



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 14, 2018

THE NEWS & OBSERVER

Bruins' big third period too much for Canes

By Chip Alexander

calexander@newsobserver.com

March 13, 2018 09:52 PM

Updated 8 hours 42 minutes ago

Raleigh

The Carolina Hurricanes are running out of games.

And hope. That's fast slipping away, too.

In what might be their most crushing loss of a season gone awry, the Hurricanes were beaten 6-4 by the Boston Bruins on Tuesday at PNC Arena.

David Pastrnak had a hat trick for the Bruins, which scored five times in the third period. The Hurricanes led 4-1 early in the third, after a shorthanded goal by Brock McGinn. They had taken a 3-1 lead in the second as Sebastian Aho and Teuvo Teravainen scored on power plays and Justin Williams at even strength.

But the Bruins were not done. Matt Grzelcyk, Pastrnak and Danton Heinen all scored in a span of 77 seconds as Boston tied it.

Pastrnak's goal at 16:30 of the third, a power-play score, was the winner for Boston (44-16-8). He later added an empty-netter for the hat trick.

Coming off a 6-3 road loss Monday against the New York Rangers, the Canes had surged ahead Tuesday on special teams. Aho and Teravainen each had a power-play goal and assist in the second period, and McGinn the shorthanded score in the third.

Williams lunged to knock in a loose puck after Bruins goalie Tuukka Rask stopped a McGinn shot for the third second-period score.

The Canes are fading fast. With the loss, Carolina remained seven points behind the New Jersey Devils, who hold the second wild-card spot in the Eastern Conference, and four points behind the Florida Panthers.

The Bruins are second in the Atlantic Division but missing the injured Patrice Bergeron and Charlie McAvoy. The Bruins also lost defensemen Zdeno Chara and Torey Krug during the game.

The Bruins' Brad Marchand, again a feisty, physical pest most of the game, scored off a no-look Pastrnak pass with 10.5 seconds left in the first. It was the 30th goal of the season for the player known as a "Little Ball of Hate" and a tough one for the Canes to absorb.

Carolina responded with the strong second period. Aho and Teravainen both scored on bullets of shots from the right circle — Aho getting his 25th of the season and Teravainen's 21st coming with a 5-on-3 advantage after Marchand was sent to the penalty box for tripping. The two Finns each had a primary assist on the scores, with defenseman Justin Faulk also assisting on both goals.

Marchand first tripped Faulk, then put a shoulder into Aho. That was all Jordan Staal could handle, taking Marchand to the ice. Williams' goal, his 15th, was all effort. After Elias Lindholm won the faceoff, McGinn got off a shot that got through Rask, the puck stopping inches from the goal line before Williams knocked it in with a dive.

Lindholm did most of the work on McGinn's shorthanded goal early in the third. He swiped the puck at the Boston blue line and was off on a breakaway, denied a goal by Rask but having McGinn in full pursuit to score for a 4-1 lead.

The Hurricanes have scored power-play goals in each of their last four games, and it was the 10th time this season they've had two in a game. The puck movement was brisk and Aho and Teravainen were on target.

Brutal loss to the Bruins the latest gut punch for fading Hurricanes

By Chip Alexander

calexander@newsobserver.com

March 13, 2018 11:33 PM

Updated 8 hours 29 minutes ago

Jacob Slavin sat on a pad in the locker room Tuesday at PNC Arena, silent, eyes fixed, staring into space.

Justin Faulk had a slightly dazed, faraway look as he tried to explain what had just happened to the Carolina Hurricanes.

Said a sullen Justin Williams, "I'm very stunned right now."

The Canes, playing with desperation and with an edge, led the Boston Bruins 4-1 midway through the third period. And then lost 6-4.

Faulk said something about how the Bruins scored a goal in the third and then "smelled blood." The Canes clearly were bleeding by game's end, somberly moving around their room at after what could have been their most gut-wrenching loss of the season.

That's a mouthful in itself because the Canes have had their share of gut-wrenchers — not to mention some ugly blowout losses — in a season in which they seemed so sure they



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 14, 2018

would be headed to Stanley Cup playoffs for the first time since 2009. Now, the Canes almost certainly will not.

"There are a few too many times where we've had situations where we had to say, 'How do we regroup from this?'" Faulk said.

For the first 50 minutes, it was all there for Carolina. Power-play goals by Sebastian Aho and Teuvo Teravainen. A shorthanded strike by Brock McGinn.

Williams, when he wasn't yapping with the Bruins' Brad Marchand or Zdeno Chara or whoever was in his vicinity, also scored a goal. Williams was at his ornery best.

But the final 10 minutes would be a blur of Boston goals and defensive breakdowns and odd-man rushes, a hat trick for the Bruins' David Pastrnak and a lot of head-hanging for the Canes. Another loss. Another bad one.

"We obviously don't have that mindset to say enough it enough," Williams said.

Whatever confidence the Hurricanes might have had when they were battling the Columbus Blue Jackets and New York Islanders for a playoff spot in the Eastern Conference has all but eroded. There was a time when Canes coach Bill Peters talked of his team perhaps climbing into the top three in the Metropolitan Division and not having to accept a wild-card playoff spot. That, too, has ended.

"We're playing tight, we're not playing loose," Faulk said.

Where once it may have seemed exciting to check out the NHL standings, now it's a downer: seven points behind the

New Jersey Devils, who hold the second wild-card spot. Ahead of the Canes (30-29-11) are the Florida Panthers, who have made a strong, late-season push into playoff contention.

"You know, we know, everyone knows where we are in the standings," Faulk said. "You want to sit here and say, 'Yeah, we're going to come back and regroup' and we have to."

Peters, for the most part, made his answers short after the game. He talked about "self-inflicted wounds" and other mistakes and his team being mentally tired in the third period.

In the final stretch of his fourth season as coach, Peters could again miss the playoffs and this time with a new team owner, Tom Dundon, in place and watching, evaluating.

Dundon has praised Peters for his preparation, organization and his generally upbeat, can-do attitude. Dundon also realizes he has an unhappy, disgruntled fan base and needs to sell tickets next season.

Peters once said losing was contagious. Has it become contagious with this team?

"You know what, that's a fair question," Peters said.

Asked if the Canes needed a turnover in personnel to combat a culture of losing, Peters said, "That's a good question."

Those weren't exactly answers. Then again, maybe they were.

NORTH STATE JOURNAL

Hurricanes at a loss for words after unraveling against Boston

The Bruins scored five times in the third to erase Carolina's three-goal lead and win 6-4

[March 13, 2018 Cory Lavalette Article, NHL, Sports](#)

RALEIGH — For 50 minutes, the Carolina Hurricanes looked like a team feverishly battling for a playoff spot. Ahead by three over the Boston Bruins on home ice and scoring all the ways a team wants to — on the power play, with a two-man advantage, crashing the net, shorthanded — the Hurricanes look unstoppable.

And then it all came crashing down, a microcosm of what will now likely be nine straight years outside of the postseason.

The Bruins scored five times in the third — including three times in 77 seconds — in a 6-4 win over Carolina in front of 14,081 at PNC Arena.

"I'm still kind of stunned, really," Hurricanes winger Justin Williams, who scored one of Carolina's goals, said. "How things can go so right for 50 minutes, and you can dig in and do all the things right. And you let one goal turn into another one turn into another one. I don't know what else to say."

Neither did coach Bill Peters, who shared little with the media after the game about his job security or whether or not major changes need to be made with this team.

"Are you concerned about a culture of losing that seems to be brewing here?"



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 14, 2018

"Yeah, that's a fair question," Peters responded.

"Are you concerned about it?"

"Yeah," he said.

"Does there need to be a turn over here? Is there something fundamentally wrong?"

"That's a good question," Peters said in ending the press conference.

Until Matt Grzelcyk scored with 9:56 remaining, everything seemed under control.

The Hurricanes trailed on a Brad Marchand goal with 10.5 seconds left in the first period, but blitzed the Bruins in the second.

Carolina's red-hot Finnish connection connected on two power plays, the first the 25th goal for Sebastian Aho and the second a 5-on-3 score for Teuvo Teravainen.

Williams, the grizzled veteran and three-time Cup winner had proclaimed at the beginning of the year, "We're done losing. It's time to climb the ladder and get relevant."

After the game, he had the same wide-eyed stare seen from so many Hurricanes this season and in the past.

"It's beyond anger, to be honest," he said. "We have thousands of Boston fans cheering for them when we're at home. I mean, it's a product of what's happening. It's beyond

upsetting, but we've got to look at ourselves and know that we're responsible for what we've done to this point."

The collapse happened with the Bruins down three men: defensemen Zdeno Chara and Torey Krug and forward Jake DeBrusk were all in the locker room when Boston scored five times with just 15 skaters on the bench.

"I don't even know what to... To be honest, we're sitting here saying — I think I've been asked that question probably too many times this year," defenseman Justin Faulk said when asked how the team bounces back from the crushing loss. "I think I've been asked after playing these guys before earlier this year, 'How do we regroup?' ... I mean, you guys know. We know. Everyone knows where we're at in the standings, and you want to sit here and say, 'Yeah, we're going to come back and regroup.'"

"And we have to, that's the bottom line," Faulk continued. "We've got to try and win 12 games, I guess. We're going to try and win all 12. Besides giving a cliché answer — just taking time off and coming back ready to go and put in the work — I don't really have much for you."

For 50 minutes, the Hurricanes had everything they wanted — and then it dissipated, like its playoff hopes.

Peters was asked if losing is contagious.

"That's a fair question. Answer that at the end of the year."



Pastrnak nets hat trick, Bruins rally to stun Hurricanes 6-4

Posted 12:18 a.m. today
Updated 12:19 a.m. today

RALEIGH, N.C. — The Boston Bruins trailed 4-1 with 10 minutes to go and were down to four healthy defensemen. It was an adverse set of circumstances, to be sure.

