 1,200th point.

But this night belonged to Malkin.

Tribune Review LOADED: 03.13.2019

1135727 Pittsburgh Penguins

Three-goal flurry in 2nd period helps Penguins knock off Capitals

JONATHAN BOMBULIE

Tuesday, March 12, 2019 9:47 p.m

TribLIVE's Daily and Weekly email newsletters deliver the news you want and information you need, right to your inbox.

If he tried really hard, Evgeni Malkin could think up a thing or two that could have gone better on the night he became the 88th player in NHL history to record 1,000 career points.

The milestone moment could have come on one of those trademark Malkin goals where he gallops through the neutral zone, splits the defense and gets a crowd on its feet, as opposed to a secondary assist.

It could have come in the first period rather than the third, so it didn't happen after his 2-year-old son Nikita's bedtime.

When all was said and done, though, Malkin was in no mood to quibble.

He was in the mood to celebrate and reflect on a great moment in his legendary career after his pair of power-play assists helped the Penguins to a 5-3 victory over the Washington Capitals on Tuesday night at PPG Paints Arena.

"A thousand points, it's a crazy number, for sure," Malkin said. "Growing up in a small city, I never (thought) I'd play in the NHL and score 1,000 points. It's probably a special day for my hometown, too. First guy to make 1,000 points, win a Stanley Cup. I'm so glad."

Malkin reached the milestone in a crucial late-season win over one of his team's longest-standing rivals.

The victory helped the Penguins move one step closer to a playoff berth. They are in third place in the Metropolitan Division, four points behind the first-place Capitals with 12 games to play.

"It's two huge points, and I make 1,000 points. It's absolutely an amazing night for me. It's like one of the best nights of my life, for sure," Malkin said, noting his parents and wife were in attendance.

On a night when two of their nearest rivals for the last few playoff spots in the Eastern Conference, Columbus and Montreal, secured wins, the Penguins fell behind 2-0 midway through the second period on a pair of Jakub Vrana goals.

Their comeback began when Jared McCann stripped a puck from Evgeny Kuznetsov and started a successful two-on-one with Jake Guentzel. It continued when Sidney Crosby beat defenseman Michal Kempny to a long, high lob from Justin Schultz and jammed a puck between the pads of goalie Braden Holtby to make it 2-2.

That's when Malkin stepped into the spotlight.

Thirty-one seconds after the tying goal, Nicklas Backstrom tripped Malkin, and the Penguins took to the power play.

Having used split power-play units for the team's first two advantages of the game, coach Mike Sullivan loaded up his top group on this occasion.

"I keep going back to them because I believe in them," Sullivan said.

It worked the way it often has over the past four seasons, with Malkin feeding Phil Kessel on the left wing and Kessel passing between the legs of defenseman John Carlson to Crosby for a one-timer from the right faceoff dot.

It worked again in the third period on the play that gave Malkin his 1,000th point. He fed Schultz for a shot from the center point, and Kessel cashed in the rebound to make it 4-2.

"Last game, we absolutely (were) so bad on the power play," Malkin said. "Tonight, we started on different lines, me and Sid. After first period, coach switch again. If we score on the power play, we help the team win. It's huge. We have five unbelievable players. Every game, we have a chance to help the team to win."

It wasn't the first time Malkin helped spark his team to victory with a show of power-play skill. It surely won't be the last.

"It's a crazy life," Malkin said. "It's not over. I'll just work next game. Keep going."

Tribune Review LOADED: 03.13.2019

1135728 Pittsburgh Penguins

Kevin Gorman's Take 5: Two points for Penguins, 1,000 for Evgeni Malkin

KEVIN GORMAN

Tuesday, March 12, 2019 1:30 a.m

TribLIVE's Daily and Weekly email newsletters deliver the news you want and information you need, right to your inbox.

The Pittsburgh Penguins made it clear every point counts.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 13, 2019

That was especially true against the Washington Capitals on Tuesday night at PPG Paints Arena, where the Penguins were going for two points. Not only did they want the two points to pull within four points of the first-place Caps in the Metropolitan Division but that's how many Evgeni Malkin needed to reach a major milestone.

They got both.

1. Nice to see you: The game marked the return to PPG Paints Arena for Carl Hagelin, a two-time Stanley Cup champion winger with the Penguins who was traded to the L.A. Kings in November and then dealt to the Capitals in February.

Penguins winger Patric Hornqvist made light of Hagelin going from teammate to rival in such a short span.

"Obviously, we're very good friends," Hornqvist said, "but when the puck drops, he's like any other guys on that team — obviously, we don't like each other. ... He will be a good friend for the rest of my life but at 7 o'clock, we're not friends."

Capitals coach Todd Reirden, a former Penguins assistant, enjoyed having Hagelin on his team when it came to pre-game preparation.

"When you're breaking down special teams, and it certainly was nice for us when we were doing our power play stuff today to not have to talk about Carl Hagelin on the opposition," Reirden said. "I know he'll be a factor up ice, disrupting and now allow easy entries and pressuring pucks in zone when he gets against them. They know the danger he can be in short-handed situations."

After a John Carlson shot at an open net was deflected by defenseman Justin Schultz, the Penguins played a tribute video to Hagelin that drew cheers from the crowd and stick taps from Penguins players.

2. No cheap shots: The Penguins' big trade-deadline deal for Erik Gudbranson was made to fortify a defense short on depth, but his physicality and toughness also were considerations.

That's especially necessary when the Penguins play the Capitals, as Tom Wilson has proven to be, at best, opportunistic and, at worst, a player who punishes the Penguins with head shots.

Wilson took out Zach Aston-Reese and Brian Dumoulin in the second round of the Stanley Cup playoffs last year and gave Jamie Oleksiak a concussion with a one-punch knockout earlier this season.

So Gudbranson endeared himself to Penguins fans when landed a forceful shoulder to the chest of Wilson only 2 minutes, 10 seconds into the first period. Four minutes later, Gudbranson fired a shot from the right circle that led to several chances on rebounds.

Wilson delivered a big blow when on a clean hit that knocked defenseman Jack Johnson off his skates. But when Sidney Crosby and Alex Ovechkin tangled late in the period, Gudbranson exchanged words with Wilson as they skated off the ice.

The presence alone of Gudbranson kept Wilson honest — until the third period. When Wilson knocked defenseman Marcus Pettersson to the ice, Gudbranson tackled Wilson, but officials stepped between the heavyweights to prevent them from fighting.

3. Double trouble: Jakub Vrana scored three points, including the winning goal, to give the Capitals a 3-2 series lead over the Penguins in the playoffs last year.

The 23-year-old winger scored two goals to give the Capitals a 2-0 lead Tuesday, although neither was a thing of beauty.

Vrana got a good shot on a rolling puck and fired a shot over Matt Murray's glove hand and under the crossbar at 19:27 of the first period for a 1-0 lead.

The second goal was even more perplexing, especially to Murray. Vrana shot a wristed from the far side of the right circle that Murray blocked with

his chest. The puck, however, bounced over Murray and behind his back. He tried to swipe behind him with his glove but missed.

Suddenly, it was 2-0 at 10:24 of the second period.

4. Triple threat: The turning point occurred on an innocuous play that led to a momentum-changing goal.

Jared McCann stripped Capitals center Evgeny Kuznetsov from behind in the offensive zone, disrupting a potential rush and creating a two-on-one opportunity for the Penguins.

McCann fed a pass to Jake Guentzel, who scored his 35th goal of the season to cut the deficit to 2-1 at 12:37 of the second period.

It's the kind of play that pains Penguins fans when skilled forwards like Evgeni Malkin and Phil Kessel make similar mistakes but goes largely unnoticed when they take advantage of an opponent.

And it was the kind of play that makes McCann the perfect complement to play on the top line with Crosby and Guentzel, scorers with the flourish to finish an odd-man rush.

As predicted, the goal-scoring competition between Guentzel and Crosby could make for an exciting race in the final month. Their focus is on winning games, but they know the best way to do that is by scoring goals.

The Penguins got three in a span of 1:48.

Only 47 seconds after Guentzel got his, Crosby got one. And it came on a job from defenseman Justin Schultz — almost a carbon copy of Crosby's to Guentzel for the overtime winner against Florida a week earlier — for a five-hole shot on Braden Holtby.

Crosby scored again — his 33rd of the season — on the power play, as Malkin passed from the high slot to Kessel at the goal line left of the net, who fed Crosby in the right circle to give the Penguins a 3-2 lead at 14:25 of the second period.

5. Geno gets 1,000: Malkin entered the game two points shy of a major milestone and reached the mark midway through the third.

Malkin scored his 1,000th point on a secondary assist at 11:56 of the third, passing from the right circle to Schultz for a slap shot from center point that Kessel poked in on the rebound.

Malkin is the fourth player to record 1,000 points in a Penguins uniform, joining Mario Lemieux (1,723), Crosby (1,203) and Jaromir Jagr (1,079). Malkin is the fifth active NHL player to reach the total, joining Crosby, San Jose's Joe Thornton (1,467), Ovechkin (1,199) and Toronto's Patrick Marleau (1,163).

Malkin is the fifth highest-scoring Russian-born player in NHL history, behind Ovechkin, Sergei Fedorov (1,179), Alexander Mogilny (1,032) and Alexei Kovalev (1,029).

And I'm not sure which was more poetic, that Malkin assisted on a Kessel goal or that he did it against the Capitals.

Tribune Review LOADED: 03.13.2019

1135729 Pittsburgh Penguins

Penguins star Evgeni Malkin scores 1,000th career point against Capitals

KEVIN GORMAN

Tuesday, March 12, 2019 9:33 p.m



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 13, 2019

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Evgeni Malkin is the 88th player in NHL history to record 1,000 career points.

Malkin reached the milestone when he recorded the second assist on a Phil Kessel power-play goal in the third period as the Pittsburgh Penguins took on the Washington Capitals on Tuesday night.

Malkin came into the game with 998 points. He also assisted on a Sidney Crosby power-play goal in the second period.

Malkin is the fourth player to record 1,000 points in a Penguins uniform, joining Mario Lemieux (1,723), Crosby (1,203) and Jaromir Jagr (1,079).

He's the fifth active player to hit the milestone, joining Crosby, Joe Thornton (1,467), Alex Ovechkin (1,199) and Patrick Marleau (1,163).

Malkin is the fifth highest-scoring Russian-born player in NHL history, behind Ovechkin, Sergei Fedorov (1,179), Alexander Mogilny (1,032) and Alexei Kovalev (1,029).

Tribune Review LOADED: 03.13.2019

1135730 Pittsburgh Penguins

Trade to Capitals blurs line between good guys, bad guys for ex-Penguin Carl Hagelin

JONATHAN BOMBULIE

Tuesday, March 12, 2019 5:06 p.m

TribLIVE's Daily and Weekly email newsletters deliver the news you want and information you need, right to your inbox.

A short time after he was traded to the Washington Capitals on Feb. 23, Carl Hagelin came to a shocking realization.

They're not the jerks he thought they were all those years.

Playing against the Capitals in high-pressure, high-intensity games for the better part of three seasons while with the Pittsburgh Penguins made Hagelin assume their locker room was filled with bad guys. It's not.

"There's a lot of good guys in the room," Hagelin said. "Before, you obviously hated every single player on this team. You said some things to them and they said some things to you throughout the year. That's thrown out of the window and you're good friends with them now."

The fit on the ice has been as good as the fit in the locker room for Hagelin since joining the Capitals.

He's got two goals in eight games for Washington, already surpassing his total of one in 16 games with the Penguins to start the season and one in 22 games with the Los Angeles Kings in between.

Since trading for Hagelin, the Capitals have an 88 percent success rate on the penalty kill. Before he arrived, it was 78.6 percent.

"It's been good," Hagelin said. "I got thrown in the heat right away. First games, I was playing PK right away and getting some good minutes five on five. It's a team with a lot of skill, but also some toughness to it, some big dudes."

While Tuesday's game was his first visit to PPG Paints Arena since the Penguins traded him away in November, it wasn't Hagelin's first meeting

with his old team. That came at Staples Center when the Kings played the Penguins on Jan. 12.

Patric Hornqvist missed that game with an injury, however, so he was facing Hagelin, a close friend, for the first time since the trade.

Before the game, he echoed a sentiment often shared by players in that position.

"He'll be a good friend for the rest of my life, but 7 o'clock tonight, we're not friends," Hornqvist said.

Hagelin said the chance to catch up with the Hornqvist family on Monday was a highlight of his trip back to town.

"That was great," Hagelin said. "We lived next door for three years, spent a lot of time with his family. It's good to see him and his wife and his two daughters. That's the one thing in this sport. You create a lot of good friendships and he's definitely one of them."

Tribune Review LOADED: 03.13.2019

1135731 Pittsburgh Penguins

Erik Gudbranson latest Penguins player to tackle Tom Wilson problem

JONATHAN BOMBULIE

Tuesday, March 12, 2019 12:36 p.m

TribLIVE's Daily and Weekly email newsletters deliver the news you want and information you need, right to your inbox.

Over the past year-plus, controversial winger Tom Wilson has been the centerpiece of the rivalry between the Pittsburgh Penguins and Washington Capitals.

From an illegal hit that injured Zach Aston-Reese in last year's playoffs to a right hand that gave Jamie Oleksiak a concussion in a fight early this season, Wilson has been a thorn in the side of the Penguins.

Erik Gudbranson is the latest player tasked with taking care of the Wilson situation, which can mean one of two things.

First, it can mean actually dropping the gloves and fighting Wilson if the situation calls for it.

The 6-foot-5, 217-pound Gudbranson is up to that challenge should it arise. He has 27 career fighting majors in the NHL, including a solid showing against Wilson in an October 2017 scrap.

"I'm OK with it. I've always been OK with it," Gudbranson said. "I don't particularly like talking about it. I'm certainly not going to say I'm looking for it. Never have. If the situation arises, I've never been one to back down. That's sort of how I put it. I guess I can leave it at that."

More likely, through, given how tight the Eastern Conference standings are and how late in the season it is, Gudbranson and Wilson will wage physical battles for valuable pieces of ice in front of the Penguins net.

Gudbranson is up for that, too.

"Obviously you've got to know he's out on the ice," Gudbranson said. "He's a physical presence. He plays the game hard. He tickles that edge pretty much every game. You need to be aware of him, but there's a number of other players as well you need to be aware of."

Tribune Review LOADED: 03.13.2019



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 13, 2019

1135732 Pittsburgh Penguins

Opportunity knocks for Penguins' Teddy Blueger with Zach Aston-Reese hurt

JONATHAN BOMBULIE

Tuesday, March 12, 2019 11:54 a.m

TribLIVE's Daily and Weekly email newsletters deliver the news you want and information you need, right to your inbox.

With winger Zach Aston-Reese sidelined on a day-to-day basis with a lower-body injury, the Pittsburgh Penguins will have a different look up front when they face the Washington Capitals on Tuesday night.

Aston-Reese was injured in the second period of a 4-2 Penguins win over Boston on Sunday night.

His spot on the left wing of the second line with Evgeni Malkin and Phil Kessel was taken by rookie Teddy Blueger. Based on morning skate combinations, Blueger will stay in that spot against the Capitals.

For the vast majority of the first three years of his pro career, Blueger was training to fill a bottom-six center position. Now, he suddenly finds himself as a top-six winger.

"I think the progression that's been there, it's like I was bottom six but I think I've gotten better and shown I can produce at (the AHL) level," Blueger said. "As long as I keep working and keep getting better every day, I think there's nothing that can stop me from doing that at the next level too."

Wilkes-Barre/Scranton call-up Joseph Blandisi moved into Blueger's spot on the fourth line with Matt Cullen and Garrett Wilson.

Blandisi, who has played 75 career NHL games with New Jersey, Anaheim and the Penguins, is known for his speed and his willingness to play an abrasive style of hockey.

"Lots of energy. Make smart plays. Be responsible in our own zone," Blandisi said of his approach. "Get pucks in and make it hard on their defensemen. Finish our checks and make some room for the other guys."

Matt Murray will make his ninth straight start in net for the Penguins, who are tied with Carolina for third place in the Metropolitan Division, six points behind the first-place Capitals.

Kris Letang (upper body) participated in morning skate in a non-contact capacity. Bryan Rust (lower body) and Olli Maatta (shoulder) remain out.

Tribune Review LOADED: 03.13.2019

1135733 Pittsburgh Penguins

Erik Gudbranson a force and 'force field' in heated battle with Capitals

JASON MACKEY

Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

jmackey@post-gazette.com

MAR 13, 2019 12:44 AM

Tuesday was Erik Gudbranson's first taste of the Penguins-Capitals rivalry.

Suffice to say, he wouldn't mind going back for seconds.

And Penguins fans might offer to cook the meal for Gudbranson and serve it on a silver platter given how the hulking defenseman has not only handled Capitals winger Tom Wilson but what he's done since that Feb. 23 trade.

"He's a tough kid," Penguins coach Mike Sullivan said of Gudbranson after his team's 5-3 victory at PPG Paints Arena. "He has great size. He's hard to play against. He's abrasive. And he knows his role. He provides that pushback aspect when we need it."

Gudbranson seemed to grasp his role in this battle from the drop of the puck. At the conclusion of his first shift, he gave Wilson a whack to the back of the legs with his stick — admittedly something for which he could've and probably should've been penalized.

At 2:11 of the first period, with the Penguins short-handed, Gudbranson delivered a hard hit on Wilson, although Gudbranson insisted the contact wasn't directed at Wilson.

"He just happened to be there," Gudbranson said. "If it was anybody else, I would have done the exact same thing."

Was it at least more enjoyable that it was Wilson?

"Maybe for you guys," Gudbranson said, smiling. "For other people in Pittsburgh, for sure."

"I knew if I could get a lick in on him or let him know that I'm on the ice, too ... it was a good hit, I guess."

Early in the third period following a battle in front of the net, Gudbranson wound up grabbing Wilson and wrestling him to the ice. Wilson retaliated with a punch to the face, although the on-ice officials wouldn't let the two fight.

In their respective penalty boxes, Gudbranson and Wilson kept jawing at one another, the dislike between the two plenty evident.

"There were two guys in between us," Gudbranson said of the on-ice part. "It's tough to start a fight when you start on the ground. Usually the refs are pretty good about breaking them up. They want to break stuff up like that before it gets going."

What Gudbranson brought the Penguins all night was something they have lacked in this games. They've called it pushback, and that's not wrong.

But it's basically a tough guy, a card they hold, someone who isn't afraid to mix it up with heavier teams and physical players. Jamie Oleksiak did it some, though Gudbranson is probably more of the Ryan Reaves role than anything else.

Gudbranson was especially noticeable Tuesday clearing the front of the crease.

"I think it makes life easier for everybody," Matt Murray said. "He plays like he has a force field around him. Everybody is kinda scared to go near him."

"He's so big and strong. Plays hard in front of the net. That's an underrated attribute, for sure, and he does it probably the best out of anybody."

Gudbranson also actually plays, which is more than Reaves was allowed to do here. Did the Penguins potentially change their thought process and realize they have to get Gudbranson on the ice more? Maybe. But he's also earned his ice time.

Get this: Gudbranson actually led all skaters — yes, including Sidney Crosby, 1,000-point man Evgeni Malkin and Justin Schultz, in a game



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 13, 2019

where the Penguins had four power plays — in ice time against the Capitals at 22:43.

Gudbranson registered two hits, blocked three shots and had an even rating. (He would've been a plus had it not been for a bad bounce on Washington's second goal.)

"He's been a real solid defending defenseman for us," Sullivan said of Gudbranson. "He moves the puck. He keeps his game simple. He plays within himself. And he adds that dimension that I think makes us a better team."

The five-on-five goal-against was just the second for Gudbranson in five games as a Penguin. Overall, he's a plus-5. Since the trade, Gudbranson continues to lead the Penguins in five-on-five shot share, scoring-chance percentage and high-danger chance percentage.

Translated into more understandable terms, that means he's basically been the opposite of what pretty much everyone expected.

"I'm excited to be here," Gudbranson said. "I've felt really good. [Tuesday] I felt really solid out on the ice. This is an easy team to step into. There's a lot of good hockey players here. They make themselves available all over the ice. It's a team working together. It's been a pleasure."

Against a team like Washington that has had success pushing the Penguins around, it helped to have someone like Gudbranson, who seemed to instantly grasp the reason he was inserted into this already-hot rivalry.

Gudbranson loved hearing the crowd and being able to help his team to a key win.

"That was a good hockey game," Gudbranson said. "That was a good, physical hockey game with two teams that are very competitive against each other every single night. I think that was a good one for the fans to watch. We battled back. We stuck with it. That was a character win for us."

Post Gazette LOADED: 03.13.2019

1135734 Pittsburgh Penguins

Top Penguins power play, back together again, delivers in win over Capitals

MATT VENSEL

Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

mvensel@post-gazette.com

MAR 12, 2019 11:57 PM

When mulling whether to split up his dangerous — both in a good way and bad — top power-play unit at a few different points this season, Penguins coach Mike Sullivan has said there is always an urge to stick with them through the bad because of all the big goals they have scored during his three-plus years behind the bench.

Sullivan again couldn't help himself Tuesday at PPG Paints Arena.

The building was booming after Jared McCann and Sidney Crosby scored less than a minute apart. Then Nicklas Backstrom tripped up Evgeni Malkin just 31 seconds after Crosby beat Braden Holtby on a breakaway to tie up the game, 2-2.

Sullivan gave Malkin and Phil Kessel the nod, sending them onto the ice.

"I keep going back to them because I believe in them," Sullivan said later.

His stubborn but completely understandable belief in his stars paid off, as Crosby scored on that critical power play to seize the lead. In the third, Kessel got another one, the game-winner in a 5-3 victory over the Washington Capitals.

The Penguins did not capitalize on either of their first two opportunities when starting with a top unit of Crosby, Patrick Hornqvist and Jake Guentzel up front and Justin Schultz and Marcus Pettersson on the blue line. After Backstrom went to the box, Sullivan pulled off Guentzel and Pettersson for Malkin and Kessel.

They produced what may be their prettiest power-play goal of the year.

Kessel cruised through the neutral zone and slipped the puck to Malkin for a clean entry. Malkin walked down the left wall, cut to the middle between Tom Wilson and Matt Niskanen and gave the puck back to Kessel, parked on the goal line.