No matter. Spurred on by Brad Marchand's words and David Pastrnak's play, the Bruins pulled off a stirring comeback.

Final 1 2 3 Tot

[Boston](#) 1 0 5 6

[Carolina](#) 0 3 1 4

[Preview](#) | [Box](#) | [Gameview](#) | [Recap](#)

Three Stars

1: [David Pastrnak](#), Bos (3G, 1A)

2: [Sebastian Aho](#), Car (1G, 1A)

3: [Brad Marchand](#), Bos (1G, 2A)

STATS

Copyright © 2018 by STATS LLC.
All rights reserved.

Pastrnak scored three of Boston's five goals in the final 10 minutes for his first career hat trick, and the Bruins stunned the Carolina Hurricanes by rallying for a 6-4 victory Tuesday night.

"We knew we didn't play well, close enough to our standards," Pastrnak said. "We don't quit, and that showed today."

Matt Grzelcyk, Pastrnak and Danton Heinen scored in a span of 77 seconds to turn a 4-1 Bruins deficit into a 4-all tie.

Grzelcyk fired home a slap shot with 9:56 remaining, Pastrnak scored on a wrister 56 seconds later and Heinen



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 14, 2018

followed 21 seconds after that with the tying goal, banging home a one-timer off a 2-on-1 rush with David Krejci.

Pastrnak put Boston ahead on a power-play goal with 3:30 left and finished off his hat trick with an empty-net goal with 1:34 remaining.

"The whole night we kind of don't have the legs and look kind of tired, no energy," Pastrnak said. "And then we get a couple goals and it seemed like all of a sudden everybody is flying and everything clicks."

Marchand had a goal and two assists for the Bruins, who snapped a three-game road losing streak. Tuukka Rask made 29 saves.

Bruins coach Bruce Cassidy credited Marchand, who missed the previous game with an upper-body injury and was a game-time decision, for rallying the bench when the team trailed 4-1.

"Right around Grzelcyk's goal, Marchy said, 'Listen, there's a lot of time, we're not out of it,'" Cassidy said. "We knew it was a big ask to be able to come back. There's a lot of energy there, a lot of emotion in his game. He brings it every night."

The comeback victory did come at a cost. Bruins defensemen Zdeno Chara and Torey Krug and forward Jake DeBrusk all left the game with injuries and did not return. Cassidy did not have an update on their status.

"It wasn't easy (playing four defensemen)," Grzelcyk said, "but it was a credit to the guys for buckling down and finding a way."

Sebastian Aho, Teuvo Teravainen and Justin Williams scored in the second period for the Hurricanes. Brock

McGinn added a short-handed goal 51 seconds into the third to make it 4-1, but the Hurricanes couldn't hold it.

"I'm still kind of stunned, really," Williams said. "Things can go so right for 50 minutes and you can dig in and you can do all the things right. You let one goal turn into another one turn into another one. I don't know what else to say."

Justin Faulk and Elias Lindholm each had two assists, and Cam Ward stopped 28 shots. It was a deflating loss for the Hurricanes, who missed a chance to make up ground as they chase the final playoff spot in the Eastern Conference. They are seven points back with 12 games remaining.

"We're in a position, trying to scratch and claw, our backs are against the wall, and we're playing tight," Faulk said. "We're not playing loose. We're probably not playing with much confidence as a whole."

"I don't really know how to explain what just happened. It's tough."

NOTES: Chara, Krug and DeBrusk are the latest injuries to hit the Bruins. Boston forward Patrice Bergeron (broken foot) won't be back until next week at the earliest, Cassidy announced before the game, and defenseman Charlie McAvoy (MCL sprain) missed his fifth straight game. ... Aho set a career high with his 25th goal. ... Teravainen has eight goals and three assists in his last 11 games. ... Bruins forward David Backes returned after serving a three-game suspension for a late hit to the head against Detroit's Frans Nielsen last Tuesday.

UP NEXT

Bruins: At the Florida Panthers on Thursday night.

Hurricanes: Host the Philadelphia Flyers on Saturday.



Recap: Canes Bested by Bruins

Canes see three-goal lead evaporate in third period

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

March 13th, 2018

The Carolina Hurricanes saw a three-goal lead evaporate in the third period in a 6-4 loss to the Boston Bruins.

[Sebastian Aho](#), [Teuvo Teravainen](#), [Justin Williams](#) and [Brock McGinn](#) scored for the Hurricanes, but the Bruins roared back with five unanswered goals to complete the comeback.

Here are five takeaways from tonight's game.

One

Stunning is perhaps the one word to describe what occurred in the final 10 minutes of regulation. With the Hurricanes leading 4-1, the Bruins tallied five unanswered goals, including three in a span of 1:17, to hand the Canes a crushing defeat.

"I'm still kind of stunned, really," Williams said. "You let one goal turn into another one turn into another one, and I don't know what else to say."

"I don't want to say we gave them the game because they're a good team and good teams do that. It just took them once



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 14, 2018

chance," [Justin Faulk](#) said. "I don't really know how to explain what just happened. It's tough."

"Got to find a way to put an end to that," head coach Bill Peters said. "Some self-inflicted wounds."

Two

Matt Grzelcyk, David Pastrnak and Danton Heinen scored consecutively in 77 seconds to tie the game. One turned into two turned into three, and it was a brand-new hockey game.

Let's talk about Heinen's goal real quick. David Krejci grabbed the puck out of midair, took a couple strides with it and tossed it to himself in the neutral zone to spring an odd-man rush. That should have been whistled down immediately, and he should have been penalized for closing his hand on the puck. Here's a snippet of rule 67.2: "If he catches it and skates with it, either to avoid a check or to gain a territorial advantage over his opponent, a minor penalty shall be assessed" - and that's precisely what Krejci did with the puck.

"I thought their guy might have closed his hand on the puck and got around [Staal] in that regard," Peters said.

But all that being said, surrendering three goals at home in a span of 1:17 is certainly not a recipe for success.

"We gave them an opportunity with one," Faulk said. "They obviously smelled blood and took advantage of it."

And then the Hurricanes took a penalty, and Pastrnak scored his second of the game on the ensuing man advantage to give his team a 5-4 lead. He completed the hat trick in the waning minutes of the game - insult to injury at that juncture.

"It's beyond anger, to be honest," Williams said. "We've got thousands of Boston fans cheering for them when we're at home. That's a product of what's happening. It's beyond upsetting, but we've got to look at ourselves and know that we're responsible for what we've done to this point."

Three

Before the unfortunate chaos that was the final 10 minutes of the game, the Hurricanes played a game certainly worthy of two points. After being outshot 13-7 and outscored 1-0 by the Bruins in the first period, the Hurricanes outshot the Bruins 18-6 and hung three goals on them to take a 3-1 lead to the locker room after two.

A pair of power-play goals scored nearly 10 minutes apart gave the Hurricanes a 2-1 advantage, and it was Aho and Teravainen connecting on both.

The tying goal came just 2:10 into the second period, as Aho scored his 25th goal of the season on an impeccably placed wrist shot that found the far corner. It didn't appear on the scoresheet, but [Elias Lindholm](#) provided tremendous net-front presence stationed right in front of Tuukka Rask's eyes.

On the Canes' next power play, a 5-on-3 advantage, it was Aho dishing to Teravainen for the one-timer bomb.

Aho and Teravainen have now combined for 29 points (14g, 15a) in their last 16 games.

Four

The Canes increased their advantage to 3-1 in the final 90 seconds of the period after Lindholm won an offensive zone faceoff. [Brock McGinn](#) put a shot on net that leaked through Rask, and Williams won the race to the loose puck to bang it home.

In the first minute of the third period, Lindholm raced down the ice shorthanded and was stopped by Rask, but McGinn was there to clean up the rebound to make it a 4-1 game.

"You look at the first 50 minutes of that game and how we played, answered the bell, battled and got out to a 4-1 lead. It wasn't a fluke," Williams said. "We obviously don't have that mindset to say enough is enough."

Five

So, what's next? The Hurricanes have plenty of time to let this one stew with the next game on the schedule set for Saturday.

"I'm very stunned right now, so reflection is kind of tough," Williams said.

"A few too many times where we've had situations that we've had to say, 'How do we regroup from this?'" Faulk said.

"Besides the cliché answer of taking time off, coming back ready to go and putting in the work, I don't really have much for you."

Up Next

Three days will pass before the Hurricanes play their next game, a Saturday night Metropolitan Division match-up with the Philadelphia Flyers at home.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 14, 2018



SB NATION
CANES COUNTRY

Recap and Ranker: Shell-shocked Canes blow three-goal lead in 6-4 loss to Bruins

Where to start?

By [Brian LeBlanc@bdleblanc](mailto:Brian_LeBlanc@bdlleblanc) Mar 13, 2018, 10:11pm EDT

The [Carolina Hurricanes](#) have lost blowouts this season. They've lost on a goal in the final second of regulation. They've lost back-and-forth games. And yet, they found a way to lose a game in a new, excruciating way on Tuesday night.

Leading by three goals with ten minutes to go, the Hurricanes collapsed in a manner befitting the other tenant of PNC Arena. Despite being down to 15 skaters for the final ten minutes, the [Boston Bruins](#) overcame a three-goal third period deficit to beat the Canes 6-4, a defensive calamity that might just have been the final nail in the coffin of Carolina's playoff hopes.

The Canes showed signs of promise early, although with no results. The line of [Teuvo Teravainen](#), [Jordan Staal](#) and [Sebastian Aho](#) had multiple good looks on Bruins goalie [Tuukka Rask](#), but couldn't beat the Finnish netminder.

Almost as if by design, at the same time the TSA line couldn't score, this happened:

And, as expected, the Canes' inability to light the lamp cost them the opening goal. [Brad Marchand](#) tapped in a behind-the-back pass from [David Pastrnak](#) with eleven seconds remaining in the period to take a 1-0 lead to the locker room.

But then the second period started, and the Canes took flight.

It started early, just 2:10 into the middle frame, when [Aho](#) wired a wrister from Teravainen through a Staal screen on a power play that Rask never saw. Aho's 25th of the season makes him the first Canes player not named [Jeff Skinner](#) to attain that mark since [Eric Staal](#) scored 33 in the 2010-11 season.

After a [Zdeno Chara](#) delay of game penalty midway through the period, Marchand joined him in the box after he tripped Aho while on the penalty kill. The Bruins pest then took a run at Aho, prompting a response from both Staal and [Justin Faulk](#), and the Canes cashed in on the two-man advantage thanks to Aho returning the favor to Teravainen. The Canes' leading scorer cashed in with his 21st from nearly the same

spot on the ice where his countryman had scored ten minutes earlier.

To wrap up the period, [Justin Williams](#) drove hard to the net and was rewarded as a [Brock McGinn](#) shot trickled through Rask's pads and sat tantalizingly a foot from the goal line. Williams just beat Chara to the puck and poked it in to give the Canes a two-goal lead.

The momentum continued into the third, with the Canes killing a [Brett Pesce](#) tripping penalty that extended through the intermission. Pastrnak, trying to keep the puck in the zone, whiffed while stickhandling, allowing [Elias Lindholm](#) to take off on a breakaway. Lindholm's shot was stopped by Rask, but McGinn followed up to make it a 4-1 lead less than a minute in.

And then things all fell apart in dramatic fashion.

Just past the halfway point of the third period, [Matt Grzelcyk](#) took advantage of [Tim Schaller](#) forcing a turnover and wristed a high shot past a surprised [Cam Ward](#) to make it a two-goal game. Less than a minute later, the lead was reduced to one as Pastrnak converted a two-on-one with Marchand.

Then, the Bruins tied it 21 seconds later in controversial fashion. [David Krejci](#) attempted to glove the puck to himself while exiting the defensive zone, but closed his hand on the puck in the process undetected by the officials. Krejci took off on another odd-man advantage and [Danton Heinen](#) finished the job to tie the game, despite the Bruins being down three players in the final 15 minutes of the game with Chara, [Jake DeBrusk](#) and [Torey Krug](#) all apparently injured.

With 4:08 remaining, Justin Faulk set the table to finish the collapse, clearing the puck over the glass and into the crowd to put the Bruins on the power play. Pastrnak, predictably, finished the job Faulk started, wiring a one-timer from the far circle to give the Bruins the lead again. He finished off his first career hat trick into the empty net with 1:30 left, leaving a good number of thousand-yard stares on the Canes' bench and no shortage of delirious Bruins fans in the PNC crowd.

The loss keeps the Canes at a seven-point deficit to the final playoff spot, and five days to marinate over it before they face the [Philadelphia Flyers](#) on Saturday.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 14, 2018

TriangleSportsNetwork

Hurricanes stunned by Bruins in 6-4 loss

Pastrnak's hat trick ignites five-goal third from Boston

[March 13, 2018 Peter Koutroumpis Carolina Hockey Network, Carolina Hurricanes, Triangle Sports Network, Triangle Sports Roundup](#)

By Peter Koutroumpis

editor@trianglesportsnet.com

RALEIGH, N.C. – It all happened so fast.

A flurry of goals from the Boston Bruins piled up like repeated punches to the gut and head that left the [Carolina Hurricanes](#) dazed and reeling and resulted in a 6-4 loss at PNC Arena on Tuesday.

A hat trick from David Pastrnak, along with singles from Brad Marchand, Matt Grzelcyk, and Danton Heinen led the Bruins offense in a shocking comeback witnessed by a crowd of 13,081 on hand.

Led by power play goals from Sebastian Aho and Tuevo Teravainen, and tap-ins from Justin Williams and Brock McGinn, the Hurricanes led 4-1.

It looked as though the game was well in hand as the latter half of the third period approached.

Goalkeeper Cam Ward, who faced 33 shots in the loss, had made equally impressive saves up to that point as his Bruins counterpart Tuukka Rask did, also facing 33 pucks on the night.

Then it all unraveled in a matter of minutes.

It left many speechless.

"I'm still kind of stunned really," Williams said.

"Things can go so right for 50 minutes – you can dig in and do all the things right. Then you let one goal turn into another, turn into another one...I don't know what else to say."

Crowded spaces

It was crowded around the creases all night.

When all 10 players were on the ice and going, there wasn't much space to move around in.

Shot selection and placement was at a premium – the only way pucks were going to bulge the twine.

Marchand scored his 30th goal of the season when he finished a backdoor pass from Pastrnak on a sequence set up by former Hurricanes center Riley Nash.

Scoring with just 11 seconds remaining in the first period, Boston didn't carry its 1-0 lead for very long into the second before Aho tied it up at the 2:10 mark.

Plugging in and surging

While scoreless on the power play up to that point, Aho's snipe from the right faceoff dot beat Rask high to his blocker side as Elias Lindholm set the perfect screen in front of the keeper.

Teravainen and captain Justin Faulk assisted on the play, the first of two helpers the defenseman finished with.

Competition for loose pucks ensured finished checks on both sides as play progressed with the game all even at 1-1.

Tempers started flaring during the latter half of the period when Marchand cut down Faulk with a trip that resulted in a center-ice scuffle with Hurricanes co-captain Jordan Staal.

With a 5-on-3, the Hurricanes took the 2-1 lead at 12:06 on Teravainen's slap shot past Rask, his 21st goal of the season on a set-up from Aho and Faulk.

Free pucks

Continuing to press late in the period, a hard shot from McGinn in the slot was stopped by Rask but trickled behind him and sat in the blue paint before Williams fought off Marchand to score his 15th goal of the season.

With Carolina holding a 3-1 advantage, the third period promised to show increased intensity from both sides.

Boston looked to pull back to even on the power play, a carryover advantage from a Brett Pesce tripping penalty.

However, effective penalty killing allowed Carolina to fortify its lead.

A turnover at the Hurricanes' blue line gave Lindholm the puck and a rink-length breakaway on Rask.

Though making the pad save on the deke, Rask was out of position and allowed a streaking McGinn to easily tuck the puck away into the net and extended the Carolina lead to 4-1.

Uprising

With just over 19 minutes remaining, Boston then put together an overwhelming, shock-and-awe comeback, and scored three goals in a span of 77 seconds.

Goals from Grzelcyk, Pastrnak, and Hinton tied the game at four goals apiece with 8:39 remaining.

It was a new game for both sides, but the momentum was too overwhelming in the Bruins' favor for Carolina to contend with.

With 4:08 remaining, the puck cleared the glass and put Faulk in the penalty box for delay of game.

While a dominating pro-Bruins crowd roared in favor, the uneasiness of everyone else in the building could be equally sensed.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 14, 2018

The man-up opportunity completed the comeback for the Bruins, as Pastrnak's blast past Ward from the left circle gave them back the lead, 5-4, with 3:30 remaining.

There was still time, but Carolina couldn't come out of its shocked state.

"I thought they caught us," head coach Bill Peters said.

"We got a little tired. Maybe mentally tired. We didn't make as many plays as we needed to. We got on our heels a little bit."

An empty-net goal two minutes later completed Pastrnak's hat trick.

It was the final sting and result of a set of sequences that handed the Hurricanes their second loss in as many nights

and pulled them further back of what has become an elusive postseason spot.

Final words

"They're a good team," Faulk said.

"We're in a position to scratch and claw, our backs are against the wall, and we're playing tight. We're not playing loose – probably not playing with as much confidence as a whole the last little while. They're a good team. Good teams do that. I don't really know how to explain what just happened. We made a lot of mental mistakes there and they capitalized. Their good players came to play when it mattered most I guess."



Hurricanes implode in PNC

Alec Sawyer, Assistant Sports Editor

9 hrs ago

It took just one minute and 17 seconds midway through the third period for the Carolina Hurricanes to utterly collapse inside PNC Arena Tuesday night, as the Boston Bruins overcame a 4-1 deficit to eventually beat Carolina 6-4.

The Hurricanes (30-29-11) played a great 50 minutes of hockey to put themselves into a position to win, but followed that up with a final 10 minutes that was emblematic of the season as a whole; hope of anything other than continued failure being completely squandered.

"I'm still kind of stunned really," Canes forward Justin Williams said. "Things can go so right for 50 minutes, and you can dig in and do all the things right and then you let one goal turn into another one, turn into another one. I don't know what else to say."

With 10:04 left to play in the game, Boston (44-16-8) defenseman Matt Grzelcyk beat Canes goalie Cam Ward, who stopped 28 of 33 shots on the night, up high to shrink the Carolina lead to 4-2. Fifty-six seconds later, forward David Pastrnak sniped the puck off the crossbar and into the net to make it 4-3. Just 21 seconds after that, forward Danton Heinen slotted away a beautiful pass from center David Krejci to complete the abrupt comeback.

"I don't really know how to explain what just happened," Canes defenseman Justin Faulk said. "We're in a position where we are trying to scratch and claw. Our backs are against the wall. We're playing tight. We aren't playing loose and we are probably not playing with much confidence as a whole."

Pastrnak broke the 4-4 tie later in the third period, converting a power-play goal after Faulk sent the puck over the glass and was assessed a delay of game. Pastrnak sealed his hat trick and the Carolina tomb with an empty-net goal, as the large contingent of Boston fans in the building poured hats over the boards and onto the ice.

Williams, who was almost at a loss for words after the game, shouldered some of the responsibility for what is one of the uglier losses the franchise has seen, while expressing what a loss like this feels like for a team.

"It's beyond anger to be honest," Williams said. "We've got thousands of Boston fans cheering for them when we're at home. It's a product of what's happening. It's beyond upsetting. We've got to look at ourselves and know that we're responsible for what we've done at this point."