Kessel one-timed a pass through the legs of John Carlson to Crosby, who dropped to one knee to rifle a shot from the right dot over the blocker of Holtby.

"Geno just did a great job of weaving through there and found Phil. I just tried to be ready," Crosby said of his 33rd goal. "Phil threw it through a couple guys and I think it ended up far side. I was just trying to get it off, so I didn't see it go in."

Kessel saw it. If Crosby had shot the puck a couple of inches higher, he may have cracked Kessel in the face. Kessel flinched before raising his arms to celebrate. As Malkin hugged Crosby in the other corner, PPG Paints Arena went bonkers.

"Those guys are some of the best talents in the world," said Schultz, the point man with Kris Letang out. "To have them all out there on the ice at the same time during a power play makes my job pretty easy. Those guys did a great job for us."

He added: "Obviously, it hasn't been going as great as we've wanted lately."

The Penguins had scored a power-play goal in just four of 16 games before a stretch early this month when they got at least one in four straight games. Then came Saturday's loss to the Columbus Blue Jackets, when Kessel blew a tire at his blue line and Cam Atkinson grabbed the loose puck and put it behind Matt Murray.

Sullivan again vented after that short-handed goal, the NHL-high 14th the Penguins have handed out this season. When the top unit went 0-for-4 to start Sunday's win over the Boston Bruins, the coach removed Malkin and Kessel, something he has now done a few times this season, though it never lasted very long.

"Sometimes when we split them up, it's a short-term decision," he said. "But within the big picture, the coaching staff has in the back of their minds that at some point they're going to go back together because we just believe they're that good."

Sullivan added: "Sometimes when I split them up, you can affect a little bit of a change, whether it be from a mindset standpoint or whatever it may be. Then when you do put them back together, it allows them the opportunity to have some success, whether it creates a little more urgency or it's not taken for granted."

Whatever the reason, the Penguins got the results they were looking for.

In the third period, with the Penguins still up 3-2, Sullivan sent Crosby, Malkin and Kessel out for one more power play, though he went with two defensemen given it was a one-goal game. Malkin sent the puck back to Schultz, who put a heavy shot on goal. The rebound went to Kessel, who buried his second goal in 20 games.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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Schultz got his 200th career point there. Someone else hit a milestone, too.

"I should ask him if he wants to split the puck with me," Schultz jokingly said in reference to Malkin. "No, that's all him. One thousand points is an unbelievable achievement in this league. It's so impressive. We're all so happy for him."

It was perhaps fitting that Malkin got those final two points he needed on the power play. Of his 1,000 career points, 385 came with the penalty box occupied.

For all of the "ups and downs this year," as Sullivan put it, Tuesday's win was another reminder that the Penguins can still take over a game with their power play. It now ranks fifth in the NHL at 25.3 percent and is not far off from their franchise-record mark of 26.2 from a season ago.

"In my time here, they've been one of the best power plays, if not the best power play, in the league," Sullivan said. "They've always shown the ability to score."

And then came his familiar refrain, the reason why he won't quit on them.

"They score big goals at key times, and they did it tonight," Sullivan said.

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1135735 Pittsburgh Penguins

Dave Molinari's Penguins Report Card: Penguins 5, Washington 3

DAVE MOLINARI

Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

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MAR 12, 2019 10:26 PM

(After every Penguins home game, the Post-Gazette will assess how each unit performed and what it means during the playoff push.)

FORWARDS

Grade: B+.

Evgeni Malkin became the 88th player in NHL history to record 1,000 career points, and he did it in style, with an assist on Phil Kessel's game-winning goal at 11:56 of the third period. Earlier, Malkin got No. 999 with an assist on Sidney Crosby's power-play goal that put the Penguins in front to stay, 3-2, at 14:25 of the second period. Although Crosby probably has a better chance of being elected the next prime minister of Canada than he does of winning the Hart Trophy as the NHL's MVP this season, it's hard to believe there are many, if any, guys performing better at both ends of the rink. He was the driving force for this team yet again, scoring two goals and being a force all over the ice. But it was one of Crosby's linemates, left winger Jared McCann, who might have made the game-changing play. Little more than two minutes after Washington took a 2-0 lead, McCann swiped the puck from Capitals center Evgeny Kuznetsov near the blue line, then drove through the offensive zone and set up Jake Guentzel at the edge of the crease for his team-leading 35th goal of the season to spark a three-goal rampage in a span of one minute, 48 seconds. McCann capped another strong performance by scoring an empty-net goal from inside his own blue line with 55.8 seconds left to seal the victory. It was his ninth goal in 20 games since being acquired from Florida. And it shouldn't be overlooked that Kessel has two goals in the past four games after going 16 without one.

Erik Gudbranson a force and 'force field' in heated battle with Capitals
DEFENSEMEN

Grade: B.

Brian Dumoulin turned in his usual stalwart performance in the defensive zone, but Justin Schultz was the dominant presence on the Penguins' blue line in this game. Midway through the first period, he prevented a sure goal by deflecting Capitals defenseman John Carlson's shot at an empty net from the left circle. Late in the second, Schultz delivered a perfect flip-pass — the kind in which Hall of Fame defenseman Larry Murphy specialized a few decades ago — that made Crosby's game-tying goal possible. Schultz also chipped in with three shots and three blocks, just one fewer than Jack Johnson's team-leading total. Erik Gudbranson, acquired from Vancouver to add muscle to the Penguins' defense, showed that he's quite capable of handling those duties when he went after Capitals tough guy Tom Wilson after Wilson had shoved Gudbranson's defense partner, Marcus Pettersson, to the ice after a whistle during the third period. Gudbranson has been a solid addition to a defense corps that still is missing two key members, Kris Letang and Olli Maatta.

GOALIE

Grade: C-

Matt Murray set a personal-high with his ninth consecutive start and finished with 38 saves, but the first two goals he allowed were the kind he'd would like to forget as quickly as possible, if he hasn't already. The first came when Jakub Vrana scored with 32.4 seconds to go in the opening period, whipping a high shot past Murray on the short side from outside and above the right dot. That was a bad goal, but Vrana's second was marshmallow-soft, as he flipped a high, harmless shot from the outside edge of the right circle, then watched as the puck hit Murray, dropped behind him and ended up in the net to give the Capitals a 2-0 lead. To Murray's credit, he did not seem to dwell on either of Vrana's goals, and the only other one he gave up came during a power play, when he had no chance to stop a John Carlson rebound of an Alex Ovechkin shot at 14:02 of the third period.

SPECIAL TEAMS

Pittsburgh Penguins center Evgeni Malkin gets his 1,000 NHL point for the Penguins against the Capitals Tuesday, March 12, 2019, at PPG Paints Arena

Evgeni Malkin's 1,000th point a memorable one

Grade: C+.

The Penguins' first two power plays were, at best, forgettable, but their third yielded the goal that gave them a 3-2 lead, as Crosby took a cross-ice feed from Kessel and beat Holtby from below the right dot. They got one more chance with the extra man and made the most of it, too, as Kessel converted a Schultz rebound to make it 4-2 at 11:56 of the third. Washington had just two tries with the man-advantage and took full advantage of the second, when Carlson threw in the Ovechkin rebound to slice the Penguins' lead to 4-3. With Zach Aston-Reese unavailable because of an unspecified injury, Teddy Blueger got work alongside Matt Cullen on the top penalty-killing tandem. They were on the ice for the entire 66 seconds of the Capitals' second man-advantage.

COACHING

Grade: B.

Mike Sullivan didn't seem to do anything eye-catching with his personnel, but he did make an excellent decision to use his timeout with 1:34 left in regulation and the Capitals pressing for a goal that would have forced overtime. That break seemed to disrupt Washington's momentum, and McCann put the game out of reach with his empty-netter not long after play resumed. Sullivan does have a significant decision to make over the next few days: Should he give Murray yet another start when the Penguins visit Buffalo Thursday, or should Casey DeSmith get some



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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game action? The thinking here is that DeSmith will be in goal against the Sabres, but won't necessarily play in either of the Penguins' home games during the weekend that follows.

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1135736 Pittsburgh Penguins

Key second-period swing helps end Washington's winning streak

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MAR 13, 2019 12:04 AM

One swipe from Jared McCann got the Penguins going.

After a terrific defensive play from a player who has taken to his role like a fish to water, the Penguins used a second-period surge to end the Capitals' seven-game winning streak with a 5-3 victory Tuesday at PPG Paints Arena.

Trailing 2-0 midway through the second period, McCann smartly lifted the stick of Evgeny Kuznetsov, stole the puck from the Capitals center, led a two-on-one with Jake Guentzel and slid a beautiful pass across the slot, enabling Guentzel to score his 35th goal of the season.

Although the obvious story Tuesday was Evgeni Malkin notching his 1,000th NHL point, that play by McCann triggered a run of three goals in 1 minute, 48 seconds that gave the Penguins all the momentum they would need.

"That was a huge goal," Penguins coach Mike Sullivan said. "It was a turning point in the game, I think. The way we grabbed a hold of momentum right after, our bench got a foot taller after we scored that goal.

Guentzel now has six goals in his past six games, continuing his push for 40 on the season; as of now, Guentzel is on pace to score 41.

McCann, meanwhile, scored an empty-net goal late for his 10th point and sixth goal in the past eight games.

"We talked about it after the first period, getting hard on the forecheck and pressuring their D," McCann said. "I had to get my feet moving after the first period. It was a good play. I feel like Jake made a good play backdoor there."

Less than a minute after Guentzel's goal, Crosby tied the score at 2 with a play the Penguins used recently. While Guentzel chased down a high flip from Crosby last Tuesday to beat the Panthers in overtime, Crosby did the same after a terrific pass from Justin Schultz.

After gaining control of the puck, Crosby beat Capitals goaltender Braden Holtby five-hole for his 32nd goal of the season at 13:24.

Pittsburgh Penguins right wing Phil Kessel celebrates his goal with Pittsburgh Penguins center Sidney Crosby against the Capitals Tuesday, March 12, 2019, at PPG Paints Arena.

Crosby scored the Penguins' third goal in a stretch of 1:48 whenever he converted a one-time pass from Kessel on the power play at 14:25.

While the Penguins had been experimenting with split units, coach Mike Sullivan put the tradition top group back together before Crosby's second goal.

"We believe in those guys," Sullivan said.

After a clean zone entry, Malkin dished to Kessel at the left post. Kessel one-touched a pass through Washington defenseman John Carlson's skates to Crosby, who buried a shot from the right circle, his left knee on the ice as the puck left his stick.

"I was just trying to get it off," Crosby said. "Was happy to see it go in."

The Penguins needed a little boost after how they started the game.

The Capitals had the puck for most of a physical first period and jumped ahead, 1-0, on left wing Jakub Vrana's wrist from the right circle at 19:27. Vrana's rising shot beat Matt Murray glove-side.

Vrana stretched Washington's lead to 2-0 10:24 of the second period, when, from outside the circle, his shot hit Murray's shoulder and bounced up and over the Penguins goaltender.

"Just a weird bounce," Murray said. "You just kind of move by it."

The Penguins certainly did. And because of McCann's strip of Kuznetsov — arguably the best player on the ice in last year's playoff series between these two teams — the Penguins flipped around the game's momentum in a big way.

"We got that one and got a huge boost," Crosby said. "It's been a while since we scored in bunches like that. That's important. That's fun. That's when you want to use your home ice like that. That was a big momentum shift in the game."

First Boston, now this. On Sunday night the Penguins ended the Bruins' 19-game point streak. Tuesday's win snapped the Capitals' winning streak at seven.

"Those are two really good teams that we beat," said Murray, who started his career-high ninth in a row and stopped 38 of 41 shots in the wining effort.

"I like our game the last couple here. We're trending in the right direction. We definitely have to keep it going."

The Penguins are 38-23-9, good enough for 85 points. That puts them four behind the Capitals for first place in the Metropolitan Division, two back of the Islanders for second, although New York has played one fewer game.

Pittsburgh has a two-point lead on Carolina for the first wild card spot.

The Penguins have earned standings points in eight of their past nine games, going 6-1-2 in those contests — all started by Murray — and tied their season-best stretch with four consecutive wins at home.

Around the boards

The Penguins have won 43 of 74 meetings between Crosby and Ovechkin. ... In those games, Crosby has 37 goals and 100 points. ... Malkin has points in 13 of his last 16 meetings against the Capitals (10-14-24). ... In the last 30 NHL seasons, only Jaromir Jagr (10), Joe Sakic (9), Wayne Gretzky (8) and Mario Lemieux (7) have more 90-plus-point seasons than Crosby's six. ... The Penguins improved to 10-1 this season in their yellow third jerseys.

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1135737 Pittsburgh Penguins

Evgeni Malkin's 1,000th point a memorable one

JASON MACKEY



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 13, 2019

Pittsburgh Post-Gazette
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Taking laps around the PPG Paints Arena ice before Tuesday's morning skate, Penguins coach Mike Sullivan and Evgeni Malkin had a conversation.

Realizing the Russian center who had gone four games without a goal was potentially pressing, the result of being so close to 1,000 career points, Sullivan offered some advice.

"I said, 'You'll score.' " Sullivan recalled. "He's too good."

OK, so Sullivan wasn't completely correct, but it's doubtful at this point anybody is going to sweat the details.

Pittsburgh Penguins right wing Phil Kessel celebrates his goal with Pittsburgh Penguins center Sidney Crosby against the Capitals Tuesday, March 12, 2019, at PPG Paints Arena.

With a pair of assists Tuesday in a 5-3 victory over the Washington Capitals, Malkin reached 1,000 career points, becoming the 88th player in NHL history to do so, the fifth from Russia.

"Finally," Malkin said. "Last couple weeks I was a little bit nervous. It was a little bit slow. I'm over 1,000. I can breath normally.

"I want to thank my teammates. It's a special day for my family, my friends. I play hockey all my life. It's amazing to be here and win here against Washington. Special day, for sure."

One that was shared by his wife and parents, too.

As soon as Phil Kessel hammered the rebound of a Justin Schultz shot — Malkin got the secondary assist — the players on the ice celebrated, Malkin, Kessel and Sidney Crosby knocking their heads together.

The in-arena camera then cut to the stands, where Malkin's family was obviously and understandable emotional.

"It's an absolutely amazing night for me," Malkin said. "It's one of the best nights for my life. My parents were here, my wife. Crazy."

Erik Gudbranson a force and 'force field' in heated battle with Capitals

Malkin joked that his son, Nikita, couldn't make it, because he usually only stays for half a game. "Too small," Malkin said.

Nikita will be at Saturday's matinee against the Blues, though chances are dad wouldn't have wanted to wait that long.

As it stood, this was excruciating enough for Malkin, who had two assists in his past four games, hence the little chat with Sullivan.

Malkin was going stir-crazy, wanting to reach the milestone, and definitely was pressing a bit.

"My experience of being around guys who reach those types of milestones, usually when you're a couple points away, guys are pressing because they want to reach it," Sullivan said. "I think it should take a little bit of pressure off Geno. He can relax and play the game the way he's capable."

And that — as much as a key win over the Capitals, snapping Washington's winning streak at seven — could be downright scary for opposing teams.

Buried in the chase for 1,000 has been Malkin's second-half turnaround. Since Jan. 2, Malkin has points in 21 of 25 games, producing nine goals and 30 points during that stretch.

Whereas earlier this season Malkin lacked confidence — and admitted it — he now has a little bit of a swagger back to his game.

His line has consistently produced chances, and Malkin is starting to convert, even if the past couple had been wearing on him.

"It's a tough year for me," Malkin said. "But I think my game is back. I feel so much better every night. My confidence is back."

Malkin became the fifth active player to reach 1,000 points, joining San Jose's Joe Thornton (1,468), Crosby (1,206), Alex Ovechkin (1,200) and Toronto's Patrick Marleau (1,164).

Malkin and Ovechkin are the fourth pair of players drafted 1-2 in the same year to hit 1,000, while the Penguins joined the Red Wings as the only franchise to have four players record 1,000 points entirely with their franchise.

Malkin had 110 players help him reach 1,000 points, with Crosby (303) factoring into the most points of any player who has skated alongside Malkin.

"He's done so much over the years," Crosby said. "Been a part of winning teams, highlight-reel goals, dominated games. Did a lot for the organization.

"It's just been fun to be a part of that, watch that. You're always happy for your teammates when they do well, but a guy you've played this long with, it's pretty special, pretty unique."

Crosby's one wish was for Malkin to get the honor at home, with his family there to watch. The Penguins captain said that was the one thing that he'll cherish about his night more than anything.

Kessel, who has become extremely close with Malkin, joked with his linemate that he wanted to score the goal on which Malkin reached 1,000. Similar to Chris Kunitz scoring to get Crosby there, Kessel made it happen.

"He wanted that," Malkin said. "He said I hope I score your 1,000th point. He's unbelievable. Special for him, too. We play a long time together. It's not easy year for him, too.

"We try to play better every game. He gave me a chance to make 1,000th points. It's a huge goal for him and huge points for me."

Before the game, Ovechkin lauded Malkin and said he'd be thrilled when Malkin got to 1,000.

"I'll be happy if he gets it," Ovechkin said. "It's a big number. He's a great player."

It's almost too perfect that Malkin did it against the Capitals, opposite fellow Russians Ovechkin, Evgeny Kuznetsov and Dmitry Orlov.

But most of all, Malkin has to love that he did it in front of the fans that simply adore him, for his goofy humor to how effortless he makes the game. Sometimes hockey players can be robotic. Malkin is most certainly not that.

The hope should also be that Malkin reaching 1,000 should open some eyes around the league. He's still criminally underrated for someone who has accomplished all that he has.

"He doesn't the credit he deserves outside Pittsburgh, in the hockey world," Sullivan said. "He has been one of the elite players in this league for a decade-plus. He deserves more attention for that."

"He's been fun to watch that over the years," Crosby added. "I think 1,000 points puts a pretty good stamp on it."

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1135738 Pittsburgh Penguins



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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Check out Mike Lange's new goal call

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Mike Lange has added a new goal call to his repertoire.

The Penguins radio play-by-play man, known for delivering folksy catchphrases when the team scores, chose a new permanent addition to his rotation Tuesday after fans submitted ideas through a social media contest. The winner was announced before the game against the Washington Capitals at PPG Paints Arena.

"Buy me a banjo in Biloxi" will now join iconic "Lange-isms" including "scratch my back with a hacksaw" and "he's smiling like a butcher's dog" as a fixture on radio broadcasts moving forward.

The phrase beat out four other finalists. They were:

Penguins center Teddy Blueger celebrates his goal against the Oilers in the second period Wednesday Feb. 13, 2019 at PPG Paints Arena.

Lange has long taken submissions from fans. He told the team's website that he used to store them in a shoebox, but has since moved them to his computer.

"It's just something that's ongoing, has been ever since I've been here with the people approaching me and asking me, 'Do you think this one's all right?'" Lange told the website. "And as I've always said, I take everything under consideration. It's been a great ride with the people and I've enjoyed it, and I think that they have fun with it, too."

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1135739 Pittsburgh Penguins

Penguins fans big donors to city Public Safety following Tree of Life shooting

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Pittsburgh Public Safety has received nearly \$200,000 in donations since the Tree of Life mass shooting, with a sizable chunk coming from Pittsburgh Penguins fans who opened their wallets at a game just days after the massacre.

"We were the next big public event after that," said Kevin Acklin, senior vice president and general counsel for the Penguins. "The shooting occurred on that Saturday, Oct. 27, and we had a game on Tuesday. Our team captain Sid Crosby came up with an idea that we would have a patch with the Pens logo and Star of David."

A gunman killed 11 inside the Squirrel Hill synagogue and wounded several others, including six police officers.

Prior to the start of the Oct. 30 game against the New York Islanders at the PPG Paints Arena, the Penguins held a video presentation and ceremony, featuring members of the Jewish Federation of Pittsburgh and a ceremonial puck drop with Pittsburgh police Chief Scott Schubert, public safety director Wendell Hissrich and two first responders, officers Anthony Burke and Mike Smidga.

Penguins broadcaster Mike Lange announced a new catchphrase before the game against the Washington Capitals on Tuesday at PPG Paints Arena.

"We were honored to be the convener of that for the city," said Mr. Acklin, former chief of staff to Mayor Bill Peduto and board chairman of the Urban Redevelopment Authority.

Between the sale of the special game-day patches, a raffle of the game-used jerseys, the 50-50 raffle, and donations received online from private individuals and foundations, the Penguins Foundation raised just over \$626,000.

The team's foundation split the donations — \$420,000 to the Jewish Federation's Victims of Terror Fund; \$156,420 to the city's Public Safety Trust Fund; and the remaining roughly \$50,000 to be split among the injured police officers who responded to the attack.

Mr. Hissrich said he "wasn't expecting such an outpouring of support."

The donation will be used for training, equipment and supplies.

"It will be used to ensure the first responders' safety," Mr. Hissrich said. "We did a lot of training prior to the Tree of Life, and we'll continue to do that so if it ever happens again, we're more prepared. And it probably will happen again sometime."

Pittsburgh City Council approved the creation of the trust fund in November 2018 after donations began pouring in.

Aside from the Penguins, multiple donors have given a total of \$43,521, including donations from the Pittsburgh Pirates, Alcoa Corp., the Greater Pittsburgh Chinese Restaurant Association and more.

Each donation to the trust fund must be approved by council.

"It's great that organizations around Pittsburgh continue to donate," said councilman Corey O'Connor, whose district includes a portion of Squirrel Hill. "They've received so much. It's great to see that support from across the city."

Council introduced a resolution Tuesday to approve the donation from the Pittsburgh Penguins. A final vote is expected March 26.

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1135740 Pittsburgh Penguins

Tom Wilson on Penguins fans: 'I don't expect them to like me.'

JASON MACKEY

Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

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For Tom Wilson, the dynamic of the Penguins-Capitals rivalry definitely has changed after what his team accomplished last year, Washington hoisting the Stanley Cup for the first time in its history.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 13, 2019

Starting in October, on the second night of the NHL season, it took Wilson and his teammates about three seconds to sense the shift in power and re-live a few memories the group created with a six-game series victory in the Eastern Conference semifinals.

"I'd be lying if I said it didn't feel a little bit different coming back here having done what we did last year compared to years prior when you have that bitter taste," Wilson, who was suspended for that first meeting, said after the morning skate Tuesday at PPG Paints Arena.

While the Capitals, after years of hunting, finally have transformed into the hunted, one thing that remains status quo when these teams meet involves the hard-hitting Washington winger.

Penguins broadcaster Mike Lange announced a new catchphrase before the game against the Washington Capitals on Tuesday at PPG Paints Arena.

Penguins fans, of course, hate Wilson, in a way that might be superseded only by taxes and rush-hour traffic. Then again, Wilson might actually win that battle. Meanwhile, players in Pittsburgh remain acutely aware of where Wilson is on the ice at all times and who in the dressing room might be able to deal with him, should something go sideways.

Wilson understands the first part of that, although he has a tough time believing Penguins management thinks that much of him ... even though that same group has kept Ryan Reaves, Jamie Oleksiak, Garrett Wilson or Erik Gudbranson around just in case.

"It's a rivalry," Wilson said. "I don't expect them to like me. We've had some good battles. It's fun. ... I think guys that grow up playing hockey, these are the games you love."

There's been no shortage of criticism sent Wilson's way, on the record, by Penguins general manager Jim Rutherford, who told the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette after his team's postseason exit that Wilson "couldn't run quick enough to get away from" Oleksiak, who sought retaliation for Wilson's illegal hit on Zach Aston-Reese.

When Wilson and Oleksiak fought Dec. 19, Rutherford spoke out against how Wilson comported himself in the bout.

"All I know is, in that fight, Wilson didn't even give Oleksiak a chance to get his gloves off," Rutherford said in late January.

It wasn't just the general manager, either.

Matt Cullen, pictured with his family, waves to the PPG Paints Arena crowd last week.

Earlier this season, Sidney Crosby was critical of Wilson's hit on former Penguins forward Oskar Sundqvist and Matt Cullen spoke out against the appeal process that shortened Wilson's suspension for that hit.

Wilson attributed how much he's talked about in Pittsburgh to a social media thing and said the Capitals have a bunch of other players worth worrying about besides him.

"I just go out there and try and play," Wilson said. "Whatever they want to say is fine. I would be surprised if they were going out for the game thinking about me. There's other guys in this room. We've got a lot of different weapons."

"What people don't realize, you have Brooks Orpik, you have [T.J. Oshie], you have a number of guys who battle extremely hard every night. It's a team game."

And one the Capitals have played extremely well of late. Enough to win the Cup, of course, but this year to take 14 of 19 since Feb. 1, including seven in a row before the

Tuesday night game.

Add to that the recent history — three consecutive playoff meetings — and there should be no shortage of vitriol or intensity on either side.

"Obviously, we don't like each other," Patric Hornqvist said. "We don't like that team. It's going to be a hard battle."

The trick for the Penguins will be not to fixate on Wilson, something they've probably been guilty of doing in the past. He's expected to skate on a top line with Alex Ovechkin and Evgeny Kuznetsov, and those two require a lot of attention by themselves.

Ovechkin leads the NHL in goals with 46. Kuznetsov, who might've been the best player on the ice in the playoff series last year, has nine goals and 22 points over his past 21 games.

"You have to be aware of [Wilson], but there's a number of other players you need to be aware of, as well," Gudbranson said.

That being said, if something does happen Tuesday, Gudbranson said he's "never been one to back down" and plans to push back on his team's behalf.

The trick, again, will be to not isolate on Wilson.

"I'm obviously going to have my eye out for him," Gudbranson said. "But I'm going to play my game, play hard, be defensively sound and move pucks well. I'm certainly not going to wrap my head around one guy on that team, but you definitely do have to be aware of him on the ice."

Those in Pittsburgh — and probably other NHL fans, too — might say that's because of Wilson's reputation as sort of a headhunter, the result of many vicious hits Wilson has delivered throughout his career.

Wilson, of course, doesn't agree with that assessment of his game. Against the Penguins or anyone else, he reiterated Tuesday morning that he's just trying to play the game hard.

"I've never seen myself as that," Wilson said. "I've never tried to do that. I finish hard checks. It's a fast game, but even people who have watched my hits, I'm not headhunting. It's different. It is what it is. We've moved on from that. I'm just trying to worry about growing my game and helping this team win."

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1135741 Pittsburgh Penguins

Teddy Blueger gets a chance on Evgeni Malkin's line with Zach Aston-Reese out

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MAR 12, 2019 1:27 PM

Teddy Blueger has mostly been used as a fourth-line forward and a penalty-killer during his time in Pittsburgh these past couple of months. But with Zach Aston-Reese out with an injury, Blueger got a chance to show he can do more.

Aston-Reese is day-to-day with a lower-body injury and officially out of Tuesday's game against the Washington Capitals at PPG Paints Arena. So Blueger was bumped up to the second line, where he skated alongside Evgeni Malkin and Phil Kessel.

"I always try not to change anything — play hard and defend well and try to create space for those guys," he said. "Just try to give them the puck



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and go to the net, pretty much. Just keep it simple for me and let those guys make the plays.”

Coach Mike Sullivan said Blueger, 24, held his own with those two after Aston-Reese was injured during the second period of Sunday’s win over the Boston Bruins. And he felt Blueger, “a good, solid two-way player,” deserved another look there.

Penguins broadcaster Mike Lange announced a new catchphrase before the game against the Washington Capitals on Tuesday at PPG Paints Arena.

But while Blueger was expected to be the responsible one on that line – and he’s OK with that – he also know he has to “chip in offensively” to remain there.

When Blueger first joined the AHL club in Wilkes-Barre/Scranton, he was utilized in a bottom-six role. During his three seasons there, he honed his offensive skills and was the team’s leading scorer with 21 goals and 18 assists when first promoted.

“I’ve gotten better and showed that I could produce at that level,” said the 2012 second-round pick. “I think as long as I keep working and keep getting better every day, there’s nothing that can stop me from doing that at the next level, too.”

Blueger has three goals and two assists in 15 games in Pittsburgh, though in his last eight games he recorded just one assist. That came against the Bruins, when he sprung Jared McCann on a breakaway, leading to a huge short-handed goal.

Still, when factoring in his strong defensive work, Blueger has made a positive impact on the Penguins, all while making the switch from center to left wing.

“I’ve got used to it. I kind of think the transition went better than I expected,” he said. “I feel good playing there. There or center, it doesn’t matter to me.”

Blandisi ready to get ‘gritty’

With Aston-Reese hobbled, the Penguins on Monday called up Joseph Blandisi, the winger whom they acquired for Derek Grant back in January. He played one game with the Penguins before spending the last two months in Wilkes-Barre.

“We’ve been working hard down there. We’ve got a young group, so it gave me an opportunity to play in all sorts of situations,” said Blandisi, who had seven goals and 15 points in 17 games there. “I think it was good for my development.”

Blandisi, who started out on the fourth line with Matt Cullen and Garrett Wilson, said he was “excited to get thrown into the fire” against the rival Capitals, and he felt his game was well-suited for when the intensity gets ratcheted up.

“I like playing physical,” he said. “I like getting gritty and going to the dirty areas.”

Malkin overlooked by NHL?

With Malkin closing in on the 1,000-point milestone – he entered Tuesday’s game with 998 career points – Sullivan was asked if Malkin is “underappreciated.”

“Underappreciated probably isn’t the right word,” the coach said. “He probably gets overlooked and doesn’t get the credit he deserves for his body of work. I think he does within our organization and I think he does within our fan base.”

Sullivan, citing Malkin’s fingerprints on three Stanley Cups and the Conn Smythe he won in 2009, said, “When you look at what he’s accomplished, it’s remarkable.”

Around the boards

Kris Letang and Olli Maatta skated before the team took the ice for the morning skate. Letang, still wearing a non-contact jersey, stayed on with the rest of the group but remained out Tuesday. ... Matt Murray made his ninth straight start. ... When the Penguins worked on their power play during the morning skate, the top unit was Sidney Crosby, Jake Guentzel, Patric Hornqvist and a pair of defensemen in Justin Schultz and Marcus Pettersson. Malkin and Kessel were on the second unit.

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20 Penguins Thoughts: OK, so is Matt Cullen really retiring?

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It’s as resolute as Matt Cullen has sounded regarding his potential retirement.

Asked the night of his 1,500th NHL game whether he might have any interest in trying for 1,600, Cullen didn’t hesitate.

“Nope,” he said with a smile.

Saturday morning in Columbus, I brought that moment up to Cullen, explaining that I thought he sounded rather convincing.

Evgeni Malkin notches 1,000th point

“I feel like this is it,” Cullen said. “That this is the last run.”

Then he paused.

“I know I’ve said that before.”

The subject of retirement is going to come up when you’re 42 years old and the NHL’s eldest statesmen. Shoot, even Cullen’s own dad, Terry, has been giving him grief about all the will-he-or-won’t-he talk that’s surrounded his son for, oh, about half a decade now.

After talking to Matt Cullen a little bit about his future, I still genuinely have no idea what he’s going to do. And I don’t think he does, either.

“I’m not thinking down the road like that at all,” Cullen said. “When you’re at this point in the season, that feels 100 miles away.”

2. A couple years ago — not sure exactly when — Cullen decided to change how he looks at things.

Evgeni Malkin nets 1,000th point as Penguins down Capitals

He essentially wanted to stop thinking so much about the bigger picture and narrow his focus. It’s one of the reasons he’s been able to keep playing this long and enjoy it so much.

“I’ve always been guilty at looking too far ahead in my career,” Cullen said. “The last few years I’ve enjoyed playing a lot more by being right in the moment and enjoying it for what it’s worth.”

“It’s easy to say that. It’s harder to do it, in our game especially.”

3. The Cullen retirement talk is interesting to me because of what it might mean for his teammates. They obviously adore him. The Penguins have also been incredibly inconsistent this season.



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I wonder if they think about this potentially being his last run and whether that serves as any extra motivation to get it together? To maybe get Cullen a fourth Stanley Cup, pass it to him first (how could Sidney Crosby not?) and let him go out on top.

It certainly wouldn't hurt as a source of motivation, but they'd also have to know that's where Cullen's head is at. But again, I just don't think he's anywhere close to that at this point.

And he's not wrong for handling it that way.

4. One funny thing about Cullen's 1,500th game: His wife, Bridget, put together a surprise party for him at Mambo Italia in Sewickley last Monday, the night before the game. A few former teammates flew in. There was a bunch of family and current teammates, there, too.

Matt fell for it hook, line and sinker. (Full disclosure: Terry Cullen told me about it during the story I did on the two of them, and I, too, had to keep my mouth shut.)

"I don't know if I'm really gullible or what, but I had no idea it was happening," Matt said. "I had no expectations going into the whole thing. It was really cool seeing family and friends. It was a pretty special night.

"The whole thing was crazy. It was beyond anything I would've ever expected."

5. Apparently Bridget duped Matt by saying they needed to head into downtown Sewickley to load up his truck with a bunch of boxes from a local juice bar. Bridget drove and had Matt walk with their three boys.

When Matt and Co. arrived, Bridget said that everything had been canceled — no boxes — but she had to pick up something from a store.

"We walked past that store, we got to the restaurant, walked in, and a bunch of family and friends were just sitting there waiting," Matt said. "I couldn't believe it."

6. Moving on ...

Penguins players wear monitors strapped to their chest during practice that monitor their activity.

That data is collected by the team's strength and conditioning staff, and it gives coach Mike Sullivan input when it comes to deciding how hard to push his club. It's not new in pro sports.

But Zach Trotman goes above and beyond.

A self-described "exercise science nerd from college," Trotman wears what's called a "WHOOOP" on his wrist. It's essentially fitness tracker that looks a lot like an Apple Watch.

Using a program called Strain, it measures your heart-rate variability and sleep.

"It gives me an idea of how recovered my body is and how much work I should be doing the next day," Trotman said.

7. This is not a team-issued thing. Trotman does it entirely on his own, but he loves it.

"I'm kinda big into all of that stuff," Trotman said. "The team does a lot of stuff for us, but I like to have my own numbers, too."

Trotman started wearing the WHOOOP this summer, and so far he's been very happy with the purchase.

"The more I've done it, the better I've got at predicting how I'm going to be the next day," Trotman said. "I've learned whether I should take it easy and go lay on the couch or if I should go out and take a walk.

"I kinda can tell how it's going to affect me the next day and where I need to be at. It's really cool."

8. To be sure, Trotman still adheres to what the team wants him to do. By no means is this a replacement for that. It's more so he can think along with the training staff.

He said he loves learning more about preparation, rest and recovery and views it as a possible career after hockey.

"I still have a year left on my degree, so I'm by no means anywhere near where they are," said Trotman, who attended Lake Superior State in his native Michigan. "It's fun for me to be able to bounce ideas off of them and ask why we do certain things and get their feedback, the reasoning behind everything. That helps me learn, too."

By the way, good for Trotman. Whether it's here or elsewhere — he'll be an unrestricted free agent this summer — the guy might be earning himself a nice next contract on July 1.

9. Garrett Wilson was sporting a few stitches on the top of his forehead Saturday, the result of his fight two days earlier with Columbus captain Nick Foligno. You've probably seen the picture of Wilson in the penalty box, blood streaming down his face.

Turns out Wilson's hands were caught in Foligno's jersey. As they tumbled to the ice, Wilson couldn't get his hands free and brace for impact.

"I just had to eat it," he said.

Wilson was not subject to the concussion spotter's intervention — fortunately he was fine — because his head hit the ice, not another player's fist.

Yeah, because the human brain can tell the difference.

10. Wilson told me that he had a similar thing happen to him in junior, when he couldn't get his hands free and "smashed my head off the ice at the end of the fight." That sounds ... not fun.

More full disclosure: I've watched hockey fights my whole life ... been in a few scraps myself, though never on skates, and I never thought about what Wilson brought up next.

"I've always been taught to not to put your hands on the ice," Wilson said. "The linesmen coming in to break up the fight can skate over your fingers. I'm always hesitant putting my hands on the ice.

"Those are the scariest ones I see. When you fall and the linesmen are coming in to break it up. They skate right over your fingers."

That sounds ... not fun.

11. Moving on ... I thought Sullivan's answer to my question Sunday night on why Nick Bjugstad and Jared McCann have had so much success here was pretty telling.

"They're two real good players. They've embraced the roles that we've put them in. When guys bring a certain level of enthusiasm and they embrace the challenge, that, for me, is where it starts, with that attitude of wanting to make a difference and wanting to help this team win games. I think both of these guys are really excited to be Penguins. They're excited about the roles that we've put them in. They've done a great job for us."

Derick Brassard was a "real good player" — or at least came here with that reputation — but he definitely did not embrace the role he was put in. Or, at minimum, was never fully comfortable in it.

I also don't think Sullivan was any intentionally saying anything to bury Brassard. But I think the Penguins appreciate how much those guys appreciate being here. And they definitely do.

By the way, how about this for a trade comparison:

Update: Brassard still has three goals and six points, and he's a minus-12 in 18 games.

12. Am I the only one who thinks the Penguins should be leading the Metropolitan Division right now? Stay with me here.

The Penguins are six points back of the Capitals.



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They're just 6-9 in overtime, which is obviously terrible. But from 2015-16, the Penguins won 34 of 59 games that required more than 60 minutes, a winning percentage of .576.

Apply that to this season and the Penguins theoretically should've gone 9-6 in extra time, giving them three more points.

Furthermore, there are three games that stand out for me when it comes to Sullivan's choice in his starting goaltender: Jan. 19 at Vegas, Jan. 9 at Tampa Bay and Feb. 21 at home against San Jose.

Those are three of the best teams in the NHL, and Sullivan started his backup netminder each time; Casey DeSmith lost all three.

I don't think it's insane to think Matt Murray could've earned three of a possible six points.

13. So here we are — without delving into the Penguins' other issues with inconsistency and underperformance this season — talking about potentially leading the division.

The Penguins and Capitals, in this scenario, would both have 89 points. If one of those wins against Golden Knights, Lightning or Sharks came in regulation, they'd be tied in what's used as the first tiebreaker — regulation wins.

Head-to-head, the Penguins have beaten the Capitals in two of three meetings. Thus, the Penguins would be in first via tiebreaker. At worst, Tuesday's game could be for first place.

None of this, of course, means a blessed thing. But it's interesting to me anyway.

14. The Fan's Andrew Fillipponi host and I got into an interesting discussion on-air last week about the Hart Trophy.

I made the point that Tampa Bay's Nikita Kucherov should be considered the front-runner at this point because of the incredible offensive numbers he's produced this season; he has 111 points, 13 more than second-place Patrick Kane of Chicago.

Fillipponi's rebuttal — it's fair and accurate — was that, since the most recent lockout, a Hart Trophy winner has never come from the team that had the most points.

15. I do think there's a couple things that should be considered here, though.

And no, I don't know if I fully subscribe to this line of thinking. Just presenting it. I still think Kane (if Chicago makes it) and Crosby have extremely compelling cases for the Hart and should maybe win it. My point is that we shouldn't immediately discount Kucherov, and here's why.

The guy has points in 53 of the Lightning's 70 games thus far. That, by itself, is crazy.

But Tampa is also a bad team when Kucherov doesn't score; the Lightning are 46-4-3 when Kucherov has at least one point, 7-9-1 when he does not.

So, yeah, you can say that he's just compiled on a top team, but Tampa has definitely benefitted from his steady-if-not-specular offense.

16. Patric Hornqvist has one goal in his past 23 games.

It doesn't look, to me anyway, like he's doing anything that would lessen his chances of scoring — not going to the net, giving the puck away all the time, shooting less, that sort of thing. You certainly can't question the effort, and he does have points in six of eight.

What confuses me here is this: Did the Penguins really give Hornqvist \$26.5 million on a five-year deal that runs through 2023 to play on the third line? I can't imagine so.

Hornqvist doesn't generate enough of his own offense. He needs the puck around the net to hack and whack and do what he does probably better than anyone else in the league.

Many of you have brought up his lack of goal-scoring, wondering if it's concussion-related. I don't think it is. But I do think it's linemate- and role-related.

17. It's tough, though, because what do you do?

McCann has looked really good with Crosby, you're not moving Jake Guentzel, and those three create an important speed element together.

Until you get Phil Kessel going, your best option for helping Kessel find his game is probably to keep him with Evgeni Malkin, then maybe think about trying Kessel on his own line. But until that point, best-case scenario, you'd be taking a pretty big chance.

It would help the Penguins if Kessel got it together, and they could use Hornqvist next to Malkin and allow Hornqvist to do his thing.

18. Had an interesting chat with David Savard, Jack Johnson's former defense partner with the Blue Jackets, over the weekend in Columbus.

Savard was interesting on the whole kerfuffle that started over the summer — "I think it just came out weird," Savard said. "I think he's glad to be with Pittsburgh, it's a great organization, and he was glad for a new beginning."

Savard also credited Johnson with doing a lot to change the culture in the Blue Jackets' dressing room.

"He was really professional in all of his time here," Savard said. "I know it didn't end really well for him, but he gave everything he had when he was playing for our team. You can only respect what he did for this team and how he helped us get to the next level."

"From the time he showed up here, he kind of changed the culture. He's a guy who works really hard. If you ask anybody in the room, I think they would only have good comments about him."

I could be crazy, but I'm starting to sense a small change in the fan sentiment relative to Johnson. Or maybe people have just directed their ire at Dominik Simon. Either way ...

19. Number of the week: 1

That's the number of five-on-five goals for which Erik Gudbranson has been on the ice in six games since the Feb. 25 trade, none of them coming in the past five.

Furthermore, Gudbranson ranks No. 1 among Penguins defenseman during that time in five-on-five shot share at 57.23 percent. He's second only to partner Marcus Pettersson in scoring-chance percentage (61.29) and high-danger percentage (76.47), both of those also coming five-on-five.

This is all a fancy way of saying Gudbranson has been solid.

Yes, the minutes are (relatively) sheltered. And no, he's not a one-man breakout. But remember that general manager Jim Rutherford took Tanner Pearson — the missing Pearson, as Post-Gazette columnist Joe Starkey calls him — and turned him into Gudbranson, when then Penguins were in a pinch and had four of their top eight defensemen hurt.

20. Non-hockey Thought of the week: If you've read something better than this recently, I'd love to see it.

Sally Jenkins, No. 1, is incredible in her own right, an absolute legend and titan in our field. But I found this piece interesting for how she paints the picture of family life in a sports writer's house.

Let's just say that my wife and I can relate.

We're all weird people, let's admit. It just depends where your quirks or eccentricities manifest themselves. And kids get a unique taste of what



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it's like growing up around professional sports, in this wacky field, and I'm willing to bet it's a heck of a lot different than growing up in a traditional household.

"Don't rob old people," might've been my favorite line in the whole thing. Definitely can relate to that. Life in our world is ... just a little different, and I wouldn't have it any other way.

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No North Shore duplicate: Penguins see differences in their plan for former Civic Arena site

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Office buildings, a music venue, restaurants, a hotel — it all sounds a lot like what has been built between Heinz Field and PNC Park over the past 16 years.

But the Pittsburgh Penguins insist their new \$750 million plan for the redevelopment of the 28-acre former Civic Arena site in the lower Hill District will be no North Shore redux.

For starters, the team is planning to build up to 1,420 units of housing, including 274 in a first phase to start this fall, in the lower Hill.

That's far different than what has happened between the two North Shore sports venues, where there currently are no residential buildings.

Penguins broadcaster Mike Lange announced a new catchphrase before the game against the Washington Capitals on Tuesday at PPG Paints Arena.

The first units — condominiums — could be built as part of a new mixed-use project being planned by Continental Real Estate Companies, the developer for the Steelers and Pirates, but only after prodding by Pittsburgh Mayor Bill Peduto.

Even then, whatever North Shore housing is erected would be nowhere near as grand in scale as that contemplated at the former arena site.

But there are other key distinctions as well, according to the Penguins and their developers.

With a 10,000-square-foot food hall, the apartments, 810,000 square feet of office space, 190,000 square feet of retail, the music venue and a 220-room hotel, the arena development is "almost mixed use on steroids," said Chris Buccini, president of the Buccini/Pollin Group, the firm hired by the Penguins to develop the office and commercial aspects.

In terms of comparisons between the North Shore and the arena site, Mr. Buccini should know. His Wilmington, Del.-based real estate firm owns the former Del Monte Food Building on the North Shore riverfront.