Before Boston mounted its comeback, the Canes were playing good hockey. In a game that featured nine combined penalties, Carolina made the most of the special-teams opportunities to take what appeared to be a comfortable 4-1 lead.

The Hurricanes tallied twice on the power play, as forwards Sebastian Aho and Teuvo Teravainen, each assisted by the other, both scored with the man advantage in the second period.

Aho, who drew the penalty on Pastrnak, received a feed from Teravainen at the top of the circle and slotted it through traffic and over the shoulder of Bruins goalie Tuukka Rask, who stopped 29 of Carolina's 33 shots, to tie things at 1-1 after Boston forward Brad Marchand netted the opener with 10.4 seconds remaining in the first.

Later in the period, Teravainen capitalized on a 5-on-3 advantage, beating Rask to his high-glove side on the power



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 14, 2018

play to take a 2-1 lead. Williams added a tap-in goal in the second, after forward Brock McGinn beat Rask with a hard shot and the puck got by him to the stick of Williams.

"Just a nice shot from Sebastian there," Faulk said. "We were lucky -- well not necessarily lucky but it doesn't happen often -- to get a 5-on-3. Just a good shot by [Teravainen]. They came up big, I guess, at that part of the game when we thought it was needed."

A shorthanded goal to open up the third period for McGinn, thanks to the hustle of forward Elias Lindholm who forced a turnover, put the Canes up 4-1.

From there, it all fell apart for the Hurricanes.

With the loss, the Canes have now dropped 10 of their last 13 games, including four of their last five. After flirting with a playoff spot for the majority of the season, Carolina is trending in the completely wrong direction with the season winding down, and finds itself seven points out of the Eastern

Conference's second wild-card spot with an extra game played.

Canes head coach Bill Peters, who said next to nothing post game, did talk about the need to recover from this one and see how the playoff hunt shaped out.

"We gotta watch, see it unfold," Peters said. "There are ways to recover, and we will see if we do it."

The Canes will get a few days off now, before returning to PNC Arena to host the Philadelphia Flyers on Saturday. Carolina has been a streaky team all season, but with the playoff hopes all but lost the need to bounce back from this loss is imperative.

"A few too many times where we've had situations where we have to say 'how do we regroup from this,'" Faulk said. "You guys know, we know, everyone knows where we are at in the standings. You want to sit here and say 'yeah, we're going to come back here and regroup.' You have to. That's the bottom line."

Embarrassing loss to Bruins sums up Hurricanes' disastrous season

Andrew Schnittker, Sports Editor

9 hrs ago

If Tuesday night's 6-4 loss to the Boston Bruins is not rock bottom, the Carolina Hurricanes do not want to find out what is.

What ended as the worst loss of the season did not start out that way. After giving up a late goal in the first period, the Canes dominated the second thanks to two power-play goals from their two most talented forwards in Finns Sebastian Aho and Teuvo Teravainen and a late tally from veteran Justin Williams, and extended the lead to three with a short-handed tally from forward Brock McGinn.

About halfway through the third period, the Canes appeared ready to cruise to a victory over one of the league's top teams and get within shouting distance (five points) of a playoff spot. That's when the wheels fell off. In a span of 1:17, the Canes surrendered three goals on a pair of odd-man rushes and a defensive-zone turnover, and just like that, the game was tied. As has been the case in many games this season, a strong effort was undone by defensive mistakes.

With four minutes left in the game, defenseman and co-captain Justin Faulk, mired in arguably the worst season of his pro career, took a delay of game penalty for clearing the puck over the glass, and Bruins forward David Pastrnak notched the game winner on the ensuing Bruins power play.

Embarrassing does not begin to describe a game like that. Blowing a three-goal, third-period lead on your home ice is inexcusable. And really, the loss serves as a perfect microcosm of the Hurricanes' 2017-18 season.

The Canes came into the season brimming with optimism. The offseason additions of goalie Scott Darling, who had shined as a backup with the Chicago Blackhawks, was supposed to fix the Canes' long-time goaltending woes.

Third-pairing defenseman Trevor van Riemsdyk and penalty-killing center Marcus Kruger were supposed to shore things up defensively, Williams, a member of Carolina's 2006 Stanley Cup Championship team, was supposed to add needed goal scoring and leadership up front.

The Canes were picked by many of the national media as a darkhorse to end their eight-year playoff drought, and the fan base expected it.

Things have not worked out that way. Darling, with a .888 save percentage and 3.08 goals against average, has been one of the worst goalies in the NHL this year, leading the Canes to a scenario that was not supposed to happen again, with Cam Ward as the workhorse. While Ward has had a solid year, you can't win with only one goalie.

Van Riemsdyk has been serviceable on the third pairing, and Williams has done his part, chipping in 15 goals and 45 points and being a voice in the room. So with Kruger currently in the AHL, half the team's offseason additions have panned out.

There have been bright spots on offense, namely the play of Teravainen and Aho, but the Canes have still struggled to put the puck in the net, with an offense that ranks 26th in the league. Forward Jeff Skinner, who had a career-high 37 goals last year, has had a down year with 20 goals and 41 points in 70 games.

On defense, which is supposed to be the team's strength, the results have not been there either. Jacob Slavin and Brett Pesce have still been an impressive shutdown pairing, but fellow third-year Noah Hanifin has not progressed as hoped, and Faulk has had an abysmal season. The Canes make far too many defensive mistakes at key moments of the game.

The end result is that the Canes are seven points back of the New Jersey Devils with 12 games to play, and the Devils have a game in hand. Barring a miracle, the NHL's longest-



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 14, 2018

active playoff drought will hit nine years. The Canes have moved into a playoff position a few times, but hit a stretch of poor play and fell out each time. With 70 games played, the Canes are actually two points worse than they were last year.

So, what happens next? Changes. The only question is how many and how big. The first of these from ambitious new owner Tom Dundon should offer some insight, as former general manager Ron Francis has been transitioned to President of Hockey Operations, and the Canes will hire a new GM that will report directly to Dundon.

Head coach Bill Peters could be on the chopping block as well. Peters, who said at the start of the year and repeatedly throughout that the Canes had a group capable of making

the playoffs, has not been able to coax the necessary results out of his most talented roster in four years.

When asked by Cory Lavalette of the North State Journal Tuesday night if there was something fundamentally wrong with the Hurricanes, Peters responded with "That's a good question."

The new general manager, when looking to make needed improvements to the Hurricanes, should have no more than five untouchables in trade talks: Aho, Teravainen, Slavin, Staal and Pesce.

A season that started with so much promise for the Carolina Hurricanes will almost certainly end the same way as the eight preceding it. Tuesday night's ugly loss offered up a near-perfect mirror image of that season.



Penguins Take First of Two Meetings with Checkers

Written by Nicholas Niedzielski

Published: March 13, 2018

The Wilkes-Barre/Scranton Penguins came to town for the first time this season and got the best of Charlotte, topping the Checkers 5-2.

The recently assigned Valentin Zykov opened the scoring with his league-leading 31st tally of the year, a simple tap in of a slick feed from Lucas Wallmark. That lead wouldn't hold for long, however, as the Penguins struck twice within the span of a minute to grab the lead heading into the first intermission.

The two teams were evenly locked in the middle frame until the Penguins' attack against burst through, nabbing the visitors another two goals less than a minute apart to grab a substantial 4-1 advantage. Andrew Poturalski would pull the home squad back with a one-time laser on the power-play late in the second, but that would be all the goals Charlotte would see. Despite a strong push in the third, including a relentless attack with the extra attacker, the Checkers couldn't solve netminder Anthony Peters and fell to the Penguins 5-2.

QUOTES

Coach Mike Vellucci on the game

I thought we played hard. We only gave up 11 chances and they scored five goals, including the empty-netter. We

weren't good defensively in some spots and Ned could have been a little bit sharper. We hit a couple of posts there in the third period and we could have tied the game up. That's the way it went today. We've got to bounce back and be ready for tomorrow.

Patrick Brown on the team not being able to capitalize on more chances

We weren't able to get enough net traffic. I think their goalie saw the puck really well. We did a whole bunch of good things all over the ice, but unfortunately we didn't get enough net traffic. We got a lot of shots, but we've got to get bodies to the net.

Brown on giving up two quick goals on two separate occasions

That's just being disciplined. Anytime there's a goal or a big hit or anything that changes the tide of the game, you've got to mentally reset, refocus and make sure it doesn't happen again. When it happens twice in a row, that shows we're not focusing. We've got to bear down, focus more and win these big games.

NOTES

The Checkers are now 2-1-0 in the four-game season series with Wilkes-Barre/Scranton that concludes tomorrow. The road team won each game thus far ... Zykov's goal gave him eight points over a five-game streak (6g, 2a) ... This was Wallmarks' third consecutive two-assist game. Since Feb. 2, he has 16 points (3g, 13a) in his last 11 games, seven of which were multi-point outings ... Andrew Poturalski



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 14, 2018

extended his point streak to four games (2g, 2a) ... Greg McKegg has five points (1g, 4a) in six games as a Checker ... After going six straight games without a power-play goal, the Checkers have scored in five straight (5-for-14) ... Forwards Marcus Kruger and Andrew Miller, defenseman Jake Chelios and goaltender Jeremy Smith missed the game due to injury ... Forward Julien Gauthier missed his third consecutive game with an illness ... Forwards Mike

Ferrantino and Zack Stortini and defenseman Tyler Ganly were healthy extras.

UP NEXT

The teams complete their four-game season series Wednesday at 7 p.m.



Bruins rally past Hurricanes, gain in Atlantic

Score five straight goals after trailing by three in third period

by Kurt Dusterberg / NHL.com Correspondent

12:26 AM

RALEIGH, N.C. -- [David Pastrnak](#) scored his first NHL hat trick, including the game-winning goal, and the Boston Bruins rallied from three goals down in the third period to defeat the Carolina Hurricanes 6-4 at PNC Arena on Tuesday.