While he sees similarities between the two developments, he views the arena site as a "unique opportunity" given its location — sandwiched between Downtown, the Hill, Uptown and the Strip District.

"We're not separated by a river. We're connected to the core and we're connected to the community," added David Morehouse, the Penguins

CEO and president. "There's not a highway dividing us behind us and there's not a river dividing us in front of us."

This is a rendering of the first phase of the residential development on the former Civic Arena site.

Keith B. Key, CEO of KBK Enterprises and a principal in Interger — the company hired to do the first 500 units of housing on the arena site — said the North Shore is more of a destination for visitors.

The publicly owned arena property, he believes, has a chance to become a true neighborhood, blending in with the rest of the Hill.

"This one is much different, where you have people who will come who will be visitors for the game and so forth, but you'll have residents interfacing at the same time. So this is like a combination of the North Shore, Oakland, and East Liberty," he said. "This is unusual."

The right teams?

Whether the Penguins can pull off their latest vision for the site remains to be seen. They were unable to generate any momentum after U.S. Steel pulled out of a deal in 2015 to build a new headquarters there.

But they now believe they have the right teams in place in Buccini/Pollin and Pittsburgh-based Interger, a minority-owned firm led by Mr. Key; developer Bomani Howze, son of former city councilman Sala Udin; and business executive Robert Agbede.

Interger is focused on building mixed-income affordable and market-rate housing in underdeveloped neighborhoods. KBK has been active in that regard in a number of Pittsburgh neighborhoods.

According to its website, Buccini/Pollin has acquired or developed real estate assets valued at more than \$5 billion, including more than 40 hotels, 7 million square feet of office and retail space, 10 residential communities and multiple entertainment venues.

Interger plans to begin the first 274 units of housing in the fall, to be followed by a second phase in the same range.

Buccini/Pollin hopes to start the first commercial development — a 200,000-square-foot office building with 50,000 square feet of retail — in the winter.

Under the team's deal with the two local authorities that own the arena land, the Penguins must start development on 6.45 acres by October 2020 or forfeit 20 percent of the parking revenue now generated from the site.

While developers haven't had much success in building new Downtown office towers in recent years, with most of the activity taking place in the Strip and East End, the arena site could have a chance, said Gerard McLaughlin, the executive managing director of the Newmark Knight Frank real estate firm.

A key piece, he said, is the completion of the park to be built over Crosstown Expressway to link the site to Downtown.

The 28 acres affords Buccini/Pollin the opportunity to erect office buildings in the 100,000- to 200,000-square-foot range rather than needing to go bigger to support the economics of developing Downtown.

"It's a matter of getting the first one," Mr. McLaughlin said of potential tenants. "After that, I think you will see things start to come together on that project."

The site also could be attractive to tech companies once the bus rapid transit system between Downtown and Oakland is finished, he said.

Buccini/Pollin has plans for a 50,000-square-foot music venue on the property. The company is in "intense conversations with a few groups right now," Mr. Buccini said, although he declined to name them.

One potential operator could be Live Nation, which has been opening new venues around the country. It took over management of Wilmington's historic Queen Theatre, owned by Buccini/Pollin, in 2017.



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"We own and have developed live music venues in the past with multiple operators. Live Nation is one of the greatest in the world, but we're still in advanced discussions with a few people right now," Mr. Buccini said.

The Penguins' latest development plan still will have to go through a neighborhood review process in the Hill to ensure that it fulfills requirements of a community collaboration agreement.

That not only includes mandates on affordable housing, but also minority and women business enterprise inclusion, workforce development, local hiring and wealth-building initiatives.

Marimba Milliones, CEO and president of the Hill Community Development Corp., said the point is to accelerate the development process while including the community.

"Everyone is past ready to see the project move forward," she said.

As part of the community agreement, 20 percent of the up to 1,420 units planned at the site would be affordable — 15 percent at 80 percent of the area median income, 2.5 percent at 70 percent of the AMI and 2.5 percent at 60 percent.

Even so, Carl Redwood, chairperson of the Hill District Consensus Group, questioned whether rents would be low enough. He said at 80 percent AMI, a one-bedroom apartment could lease for \$900 a month — out of the range for many black families.

Kevin Acklin, the Penguins' senior vice president who is spearheading the arena development, said the team's commitments to community engagement and empowerment "far exceed any comparable development in the city."

He said having InterGen to do the first 500 units of housing more than doubles the commitment in the community agreement to have at least 200 units done by a minority developer.

The development also is expected to generate \$25 million in Local Economic Revitalization Tax Assistance Act funding to be used to invest in affordable housing, small business development and other opportunities in other parts of the Hill.

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1135744 Pittsburgh Penguins

Sidney Crosby on Alex Ovechkin, their relationship and the rivalry that matters most

By Josh Yohe

Mar 12, 2019

Having conducted interviews for 24 of his 31 years, Sidney Crosby mastered the rare ability of never lying while also never offending. It's his way.

Underneath the politeness and sincere respectfulness, however, resides a fierce competitiveness that all of the great ones possess.

This brings us to last week, as Crosby sat at his locker following practice and considered a question that was raised.

You were 21 when you won your first Cup. It took Alex Ovechkin a decade longer. Was there a part of you that was happy to see him finally win it?

Crosby considered his thoughts and emotions for a moment. He has been compared with Ovechkin since they were teenagers. They battled in four unforgettable, dramatic playoff series, with the winner of each meeting going on to win the Stanley Cup one month later.

Their personalities couldn't possibly be more different, as illustrated by Crosby's much more subdued celebration the Cup in contrast to Ovechkin's party through Washington, D.C., last June. Both are immeasurably popular, but for completely different reasons. Penguins fans take such pride in Crosby's down to earth nature. Capitals fans would love nothing more than to have a drink with Ovechkin.

After pausing, Crosby offers this.

"I don't know," he said. "It's hard to say. I can relate to the expectations. I guess it's unique that way between us."

Then, the memory of May 7, 2018, sweeps over Crosby. Evgeny Kuznetsov scored on a breakaway to end the Penguins' three-peat dreams, giving the Capitals a series victory against the Penguins for the first time since Crosby was 7 years old.

"It's hard to say," Crosby continued. "Because that's the team that beat us."

Crosby doesn't like talking about "Sid vs. Ovi." He receives questions about their rivalry on a regular basis, but to him, it's not the rivalry that matters. Crosby isn't big on promoting himself. His default mode of turning questions about himself and Ovechkin into answers pertaining to the Penguins and Capitals is a sincere one.

"That's just who I am," he said. "I just want to win games against them. I don't like turning it into me and him."

Crosby isn't being dismissive of Ovechkin's greatness, though. Far from it. The greatest playmaker of his generation once said, with a smile, of the greatest goal scorer of his generation: "I'd shoot more if I had a shot like Ovechkin's got. Anybody would."

As Ovechkin climbs the all-time goal scoring ladder, Crosby looks on in awe. At his current pace, Ovechkin, who has 653 career goals, will pass Brendan Shanahan, Luc Robitaille, Mario Lemieux, Steve Yzerman and Mark Messier in the next year.

And if that pace continues, Ovechkin, 33, will have a chance to break Wayne Gretzky's all-time record of 894 goals before he is through.

"Oh, I think he's got a real chance to do it," Crosby said. "I don't think it's out of the realm of possibility at all. If anybody is ever going to do it, it's going to be him. I don't think we'll see anyone quite like him again."

Crosby still marvels at Ovechkin's physical gifts after all of these years. The two produced a show for the ages in Game 2 of their 2009 postseason meeting, each recording hat tricks. Ovechkin's Capitals won that game, but Crosby's Penguins won the series.

"I remember some of the goals he scored in 2009," Crosby said. "The hat trick game, he had this one shot, he was barely past the blueline, and he just ripped it. I've never seen a guy shoot the puck like that. And when teams would scout him and figure something out, he would just find another way to score. He's always been like that. The way he shoots the puck, he'll just keep scoring."

Crosby keeps scoring too, of course. He sits at 1,204 career points, a mere five ahead of Ovechkin, who will hit the 1,200-point mark with a goal or an assist against the Penguins on Tuesday.

Ovechkin is the greatest goal-scorer of his time and Crosby is universally regarded as the greatest player of his generation. They will always be linked to each other even if an awkward overtone to their relationship may always remain.

Some of the great rivals in sports history become friends after years of hostility. There is the iconic video of Magic Johnson and Larry Bird exchanging a fist-bump during the NBA Finals. Bjorn Borg was in John McEnroe's wedding.



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Perhaps, one day, Crosby and Ovechkin will grow closer. For now, though, there is a sense that Penguins vs. Capitals is the priority.

"You see a lot of players here and there, All-Star games, things like that," Crosby said. "It's probably the same kind of relationship I have with a lot of guys that I've played against a lot over the years. I'd say that we are cordial. The rivalry between the teams is just a lot more important to me."

The perspective around many hockey circles is that the rivalry is renewed because Ovechkin and the Capitals finally got their Cup.

"I can relate with what he's gone through, the expectations, the pressure," Crosby said. "When you think about it, I mean, yeah, I've been compared to him a lot over the years."

Evgeni Malkin and Ovechkin were friends as teenagers in Russia. Their relationship took a bizarre swing and Ovechkin went out of his way to take runs at Malkin for years around a decade ago. Things thawed between them in recent years, as they generally speak outside of their respective dressing rooms following games.

Crosby said he's never explored Ovechkin via Malkin. The curiosity simply doesn't seem to exist.

"I've been around him a little bit. ... Like I said, we're cordial. We're just different in a lot of ways," Crosby said.

The two have feuded on the ice on a number of occasions, Ovechkin often the instigator. Things got a little hostile between them in Washington in December. They probably will again Tuesday at PPG Paints Arena.

"Of course, it always gets blown up when there is an interaction between us," Crosby said.

This is true. And this is because there is only one Crosby and only one Ovechkin, and for all of their differences, both are equipped with the rarest of competitive fire, and both came along in the same generation, two icons who happen to play in the same division.

What possibly lies ahead is mostly on Crosby's mind. The Penguins and Capitals have met in the playoffs in three straight seasons. Both teams are playing their best hockey of the season with spring in the air, and the reality is that another postseason meeting possibly awaits. The Capitals would love nothing more than to prove their victory last spring was the new normal, not an aberration. The Penguins? They'd love nothing more than to reassert their dominance.

With such important moments possible in the near future, relationships with the competition can wait.

"We play each other a lot, and we both get up for that challenge," Crosby said of Ovechkin. "I'm focused on winning, though. That's what it comes down to. That's my motivation."

Then, the familiar refrain strikes again.

"That's the team that beat us last year," Crosby said.

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The Athletic / Matchup data for defencemen from all 31 teams to find out who has earned their coach's trust

By Tyler Dellow Mar 11, 2019 35

One of the things I like to keep an eye on is how defencemen are being matched up against opposing forwards. While there's a debate about the extent to which that matters, when you look at the data it's pretty obvious that coaches believe in it. There a million ways to do this but the approach that I like to take involves classifying opposition lines based on who the coach likes to use. In order to do this, I've simply classified the forward with the highest average time on ice for the season as the first line. I eliminate him and his two most common linemates in that game from the data and then classify the forward with the second highest average time on ice from the remaining nine as my proxy for the second line. Everything else is bottom six minutes.

What this does is let us look at ice time profiles for a team's defencemen. Defence is a position where reputations sometimes last longer than a coach's faith in a player. Looking at things like this lets us see what the coach is thinking. In order to provide a sense of the ranges involved, I've put together a line graph showing the percentage of ice time played against opposition top lines, second line and bottom sixes by defencemen this year.

Just to explain what we're looking at here, the 100th percentile defenceman against opposition bottom six forwards (the defenceman who played the highest percentage of his time against them) played just under 70 percent of his ice time against bottom six forwards. You can see a few things in this. First of all, the distribution of ice time against second lines is much narrower. If I'd broken this out further, we'd probably see the same thing with fourth lines too. It's easier to control matchups on the edges – against the opposition's best and worst players.

Second, the spread actually is fairly big for the top and bottom of the opposition's lineup. Again, it's more on the edges than anything. You can see in particular that things change starkly in the bottom and top ten percent of defencemen. Whether it's impacting results or not, coaches deploy different defencemen differently. Finally, note that the second line is going to make up a smaller proportion of most defencemen's ice time than the first line (which plays more by definition) or the bottom six (which involves two lines rather than just one.) As you look through the various teams, you can use the graph above for a sense of where a given player's usage rates relative to the team.

Pacific Division

San Jose Sharks

One of the things that you notice when you start looking at teams this way is that the defenceman who plays the most ice time isn't necessarily the one who has played the toughest minutes. There's been a long time trend in San Jose where Marc-Edouard Vlasic provides some shelter for Brent Burns. This year, that's extended to Erik Karlsson as well. Justin Braun and Vlasic have played much tougher minutes than the typical defenceman sees; this provides a benefit to the rest of San Jose's defence.

Calgary Flames

It's not surprising that TJ Brodie and Mark Giordano are playing the toughest minutes in Calgary. Two other things jump out at me looking at this. First, Travis Hamonic and Noah Hanifin aren't being particularly sheltered. Rasmus Andersson and Oliver Kylington on the other hand ... they're getting a very nice introduction to life in the NHL. As we'll see, this is something of a Mike Babcock trait and Calgary coach Bill Peters is a product of the Mike Babcock finishing school for coaches.

Vegas Golden Knights

Vegas is similar to San Jose, in the sense of one pair providing some cover for the rest of the defencemen, only more so. Nate Schmidt and Brayden McNabb are taking the hardest minutes; every other defenceman on the team is nicely sheltered from the opposing first lines as a result. This will be worth keeping an eye on if the Golden Knights run into deeper opposing teams in the playoffs. Their second and third



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pairs haven't been asked to eat minutes against really high-end competition for most of the year.

Arizona Coyotes

Oliver Ekman-Larsson and Niklas Hjalmarsson are pretty clear matchup favourites for Rick Tocchet in Arizona. Beyond that, he doesn't really seem to have any preferred matchups, although, with the injuries that the Coyotes have endured this year, it might be difficult to spot trends there. To the extent that Tocchet's had a preferred matchup for opposition second lines, it's probably depended a lot on who happens to be healthy on any given night.

Edmonton Oilers

Edmonton's basically run with a top four and bottom two this year. There's a slight edge towards shifting the more difficult minutes to Adam Larsson and Oscar Klefbom but it's not particularly strong. Kevin Gravel and Matt Benning have been particularly sheltered.

Vancouver Canucks

Travis Green is a coach who's really impressed me as someone who decides on the matchups he wants and in his time behind an NHL bench, finds a way to get them. Sure enough, that shows up again, with Tanev and Edler playing helaciously difficult minutes. After that, Ben Hutton stands out, particularly given that 2017-18 was a difficult year for him and then you've got a group of four who look to have been more sheltered. It will be interesting to see where Quinn Hughes slots in here exactly. Green would presumably like to break him in slowly but there are a lot of people in Vancouver fighting for those minutes.

Anaheim Ducks

Curiously, given Randy Carlyle's reputation as a matcher of lines and pairs, there aren't all that many particularly strong trends with Anaheim this year. The Ducks only have five defencemen who made the games played limit due to the injuries and player churn that they've endured this year. Unsurprisingly, Hampus Lindholm and Josh Manson are the matchup pair but Carlyle and Bob Murray don't really seem to have hidden any of the Ducks' five regulars.

Los Angeles Kings

There's not a ton of really hard matching going on in Los Angeles this year. Drew Doughty and Derek Forbort are, I suppose, playing a little more against top line competition than Jake Muzzin, formerly of that parish, and Alec Martinez. Then you've got three guys who are clearly being more sheltered with Dion Phaneuf having been the most sheltered of the three.

Central Division

Winnipeg Jets

Winnipeg's kind of been running with a top three this year. Dustin Byfuglien, Jacob Trouba and Josh Morrissey have all been playing minutes with markedly different profiles than the other Jets defencemen. There was a school of thought amongst some smart Jets' fans to whom I pay attention before the trade deadline that Winnipeg could really use a left-shot defenceman. As it so happens, Paul Maurice's usage patterns kind of line up exactly with that.

Nashville Predators

In the years that I've been paying attention to this, it seems like nothing has ever changed with Nashville. They roll out the big four defencemen against the opposition's best and then the bottom pair is heavily sheltered. Plus ça change ...

St. Louis Blues

Vince Dunn is someone who's gotten a lot of positive attention this year. He's had a good year, but St. Louis is fairly similar to Nashville in terms of having a clear top four and bottom two.

Dallas Stars

Miro Heiskanen isn't going to have much luck in the Calder Trophy race this year what with Elias Pettersson but a teenager playing top-four minutes and surviving on a likely playoff team is worthy of a mention. It's not all that common.

Minnesota Wild

The Wild are another team that's kind of clearly running a top four and a bottom pair. If Matt Dumba had been healthy all year, Greg Pateryn's splits would probably look a lot more like Nick Seeler's.

Colorado Avalanche

Jared Bednar hasn't run particularly strong matches this year. There appears to be a bit of a preference for getting Erik Johnson, Samuel Girard and Ian Cole out against the other team's best players and a bit of a preference for Nikita Zadorov and Patrik Nemeth against bottom six forwards but beyond that, it's a pretty generic looking split.

Chicago Blackhawks

Surprisingly to me, Connor Murphy and Carl Dahlstrom (!) have been playing a lot against the opposition's top players. In addition to them, Jeremy Colliton seems to have given Duncan Keith and Henri Jokiharju a bit of a run there. That leaves Erik Gustafsson, Gustav Forsling and Brent Seabrook playing the more sheltered minutes in Chicago.

Metro Division

Washington Capitals

There's not much to say here. This is a very clean example of a top four and a bottom pair. It will be worth keeping an eye on whether or not the usage patterns change now that Nick Jensen has been slotted into the third pair with Brooks Orpik.

New York Islanders

One of the curious things about the Islanders last year was that they didn't really have a lot of definition in their defence pairs. That's changed this year, with Ryan Pulock having become someone who Barry Trotz is using in a matchup role. Also of note: Johnny Boychuk's competition seems to have been taken down a notch.

Pittsburgh Penguins

One of the big stories coming out of the Stadium Series were the injuries suffered by Kris Letang and Brian Dumoulin. When you see this, you can see why. Letang and Dumoulin are very much Mike Sullivan's preferred pair in terms of playing against the opposition's first line. You can contrast that with a team like Washington, where that burden is being shared more evenly.

Carolina Hurricanes

Speaking of burdens that are evenly shared, Rod Brind'Amour seems to spread the work out fairly evenly in Carolina. There's a slight tendency towards Calvin de Haan and Trevor van Riemsdyk playing a little bit more against bottom six opposition and a little bit less against top six opposition but it's fairly weak compared to some other teams.

Columbus Blue Jackets

Seth Jones has evolved into a tough competition player in Columbus. About a quarter of the defencemen who qualified under the limits that I established played a greater percentage of their time against opposition top lines than against bottom six forwards; Jones is one of them. More surprisingly, so too is Ryan Murray. Murray's had a bit of a tough start to his career since going second to Columbus in 2012; judging by his usage this year, he's earned John Tortorella's trust.

Philadelphia Flyers

Ivan Provorov has become the clear first choice in Philadelphia, with Travis Sanheim and Robert Hagg also playing a reasonable share of



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their time against opposition first line players. After that, Shayne Gostisbehere, Radko Gudas and Andrew MacDonald look to be players who the Flyers coaching staff has preferred to get on the ice for the opposition's bottom six forwards rather than their top six.

New York Rangers

There appear to be three groups of defencemen who appear from the Rangers' data. In the first tier, you have Neal Pionk and Marc Staal. They're followed by Brady Skjei, Tony DeAngelo and Adam McQuaid. Finally, you've got a more sheltered group that includes Fredrik Claesson, Kevin Shattenkirk and Brendan Smith.

New Jersey Devils

New Jersey's more in the mold of teams like Washington, with four defencemen who the coaching staff uses against opposition top lines and then two who they tended to deploy more against the opposition's bottom six.

Atlantic Division

Tampa Bay Lightning

It's surprising to see Victor Hedman third on this graph, which is sorted by 5-on-5 ice time. The Lightning have reduced his minutes this year, both overall and at 5-on-5. He still leads Tampa's defence in overall ice time but his 5-on-5 minutes have been dialed back. So, uh, they can probably play him more in the playoffs if they're so inclined. It's also kind of noteworthy to me that Hedman isn't particularly someone who the Lightning are matching up against opposition top lines this year. He's not being hidden or anything but Ryan McDonagh, Anton Stralman and Erik Cernak are carrying more of that load. Again, that kind of suggests to me that Tampa could make things even more uncomfortable for the opposition in the playoffs if they're so inclined.

Boston Bruins

It's hard to say that an inner circle Hall of Famer is underrated but if there's a case to be made for anyone, it's Zdeno Chara. According to hockey-reference, only nine defencemen have even played in the NHL in their age 41 season – Chara, Tim Horton, Allen Stanley, Nicklas Lidstrom, Chris Chelios, Doug Mohns, Tommy Albelin, Carl Brewer and Terry Harper. I'd be very surprised if anyone other than Lidstrom was playing the hellacious competition level that Chara's facing. Even at 41, he's still making life easier for Boston's other defencemen.

Toronto Maple Leafs

This is a very typical Mike Babcock split. He picks a pair and rides them hard. As with last year, Morgan Rielly and Ron Hainsey eat a lot of the tough minutes. Travis Dermott and Igor Ozhiganov have had much more limited exposure to the opposition's top players. In fact, of the 202 defencemen who qualified for this study, only Bogdan Kiselevich in Florida has played a smaller share of his minutes against the opposition's top line. (Calgary's Oliver Kylington is next on that list; as was mentioned earlier, Peters and Babcock seem to share a philosophy with respect to sheltering their third pair.)

Montreal Canadiens

About the only surprising thing with Montreal is that Victor Mete has played the second highest share of his minutes against the opposition's top line. This is, I suspect, a result of being the left-handed partner of choice for Jeff Petry or Shea Weber when they were filling the matchup role. Other than that, Claude Julien has managed his bench very carefully.

Florida Panthers

You can make a case that Aaron Ekblad has the toughest minutes amongst NHL defencemen this year. He's played the fifth highest share of his minutes against the opposition's top line and the lowest share against their bottom six forwards. The Panthers then kind of have a tier of Mike Matheson, Keith Yandle and Mark Pysyk, with Mackenzie Weegar

and Bogdan Kiselevich being very heavily sheltered by Bob Boughner and his staff.

Buffalo Sabres

The Sabres are kind of similar to Winnipeg in that there are three defencemen who their coaching staff seems to trust above the others: Rasmus Ristolainen, Jake McCabe and Marco Scandella. Rasmus Dahlin's usage looks a little easier than Heiskanen's in Dallas but fairly similar. As with Heiskanen, it's always noteworthy when a teenaged defenceman takes on significant minutes in the NHL. Nathan Beaulieu was clearly less trusted than the others; unsurprisingly, he's no longer a Sabre. He's been getting a look in Winnipeg as the Jets deal with the absence of Josh Morrissey and look for a defenceman to solidify their top four.

Detroit Red Wings

Two things really jump out about Detroit. First, Nick Jensen was getting some exposure to opposition top lines. He's a bit of an analytics darling and analytics darlings are occasionally players who aren't facing the strongest competition. You certainly can't say that about him. Second, Filip Hronek's usage this year is interesting, in terms of a coaching staff trusting a young player. If you contrast his usage with that of Dennis Cholowski, it's pretty easy to see a difference. Hronek's ice time is still reasonable but for a defenceman in his age 21 season, he's getting some significant exposure to high-end opposition forwards.

Ottawa Senators

The Senators kind of dialed back the usage of Cody Ceci against the opposition's top players this year. He's had years where he was much more the main man for Ottawa than he is now. In fact, five of Ottawa's defencemen – Ceci, Max Lajoie, Ben Harpur, Mark Borowiecki and Christian Jaros all have fairly similar usage profiles. There are two that are markedly different from the rest: Thomas Chabot and Dylan DeMelo.

Ottawa's usage of Thomas Chabot is kind of surprising, in that with this being a bit of a transitional season for Ottawa, it seems like the sort of year in which you could get Chabot time against the opposition's top lines and live with the consequences a little bit. That's not the direction that the Senators chose.

It's all the more unusual because Chabot has led the Senators defence in average time on ice this season. That's something that's usually done by a player who the coaching staff is using against the opposition's best players. Chabot's one of just three defencemen to lead his team in average time on ice while spending less than 30 percent of his time on ice against the opposition's top line (Brent Burns and Mike Green are the others); he's the only one to come in below 25 percent. He is, obviously, very young – this is his age 21 season – but it seems like this would have been the sort of year for in which Ottawa could make that investment in him. It will be something to keep an eye on going forward – if Chabot is going to be the player that they ultimately want him to be, his minutes will have to start to skew away from the bottom six opposition at some point.

There you have it – 31 teams worth of matchup data for defencemen. It's important to remember that a defenceman isn't good or bad simply by virtue of his matchups; coaches are fallible. At the same time, it's a helpful point of context when looking at a defenceman, thinking about what he might be in other circumstances and understanding what his current coach thinks of him. While it's not dispositive of anything, it's another piece of information that can help in painting a picture of a player.

From my perspective, going through this is useful for a couple of reasons. It gives you some insight into the ways in which different coaches are running their benches. I always find it particularly interesting to see who's really riding one pair in tough matchups (San Jose, Vegas, Boston, Toronto, Florida, Montreal and Vancouver) both in terms of their immediate strategy and, in the case of Vancouver, how that might inform what they end up doing with Alex Edler this summer. Travis Green would, presumably, have a hard time seeing him leave. Similarly, with a team



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like Winnipeg, it's easy to see how adding another left-shot defenceman might be a priority at the end of the year.

It's also useful in terms of identifying players with big names and reputations who the coaching staff doesn't trust. When free agency rolls around in the summer, it'll be worth checking back on this to see if the roles that teams are acquiring players to play are roles that their current coaches trusted them with during this past season.

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The Athletic / On the road: A peek into the mind and eye of the Canadiens director of amateur scouting

Marc Antoine Godin Mar 11, 2019 27

Shane Churla never had a reputation for being a gentle, easygoing customer.

Among players who have suited up for at least 300 NHL games, no one has averaged more penalty minutes per game.

"He always has his game face on," said Bob Boughner, now head coach of the Florida Panthers and also known in the 1990s for a willingness to shed his gloves.

At first glance, it's obvious that Trevor Timmins' right-hand man isn't given to kidding around.

At second glance too, for that matter.

The handshake is firm and all-engulfing. His gaze is serious, determined, reinforcing the impression that every gesture, every step, serves a specific purpose. The 53-year-old takes his job to heart; whether he's in a high school rink in Massachusetts or watching the Allsvenskan in Sweden, he never, ever loses sight of the prize.

"I'm not in it to pay the light bill, I'm in it because I want to win the Stanley Cup," Churla says. "I went to the finals as a player and that taste is still in my mouth because I was on the wrong end of it."

On this night, Churla is in Okotoks, Alberta, to watch the best Junior A prospects in Canada. He's flanked by a sizable delegation from the Canadiens. Several NHL general managers are also in attendance; in all there are more than 200 people who draw a paycheck from an NHL team.

"I always say this is the most dangerous game in the world," he says, "not because of us, but because of management showing up."

Churla isn't necessarily referring to the Canadiens – if Marc Bergevin is here, he's not sitting with the rest of the Montreal contingent – but of the broader peril that a manager will form a hard opinion on a player without the benefit of deep knowledge of the prospect.

Which, of course, runs against every principle of scouting.

"You can't scout fast," Churla explains. "Everybody wants us to find a guy in one game, two games. It doesn't work that way. You're normally wrong more than you're right, I can tell you that."

Any scout worth his salt will insist on seeing a young player a half-dozen times, if not 10, before reaching any conclusions about his average performance level, and what he's capable of when playing at his best.

"I give the player the benefit of the doubt," he said. "Patience is key. You can go watch a stinker, you can go watch two or three stinkers, and then the guy will show you what (former Canadiens assistant GM) Rick Dudley

would always talk about: 'his best game.' It was a great point because his best game is pretty good. So I always look at that, I go: if this guy could play at that level – he showed me that, I know he can play at it – now why can't he play to it every game? Those are things you have to figure out."

The various delegations grab seats, the Canadiens' guys all sit in the same general vicinity, the Jets' group huddles nearby. Some scouts have opted to stand in the area above the seats that rings the building. There are so many black jackets on display, they look like crows perched on a telephone wire.

One of the Canadiens' regional scouts has done a preliminary triage of the more intriguing players, and every member of the organization who's made the trek to Alberta knows which candidates are sitting for Montreal's exam. Churla, however, is already well-versed on the players who could end up landing in his net. His primary preoccupation is those who could be picked in the first two rounds of next June's draft. But he also knows the players who are destined for the later rounds.

"We've targeted some guys already, but we don't come with a closed mentality," Churla says. "One thing you learn in this job is to never close the books, always keep the glass half full."

Showcase games like this can create an instant impression, a peek at how a player handles himself when surrounded by the best prospects in his age group. Given that not all of them will have the opportunity to rip their best shot or to dangle with the puck as much as they'd like, it's important to be attentive during the warmup. It may not be a game situation, players still tend to give free reign to their individual skills. So, you take notes. During the game, they'll be assessed for how quickly they execute, whether their skating stands out from the pack.

But doesn't knowing all eyes are on them heighten the risk that some of the kids will try to do too much and provide a somewhat doctored picture of what they're actually capable of?

Churla shrugs.

"The fibre of the player always shows."

A few moments after the Canadiens beat the Vancouver Canucks on Jan. 3 at the Bell Centre, the entire Montreal front office – literally everyone – crossed the hallway opposite the home dressing room en route to some private nook (or possibly a cranny). It's not the sort of foot traffic one normally sees after a game. The club was holding its mid-season organizational meetings. Most NHL teams do likewise, it provides an opportunity to catch up and plot strategy for the coming weeks and months.

During the meetings, the amateur scouting staff conducted its first draft simulations in order to get a better handle on where the prospects fit, and which round to target which player. That first run through will serve as a template for the rest of the season.

Thus, when the Canadiens' mob rolls from Okotoks into Red Deer the next day to take in the CHL Top Prospects game, it already has a preliminary sense of what each of the players on the ice is all about. But there's lots of hockey yet to be played, and those impressions are subject to change.

Trevor Timmins, whose official title is assistant general manager, has overseen the scouting operation since 2004, and Churla has been his second-in-command for the past three seasons. Churla joined the Canadiens in 2013 and was appointed director of amateur scouting three years later when Frank Jay, the office's previous occupant, left the organization (Jay passed away last year).

Timmins and Churla steer the ship, but the overall success of the enterprise hinges on the quality of the regional scouts. They're expected to have thick skin, to be prepared to go the mat for the players they believe in. Scouts who recommend a pile of players to hedge their bets? Yes-men who play the that's-a-lovely-tie-sir game in meetings? Churla's not a fan. It's not possible for two men to appraise every leaf and branch



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on Planet Hockey by themselves. Others need to do a pruning job first, and it has to be done well.

"It's a cliché, but you're only as strong as your weakest link," Churla says. "So if one of your area guys is weak, you're probably going to miss a guy over there and it could be a guy in range of your first round pick."

Churla adds he's happy with his team of scouts and the way it operates, but that's not to say he doesn't hold everyone accountable for their work.

"We're always reading reports, watching games on video, and if you see something that makes you go 'did you give the guy enough credit for this'. You want to make them think all the time, and you want them to make you think," he says. "It goes both ways because if you think you know everything in this business ... It's a humbling business. When you think you're real smart, you usually get kicked right in the crotch."

As in past years, the best prospects from the QMJHL, OHL and WHL are split into two groups, Team Cherry and Team Orr.

Churla has brought along a sheet of paper, it features a box for each player. Scouts around the league work from a similar evaluation grid, but Churla isn't going to spend the game busily scrawling on his. Perhaps he'll jot down an observation or a quick note, but nothing more. Here he might identify a game situation that confirms the development trajectory of a young player, or casts it into doubt. There he'll underline the presence of a skill that might eventually grow to become a 'dimension', which is to say a fundamental ability a player can build his game around. He might scribble out an impression on the quality of a defenceman's reads, his footwork, his gap control as an opposing forward barrels down the wing . . .

The next morning, at the hotel, Churla will enter all this information into the reports he's constantly filling out on a software package called RinkNet. Every NHL team uses it.

"I find you go to a game and you can get too hard on a guy. That's why I don't do my reports right after a game. Because there is some emotion in it," Churla says. "After you sleep on it, it seems like you have a clear mind, like it comes together better. I think a lot on the way home after the game as far as referencing other guys, other situations that you've seen."

"I come back and I got all that stuff going through my head. Geez, he reminds me of that player ... He does this really well, but I remember I overvalued that."

Scouting is not simply showing up to the rink, making an evaluation and moving on to the next stop. For Churla, it's also about plumbing the depths of his experience to skirt around the traps he's tumbled into in the past. It's also paramount to possess the somewhat arcane talent of accurately projecting what a young player can become in future.

According to Timmins, that's the key to being a good scout.

"You have to think long term," he says. "Too many inexperienced scouts today report on only what the player is doing, or how he is performing today."

The work is methodical, not unlike peeling back the layers of an onion. Beyond what's observable on the surface, what is the basic essence of the player? What, if anything, lurks inside that could eventually make him better?

"My mother can come and tell you who's the best player in the game today," Churla says. "But who's going to be the best player in five years and have the best career? Why are they going to have that best career, and what is going to allow that? That's what we try to determine."

The Top Prospects game is not a venue that yields definitive answers. These kinds of events have limited value, even if it can be genuinely useful to see players from bad teams finally have a chance to line up alongside top level talent. It's only after Churla has met the player, his coach or his teachers, and has seen him play multiple times – preferably in his natural environment or away from prying eyes – that he'll start forming an opinion.

This night is mostly a marketing exercise. For the three major junior leagues, for a paint company, and for a few youngsters who may have captured a random GM's fancy.

At the Calgary airport, familiar NHL faces are out in force. Hey, there's Flames head coach Bill Peters. And there's Johnny Gaudreau, the two of them waiting for a flight to All-Star weekend in California. Gaudreau, already not an imposing human, is sinking into his chair in the manner of someone who'd just as soon go unrecognized.

A little further down the departure concourse, Churla is handing his boarding pass to a gate agent as he steps aboard a flight. This is where you might notice the knuckle on the index finger of his right hand has somehow disappeared, eroded by the dozens of fights he had over his 11 years in the NHL.

In minor hockey, Churla was a more than decent player. But like many others from his era, he understood quickly upon arriving in the junior ranks that his only path to fulfilling his NHL dream was to let his fists do the talking.

"Nothing was ever given to him, he had to work for everything he got," Timmins says. "He had an appreciation for talent."

Churla carved out a role in the 1980s as the Medicine Hat Tigers' resident hard case, which evidently piqued the interest of the Hartford Whalers, who made him their sixth-round draft choice in 1985. The following year, his Tigers teammate Mark Pederson would become the Canadiens' first-round pick.

Pederson only ended up playing 169 NHL games, with only 56 of them in Montreal, while Churla stretched his career to nearly 500 games. The guy with less abundant natural talent ended up being significantly better at acclimatizing to the NHL environment.

"He was an extremely dedicated team player," said Guy Carbonneau, a teammate in Dallas. "He was a pretty tough guy, but he could play. A little like Chris Nilan. He was a great teammate, and he was prepared to do whatever he had to do to win games."

"He's a guy who was never afraid to give his opinion, and who was never scared of standing up for what he believed in. It was a form of leadership for sure."

Churla shared a dressing room with legends like Wayne Gretzky and Mike Modano, but also with blue collar guys who showed him how to survive by dint of hard work and character. They taught him that you adapt or you die, a lesson that allowed him to survive in the NHL and stayed in the back of his mind when he switched over to scouting.

With the Stars he saw men like Carbonneau and Jere Lehtinen, prolific scorers at the lower levels, reinvent themselves as elite defensive players. When he looks at prospects today, Churla scrutinizes offensive performers for elements that might later allow them to evolve into a different kind of player, should their scoring or playmaking abilities not follow them to the professional ranks.

"It's even more vital in today's game," Carbonneau said. "The game is so fast. Offensive players are going to remain offensive players, but there will be fewer scoring chances, and fewer opportunities overall. You have to be able to do other things and adjust."

After a short break following his retirement as a player, Churla signed on as a scout with the then-Phoenix Coyotes. That's where renowned talent evaluator Vaughn Karpan, who he'd later link up with again in Montreal, became his mentor. The two men were responsible for drafting Blake Wheeler fifth overall in 2004, a choice that generated considerable debate within the Coyotes organization.

Karpan never played in the NHL; his on-ice career ended with him in a Team Canada sweater at the 1988 Calgary Winter Olympics. Churla, on the other hand, is part of a large pool of ex-NHLers who work in scouting. However, by most estimates they constitute only about a third of all amateur scouts in the league. That's a much smaller percentage than the professional scouting business, which remains the landing spot of choice



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for former players who want to stay in the game. On the amateur side, the correlation between former player and good scout is far from direct. Some just don't have the eye. Others have trouble taking their NHL blinkers off. Or they have difficulty adjusting their expectations when they watch 16 and 17-year-old players and find themselves unable to project them into the future. Others aren't willing to put in the work.

"I don't think necessarily you have to be a player to be a good scout. History shows us that's not true. Because there's been guys, Hall of Fame coaches, that never played," says Churla. "But I think as a player you can see those intangibles sometimes. They're subtleties that the average eye won't catch ... some courage issues, some cheat issues, those things."

Churla is ambivalent about the first player he's come to watch after leaving Alberta. It might not be a lack of courage, exactly, it may not rise to the level of cheating, but he sees a lack of engagement during moments when the kid has an opportunity to get his nose dirty. And this isn't the first time he's noticed it.

The Canadiens' top scout expected to see more. He leaves the arena unconvinced.

Churla grew up in the mountains of southeastern British Columbia, not far from the Alberta and U.S. borders. He was five years old when the Canucks entered the NHL, but the family's religious affiliation was already entrenched: they were Canadiens fans. On the nights Montreal was on the television, an unmistakable intensity permeated the household. For dad, it was serious business. Kids running around and making a racket? Completely out of the question.

So little Shane would stop and watch, captivated by the fastest skater on the rink: the Roadrunner.

"I remember even when I was with Minnesota and we'd just go to Montreal, because of Bob Gainey we'd always have one or two of those guys coming to dinner with us," Churla recalls. "Like Yvan Cournoyer. My god, I just loved him. He sat right next to me for dinner and I was just..."

"Of course I liked Lafleur. I played against Lafleur there at the end. But I liked Cournoyer."

The Churlas were far from the only Western Canadian family with deep bleu-blanc-rouge allegiances. It's a curious phenomenon, but one that manifests itself every time the team takes the ice out there.

"It's funny, I played for a long time, and I have more people coming up to my wife. 'Oh, I'm so proud Shane is working for the Habs...' That's the mentality with the Montreal Canadiens. That's why, to me, there would be nothing cooler than winning with this team," he says.

The elder Churla may literally have burst with pride at the idea of his boy working for the Canadiens. He passed away several years ago, aged just 62. Sometimes, when he's alone in the car driving to a game, Churla imagines himself criss-crossing North America with his pop at his side.

"My dad was a player, he was a high skilled player in his own right, hard skilled. He loved the game. All through junior, he didn't miss many games I played, and I played junior in Medicine Hat, five hours away from where we lived. He didn't miss many of those games," Churla says. "He was (already) passed when I started scouting, but I could see myself doing a lot of trips with him if he was still alive. He would have loved that. Just to come around and watch hockey, watch players."

Eyes boring into the road, Churla is momentarily lost in his thoughts. The quiet takes him back through the decades.

"It would have been good fun for me too..."

Think playing in the NHL is tough on a family? Try scouting.

When Churla was a player he knew that, by hook or by crook, he'd be home for 40 nights during the regular season, and several dozen more practice days.

Last year, Churla the scout took in some 230 games on the road, and figures he watched at least as many on video. In the first half of this season, before heading off to Europe, he made a trio of two-week road trips. He spent two days at home between each of them. Four nights in his own bed in six weeks.

"I'm gone a minimum of a week and I like to keep it at around 10 days or two weeks. Any more than that you start losing the ability to retain information, you get tired or worn down," he says.

"It's funny, people think you're just watching hockey, but you're getting home from some of these games at 12 o'clock at night, you got to catch a flight at six in the morning. You're working on three or four hours of sleep, you got to drive five hours to a game and then do it all over again, and all over again, and all over again. Then you got to work on your list, work on your scheduling, work on your staff, try to work out ... by the end of the year I'm worn."

The job involves racking up a serious amount of mileage. If the West is Churla's preferred stomping ground, he must also do a secondary sweep of all the other territories the team covers. The industry term is the "cross-over," and Timmins and Churla are in charge of confirming their regional scouts' observations. Serge Boisvert, who played in Sweden, coached in Norway and now handles Eastern Canada for the Canadiens, sometimes performs the same role in Europe, as does veteran Swedish talent-spotter Christer Rockstrom. But most of the double-checking is done by Churla and Timmins.

Churla is thus able to get home for between four and six days in the average month. He's fortunate in that his two daughters are grown and left the nest some time ago; if you have a young family, no Super Elite or Platinum status can erase the sacrifices demanded by life on the road.

As he walks into the lounge reserved for frequent hotel guests to grab a coffee for the road, Churla runs across a hotel employee, who says hello.

"The concierge guys are my best friends."

The sun is trying hard to find an opening, but the snow hasn't yet abated. The road is icy; in the opposing highway lanes a white pickup truck loses control and veers into the ditch. It comes to rest with its nose pointed into oncoming traffic. The incident provides a handy reminder of the time another motorist t-boned the Yukon Churla was driving. He was trying to get to Detroit in a snowstorm, and the woman driving the other car slid at him all the way from the far right-hand lane, spinning like a top for the entire distance. He managed to get the vehicle back to the rental company under its own steam, but it was a total write-off.

"I always say, we deserve danger pay in this job on some days because nobody in their right mind should be on the road," he says. "But here we are, blazing the trail to some game."

Today, Churla has two games on his schedule. He rarely stays in the same province or state for three days, but in this case the opportunity to kill several birds with one stone was too good to pass up.

Managing travel is one of the thorniest tasks a scouting director has to deal with. It's like a particularly challenging level of Tetris. You have to draw maximum benefit from every travel segment and juggle the calendars of multiple teams in a given region in order to hit as many different targets as possible. If an appetizing prospect happens to get hurt in the days preceding a viewing, it creates a domino effect on the rest of the trip. Same deal if a start time is postponed or a game gets rescheduled for some reason.

And then there are days like today, where Churla makes a two-hour trek to spy on a player only to have him take 17 minutes in penalties in the first period. All that planning, all that time expended, and all you get out of it is a handful of shifts.

"It happens," he says with a shrug.

Like the t-shirt said, shit does indeed sometimes happen.



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Be that as it may, you could go a bit nuts from a job that hinges on so many maybes and abstract notions and instability. Scouts invest vast amounts of time and effort in pursuit of an objective that frequently vanishes from view.

Patience is everything. Think long term. No instant gratification. Just follow the game plan.

"The players dictate my travel," Churla says. "When we come out of those mid-term meetings, that's my roadmap right there. I've got to see all those top players. Wherever they're at, that's where I got to go."

Fine, but a large number of other factors also come into play.

American high schoolers play a short season that finishes well before most other leagues, so if you want to get a decent look at them, you'd better do it quickly. You also have to forecast, based on the relative strength of each team and each league, which clubs are poised to go on a deep playoff run, and which are likely to be eliminated quickly.

Where possible, you also want to watch players in conditions that best allow them to perform. For example, if the prospect in question plays on a terrible team there's no point going to see him fight a losing battle, alone on his island, against a league powerhouse. At the same time, you won't learn as much from watching him torch mediocre opposition as you will from an evenly-matched contest. That's not a luxury Timmins and Churla can always afford for themselves, but it is one of the recommendations they make to their regional scouts when it comes to choosing which games to attend.