[Matt Grzelcyk](#), Pastrnak and [Danton Heinen](#) scored in a span of 1:17 in the third to erase Carolina's 4-1 lead. Pastrnak scored from the left face-off circle on the power play to make it 5-4 with 3:30 remaining and completed the hat trick with an empty-net goal that made it 6-4 with 1:34 left.

The Bruins (44-16-8) are 7-1-0 in their past eight games and four points behind the first-place Tampa Bay Lightning in the Atlantic Division. The Lightning lost at the Ottawa Senators 7-4.

Boston played with four defensemen for part of the third period after [Zdeno Chara](#) and [Torey Krug](#) left with injuries. Forward [Jake DeBrusk](#) also left early in the third.

"We knew it was a big ask to come back, and we talked about it after the second period," Boston coach Bruce Cassidy said. "Listen, we just have to play better than the guy across from you. Outcompete him, win some pucks. We may or may not win the game, but that's just the way we need to play, and we were able to do it."

The Hurricanes (30-29-11) have lost four of their past five (1-4-0) and remain seven points behind the New Jersey Devils for the second wild card into the Stanley Cup Playoffs from the Eastern Conference.

"I'm still kind of stunned really," Hurricanes forward [Justin Williams](#) said. "Things can go so right for 50 minutes and you can dig in. Then you let one goal turn into another one and then another one."

[Brad Marchand](#)'s 30th goal of the season gave the Bruins a 1-0 lead with 11 seconds remaining in the first period. Pastrnak carried the puck behind the net and left a drop pass for Marchand, who scored at the right post. Marchand reached the 30-goal mark for the third straight season.

Carolina tied it 1-1 on [Sebastian Aho](#)'s power-play goal at 2:10 of the second period. Aho, who had a shooting lane at the top of the right face-off circle and a screen in front, shot to the far side for his 25th goal.

Carolina took a 2-1 lead on [Teuvo Teravainen](#)'s goal with a two-man advantage. Teravainen scored on a one-timer off a pass from Aho at 12:06.

Williams made it 3-1 lead with 1:17 remaining in the second. Tuuka Rask (29 saves) stopped [Brock McGinn](#)'s shot from the slot, but Williams dived to the loose puck behind the goaltender and pushed it into the net.

"It was our worst period of the year, I think," Cassidy said. "They were much better than us. They won all their puck battles."

McGinn scored shorthanded for a 4-1 lead at 51 seconds of the third period. Rask stopped [Elias Lindholm](#) on a breakaway, but McGinn tapped in the rebound.

Grzelcyk made it 4-2 when he scored on a wrist shot over [Cam Ward](#)'s glove at 10:04.

"It was a weird game," Pastrnak said. "There was not much energy. Then [Grzelcyk's] goal happens and it's 4-2 with 10 minutes to go. Definitely, that gets us going."



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 14, 2018

Pastrnak scored on a wrist shot at 11:00 to pull Boston within 4-3, and Heinen took a pass across the slot from Krejci and finished at the left post to tie it 4-4 at 11:21.

Goal of the game

Pastrnak's goal at 16:30 of the third period.

Save of the game

Rask's save on McGinn with 5:37 remaining in the third period.

Highlight of the game

Heinen's goal at 11:21 of the third period.

They said it

"All of a sudden everything clicks. Every play we make is a sharp play. You kind of laugh at yourself. How can you go from not executing one play and not playing the system, to executing every play and playing in the system? You can't really explain that. We've been that resilient group all year." - *Bruins goaltender [Tuukka Rask](#)*

"Well, you have no option, right? We've got to do it. We've got to watch, see it unfold. We've got two days of practice. There are ways to recover, and we will see if we do it." -- *Hurricanes coach Bill Peters on how Carolina will respond to the loss*

Need to know

Boston came back from three goals down to win in regulation for the sixth time in its history and first since a 6-5 road win against the Ottawa Senators on April 20, 1995. ... The Bruins are 15-3-4 against the Metropolitan Division. ... Aho, McGinn, Teravainen, Lindholm and [Justin Faulk](#) each had two points for Carolina.

What's next

Bruins: At the Florida Panthers on Thursday (7:30 p.m. ET; TVAS, FS-F, NESN, NHL.TV).

Hurricanes: Host the Philadelphia Flyers on Saturday (7 p.m. ET; FS-CR, NBCSP, NHL.TV).

TODAY'S LINKS

<http://www.newsobserver.com/sports/nhl/carolina-hurricanes/article205000269.html>

<http://www.newsobserver.com/sports/nhl/carolina-hurricanes/article205009764.html>

<http://nsjonline.com/article/2018/03/hurricanes-at-a-loss-for-words-after-unraveling-against-boston/>

<http://www.wralsportsfan.com/pastrnak-nets-hat-track-bruins-rally-to-stun-hurricanes-6-4/17414813/>

<https://www.nhl.com/hurricanes/news/recap-hurricanes-bested-by-bruins/c-296917146>

<https://www.canescountry.com/2018/3/13/17117920/carolina-hurricanes-recap-boston-bruins-david-pastrnak-hat-trick-teuvo-teravainen-sebastian-aho>

<http://trianglesportsnet.com/carolina-hockey-network/hurricanes-stunned-by-bruins-in-6-4-loss/>

http://www.technicianonline.com/sports/article_87808d10-2735-11e8-9061-47cae59a014f.html

http://www.technicianonline.com/sports/article_bda9b4c2-2738-11e8-98c9-e3744d2c4b3a.html

<http://gocheckers.com/game-recaps/penguins-take-first-of-two-meetings-with-checkers>

<https://www.nhl.com/news/boston-bruins-carolina-hurricanes-game-recap/c-296916814>

SportScan

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

1103484 Carolina Hurricanes

Brutal loss to the Bruins the latest gut punch for fading Hurricanes

BY CHIP ALEXANDER

calexander@newsobserver.com

March 13, 2018 11:33 PM

Updated 5 hours 29 minutes ago

Jacob Slavin sat on a pad in the locker room Tuesday at PNC Arena, silent, eyes fixed, staring into space.

Justin Faulk had a slightly dazed, faraway look as he tried to explain what had just happened to the Carolina Hurricanes.

Said a sullen Justin Williams, "I'm very stunned right now."

The Canes, playing with desperation and with an edge, led the Boston Bruins 4-1 midway through the third period. And then lost 6-4.

Faulk said something about how the Bruins scored a goal in the third and then "smelled blood." The Canes clearly were bleeding by game's end, somberly moving around their room at after what could have been their most gut-wrenching loss of the season.

That's a mouthful in itself because the Canes have had their share of gut-wrenchers — not to mention some ugly blowout losses — in a season in which they seemed so sure they would be headed to Stanley Cup playoffs for the first time since 2009. Now, the Canes almost certainly will not.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 14, 2018

"There are a few too many times where we've had situations where we had to say, 'How do we regroup from this?'" Faulk said.

For the first 50 minutes, it was all there for Carolina. Power-play goals by Sebastian Aho and Teuvo Teravainen. A shorthanded strike by Brock McGinn.

Williams, when he wasn't yapping with the Bruins' Brad Marchand or Zdeno Chara or whoever was in his vicinity, also scored a goal. Williams was at his ornery best.

But the final 10 minutes would be a blur of Boston goals and defensive breakdowns and odd-man rushes, a hat trick for the Bruins' David Pastrnak and a lot of head-hanging for the Canes. Another loss. Another bad one.

"We obviously don't have that mindset to say enough it enough," Williams said.

Whatever confidence the Hurricanes might have had when they were battling the Columbus Blue Jackets and New York Islanders for a playoff spot in the Eastern Conference has all but eroded. There was a time when Canes coach Bill Peters talked of his team perhaps climbing into the top three in the Metropolitan Division and not having to accept a wild-card playoff spot. That, too, has ended.

"We're playing tight, we're not playing loose," Faulk said.

Where once it may have seemed exciting to check out the NHL standings, now it's a downer: seven points behind the New Jersey Devils, who hold the second wild-card spot. Ahead of the Canes (30-29-11) are the Florida Panthers, who have made a strong, late-season push into playoff contention.

"You know, we know, everyone knows where we are in the standings," Faulk said. "You want to sit here and say, 'Yeah, we're going to come back and regroup' and we have to."

Peters, for the most part, made his answers short after the game. He talked about "self-inflicted wounds" and other mistakes and his team being mentally tired in the third period.

In the final stretch of his fourth season as coach, Peters could again miss the playoffs and this time with a new team owner, Tom Dundon, in place and watching, evaluating.

Dundon has praised Peters for his preparation, organization and his generally upbeat, can-do attitude. Dundon also realizes he has an unhappy, disgruntled fan base and needs to sell tickets next season.

Peters once said losing was contagious. Has it become contagious with this team?

"You know what, that's a fair question," Peters said.

Asked if the Canes needed a turnover in personnel to combat a culture of losing, Peters said, "That's a good question."

Those weren't exactly answers. Then again, maybe they were.

News Observer LOADED: 03.14.2018

1103485 Carolina Hurricanes

Bruins' big third period too much for Canes

BY CHIP ALEXANDER

calexander@newsobserver.com

March 13, 2018 09:52 PM

Updated 5 hours 41 minutes ago

RALEIGH

The Carolina Hurricanes are running out of games.

And hope. That's fast slipping away, too.

In what might be their most crushing loss of a season gone awry, the Hurricanes were beaten 6-4 by the Boston Bruins on Tuesday at PNC Arena.

David Pastrnak had a hat trick for the Bruins, which scored five times in the third period. The Hurricanes led 4-1 early in the third, after a shorthanded goal by Brock McGinn. They had taken a 3-1 lead in the second as Sebastian Aho and Teuvo Teravainen scored on power plays and Justin Williams at even strength.

But the Bruins were not done. Matt Grzelcyk, Pastrnak and Danton Heinen all scored in a span of 77 seconds as Boston tied it.