Churla also makes it a point of personal pride to ensure he watches prospects play in their home rink. Schlepping all the way to Prince George or Brandon to see a guy might constitute a disincentive to some scouts. In 2003 the Boston Bruins grabbed Patrice Bergeron in the second round, and there's little doubt the fact he played in faraway Bathurst gave him less visibility than he evidently deserved. There's a tangible benefit to evaluating a player in the surroundings where he plays 50 percent of his games.

Mostly, it's about putting in the hours, particularly given there are far fewer secrets in amateur scouting than in years past. The days of teams finding a diamond in the rough in some far-flung place and keeping him under wraps until draft day are pretty well over.

There's only one reliable way to build a competitive advantage: work harder than the other guy.

And so, scouts' comings and goings have a cloak-and-dagger element to them. Think of it as a free-range game of poker played across multiple continents. Sure, Churla sees a lot of the same faces as the year progresses. He'll have a coffee with them, and exchange banter, but he never reveals his next destination.

"Some of these guys used to travel together, but I was never with them. I'm too competitive. I know what goes on in the car, they're probably talking about players," he says with just a hint of disgust in his voice.

Churla travels alone.

He prefers it when the competition doesn't know his whereabouts, but as the season wears on, he develops a keener interest in finding out which teams are following which players. It's the sort of detail that could eventually percolate its way into consideration as the Canadiens set their final draft list.

On this particular afternoon, kids are cavorting in the stands. A mother screams her lungs out with words of encouragement – and a few that aren't exactly suitable for a family audience. The NHL feels a long way away.

"Here we have to buy our ticket," says Churla, who somehow knows the ins and outs of every neighbourhood arena, everywhere. He didn't need to pull out his wallet the previous day, his NHL identification card was all he needed. Still, it's not a huge price to pay to help out the local minor hockey association.

Churla wanders over to a sparsely populated section of the rink and takes a seat with a view of one of the faceoff circles. Sitting at the centre-ice red line, usually considered the best seats in the house, seems to hold little appeal. When he's watching a defenceman, he likes to sit behind the net wherever possible. That way he can see the game unfold from the same point of view as the player he's studying.

The atmosphere is a primeval expression of hockey, which is appropriate given amateur scouting is the source from which all else flows.

Churla has had multiple opportunities to jump over to the pro scouting department over the years. But in his considered view, amateur scouting is where it's at.

"This is where it starts. Like, if you get it wrong here then it's a domino effect. Now the pro scouting has to make up for a missed pick and try to sign a free agent, and so on and so forth," he says. "So that's why if you don't scout well it's really, really hard, especially in the salary cap era. You just can't go and buy players."

The pressure is undeniable, especially given the Canadiens had a multi-year stretch where they didn't have much success filling the pipeline via the draft. The three most recent classes show encouraging promise, but in the previous seven or eight the number of youngsters who made meaningful contributions at the NHL level was severely limited.

And that's not even counting the fact that Bergevin set the table in the weeks preceding the trade deadline by stating publicly and clearly he had no intention of cashing in on draft prospects to obtain immediate help. From a scouting standpoint, this year's draft is at the heart of the club's reboot or reset or whatever it's being called these days (the Canadiens currently hold 10 picks). Success or failure at the draft table will be a determining factor as the Canadiens seek to add firepower and the other pieces they lack.

However, Timmins and his group have created a values-based grid in order to better identify the prospects with the greatest chance of becoming viable NHL assets, and their faith in the model is unshakable. They're trying to find the players who will have the best and longest careers, and that philosophy doesn't change in the later rounds.

"The top guys are easy – well I shouldn't say they're easy because you still have to get that order right; there's been a lot of mistakes at the top – but those complete guys that you see, they're easy. It's the guys that aren't complete, that are missing something," Churla says. "Can he survive without that? Can that grow? Is it coachable? Can it be brought up through with physical maturity?"

Each of those questions is central to the reflection that goes into putting a draft list together.

When Churla started in the business, he worried when his team showed up on the draft floor with barely 60 names on its list. He was afraid it wouldn't be nearly enough. There is no such fretting today.

"There's some drafts where there's all kinds of players and you can go to the draft, in all honesty, with a drafting board of about 60 names and there are names that are left over," he says. "In a weaker draft, a lot of teams will have the same names, so you're going to need more names. So it's harder because the players dry up faster. It goes back to stronger area people. Know your area because that's where you snatch the (Brett) Stapley, the (Cayden) Primeau, the Jake Evans."

And what of the quasi-consensus that emerges yearly from media outlets on the best prospects for the first round? It's not necessarily reflected in the head scout's list. Teams will take a gander at what's being said in the media to take the temperature on who's hot and who's not, but their lists are usually far different, if not completely so.

"Some of the high-profile guys are hyped up and we have them nowhere near that," Churla says.

Without going so far as to say scouts have two distinct draft lists, there are differences between the way teams rank players and the order in which they plan to select them. The idea is to stock the cupboard with as



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many quality prospects as possible, so a team may decide to take a player who slots a little lower in their ranking because they believe he's prized by other teams. Conversely, the various morsels of intelligence gleaned throughout the season will sometimes convince a team to wait a while to choose a player they like because he should still be available the next time their turn comes up.

Last June, the Canadiens sure seemed to deploy a version of the first approach with defenceman Alexander Romanov, who they rushed to draft in the second round. Other teams that day didn't even include him on their list. Montreal, on the other hand, wanted the young Russian too much to run the risk of having him slip through their fingers. The old scouting standby of "if you like him, pick him" clearly prevailed.

The Romanov selection already feels like it's in the distant past. Everyone is completely submerged in analyzing and sorting the next crop of talent. The finish line may still be way off in the distance, but make no mistake: the sprint has already begun.

As per his habit, Churla has booked a hotel next to the airport. Efficiency matters, so travel day movement is kept to a strict minimum. The time has come for him to settle the bill, hand in his room key and return the rental car.

There's no time to hesitate. The quest to unearth the next Romanov is already under way, and it waits for no man.

Churla, unflinchingly, joins it for another day.

The Athletic LOADED: 03.13.2019

1135799 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Stanley Cup Playoff Push: The Oilers are somehow still alive

Rory Boylen | @RoryBoylen March 12, 2019, 1:00 PM

After a terrible night for Western Conference wild-card teams that opened the door ever so slightly for a couple of long shots, Tuesday brings us eight more games that will all have some influence on the playoff picture.

Here's your look at what the first-round matchups would look like today, a couple of interesting stats, and games to keep an eye on Tuesday.

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

EASTERN CONFERENCE

If the regular season ended today...

(A1) Tampa Bay vs. (WC2) Columbus

(A2) Boston vs. (A3) Toronto

(M1) Washington vs. (WC1) Pittsburgh

(M2) NY Islanders vs. (M3) Carolina

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

What'd I miss? The Philadelphia Flyers refuse to go away. They are now 18-4-2 since Jan. 19, tied with the Tampa Bay Lightning for most points over that stretch and their offence is carrying the load. They're averaging 3.7 goals per game and it's been three weeks since they've scored less than three times in a game. A win over Ottawa Monday night pulled the Flyers to within three points of Columbus and Montreal, with games against Washington, Toronto and Pittsburgh this week.

Fun fact: Remember how awful the NY Islanders were defensively last season, when they allowed a league-high 296 goals-against? The fact they are now one of the best shutdown teams in the league with a tandem of goalies pushing for NHL-best save percentages is why Barry Trotz is the favourite to win the Jack Adams. In Monday's 2-0 win over Columbus, the Islanders earned their ninth shutout of the season and are now just one off a franchise-best 10 in a season, set in 1975-76.

Currently with a league-low 163 goals-against, the Islanders could become the first team to allow the most goals one season and then allow the fewest the next since the 1917-18 and 1918-19 Ottawa Senators.

Always worth circling on the calendar, there are some playoff implications in the air Tuesday night. Think back a couple weeks ago to the outdoor game against Philadelphia in which the Penguins lost Kris Letang and Brian Dumoulin, their top defence pair, and the game. It was a low point on the season and the following morning, Pittsburgh was out of a playoff spot.

But the team rallied and has been 5-1-1 since, including a 4-2 win over Boston Sunday that ended the Bruins' 19-game point streak. Goal scoring is coming, but more importantly, Matt Murray has settled into a groove with a .937 save percentage and 1.98 goals-against average over that stretch, which is among the league's best. Now tied with Carolina in points and just four back of the Islanders, it's still entirely possible the Penguins and Capitals will finish 1-2 in the Metro Division.

WESTERN CONFERENCE

If the regular season ended today...

(P1) San Jose vs. (WC2) Minnesota

(P2) Calgary vs. (P3) Vegas

(C1) Winnipeg vs. (WC1) Dallas

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

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

What'd I miss? After a brief uptick, the snail race towards one of the West's two wild-card spots is slowing down again, and so on another night where all the teams ahead of them lost, the Chicago Blackhawks and Edmonton Oilers kept their tiny chances alive.

Minnesota, Colorado and Arizona all combined for three losses and a single goal on Monday, while Edmonton (3-2 over the Rangers) and Chicago (7-1 over the Coyotes) pulled to within five points of the last playoff spot. It's a tough road ahead of course, with at least three teams to leapfrog, but both are trending in the right direction. Edmonton, specifically, is 7-2-1 over its past 10. That stretch coincides with Andrej Sekera's return to the roster, but it's also worth noting five of those seven wins came in one-goal games, indicating this recent run could easily have flipped the other way.

The Oilers don't play again until Wednesday, but with their next two against New Jersey and Arizona, there's a chance now Edmonton heads into next week within fair reach of the post-season.

Leon Draisaitl of the @EdmontonOilers extended his point streak to 14 games.

Only one German-born player in NHL history has recorded longer point streaks: Dany Heatley from Oct. 5 – Nov. 29, 2005 (22 GP) and Feb. 8 – March 15, 2007 (16 GP). #NHLStats
pic.twitter.com/bsqWGrx2HZ

— NHL Public Relations (@PR_NHL) March 12, 2019

Fun fact: Usually when seven of your remaining 12 games are at home and you're in the middle of a playoff race you'd consider that a favourable schedule. But, in a stat fun to only those outside the fan base, the Wild have a horrid 1-5-3 record at Xcel Energy Center, during which time they have just 16 goals and have been shut out three times, including Monday's 3-0 loss to San Jose.



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The best game on the slate and another possible Western Conference final preview, we're pointing this out as one to keep an eye on, with the idea that your other eye is monitoring New Jersey-Calgary. With Vegas surging thanks to Marc-Andre Fleury's Vezina pitch of a season, and a newly formed super line with Max Pacioretty, Mark Stone and Paul Stastny, it would seem vitally important to win the Pacific Division and end up in a first-round matchup against the second wild card instead.

The Sharks have a one-point lead on the Flames right now, but Calgary has the easier schedule this week. Where San Jose follows tonight's game with ones against Florida and Nashville to close the week, Calgary gets New Jersey and the Rangers at home before closing out in Winnipeg on Saturday.

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Sportsnet.ca / Quinn Hughes' arrival adds optimism, expectation to Canucks' future

Iain MacIntyre | @imacSportsnet March 11, 2019, 7:23 PM

VANCOUVER – Quinn Hughes is the shaft of sunlight capable of piercing another perfect spring storm for the Vancouver Canucks.

The dynamic 19-year-old defenceman from the University of Michigan turned pro on Sunday, arrives in Vancouver on Tuesday and could be in the Canucks' lineup Friday when they play the New Jersey Devils. But after blocking a shot on his ankle during college playoffs last weekend, Hughes first must get healthy, which seems appropriate because nearly everyone on the Canucks has been injured this season.

It was another mass migration to the medical room that torpedoed the team's unexpected playoff bid and started its current 4-10-3 freefall in the National Hockey League standings. The defence, especially, has been a mess since top blue-liners Alex Edler and Chris Tanev were injured, again, nine days apart in February.

The Canucks have one win in six games and two of their worst performances of the season came last week against the Vegas Golden Knights. In its last home game, Saturday, Vancouver surrendered five first-period goals for the first time in 15 years. On national TV.

The optimism that surrounded the team and rookie star Elias Pettersson a short time ago — and the pleasant novelty of a playoff race — has been replaced by the annual sense of despair and outrage in Canucks Nation, whose angriest activists are once again shouting for the head of general manager Jim Benning.

Into this, Quinn Hughes comes.

"When I talked to Quinn, I explained to him there's going to be lots of expectation," Benning told reporters on Monday. "But just come in and do the things you're capable of doing and everyone's going to be happy."

"He's an excellent skater. The transition part of the game, he'll help our group. He'll help us on the power play. I just said: 'Come in, work hard and have fun, and don't be nervous. Just do the things you're capable of doing.'"

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

The problem is there's an expectation that Hughes, an American who grew up in the Toronto area, is going to be Pettersson 2.0.

Before this season began, Hughes and Pettersson were considered about equal in terms of skill and potential impact. They were not only the Canucks' best prospects, but Vancouver's most exciting draft picks since Daniel and Henrik Sedin were selected two decades ago.

Partly out of the Canucks' concern over physical strength and the difficulty of incorporating both rookies at the same time, Hughes returned to the University of Michigan while Pettersson, a year older and with an MVP season in Sweden already on his resume, went into the NHL lineup.

Six months later, Pettersson merely leads the Canucks in scoring with 57 points in 57 games and is a heavy favourite to win the Calder Trophy.

Benning admitted he approached Hughes' advisor, agent Pat Brisson, after the world junior championships in Vancouver at Christmas time to see if the 5-foot-10 defenceman had any interest in joining the Canucks then. But there was no way Hughes was abandoning his college teammates in mid-season.

The Canucks could have used Hughes, although by playing fewer than 11 NHL games, he won't be subject to the Seattle expansion draft in 2021 when Vancouver projects to protect defencemen Ben Hutton, Troy Stecher and Olli Juolevi.

"I can assure you that from an organizational standpoint, we're going to look at that and (do) everything to safeguard ourselves," Benning said. "But let's just get (Hughes) in here and see where he's at and see when he starts playing, and we can figure that out as we go."

"Looking back on it, I think we made the right decision. His family and his advisor were part of that decision, too. The reasons for him to go back was to get physically stronger and have another real good year at college. He's done that. So I feel comfortable with the decision we made last summer."

It may be one of the few things Benning can afford to be comfortable about.

With Hughes in the NHL, Benning has a foundation in place. The defence still needs to get better beyond Hughes, and the Canucks will be looking to add in free agency or trade for a reliable defencemen. Another winger who can score would also help.

But the Canucks' progress is evident in the evolution of Pettersson and forwards Bo Horvat and Brock Boeser, Hutton and Stecher on defence, goalie Jacob Markstrom, the development of centre Adam Gaudette and the slow but noticeable improvement in wingers Jake Virtanen and Nikolaj Goldobin.

As Benning said Monday: "It's been hard. But going into our season, our objective was the growth and development of our young players. And I think when you look at how they've developed over the course of the year, how much they've played, how many young players we've been able to get up and get games ... I think if we look at it that way, it's been a successful year."

But it's been an awful month and owner Francesco Aquilini's family, which has given Benning a five-year-long runway to get the Canucks rebuilt, is going to want to see continued progress and, soon, playoff revenue.

The bleakness of the current Vancouver tailspin feels a lot like the periods of disintegration during the last three seasons.

There must be progress. There has to be hope.

"Francesco is right on board with doing things the right way — drafting and developing," Benning said. "Of course, they're not happy if we're not winning games, but all owners are like that."

Playoffs this season were always going to be a bonus for the Canucks. But next year, the Stanley Cup tournament will be the clear goal.

"That's what we're hoping for," Benning said. "Depending on where we pick in the draft (in June), we're going to add another real good player to



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our group. In free agency, maybe we can add a piece. And we need some luck with our health.

"Our goal from a management side is every year to try to take the next step. And for the most part, until these last five weeks, we were in the hunt. If you look at the standings, we're five wins away from being in a playoff spot. If we can make improvements to our group and win five more games, then you're part of it. That's what we're going to try to do."

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Sportsnet.ca / Carey Price's record-breaking performance was unforgettable

Eric Engels March 13, 2019, 12:09 AM

MONTREAL — It is a moment that will forever be etched in the memory of anyone who came to the Bell Centre to watch Carey Price make history. A desperate pad save on Detroit Red Wings forward Tyler Bertuzzi, who had a breakaway from his own blue line. The type of play worthy of the winningest goaltender in Canadiens history. The type of play he's made time and time again with his team's hopes hanging in the balance—as they were in this one when he stretched the width of the goal line to get his toe on the puck and preserved a 2-1 lead.

Think about the 110-year history of the Canadiens for a second. Think about it being made in this fashion by a player in 2019. A player notching the 315th win of his career to pass one who recorded his 314th in 1963. That is something miraculous.

How Price notched this record-breaking win was something incredible, too, starting with a breakaway save on Andreas Athanasiou on the very first shot of the game and ending with a sharp challenge on a Danny DeKeyser shot to the blocker side. In between, he stopped Darren Helm's sneaky backhand from the slot, got the shaft of his stick on a heat-seeking slapshot from Thomas Vanek, and he made the splits to stop Justin Abdelkader on the doorstep.

At one point, Price took an Anthony Mantha slapshot to the chest and in desperation made a Martin Brodeur-like scorpion save on the rebound Michael Rasmussen pushed at him.

When asked how he made that memorable save on Bertuzzi, Price laughed and quipped, "I just tried to do the Dominator and just spread out and cover the goal line," paying homage to the great Dominik Hasek.

Max Domi, who scored two goals to help the Canadiens beat the Red Wings 3-1, had a good view of the play from Montreal's bench.

"It's an absolute joke," Domi said. "Honestly, it's crazy how good he is. The saves he makes—on the bench we're just laughing. It's just crazy. He's the best in the world for a reason. He has been for a long time and he will be for an even longer time."

And on Price's accomplishment?

"It's a pretty special night for him and we're happy to be part of it," Domi said.

Carey Price on the pictures of Canadiens legends that line the walls of the team's dressing room: "Every one of them played hard for this organization and I feel like most people that have donned this jersey have laid it all out there and I'm proud to be a part of this."

— Eric Engels (@EricEngels) March 13, 2019

He wasn't alone. There were 21,302 people who packed the Bell Centre to bear witness to this event. As many as half of them were still in the stands when Price took his final curtain call as the game's first star. Among them were many people of his generation; people who know only of the legend of Plante—the first goalie to don a mask in a game, a Stanley Cup-winning Hall-of-Famer whose name is etched across a banner that hangs from the rafters of the Bell Centre. They are people who would have faint memories, if any, of Patrick Roy in his prime with the Canadiens; people who might vaguely recall Jose Theodore's 2002 Hart Trophy bid; people who bore witness to Jaroslav Halak's 2010 playoff heroics and didn't quite value Price until they saw him backstop Team Canada to a gold medal in the 2014 Olympics before completing a season that had him collect the Hart, Vezina and Jennings Trophies and the Ted Lindsay Award.

"It was a great time to share it with the fans," Price said.

His relationship with them has been tumultuous. When he's struggled, they've been merciless—booing him and mock-cheering him. When he's excelled, they've risen to their feet and chanted his name at full volume—like they did after he stopped Bertuzzi on that breakaway Tuesday night.

Surely all of that was swirling around Price's head in the lead-up to this event, but as he said, he's not quite ready to think long on any of it.

"I'll definitely have time to reflect on it, but I don't feel that time is quite yet," Price added.

In Year 1 of an eight-year, \$84-million contract, it'll be some time before Price reviews all the things that brought him to this moment. In sharper focus is the win notched to keep the Canadiens entrenched in their battle for one of the eight playoff spots available in the Eastern Conference.

"It was definitely an important two points for us," Price said, surely aware that the Columbus Blue Jackets and Pittsburgh Penguins had done their part in games earlier in the evening to remain ahead in the race.

"Obviously we're in a dog fight right now and every effort put out for the rest of the season's going to be very important. So I feel like if we continue play the way we did tonight, we'll be successful."

The Canadiens weren't necessarily at their peak, but they out-shot the young, struggling Red Wings 36-21 and out-chanced them handily.

Without Price, though? Different story.

"He controls the game and it just kind of settles everything down, just like the way he did tonight," said captain Shea Weber, who was describing what we've seen from Price since he first pulled on a Canadiens sweater in 2007.

The 31-year-old goaltender has created indelible moments over his 12 years in uniform. The ones he authored on Tuesday will live forever.

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 03.13.2019

1135802 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Canucks coach Green on tumble down standings, injuries, Quinn Hughes

Iain MacIntyre | @imacSportsnet March 12, 2019, 7:52 PM

Two years ago, Travis Green took over a 69-point National Hockey League team and transformed the Vancouver Canucks into a 73-point team.

One month ago, the Canucks held the last playoff spot in the Western Conference and the team's improvement during Green's second season as coach projected to be far more impressive than another four points.



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But seven injuries in seven games after the all-star break – on a team without depth to survive them – catapulted the Canucks out of the playoff race and started the 4-10-3 free fall that reached terminal velocity a while ago.

Nine points out with 13 games to go, the Canucks have failed in their pre-season objective to “play meaningful games in March” and need to win six more times just to replicate last year’s modest improvement in the standings. Where did this go wrong again?

Sportsnet sat down Tuesday with Green to ask him:

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Sportsnet: How did things come apart so quickly in the last month?

Green: As a coach, you don’t sit there and say, ‘OK, we’re going to go on a bad roll.’ I think we were playing well. I think we surprised some people. But I don’t know if we’re a team that’s capable of sustaining (injuries). With two of our top four D out, that was a huge loss. When you’re in it, as a coach, you’re trying to keep your team in it. So when injuries are piling up, you start playing some guys more minutes out of necessity. And I think that’s a big part of why we’ve lost some games lately.

Sportsnet: So it’s about the injuries, which first piled up in November and led to a 1-10-2 nosedive last fall?

Green: I’ve always said I’m not going to use injuries as an excuse. But if you’re asking me, I think that’s a reason we’ve lost some games.

Sportsnet: When you were in the wild-card race and finally healthy, it looked like you were only a few players away from being able to compete with top teams. In the last couple of weeks, the Canucks have looked miles away from being competitive. So, are you near or far away?

Green: Even at the beginning of the year, I never sat here and said: ‘Our goal is to make the playoffs this year.’ I don’t think I’ve ever said that. Our goal was to get better and try to play some meaningful games down the stretch. Do I think we’ve taken a step? I do. A lot of our young guys are better players than they were. And they’re playing in the hard part of the season. Last season, Hank and Danny (Sedin) were playing bigger minutes at the end of the year, and they made our power play better. This year, our young guys are playing hard minutes and they’re being asked a lot.

How close do I think we are? Our young guys are going to be a year older next season. I want to take a step every year. Point-wise, I don’t know where we’re going to finish. But if we were healthy, I know we’d have a lot more points.

Sportsnet: You probably knew what you were in for when you took the job. But how hard is the losing – being out of it in March – for you?

Green: I think just lately it’s been challenging. The last two weeks it’s been a challenge for me, and I could probably say the same thing for our veteran guys. I’m proud of our guys for putting themselves in the position they were in not long ago. The last 10 days, two weeks, yeah, it’s taken a little wind out of us, and especially for our older guys. They know that winning is everything.

Sportsnet: Young guys don’t take losing as hard?

Green: Everything is new to them. They’re kind of happy-go-lucky. But that’s what we talked about today: You’ve got to be dialled in this time of year. If you’re just going out there to play, you’re going to stick out.

Sportsnet: How do you make them understand these final 13 games still matter?

Green: I spent the last three days kind of getting ready to talk to our group about hockey at this time of year. Now that we’re on the outside looking in, there’s still a lot to play for. Right from Day 1, there was a certain style we wanted to play. We wanted to develop and needed to get

better. But if you can’t play at this time of year. . . we’re not going to have the same team back next year.

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Sportsnet: You’ve talked often about finding players you can win with. How many have you found?

Green: I haven’t looked at it that way, haven’t tried to put a number on it. We’ve got a lot of young players and they’ll determine whether they’re guys we can win with. Just because you’re playing a lot of minutes right now, doesn’t mean you’ll still be on the team next year. Do you have what it takes to win? We’re always finding out about our group and the next 13 games will tell us a lot more.

Sportsnet: By all accounts, college star Quinn Hughes is going to be a guy you can win with, although perhaps we should actually see him play a few NHL games down the stretch before retiring his number. But if Hughes is as good as expected, and he joins Elias Pettersson, Bo Horvat and Brock Boeser as a core piece, is that a big enough foundation on which to build a team?

Green: They are pieces, but they’re young pieces. And we have to make sure we’re surrounding them with the right other pieces. You look at the teams that are trying to win a Stanley Cup, they’ve got a lot of pieces. Look at Tampa Bay, they lost in the finals four years ago. And they’ve got a lot of the same guys. They even missed the playoffs one year. But they’ve slowly added more pieces, made some trades, and they’re still knocking on the door. We just need to keep getting better.

Sportsnet: Can you expedite the process?

Green: Everyone has their own opinion on that. Part of it is sometimes you get lucky and you get a player that maybe you’re not expecting. But for me it’s: ‘OK, keep your eye on getting better. All the time.’ These last few days have been good for me as well, just to refocus on that.

Sportsnet: It’s tough to argue that your young players, as a group, haven’t gotten better. Players like defencemen Ben Hutton and Troy Stecher, forwards Nikolay Goldobin and Jake Virtanen, even rookie Adam Gaudette, look better than they were at the end of last season. Does that mean your tough-love approach, your willingness to scratch guys, is working?

Green: That’s the only way I know how to coach. Give the players opportunity, and then figure out when it needs to be taken away. Ice time is always a key. If you’re not making your young players better, then you’re not going to get better (as a team). People aren’t always going to like when we do it, but they’re not privy to the conversations we have in here and the messages we send.

People don’t always see why we’re unhappy with a young player and where he needs to improve. Look at a player like Brock Boeser. Everyone talks about the goals and assists. But to me, Brock has gotten a lot better away from the puck. Is he a player you can just slot into a Stanley Cup team? I don’t know, but he’s working on his game and understands he has to get better in certain areas. When you have players who can be honest with themselves and say, ‘Yeah, I have to do that,’ that goes a long way. The onus always goes back to the player.

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.

Sportsnet: Everyone wants Hughes to be a dynamic, offensive player, but will you allow him to make some mistakes playing that way?

Green: I’ve been through it, seen it, been there first-hand as a young player, and coached young players. I don’t talk to Petey (Pettersson) about taking away any part of his offensive game. I’ve told Goldie (Goldobin), ‘I don’t care what you do with the puck in the offensive zone. But if your work ethic and compete level isn’t high enough, then you can’t play.’ And I’ll tell Quinn Hughes the same thing. We need him to be an



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offensive defenceman. We'll help him in areas he needs to improve in, but I'm not going to make him a checking defenceman.

Sportsnet: He should help your power play, which is 6-for-76 since Jan. 2. Shouldn't it be better with Pettersson on one side, Boeser on the other and Horvat in the middle?

Green: There's not a lot of power plays built on a 20-year-old (Pettersson), a 21-year-old (Boeser), a 23-year-old (Horvat) and your top defenceman (Alex Edler) is out of the lineup for a lot of the season. This is a young power play. There are so many little details in the power play in the NHL that are learned. Even Petey, he's been good on the power play, but he's going to be a lot better in two or three years. We also had a lot of production from our second unit last year. I think we had 19 goals from our second unit, so this can't just fall all on our first unit, either.

Sportsnet: Besides health, what does your lineup need in order to be better next season?

Green: That's something we'll answer at the end of the year. We're a young team that needs to get better in a lot of areas. Keep improving, keep developing and good things will happen.

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Sportsnet.ca / Rielly, Dubas leave no doubt about Leafs' stance on LGBTQ rights

Chris Johnston | @reporterchris March 12, 2019, 5:28 PM

TORONTO — Kyle Dubas and Morgan Rielly could have let the NHL investigation speak for itself. On a scheduled day off for the Toronto Maple Leafs, the general manager and star defenceman could easily have let Colin Campbell's determination that Rielly did not direct a homophobic slur at referee Brad Meier carry the day.

But, in deciding instead to meet the issue head-on, they left no doubt about where the Maple Leafs stand on LGBTQ rights and matters of inclusion.

"It's incumbent on us in management to build an environment if someone were gay, or were questioning their sexual orientation, that they don't feel that they have to come in here and be somebody that they're not," Dubas told reporters Tuesday. "And that we can create an environment where even if they don't come out, if they are gay, that they still feel safe within the confines of our building.

"That's really the hope, is that people see that we support it, we understand that it is a challenge for people to potentially come out if they are gay, but our goal as an organization ... is that it's more about the environment that we're creating for everybody."

That environment came into question during Monday's game against the Tampa Bay Lightning, where a microphone on the broadcast seemed to pick up a homophobic slur being yelled during game action.

It was initially attributed to Rielly by multiple social media accounts, presumably because he was skating back into his own zone after being hooked and looking directly at Meier, and those serious allegations spread like wildfire before the player even had any idea a slur was potentially uttered in the game he just played.

Rielly had essentially been found guilty on the internet before arriving home to his downtown condo. He immediately returned to Scotiabank Arena to meet with Dubas, and eventually be interviewed by NHL officials, and had his name cleared by their investigation a little more than 12 hours later.

"I was 100 per cent confident that I didn't use the word so we allowed the process to play out," said Rielly. "It was difficult at times to not make a statement because of how strongly I felt about it and the fact that it is a very important issue, but I'm very happy that it came out today that it wasn't used by me.

"I think it's an opportunity for us as a team to realize that there's really no place for slurs like that in sport and in life."

Dubas took it even further. He's marched in the Pride Parade in years past and saw his team host an awareness night for the "You Can Play" organization just over two weeks ago.

As much as he didn't like seeing the allegations directed at Rielly, it offered an opportunity for the Leafs and the 25-year-old defenceman to stand alongside fans in the community and perhaps even some working within their own organization.

"I don't think the team or Morgan are victims at all," said Dubas. "I don't want it to be perceived that Morgan feels that way or that the team feels that Morgan was slandered. I think some people rushed to judgment and that's what happens in 2019. There are a lot of people in our community and people that we know and people who have family members where they are affected by homophobia every single day in our community and all throughout the world.

"Every time it's even thought that those types of words are uttered in our facility or anywhere, I think we have to do our part as the Toronto Maple Leafs to use this situation to continue to do our part to rid casual homophobia, vulgar homophobia, things that make people of any sexuality or sexual orientation feel uncomfortable and unsafe."

It still isn't entirely clear what was said or who said it. There were 10 microphones stationed around the ice surface and players' benches for Monday's game and a couple conspiracy theories popped up, including the possibility a common hockey term ("rag it") was confused for a homophobic slur.

The NHL interviewed Meier and Rielly while also reviewing tape from both broadcasts. Dubas said he watched the clip so many times that "you kind of convince yourself you can hear hundreds of different things as you go through it."

"I know that I didn't use that word and I didn't hear it during play, but I did listen to the video," said Rielly. "There are different ways to listen to the video and when it's a topic that's very serious you tend to think what may have been said."

The mere possibility it was said was enough for the general manager to step back and reflect on what the organization is doing to create an inclusive atmosphere. Without getting into specifics, he said there's more that can be done to be proactive and take a stance on these issues.

"If a homosexual, a bisexual or transgender fan walks in the rink, [we want them to] feel welcome here and safe here," said Dubas. "If we have a player whose contemplating what their sexuality is [we hope] they feel safe here and can be themselves here. That's why the cause matters to me and I think that because of our role in the community and in the country as the Toronto Maple Leafs, we have a unique opportunity to be proactive and to take a stance on the matter."

That will be remembered long after this particular incident has been forgotten.

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Sportsnet.ca / Sharks' enviable culture on display in impressive win over Jets



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 13, 2019

Mark Spector | @sportsnetspec March 13, 2019, 12:45 AM

WINNIPEG — When the Sedins retired, they wondered in Vancouver how it would affect the Canucks culture. In Boston there is no wondering: Patrice Bergeron and Zdeno Chara pass it down to players like David Krejci and David Pastrnak, who in turn indoctrinate young guys like Jake DeBrusk and Charlie MacAvoy on how things are supposed to work inside a perennially competitive NHL franchise.

Hockey culture.

To hockey analytics it is a unicorn. The thing you never see that can not be quantified. But all the best teams have it, and the worst ones are actively in search.

Well, meet the San Jose Sharks: A.K.A. "Boston West."

They may not have the best team every year, but do the Sharks ever have to rebuild? Do they miss the playoffs? (Hint: just once in the last 15 seasons, including this one.)

On Tuesday night in Winnipeg, just 24 hours after San Jose had rolled through Minnesota in a 3-0 road win, the Sharks outlasted a rested Jets club in a battle of Western titans.

Joe Pavelski, who epitomizes everything a leader should be, buried a two-on-one pass from Timo Meier with less than five seconds left in regulation to complete the 5-4 victory. It was two points earned on the second of a back-to-back, on the road against an excellent Jets club, and with five defencemen — Radim Simek having left with a leg injury early in the game.

There were a bunch of reasons to lose, none of which the Sharks accepted.

"We're just deep. We're very, very deep," said Joe Thornton, who had two silky primary assists Wednesday. "We've got eight good D, 14 good forwards, and we've got goalies who win us games. We're a very, very deep group."

Give the management credit. The Sharks draft and develop with the best of them, and aren't afraid to dip into the trade waters for an Erik Karlsson, a Brent Burns, or an Evander Kane along the way.

Some teams were shy of Kane, with a history of immature actions and off-ice distractions. Not the Sharks, who have in their dressing room a culture that has extracted the positives from Kane's game — he'll score 30 this year — while quietly culling the negatives.

"It makes my job easy," said head coach Peter DeBoer. "They established the culture there... It's been over a decade, with Jumbo and Pavelski, and Vlasic, and Burnsie, and on and on. That culture was there when I got there. They hold each other accountable, so you're not having to do that like you would with a young team on a daily basis."

In a place like Edmonton, where the culture has been lost, they've tried to import it from outside, tapping Boston for players like Andrew Ference and Milan Lucic. It doesn't work, they've learned, and even though it takes time they've figured out that it is better to allow Connor McDavid, Leon Draisaitl, Darnell Nurse and the rest of the young core to build their own culture, the way they did in San Jose so long ago.

"It's a great culture," Burns said, "All the way from the top, from Hasso (owner Plattner), to Doug (GM Wilson), to the coaching staff... And then the guys. We work, but we have fun. It comes from the top down."

For years in San Jose, they've had something called Shooting Club, where players would go out 30-45 minutes before practice and hone their skills.

It started with assistant coach Jay Woodcroft in the Todd McLellan years, and Pavelski took ownership of it.

Then Patrick Marleau joined in. Then Logan Couture. Then Thornton...

To this day, while Burns is working on his point shots, Pavelski is practising tipping pucks. Thornton is elsewhere, getting in some extra stick-handling drills.

When hockey people speak of culture, this is a big part of it: The best players on the team are working daily to improve, outside of team practice. So Tomas Hertl arrives as a young player, and what does he do? He joins the Shooting Club. Then Kevin Labanc. Then Meier and Marcus Sorensen.

Look at how good Marleau has been for the Maple Leafs dressing room? Well, where did that all come from?

In Boston West, Joe Pavelski is Patrice Bergeron, Joe Thornton is Zdeno Chara, and underneath is a collection of (mostly) homegrown talent that has produced a franchise that competes every single season for a Pacific Division title, showing no signs of being in need of a rebuild any time soon.

Pavelski is at the heart of it, one of the great leaders in today's game who's on pace for a 40-goal season at age 34.

"Everybody is different, their approach to the game, how they go about things," Burns said of the Sharks captain. "He's just a guy who always does things right. He's that perfect kind of guy. He just works."

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I know what you're thinking: How great can the Sharks be when they've never won a Cup. OK, but the sign of a great franchise is one that competes at that championship level year after year. One that never runs out of gas and has to start over, like pretty much every franchise in Canada today.

The Sharks are a point out of the Pacific lead this morning. If they edge out Calgary, it will be San Jose's seventh divisional crown in 17 seasons.

One of these days it has to pan out in June.

"I don't know. We haven't won it yet," shrugged Pavelski. "You know we just have fun. We like the game, and you hope that at the end of the year that you've got the right team."

"Each season is unique, and you never know which one is going to go. That one run we went on (to the Final three years ago) was a team that, maybe we didn't expect it. But we had gotten better and better all year, similar to this year."

"We've got good depth, and it's just on us to compete every night."

That's a promise that gets kept around here.

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1135805 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Competition for places on blue line benefits Flames entering playoffs

Eric Francis | @EricFrancis March 12, 2019, 6:04 PM

CALGARY – There are no Welcome Wagon committees in the NHL.

A veteran can miss four months with a blood clot, get some conditioning in the AHL and return to the team only to be on a standby list to return to the lineup.

In Michael Stone's case, the list is a long one, as the Calgary Flames are now carrying nine defencemen.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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Brad Treliving's plan is for it to be that way until he vows to add a 10th before season's end.

"That's how you come into training camp every year – you have a lot of bodies and everybody wants to play at this level but there are only six spots a night," shrugged Stone, 28, whose 436 NHL games don't guarantee him anything upon his return.

"Three games (in the AHL) was good for me. I got some good minutes, played some decent hockey and feel good to go. I'm ready."

Treliving has long been focused on building his team from the blue line out, making the unusual logjam of defenders a delicious quandary.

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"Not a problem at all – it's a good thing because if someone goes down we've got lots of depth there and they're all NHL players," said Treliving, whose only trade deadline move was to add Oscar Fantenberg from the Kings as defensive insurance.

"It's going to create a little competition. It's what we wanted to have because coming down the stretch we're going to need bodies. Touch wood we haven't run into injury issues."

Stone's return from a three-game conditioning stint in Stockton literally bumped rookie Oliver Kylington from the cozy confines of his stall, to a folding chair at the front of the dressing room.

No shelves for his shaving kit, nowhere to hang anything and no neighbours to talk to.

But he isn't going anywhere.

He still has just as good a chance at getting into the lineup as Stone, Fantenberg and Dalton Prout moving forward.

With everyone healthy, the mainstays are as such:

Rasmus Andersson and, well, take your pick.

Coach Bill Peters said he likes the chemistry Fantenberg has built with Andersson over the bulk of his four games as a Flame.

The coach likes to keep lefties on the left and righties on the right, with the exception of Brodie, a lefty who prefers playing on the right side, especially when it's alongside Giordano.

Andersson's emergence from minor-league call-up to first-pairing fill-in bodes well for his playing status, as long as he's healthy. The righty can swap spots with Brodie on the top pairing seamlessly, opening up more possibilities for the third duo.

Unlike the three-headed goalie monster the Flames employed several seasons back with horrific consequences, the abundance of back-enders is something every team would cherish.

Any deep playoff run requires plenty of manpower at the back due to the war of attrition NHL clubs go through each spring.

Treliving insists all nine will stay in town for the balance of the year.

He said he'll soon need one of his four precious call-ups to summon first-round hotshot Juuso Valimaki from Stockton.

"We actually have 10 defencemen when you think about it," said Treliving of the left-shooting Valimaki, who is flourishing in the minors following a lengthy recovery from a high ankle sprain.

"We just want to keep him playing right now. It's exciting because Rasmus is popping all over and the other guy (Valimaki) is going to be a star. He'll be back. He's playing 24 to 25 minutes a night, in all situations and has been dominant the last 3 or 4 games."

That's why the GM refused all the proposed deadline deals that included the 20-year-old Finnish talent or the 22-year-old Andersson.

Stone participated in the morning skate with the Flames Tuesday morning ahead of their game against New Jersey, but wasn't told when he'll next see game action.

"I understand where we're at at this time of season – it's playoff hockey," said Stone, who was scratched seven times before his arm ballooned in practice mid-November due to the blood-clot that required blood-thinners.

"So, make the most of it when you get in there."

That's clearly the message all nine are taking to heart.

"You need that depth going into the playoffs and I'm sure at different times guys are going to get their opportunity," said captain Giordano, a frontrunner for the Norris Trophy as the league's best defenceman.

"Everyone in the group is a good NHL defenceman. There a lot of bodies out there during practice but it's good – if anything it gives you a little bit of extra rest out there which isn't a bad thing at this time of year."

No one wants the rest game night or play forward during practice, which is what Peters said will likely happen.

"Some days we might use them as forwards, or some days they may go out early and skate by themselves – you've got to be creative," said Peters.

"We're real deep back there. Now it's a matter of seeing how we play, and how we are health wise and we'll just move forward every day."

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1135806 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Jets not fretting criticisms with playoffs approaching

Mark Spector | @sportsnetspec March 12, 2019, 4:30 PM

WINNIPEG — When the 2017-18 regular season concluded, with the Winnipeg Jets on an 11-1 run, they were in second place in the Central Division with 114 points. As the No. 2 team in the entire National Hockey League, behind only Nashville, it was clear that the cake was finally done in Winnipeg.

General manager Kevin Cheveldayoff's tutorial in drafting and developing was panning out. Maybe Scott Oake's town was ready for another Cup celebration, but this time it wouldn't be the Avco Cup.

Today, Winnipeg sits atop the Central. But is it a better team than a year ago?

"We're not too worried if people are worried about our advanced stats or whatnot," said third-line centre Adam Lowry. "In a playoff series, the sample size is too small to worry about our Corsi number."

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It's not only the advanced stats, however, that indicate a Jets team that is still pretty good, but perhaps not quite the powerhouse it was a year ago.

For instance, last year's 118-point club is on pace for just 101 points this season. In a weaker Central Division, they've fallen six spots to eighth in the NHL, and facing a schedule that will make it awfully tough to replicate the run that shot these Jets into the playoffs a year ago.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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Patrik Laine, who had 44 goals last season, has 29 this year. And remember, 18 of those goals came in the month of November. Since Dec. 1, Laine has just eight goals while posting a minus-20 this season.

Year over year, goaltender Connor Hellebuyck's goals-against average has gone from 2.36 to 2.97, while his save percentage has fallen from .924 to .910. The latter is a significant statistic, considering the Jets allow the third-most shots in the NHL (33.5) — a full five more per game than tonight's opponent, the San Jose Sharks (28.4).

"We've given up a lot of chances, and we might be as tight defensively as we were last year," Lowry said. "But people also have to look at, we've been without Dustin Byfuglien for almost two months. We've had some pretty key guys out of the lineup at different times.

"Guys are now at the point where we know what it's going to take to be successful in the post-season. I don't want to say that guys have been saving themselves, but it's about peaking at the right time."

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.

That is the hope here, with Byfuglien having left the team on the recent road trip to go back to Winnipeg for alternative treatment. He is a huge part of this team, both offensively and defensively, and add to that a shoulder problem that could keep Josh Morrissey out until very close to the playoff opener, and you have a team trying to perfect its game with two of its Top 4 defencemen watching from the press box.

Then there are the expectations. For the first time in the history of NHL hockey in this city, the Jets were picked by some to win a Stanley Cup this season. Not only is that a new wrinkle for the team, but for the Winnipeg fans and media as well.

"We played a game in late December, we won, and I think it put us in first place in the conference at that point," head coach Paul Maurice recalled. "The theory was that it was our first complete game of the year — in, like, Game 45 or something.

"Expectations are what they are."

Heavy is the head that wears the Central Division crown. The Jets went all the way to the Western Conference Final last season. The expectations are to go further in 2019.

"When Helly's on his game we're going to put him up against any goalie in the league," said Lowry. "Same with our D-corps. When they're healthy, when we get those guys back, just look at that depth. You've got Tyler Myers on, arguably, your third pair.

"People are saying maybe we're a paper tiger; that you want to play Winnipeg in the playoffs. We're still tight for that Central Division lead. We'll get home ice in the first round and take it from there."

Those will be the only games that matter, in the end.

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1135807 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Lightning's business approach gives Maple Leafs reason to worry

Luke Fox | @lukefoxjokebox March 12, 2019, 12:43 AM

TORONTO – The interesting thing about Jon Cooper making an excuse for the Toronto Maple Leafs' fatigue after trouncing all over them for 60

minutes in their own building is that the Tampa Bay Lightning have never felt the need to play that card.

In the losers' dressing room, there were admissions of quit and lethargy as the Leafs — on track for another best regular season in club history and another third-place finish in their own top-heavy division — gave away 21 pucks, mustered all of 14 body checks, and surrendered one of the ugliest shorthanded goals you'll see en route to a 6-2 beatdown by a polished armoured tank of a hockey team that's breaking wills and records.