Pastrnak's goal at 16:30 of the third, a power-play score, was the winner for Boston (44-16-8). He later added an empty-netter for the hat trick.

Coming off a 6-3 road loss Monday against the New York Rangers, the Canes had surged ahead Tuesday on special teams. Aho and Teravainen each had a power-play goal and assist in the second period, and McGinn the shorthanded score in the third.

Williams lunged to knock in a loose puck after Bruins goalie Tuukka Rask stopped a McGinn shot for the third second-period score.

The Canes are fading fast. With the loss, Carolina remained seven points behind the New Jersey Devils, who hold the second wild-card spot in the Eastern Conference, and four points behind the Florida Panthers.

The Bruins are second in the Atlantic Division but missing the injured Patrice Bergeron and Charlie McAvoy. The Bruins also lost defenseman Zdeno Chara and Torey Krug during the game.

The Bruins' Brad Marchand, again a feisty, physical pest most of the game, scored off a no-look Pasternak pass with 10.5 seconds left in the first. It was the 30th goal of the season for the player known as a "Little Ball of Hate" and a tough one for the Canes to absorb.

Carolina responded with the strong second period. Aho and Teravainen both scored on bullets of shots from the right circle — Aho getting his 25th of the season and Teravainen's 21st coming with a 5-on-3 advantage after Marchand was sent to the penalty box for tripping. The two Finns each had a primary assist on the scores, with defenseman Justin Faulk also assisting on both goals.

Marchand first tripped Faulk, then put a shoulder into Aho. That was all Jordan Staal could handle, taking Marchand to the ice. Williams' goal, his 15th, was all effort. After Elias Lindholm won the faceoff, McGinn got off a shot that got through Rask, the puck stopping inches from the goal line before Williams knocked it in with a dive.

Lindholm did most of the work on McGinn's shorthanded goal early in the third. He swiped the puck at the Boston blue line and was off on a breakaway, denied a goal by Rask but having McGinn in full pursuit to score for a 4-1 lead.

The Hurricanes have scored power-play goals in each of their last four games, and it was the 10th time this season they've had two in a game. The puck movement was brisk and Aho and Teravainen were on target.

News Observer LOADED: 03.14.2018

1103557 Philadelphia Flyers

Flyers are fading because they can't finish scoring chances

Updated: MARCH 13, 2018 — 4:13 PM EDT



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 14, 2018

by Sam Carchidi, STAFF WRITER @BroadStBull |
scarchidi@phillynews.com

The Flyers are not finishing their numerous scoring chances, and more than anything else, that has caused them to slip in the Metropolitan Division standings.

Since moving atop the Metro with a 1-0 shootout win in Montreal on Feb. 26, they have lost six of their last seven games and have fallen into third place with 12 games left. The Flyers are just two points ahead of Columbus — the surging team they will host Thursday — and are in danger of dropping into a wild-card spot. Or worse.

In their latest loss, the Flyers had a territorial advantage and outshot speedy Vegas, 40-29, but some defensive breakdowns — and the fact they got outworked along the walls — led to a late goal and a painful 3-2 loss Monday.

“As hard as it is to walk away with no points, we have to look ourselves in the mirror and flush it out and move forward,” coach Dave Hakstol said.

The Flyers are outshooting most of their opponents. The chances are there.

The finishers aren't.

The Flyers did erupt offensively in a 7-6 shootout loss in Tampa on March 3, but they have scored a total of 10 goals in their other seven games since Feb. 26. That's an average of 1.4 goals in those seven games.

When a team is in a scoring slump, you hear the same refrain from players and coaches: “We have to get to the dirty areas. We need some greasy goals.” Etcetera.

But it seems even when the Flyers do get to the dirty areas, either they miss the net or the goalie makes an outstanding save. In Monday's loss, for instance, Oskar Lindblom seemed to be at the right place at the right time late in the second period. Marc-Andre Fleury had just stopped Nolan Patrick's point-blank shot, and Lindblom quickly pounced on the rebound — only to be robbed by the veteran goaltender.

“I'm getting chances. I just have to keep going here,” said the snake-bitten Lindblom, a second-line left winger who is still searching for his first NHL point after 11 games. “Not trying to be too negative.”

Several Flyers are in long droughts:

Lindblom hasn't collected a point since being recalled from the Phantoms, though he has played a responsible two-way game and has gotten lots of scoring opportunities.

Third-line center Val Filppula, whose failed clear led to Vegas' winning goal with 2 minutes, 40 seconds left Monday, has no goals in the last 24 games.

Shayne Gostisbehere has no goals in the last 19 games.

Michael Raffl has no goals in the last 15 games.

Jordan Weal, a healthy scratch the last three games, has no goals in his last 13 games.

Sean Couturier, who has been stuck on 29 goals since Feb. 16, hasn't turned on the red light in 12 games.

Scott Laughton has no goals in the last 11 games.

Claude Giroux, who has 10 goals in his last 17 games, has carried the Flyers lately. In fact, if the Flyers rally and win the Metro title, he would be a strong MVP candidate. But the 30-year-old captain needs some help.

During the 10-0-2 run that put them in first place, the Flyers received balanced scoring. In their last five games, however, they have had just one even-strength goal from a player not on the top line.

As a result, the Flyers have fallen four points behind first-place Washington and three points behind second-place Pittsburgh. Only two teams in NHL history have won a division title during a season in which they had at least a 10-game winless streak (as the Flyers had in November and December) — the 1976-77 St. Louis Blues and the 1989-90 New York Rangers — according to the Elias Sports Bureau.

Breakaways

In nine games with the Flyers, Petr Mrazek is 4-4-1 with a 2.85 goals-against average and an .898 save percentage. After starting 3-0 with his new team, Mrazek has won just one of his last six starts. ... Giroux has a seven-game points streak. ... The Flyers loaned goalie Anthony Stolarz from the AHL's Phantoms to their ECHL affiliate in Reading. Stolarz had both knees surgically repaired in the offseason and is close to getting into a minor-league game. ... Phantoms coach Scott Gordon was given a contract extension. ... The Flyers signed 6-foot, 179-pound forward Maksim Sushko, a fourth-round selection in the 2017 draft, to an entry-level contract. A native of Belarus, he has 30 goals in the Ontario Hockey League this season.

Philadelphia Inquirer / Daily News LOADED: 03.14.2018

1103558 Philadelphia Flyers

Losing battles hurting Mrazek's efforts to win war of confidence for Flyers

By Rob Parent, Delaware County Daily Times

POSTED: 03/12/18, 11:23 PM EDT | UPDATED: 13 HRS AGO #
COMMENTS

PHILADELPHIA >> Petr Mrazek hasn't been around here all that long, but he's been here long enough to have seen the Flyers repeatedly do what they did late in the third period against the Vegas Golden Knights Monday night.

A failed clearing attempt, a bit of a chronic malady for the Flyers of late, eventually resulted in a puck passed out to wide-open Vegas center Ryan Carpenter. One crisp shot from the circle and past Mrazek's glove later, the Golden Knights had a 3-2 lead that they wouldn't have much of problem protecting the rest of the way.

So it's six losses out of their last seven games for the Flyers (35-24-11, 81 points), who are getting a little desperate in their attempt to hold onto the third playoff spot in the Metropolitan Division, with the Blue Jackets (79 points), Devils (78) and Panthers (77) right behind.

Even from a wild card perspective, no one should feel comfortable now in the Flyers' locker room, as evidenced by Shayne Gostisbehere's slice of honesty after this latest loss.

“Uh, yeah, we were pretty hissed,” Gostisbehere said. “We're letting these games get away from us right now and it's March. We can't be doing this. We need every point we can get.”

That includes the one point teams get for not losing in regulation time. Those that old coach Bill Barber would say players should “cherish,” even if they can be doubled down upon in overtime (or a shootout now).

Over the past three games, two of those cherishable points have escaped the Flyers, losing a game with 22 seconds left in regulation in Boston last Thursday, and losing to the Golden Knights Monday night with 2:40 remaining.

Both times, the opposition goals came on a lost battle along the boards behind the Flyers' net. With a little more caution and effort, both lost



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 14, 2018

points would have had the Flyers feeling a lot more comfortable in the Metro and wild card standings than they feel now.

The lost regulation point Monday came when first Val Filppula failed to clear the defensive zone when he should have, which led to Wayne Simmonds losing a puck battle along the back boards to ex-teammate Pierre-Edouard Bellemare. Two passes later, Ryan Carpenter ripped a wrist shot past the glove of goalie Petr Mrazek, who again had a decent but far from great night.

Mrazek started 3-0 with the Flyers while they were on a run of 10-0-2. Mrazek is now 4-4-1 with his new team, which is sinking fast and acting like it.

"Any night you don't get any points, it's frustrating for everyone," the Flyers' fill-in goalie said. "We have to stay positive. Playing every game 60 minutes, playing hard ... if you're going to play every game like that, you're going to get the results."

Mrazek made a boo-boo on the Knights' first goal, blocking a cross-slot pass with his stick, but knocking the puck right by himself in the process. And on the game-winner by Carpenter, well, it was a good shot ... but it did go right past the glove.

"That's a tough one to put on a goaltender," said head coach Dave Hakstol. "He was trying to do the right thing. Obviously, he can execute it differently and better and obviously you want to do that, but that's a pretty tough, quick play from below the goal line."

One that shouldn't have happened in the first place.

On that latest lost board battle that wound up playing a large part in deciding a game, Simmonds said, "It was a battle on the wall, and we're all battling. So we have to do a better job on the battles."

If they don't do so soon, they might find themselves losing the playoff standings war.

Delaware County Times LOADED: 03.14.2018

1103559 Philadelphia Flyers

Time to start treating Giroux like all-time Flyer he is

By Tom Dougherty | NBC Sports Philadelphia March 13, 2018 9:00 AM

Claude Giroux was told he was too old. You know the rest.