"The effort kind of just wasn't there at times," Auston Matthews admitted. "I mean, I think in the third period we pretty much just quit. That's on us as players. We got to wake up and do a much better job and hold each other accountable."

Twenty-five minutes into the game it wasn't one anymore.

The mighty Bolts had already scored four times, each puck touching a Tampa skater within spitting distance of Frederik Andersen's crease, and chased the Leafs netminder.

Mike Babcock so rarely pulls his starter, this was the equivalent of waving a white flag in surrender to a program he'd dubbed "the envy of the league right now."

Uncle.

"You get the lead like that, and it's a little deflating to them," reasoned Cooper, citing his opponents' exhausting swing through Western Canada. "I like the fact we kept going. We possessed the puck."

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Thing is, in this ridiculously consistent runaway Year of the Lightning, they never had a so-called "schedule loss" this lopsided.

In October, when the Lightning returned East from a five-game voyage through the Central and Western states, they whooped New Jersey 8-3.

To celebrate their first home date after a four-game roadie in November, they beat up Florida 7-3.

In December, the Lightning were greeted home after long trips by Boston and Philadelphia, who were already in Tampa waiting for them. The Bolts won both of those games, too — one of them after an even longer trek through Western Canada than the Leafs just endured (it also included a stop in Winnipeg).

In January, after their swing through California, the Lightning shut out Columbus 4-0.

This is not to say the Leafs weren't exhausted or depleted. Most certainly they were.

This is to say that pushing through that pain and fatigue requires a roster depth and a desire and a level of perseverance only one of Monday's NHL powers seems to have attained.

"Like today: How good we are when we play the right way," said Victor Hedman, excelling in his top lefty-lefty pairing with young Mikhail Sergachev.

"Our consistency throughout the season has been phenomenal. We're not tapping ourselves on the shoulder. We're looking at the big picture. We've got [12] games here before the fun starts."

The business-as-usual atmosphere in the moments after a such a decisive victory over a potential playoff foe is arresting. No hooting or hollering. Another day, another victory.

"Tonight we really wanted to show them that's why we're the best team in the league," Cedric Paquette said after a two-goal outing. But that's as juicy as things got.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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We suppose when you've had your heart snapped in the conference finals twice (2016, 2018), whiffed entirely on the post-season as a consensus Cup contender (2017) and come within two W's of your ultimate goal (2015), perspective digs its blades in.

"We're trying to build a program like Tampa has done. You need some wounds and all that stuff, and you go through that over the years as you build your program," Babcock said.

"They have a real good team, a veteran-laden team. They've done a good job keeping their players and acquiring more players. Obviously, they've scouted real good, so they could trade and get more players."

It's no secret the Kyle Dubas Maple Leafs are following the Tampa blueprint.

Kill your enemies with speed, skill and superior goaltending. Fuel your roster by graduating AHLers as talented as they are cap-friendly. Then splash the pot by adding difference-makers like Ryan McDonagh (two assists, plus-3 Monday) and J.T. Miller via trade.

Construct a powerhouse that can rank first-overall in both power play and penalty kill, that can register its 16th game in which its offence explodes for six or more goals.

Tyler Johnson (two goals) snuffed out the suggestion that the Lightning benefitted from some lucky deflections.

"You can look at it as fluky, but we're in the right spots for those to be able to happen. That's what happens at the end of the season and in the playoffs — a lot of times it is the garbage goals that go in. We've got to try to play more hockey that way," Johnson said. "We've had a good season, but we really haven't done anything."

"We just want to be better tomorrow than what we are today, and I think we've been doing that."

So, is there anything the Lightning can learn about the Leafs on a night where they forecheck, backcheck, penalty-kill and cycle their high-flying rival into submission?

"Honestly, not much," Johnson said. "Playoffs and regular season are completely different. If you ask them, they didn't play a playoff game. If you ask us, we didn't either."

"Both teams still have a lot left in the tank in that regard. We're just trying to work on little things right now."

Toronto still has a few big things to worry about.

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Sportsnet.ca / Maple Leafs unable to step up against powerhouse Lightning

Chris Johnston | @reporterchris March 11, 2019, 9:57 PM

TORONTO — In search of an explanation for what happened here, we'll turn to a voice from beyond the hockey world, because it wouldn't sound very becoming for a serious hockey observer to trot out anything resembling an excuse for a poor performance.

So here goes: "I think one thing that we're learning is it's just really hard on your body. And mentally."

That was Toronto Raptors general manager Bobby Webster, speaking earlier this year at a business luncheon about the impact of cross-

continent travel on athletes and a schedule that includes as many as four games per week.

It seemed prescient while watching the Toronto Maple Leafs sleepwalk through a 6-2 loss to the Tampa Bay Lightning — not just the top team in the NHL this season, but arguably the best of the last two decades.

Toronto returned from a swing through Western Canada on Sunday, after seeing the clocks moved ahead an hour for daylight savings. It concluded a stretch which saw them spend 20 days in hotels compared to 10 in their own beds while frequently bouncing between time zones.

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If they looked like they had no legs against the Lightning, it's probably not a coincidence.

"People will tell you if you take a red-eye and you have to go to work the next day you're just bad," Webster said during the January panel discussion with Maple Leafs GM Kyle Dubas. "Vegas has been able to quantify it, the oddsmakers. So if you play back-to-back, the second game of the back-to-back, you automatically get docked two points on the [betting] line. So they're saying 'We just know, over the course of however many games we've studied, that whether you're the Raptors or you're Golden State or you're San Antonio, you're going to start off that next game down two in Vegas.'"

"So I think that's just an example probably objectively of why this stuff, we need to look at it."

Now, the NBA is already way ahead in this department. It's routine to see star players in that league, like Toronto's Kawhi Leonard, sit out games in order to lessen their workload and maximize performance.

The Montreal Canadiens did the same with rookie Jesperi Kotkaniemi for two games in California last week, citing "load management," but that's far from the norm. Tampa has already clinched a playoff spot and coach Jon Cooper said Monday he hadn't yet considered resting regulars. Mike Babcock also deflected that question, saying: "We plan on doing everything we can to make the playoffs."

If anyone was ever to introduce it as a regular practice in the NHL, the Leafs are a safe bet. They are at the forefront of the league's use of sports science and performance, and Dubas acknowledged during that talk with Webster that he's thought about it.

"I think it will become something that moves over to hockey in time," he said.

Facing this return home, they did try to maximize sleep and recovery by flying back from Edmonton on Sunday morning rather than immediately after the game on Saturday night.

But over an 82-game regular season, sometimes there's only so much you can do.

We are not yet at a point where Leafs coach Mike Babcock can freely acknowledge as much to reporters — not in a sport where players are celebrated for gutting their way through gruesome injuries, and not while coaching a team that has a less onerous schedule than many of its counterparts.

Still, Babcock did slyly hint they were in tough before the game against the Lightning when he was asked if he bought into the notion of teams struggling when returning from a western road trip: "I would if it was someone else coming off of one, but today I don't at all. I think it's just a great opportunity."

The opportunity went up in smoke when Tyler Johnson and Anthony Cirelli tipped home shots from the high slot and then Johnson was wide open to score again after Frederik Andersen took a shot to the mask.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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Ondrej Palat made it 4-0 on a pinballing puck that last hit Auston Matthews before going in.

That prompted Babcock to pull Andersen for just the second time all season, granting him an extra 35 minutes of rest while backup Garret Sparks went in.

Matthews did score one highlight-reel goal to briefly spark thoughts of a comeback inside Scotiabank Arena, but it didn't last. He was the most visibly frustrated player in the losing dressing room when the game mercifully ended.

"I consider it a wake-up call for us," he said. "It was a measuring-stick game, that's the best team in the league and we didn't come ready to play and they pretty much just slapped us."

As much as Babcock echoed that sentiment — "we were no good" — he did cancel a scheduled Tuesday practice. There was a time in this league when a coach would be looking to skate his players hard as punishment following a 6-2 loss to a division rival.

Down the hall, the Lightning had their own view on what transpired. They were given two tough games from Toronto earlier this season and saw something different this time around.

"We caught a tired team," said Cooper. "They just came off the West Coast and they've got to play another game at home in a different time zone, and you've got to take advantage of that."

It's an easier observation to share publicly when you come out on the winning end.

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1135809 Websites

TSN.CA / Ambrosie to speak at government hearing on concussions

Rick Westhead

CFL commissioner Randy Ambrosie and former NFL player Chris Borland have confirmed they will speak before a Canadian parliamentary committee studying the issue of sports-related concussions before the committee winds up in early May.

NHL commissioner Gary Bettman has been asked to participate in the hearings but has not yet confirmed whether he will, said Peter Fonseca, a Liberal Party member of parliament from Mississauga, Ont. and former Canadian Olympic team member who is chairing the hearings.

"We've heard from parents, and we've heard from young athletes who have played about how concussions have affected them," Fonseca said in an interview on Friday.

"We want to be able to share with these commissioners, whether it's Randy Ambrosie or commissioner Bettman, the power that they have as decision-makers and leaders and that it is in their interest, we would think, to grow the grassroots of their sports and have parents feel their kids are playing in safe environments all the way through."

A CFL spokesman said Ambrosie was unavailable and an NHL spokesman did not respond to an email requesting comment.

Ambrosie, a former offensive lineman who played with Calgary, Toronto and Edmonton, has sought to improve player safety since his hiring as the league's commissioner in July 2017.

In September 2017, the CFL announced it would outlaw full-contact padded practices during the season, a move designed to cut down the number of collisions that players give and take during a season.

CFL teams have also received an extra bye week each season to help reduce the risks of player injury.

At the same time, Ambrosie has refused to acknowledge a link between repeated head trauma and long-term brain diseases. Bettman has taken the same stance publicly, although internal NHL emails have shown top NHL officials have acknowledged that head injuries led to a higher prevalence of depression and personal tragedies.

It's unclear how Bettman would respond to the claim that the NHL should embrace a leadership role when it comes to safety in amateur hockey.

In one string of emails in 2014 that was unsealed in the NHL's concussion lawsuit, Gary Meagher, the NHL's vice-president for communications, wrote to a public relations firm executive that the league had a different approach toward safety from that of the NFL, which "is in the business of selling that they are making the game of football safer at all levels — it is smoke and mirrors but they are masters of smoke and mirrors."

"The N.H.L. has never been in the business of trying to make the game safer at all levels and we have never tried to sell the fact that this is who we are," Meagher wrote.

Borland retired in 2015 from the NFL after one season, citing worries about the long-term effects of head trauma. A linebacker with the San Francisco 49ers, Borland was 24 at the time he walked away from the game. Since his retirement, he has filmed a CTE public service announcement and done many news media interviews about the issue of brain injuries in sports.

Since the hearings began Nov. 21, witnesses have discussed the issue of concussions in both professional and amateur sports. Hockey has been a repeated discussion point.

Former Montreal Canadiens goalie Ken Dryden, the hearing's first witness, reiterated a case he has made repeatedly that the NHL should introduce a no-tolerance rule for hits to the head. Former Flyers forward Eric Lindros delivered the same message, as did Mark Aubry, a doctor with the Ottawa Senators and Hockey Canada.

The NHL has made some, but not all, head hits against the rules. In March 2010, the league's general managers approved Rule 48, which penalized lateral, blindside hits to an opponent where the head was targeted.

Fonseca said that when testimony wraps up, a group of government analysts will write a report that will be tabled in parliament. The report will include a series of recommendations for handling concussions moving forward.

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1135810 Websites

TSN.CA / Lightning depth players dominate 'lethargic' Leafs

Kristen Shilton

TORONTO — The Maple Leafs have no excuse for what happened on Monday night, nor are they accepting any offers of justification. Their spiritless performance in a 6-2 drubbing by the Tampa Bay Lightning wouldn't be hung on a long albeit successful trip through Western Canada that ended early Sunday, or any seasonal illnesses players may be battling.

In taking on the NHL-leading Lightning, the Leafs were just bad. And there was no way to sugar coat that after the fact.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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"The effort just wasn't there at times, and in the third period we pretty much just quit," assessed Auston Matthews, who scored one of Toronto's two goals. "So, that's on us as players. We have to wake up and do a much better job and hold each other accountable. They were just better than us in every way."

Even before the hits started coming in the first period, after which Toronto trailed its visitors 2-0, the Leafs were dealt an early blow with the loss of top-six winger Kasperii Kapanen, held out for precautionary reasons related to illness. That shoved William Nylander up to his old spot alongside Matthews and Andreas Johnsson, but the Leafs stars never played like star players.

Neither, really, did the Lightning's big guns, who courted all the headlines leading into Monday night. In a game Tampa won by four goals, the NHL's points leader Nikita Kucherov, top-line centre Steven Stamkos and top-pairing defenceman Victor Hedman combined for just two assists. It was Tampa's depth that drowned the Leafs on a night the hosts were outshot 42-28.

Tyler Johnson delivered the opening salvo, deflecting a puck off his skate past Andersen for a 1-0 lead. Anthony Cirelli next deflected Mikhail Sergachev's point blast to make it 2-0 before the end of the first. And then Johnson struck again early in the second, burying a puck that ricocheted off Andersen's mask (hard enough to dislodge the strap) and found the winger waiting in the weeds to make it 3-0.

Within 30 seconds, Ondrej Palat put another goal past Andersen, chasing the Leafs' starter for the first time all season in favour of backup Garret Sparks.

"They got some bounces early and I don't think we responded that well," Morgan Rielly said. "No excuses. There's no reason for us not to be ready and [any lingering fatigue] is certainly not an excuse for what happened on the ice tonight."

"We have to find a way to establish our game and grab some of that momentum back," added John Tavares. "As frustrating as it could be, halfway through the game, we have to find a way to get our game going and execute better than we did."

As Andersen took the fall for a poor overall team showing, Matthews came to life with an end-to-end rush and shot that beat Andrei Vasilevskiy, cutting the Leafs' deficit to 4-1.

If Toronto still had hope of a comeback at that point, it was rapidly extinguished by their own egregious error on an ensuing power play, when an inexplicably bad line change created a three-on-one shorthanded chance the other way, and Cedric Paquette delivered a dagger past Sparks to make it 5-1 Lightning.

Rielly thought he'd been hooked prior to that play developing, and Nazem Kadri said he thought a penalty was coming, too, but one didn't materialize.

"I know personally I shouldn't have changed when I changed. Really unacceptable," said Tavares of the mistake. "Our execution and the will to find a way to overcome some of the things they're doing to counter us [has to improve] and that's just by bearing down and executing in certain areas."

Paquette would score again in the third, deflecting a shot up and over Sparks to pad Tampa's total. Connor Brown added a late goal with 4.2 seconds left in regulation, right before Toronto limped off with the loss.

"We were no good," surmised coach Mike Babcock. "They were better than us from start to finish and won more battles, more races and just had more jump. We looked like a lethargic group right from the get-go, didn't have any energy right through our whole group, didn't skate well, didn't execute well, weren't good."

Toronto had already seen Tampa twice this season, and beaten them once, so how well the Lightning play isn't exactly a mystery. It was the Leafs' seeming lack of preparedness to manage their attack that was most bothersome.

"I think it was a good measuring stick for us," Matthews said. "That's a veteran team. They obviously came out hungry...we just didn't come ready to play. Despite bad bounces they still beat us in every area of the ice."

Simply flushing the defeat isn't good enough now, either. It's too late in the year, with too few regular season games remaining before playoffs are slated to begin. If Toronto wants to be a better team in the future, there's no shying away from the present.

"We have to learn from today," Tavares stated. "This was a great opportunity for us. Certainly look ourselves in the mirror and look to bounce back and understand we have to be a lot better than we were today."

TAKEAWAYS

NHL investigating alleged use of homophobic slur

During Monday's game, a microphone picked up audio of a homophobic slur being uttered on the ice.

Toronto's general manager Kyle Dubas released the following statement after the game in regards to the alleged incident:

"The Club is aware of the reports surrounding a homophobic slur used during the Maple Leafs vs. Lightning game on Monday night. The issue of homophobia is one the Toronto Maple Leaf Hockey Club strongly condemns and takes very seriously. We are in communication with the NHL and are cooperating fully with their office."

NHL PR released a similar statement and said they will have no further comment until their investigation is complete.

Good, bad and ugly

Matthews had as fraught an outing in Monday's game as any Leaf, punctuating some difficult defensive zone errors with a highlight-reel worthy goal to try and breathe life into his lagging team.

Given the slight skid Matthews had hit offensively prior to Monday's game – with zero goals and two assists in his previous six games – all eyes were on the Leafs centre to deliver. The prospect of being reunited on a line with Nylander could have been the spark Matthews needed to get rolling, and he did have good jump skating throughout the game, but initially the linemate swap did nothing to jog his scoring touch.

In fact, Matthews' first period was altogether forgettable, starting with his giveaway on a backwards pass attempt to Jake Muzzin that was intercepted and eventually shot past Andersen by Johnson to open the scoring.

Matthews' line was out again on Palat's goal, scored off Matthews' lost defensive zone draw. Right after that draw is when Matthews went zone-to-zone for his 31st goal of the season, breaking out of his mini-slump and giving Toronto momentum to cling to.

But they didn't, Matthews included. He did manage the third-highest possession total on the team at 48 per cent (the Leafs finished at 44 per cent overall), but it was clear after the game Matthews had higher expectations for his own game that what he showed against Tampa. Matthews finished with two shots on goal in 17:20 time on ice.

Andersen gets the hook

As soon as Palat's goal went in, Babcock didn't flinch before turning to Sparks on the Leafs bench and sending in his backup to replace Andersen. It was the first time all season Babcock had given Andersen the hook, but with four goals allowed on 19 shots and more than half a game still to play, it was in the Leafs' best interest to make the change.

While Andersen wasn't stellar over his 24:50 in net, the goalie was also victimized by some good deflection work by the Lightning. Both Johnson's first goal and Cirelli's score were re-directed, leaving Andersen with little chance of making a stop. When Palat scored, the puck deflected twice before going past him.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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Andersen's teammates came to his defence after, saying they hung the goalie out to dry.

Assessing his own game, Andersen said he "felt pretty good" but sometimes, "you don't get the bounces." And the bottom line for Babcock was Andersen didn't come up with the saves Toronto needed, and jolting his team awake with a goalie change was the right course of action. Andersen ended the night with a .789 save percentage, while Sparks topped out with 21 saves and a .913 save percentage.

Devil in the details

While the Leafs held an overall edge in faceoff wins at 55 per cent over the Lightning, the draws they did lose were a key cog in the final score.

Four of Tampa's six goals were scored nearly the same way, off offensive zone faceoff wins and quick passes that cut right through the reeling Leafs struggling to sort assignments down low.

Blue and White Trending

Tracking Leafs' trends all season long

Monday's loss was the fifth time this season Toronto has given up six goals in a game, and the second time in six games. The four-goal loss was tied for the largest deficit Toronto has endured in a home loss this year.

Next up

Toronto continues its homestand on Wednesday against the Chicago Blackhawks.

Last Word

"We should have showed a better effort tonight, but that being said, you're not going to see that very often from us. We're not quitters. We've never been like that; we always finish it to the end. [But] did we want a better effort? Of course."

- Nazem Kadri, reflecting on the Leafs' 6-2 loss to the Tampa Bay Lightning

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1135811 Websites

TSN.CA / NHL investigating alleged use of homophobic slur in Lightning-Leafs game

TORONTO — The NHL has launched an investigation into the possible use of a homophobic slur in the Toronto Maple Leafs' 6-2 loss to the Tampa Bay Lightning on Monday night.

Television cameras picked up what sounded like a slur with 1:51 left to play in the second period as Tampa Bay's Yanni Gourde and Toronto's Morgan Rielly skated into the Maple Leafs' defensive zone on a dump in.

"The NHL is aware of reports that a homophobic slur was used during the Maple Leafs-Lightning game," read the statement. "The League is investigating the incident and will have no further comment until this investigation is completed."

Two hours after the game Maple Leafs general manager Kyle Dubas also issued a statement.

"The Club is aware of the reports surrounding a homophobic slur used during the Maple Leafs versus Lightning game on Monday night," said Dubas. "The issue of homophobia is one the Toronto Maple Leafs Hockey Club strongly condemns and takes very seriously. We are in communication with the NHL and are co-operating fully with their office."

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1135812 Websites

USA TODAY / Blue Jackets don't send out enough players onto ice for Bruins' fourth goal

Mike Brehm, USA TODAY Published 10:15 p.m. ET March 12, 2019 | Updated 4:52 a.m. ET March 13, 2019

Boston Bruins star Brad Marchand scored right off a faceoff in the second period Tuesday night to cut the Columbus Blue Jackets' lead to 5-4.

There's a reason for the ease of his goal.

The Blue Jackets didn't have the right number of players on the ice.

It was a 5-on-5 situation after Blue Jackets goalie Sergei Bobrovsky made a glove save to freeze play.

But the Blue Jackets put out only four players on the ice for the ensuing faceoff: Boone Jenner, Riley Nash, Zach Werenski and Seth Jones. A forward was missing.

Bruins center Patrice Bergeron's faceoff win went straight to Marchand, who ripped a shot past Bobrovsky for his second goal of the game and 30th of the season.

The Bruins, who had trailed 5-1, were down by one heading into the second intermission.

Blue Jackets coach John Tortorella, once he realized the mistake, was pretty animated. He said, "I'm not talking about it," after the game.

Werenski told reporters he noticed the team was short-handed right as the puck was being dropped.

"I turned around to tell Nasher that we were going to go short side," he said. "Usually I tell two forwards. When I turned around, I was like, 'Is he behind me?' I thought he was maybe following me."

"Once I realized it, the puck was down and the puck was in our net. I've never seen that before. I probably won't ever see it again. But it happens, I guess."

But the gaffe didn't cost the Blue Jackets. Werenski scored a power-play goal in the third period and Jenner scored an empty-netter for a hat trick and a 7-4 win that kept Columbus still holding onto the final wild-card spot in the Eastern Conference.

The goal was Werenski's first in 30 games.

"It's a big goal," Tortorella said. "We faced a little adversity, them coming back. I thought we answered really well in the third period. That's a big goal for us, obviously."

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