Monday night, it was a scene, and a script, all too familiar.

The scene saw Giroux scoring his 205th career goal, but the script had heartbreak in the ending.

The Flyers lost their sixth game in their last seven. This time, 3-2 to Vegas. Last week, playoffs seemed almost certain. Now? Still probable but who knows.

Despite the losses, the Flyers remain in third place of the Metropolitan Division but are just two points ahead of Columbus.

One week, the Flyers are up and the next, they're down. It's hard to nail down exactly who they are, but through it all, there's been one constant and it's flown under the radar.

Giroux, who turned 30 in January, is having a career year and not only deserves to be in the Hart Trophy conversation but should also be a serious contender for the league's MVP award.

After potting his 25th goal, Giroux is three markers shy of tying his career high.

With 12 games left, he's on pace to set new career bests in goals, assists and points. He secured his 82nd point Monday, meaning at the worst, he'll finish at a point per game. Considering his recent pace, it's unfathomable to believe that's possible.

Giroux's goal extended his point streak to seven games and he has points in 15 of his last 17. It was also his second straight game with a goal. Since Feb. 8, Giroux's 24 points are second most in the NHL behind Evgeni Malkin's 25.

Among the league leaders, Giroux's 82 points are fourth most. His 57 assists are third most, behind Jakub Voracek (59), and Blake Wheeler and Johnny Gaudreau (58).

There are a handful of players worthy of the Hart discussion. There's Nikita Kucherov, Nathan MacKinnon, Connor McDavid, Malkin and even Taylor Hall. Cases can be made for all.

But it's time to lump Giroux into that debate.

It's also time to appreciate what Giroux's doing this season, and what he's done as a Flyer. It's way overdue, and it's time for the fans and media to give him the respect he deserves.

Whenever the Flyers needed a big goal this season, Giroux has been there. There are a lot of factors; the move to wing, putting him with Sean Couturier, health.

That diminishes what Giroux's accomplishing.

Last season was the low point — 14 goals, 58 points — and it came after his numbers steadily declined in each season after his eight-year, \$66.2 million extension in July 2013.

Then, there were the injuries. Factor in his age and we saw the calls to trade him.

The Flyers, obviously, didn't and Giroux has bounced back better than ever. Giroux is three points from passing Eric Lindros (659) on the team's all-time point list.

When it's all said and done, Giroux will go into the record books as one of the best Flyers ever.

Perhaps it's time for us to start treating him like one.

Comcast SportsNet.com LOADED: 03.14.2018

1103560 Philadelphia Flyers

Oskar Lindblom doing everything but score for Flyers

Dave Isaac, @daveisaac Published 3:14 p.m. ET March 13, 2018 | Updated 3:15 p.m. ET March 13, 2018

PHILADELPHIA — The opportunity caught Oskar Lindblom by surprise.

He has been crashing the net in each of his first 11 games in the NHL and this one might've been his best chance. Marc-Andre Fleury stopped Nolan Patrick's shot and Lindblom put the rebound right back into the Vegas Golden Knights goalie.

"There was a little frustration in the second period when he had a great opportunity right on top of the goaltender but I think he shakes that off pretty well," coach Dave Hakstol said. "We went out and played a good hockey game. He was part of several really good scoring chances



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 14, 2018

(Monday), either he having them or part of setting them up. He's gotta stay with it."

The 21-year-old Swede was in the scoring race in his home country last season and some may have thought that made him a sniper.

His goals are scored more like Wayne Simmonds'. He goes to the netfront and wins battles along the walls to get his chances.

In North America, his starts haven't been terrific this season. With the Lehigh Valley Phantoms, Lindblom didn't score a goal until his ninth game. It went off his leg instead of his stick.

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

So far it's been the same story in the NHL, begging the question: who did he wrong in a past life?

"Good question," he said. "I don't know. I'm getting chances. I just have to keep going here. I'm trying not to be too negative.

"I think it's mostly me putting pressure on myself and trying to get a goal here. Hopefully it's gonna come if I just keep going to the hard areas in front of the net."

The Flyers are happy with his mindset, which can easily go sour for a young player who has had prime opportunity to score but hasn't.

He played well defensively for the Flyers in training camp and was the last forward cut from the final roster. He nearly made it, but offensive production wasn't there.

"He's been great. Really smart player," Simmonds said recently. "Great on the boards. What I really notice about his game is that he's really good at making tight plays, little give-and-gos where he gives it and gets right back open like that. I'm surprised he doesn't have a few points here, a couple goals. He's been awesome."

The Flyers need Lindblom to keep thinking that, too.

After the trade deadline, teams can take care of some housekeeping within the organization and the Flyers did that within the past week.

They signed 2017 fourth-round pick Maksim Sushko to an entry-level contract that will take effect when his junior career is over in the Ontario Hockey League. The 19-year-old right wing has 30 goals and 55 points in 57 games for the Owen Sound Attack. He was also the captain for Team Belarus in the World Junior Championship where he had eight points in six games.

Carsen Twarynski signed his entry-level contract as well. The third-round pick in 2016 proved worthy of a deal in his overage year with the Kelowna Rockets. He has 43 goals and 70 points in 66 games as a 20-year-old playing against younger players. The Flyers could have signed the deal before the season and started him with the Lehigh Valley Phantoms, but they opted to wait. Twarynski won't be asked to be a goal machine as a pro and can join the Phantoms when the Rockets' season is over.

Tuesday the Phantoms announced an extension for head coach Scott Gordon. The 55-year-old Massachusetts native is in his third year of coaching the Phantoms and has a 122-74-19 record. He's done a terrific job with the Flyers' young prospects, helping groom Travis Sanheim last season and Lindblom this season.

Had Gordon not re-signed, there might have been a place in the NHL for him. He was the head coach of the New York Islanders for 181 games across parts of three seasons and was an assistant coach with the Toronto Maple Leafs before the Flyers hired him to coach the Phantoms.

Islanders' Doug Weight: 'We know we've got to go on a big run'

By Andrew Gross

andrew.gross@newsday.com @AGrossNewsday

Updated March 13, 2018 6:15 PM

Doug Weight is acknowledging the "elephant in the room."

Which is, as much as players are taught to focus only on the next game, there's no getting around the Islanders' need to win at least 10 of their final 13 games, in the coach's estimation.

"We know we've got to go on a big run," Weight said after Tuesday's practice at Northwell Health Ice Center. "It's going to start with one game. We have to plan for Thursday like it's April 8 and go from there."

The Islanders, eight points out of the Eastern Conference's second wild-card spot, face the Capitals on Thursday night at Barclays Center to start a home-and-home series on successive nights.

The Islanders concluded a 1-0-3 road trip by snapping an 0-4-4 slide with Sunday night's 5-2 win at Calgary.

"You go eight games and get four points, regardless of being in position to win or not, that's pretty catastrophic at this time, there's no ands, ifs or buts," Weight said. "But it happened. It's behind us. We've got to win every game and that's how we've got to go about it. We've got to beat a good team on Thursday and then we'll try to beat them again Friday and we'll go from there. That's our mindset."

The Islanders play six of their next seven and nine of their final 13 at home.

Still, the reality is the Islanders are likely to miss the playoffs for the second straight season after making it in three of the previous four seasons, though they have won just one series since 1993.

And part of the frustration in the Islanders' room now is the feeling of a blown chance.

"I've been on teams that have been in position to not make the playoffs and it's a different feeling because, deep down, you know the team probably doesn't have it," Cal Clutterbuck, in his 10th NHL season, said. "Even if you were to make it, you wouldn't really be able to make much of an impact in the postseason. But that's not this team and that's the frustrating thing for sure."

"It's extremely frustrating," added defenseman Thomas Hickey. "You look at teams that are primed for Stanley Cup runs and you have your veteran leadership and then you have the young, affordable, high-energy players that are a big part of your team. We do have that. You look over the past nine games and we lost eight in a row and we probably could have won six. I do think this group has that kind of potential and it is tough to see those points slip away."

But Clutterbuck believes there might be one positive in the Islanders' desperate situation.

"We're in a position now where we can kind of allow instincts to take over," Clutterbuck said. "We've got nothing to lose in this situation now. I think that sometimes promotes a little more confident play. Sometimes, it creates results."

Newsday LOADED: LOADED: 03.14.2018

1103506 Edmonton Oilers

Courier-Post LOADED: 03.14.2018

1103547 New York Islanders



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 14, 2018

Flames blank Oilers 1-0

Jim Matheson, Edmonton Journal
JIM MATHESON, EDMONTON JOURNAL

CALGARY — The quotes in the morning all had the same theme.

Big was part of every Calgary Flames player's TV sound bite.

"Big game, really big game, we need this in a big way."

So, on a night when the Flames, their noses pushed firmly outside the playoff glass, had to beat the Edmonton Oilers, they got the job done on the broad shoulders of their goalie Mike Smith.

With a new paint job on his mask and some old-style diving heroics, Smith made two huge stops on Ryan Nugent-Hopkins and Connor McDavid early in the third, on the heels of a tremendous mitt stop on Ryan Strome late in the second to blank the Edmonton Oilers 1-0.

If he was rusty against the New York Islanders Sunday in his first game in a month after having gone down with a leg injury, Smith stole this one for the Flames, who came in having lost seven straight to Edmonton.

Oilers goalie Cam Talbot, who came into the game with a .949 save percentage in his previous three starts, was almost as good as Smith, only giving up Johnny Gaudreau's nifty backhand five minutes into the second period. Talbot made an excellent save on Dougie Hamilton, in the third when he snuck in unmolested, to keep the Oilers in it.

Smith looked like his team's MVP from start to finish as the Flames remained two points out of the wild-card (Dallas and Colorado) in the West.

Gaudreau lifted a quick no-look backhand under the crossbar on Talbot when Darnell Nurse got pulled up toward the blue line and Sean Monahan slipped it past the Oilers defenceman to Gaudreau, standing by his lonesome.

The Oilers thought they had scored in the opening period when Zack Kassian jammed the puck past Smith in a goalmouth mosh pit 14 minutes in. But young referee Tom Chmielewski said he had blown his whistle to stop play before the puck crossed the line by a couple of inches. It was under Smith's pad as Kassian poked away. It's not a reviewable play.

On the bench: There was moment of silence for former Atlanta/Calgary Flames' winger Ken Houston who died of cancer at 64 ... The Flames didn't have their most antagonistic winger, Matthew Tkachuk, who was out with a possible concussion.

Edmonton Journal: LOADED: 03.14.2018

1103507 Edmonton Oilers

Oilers captain McDavid not interested in MVP talk

Jim Matheson, Edmonton Journal
JIM MATHESON, EDMONTON JOURNAL

CALGARY — Connor McDavid would rather chew on a bar of soap than talk about his chances for a second straight Art Ross scoring title or another Hart trophy as league MVP, but he knows the score.

Your team has to make the playoffs or be very close to win an MVP title.

"I'm just looking to finish off the season strong on a team and personal level and see where that takes me. That's my answer the rest of the way," said McDavid, again deflecting any concrete talk of consecutive MVP awards.

But his coach said No. 97 should definitely be in the Hart hunt no matter where the Oilers are in the standings.

"He absolutely deserves talk of the Hart. I disagree with people who say he shouldn't because the Oilers aren't going to make the playoffs," said Todd McLellan. "Without him, we'd be in big trouble. He's the heartbeat of our team with his numbers and for a month he was playing sick (with strep throat) where we had to cut his minutes back."

McLellan said McDavid, who went into Tuesday's Calgary game with 18 goals in 19 games since Feb. 1, has seriously taken something off his playmaking ability to shoot more this season. Like all the great players, working on their game and never completely happy.

"He's made strides on the defensive side of his game and we've matched him up against the other team's top lines. His ability to break plays up has gotten better," said McLellan. "There's a unique talent or tool that the great players have. I saw it in (Pavel) Datsyuk and (Henrik) Zetterberg when I was in Detroit and saw it with Joe Thornton and Joe Pavelski in San Jose. They're always looking for an edge because the edge they have today isn't going to last forever."

Especially with the way video use in the coaching world forces the great ones to be moving targets.

"Hundred percent, there's things and areas you can do better. It's so tight-checking now that once you get a little stale, teams will figure out a way to shut you down. You have to find different ways to create offence," said McDavid, who isn't a big video study guy because he has great recall of games in his subconscious.

He just switches the replay button in his head.

"I definitely have memories of things. Not everything, but certain plays and chances where you made mistakes," he said.

Is McDavid always going to be interested in lifelong learning?

"Jeez, that's kind of deep," laughed McDavid to a question from The Athletic's Eric Duhatschek. "Yeah, it's important to do things differently. If you're going to do this for 20 years or however long, you have to mix it.

"Teams are so prepared now."

CHASING GRETZKY

McDavid is a hockey player but also a hockey fan who's followed Alex Ovechkin's run to 600 goals.

"I'd say he's the greatest goal-scorer of this generation. To score 600 goals in this day and age is incredible," said McDavid. "Definitely hats off to him.

"I guess with a shot like he has it makes it a bit easier, but he scores them all different ways with teams so prepared."

Can he catch Wayne Gretzky's all-time record 894 goals? Ovechkin is only 32, but McDavid doubts it. Ovechkin would have to play until he's 40 and average 35 goals a year for the next eight.

"He isn't slowing down, but Gretzky put up a crazy amount of goals," McDavid said. "That'll be interesting."

FOUR SURE

Former Edmonton Oil Kings forward Curtis Lazar has struggled to gain NHL traction after being a first-round Ottawa pick in 2013 (17th overall), but he may finally have found his role on the Flames' fourth line.

"For me, it's the mental battle. For so long in my career it's been, 'Am I in, am I out (of the lineup)? How long am I going to play for,'" said Lazar, 23. "The four years in the NHL haven't been easy for me. It's been frustrating



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 14, 2018

because I know the player I am. Now, I know my role and I'm embracing it. I'm playing hockey like I did with the Oil Kings. I'm taking the puck and trying things. I'm seeing improvements."

This 'n' that: Oilers winger Mike Cammalleri played his 900th NHL game against Calgary, where he played 216 games over two separate time frames. Only eight guys from the 2001 draft year, where Cammalleri was a second-round pick by Los Angeles, have played in more NHL games. Of those, only Jason Spezza, Ilya Kovalchuk, Jason Pominville and Mikko Koivu have more points ... Calgary's fourth-line centre, Matt Stajan, 34, played in his 996th game. He's the only Flames' piece left from the blockbuster Jan. 31, 2010, trade where Dion Phaneuf went to the Leafs. Calgary got Stajan, Niklas Hagman, Jamal Mayers and Ian White. Toronto got Phaneuf, Keith Aulie and Fredrik Sjostrom.

E-mail: jmatheson@postmedia.com

Edmonton Journal: LOADED: 03.14.2018

1103508 Edmonton Oilers

Calgary Flames blank Edmonton Oilers 1-0

Jim Matheson, Edmonton Journal

CALGARY — The quotes in the morning all had the same theme.

Big was part of every Calgary Flames player's TV sound bite.

"Big game, really big game, we need this in a big way."

So, on a night when the Flames, their noses pushed firmly outside the playoff glass, had to beat the Edmonton Oilers, they got the job done on the broad shoulders of their goalie Mike Smith.

With a new paint job on his mask and some old-style diving heroics, Smith made two huge stops on Ryan Nugent-Hopkins and Connor McDavid early in the third, on the heels of a tremendous mitt stop on Ryan Strome late in the second to blank the Edmonton Oilers 1-0.

If he was rusty against the New York Islanders Sunday in his first game in a month after having gone down with a leg injury, Smith stole this one for the Flames, who came in having lost seven straight to Edmonton.

Oilers goalie Cam Talbot, who came into the game with a .949 save percentage in his previous three starts, was almost as good as Smith, only giving up Johnny Gaudreau's nifty backhand five minutes into the second period. Talbot made an excellent save on Dougie Hamilton, in the third when he snuck in unmolested, to keep the Oilers in it.

Smith looked like his team's MVP from start to finish as the Flames remained two points out of the wild-card (Dallas and Colorado) in the West.

Gaudreau lifted a quick no-look backhand under the crossbar on Talbot when Darnell Nurse got pulled up toward the blue line and Sean Monahan slipped it past the Oilers defenceman to Gaudreau, standing by his lonesome.

The Oilers thought they had scored in the opening period when Zack Kassian jammed the puck past Smith in a goalmouth mosh pit 14 minutes in. But young referee Tom Chmielewski said he had blown his whistle to stop play before the puck crossed the line by a couple of inches. It was under Smith's pad as Kassian poked away. It's not a reviewable play.

On the bench: There was moment of silence for former Atlanta/Calgary Flames' winger Ken Houston who died of cancer at 64 ... The Flames

didn't have their most antagonistic winger, Matthew Tkachuk, who was out with a possible concussion.

Edmonton Sun: LOADED: 03.14.2018

1103509 Edmonton Oilers

Edmonton Oilers captain Connor McDavid not interested in MVP talk

Jim Matheson, Edmonton Journal

CALGARY — Connor McDavid would rather chew on a bar of soap than talk about his chances for a second straight Art Ross scoring title or another Hart trophy as league MVP, but he knows the score.

Your team has to make the playoffs or be very close to win an MVP title.

"I'm just looking to finish off the season strong on a team and personal level and see where that takes me. That's my answer the rest of the way," said McDavid, again deflecting any concrete talk of consecutive MVP awards.

But his coach said No. 97 should definitely be in the Hart hunt no matter where the Oilers are in the standings.

"He absolutely deserves talk of the Hart. I disagree with people who say he shouldn't because the Oilers aren't going to make the playoffs," said Todd McLellan. "Without him, we'd be in big trouble. He's the heartbeat of our team with his numbers and for a month he was playing sick (with strep throat) where we had to cut his minutes back."

McLellan said McDavid, who went into Tuesday's Calgary game with 18 goals in 19 games since Feb. 1, has seriously taken something off his playmaking ability to shoot more this season. Like all the great players, working on their game and never completely happy.

"He's made strides on the defensive side of his game and we've matched him up against the other team's top lines. His ability to break plays up has gotten better," said McLellan. "There's a unique talent or tool that the great players have. I saw it in (Pavel) Datsyuk and (Henrik) Zetterberg when I was in Detroit and saw it with Joe Thornton and Joe Pavelski in San Jose. They're always looking for an edge because the edge they have today isn't going to last forever."

Especially with the way video use in the coaching world forces the great ones to be moving targets.

"Hundred percent, there's things and areas you can do better. It's so tight-checking now that once you get a little stale, teams will figure out a way to shut you down. You have to find different ways to create offence," said McDavid, who isn't a big video study guy because he has great recall of games in his subconscious.

He just switches the replay button in his head.

"I definitely have memories of things. Not everything, but certain plays and chances where you made mistakes," he said.

Is McDavid always going to be interested in lifelong learning?

"Jeez, that's kind of deep," laughed McDavid to a question from The Athletic's Eric Duhatschek. "Yeah, it's important to do things differently. If you're going to do this for 20 years or however long, you have to mix it.

"Teams are so prepared now."

CHASING GRETZKY

McDavid is a hockey player but also a hockey fan who's followed Alex Ovechkin's run to 600 goals.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 14, 2018

"I'd say he's the greatest goal-scorer of this generation. To score 600 goals in this day and age is incredible," said McDavid. "Definitely hats off to him.

"I guess with a shot like he has it makes it a bit easier, but he scores them all different ways with teams so prepared."

Can he catch Wayne Gretzky's all-time record 894 goals? Ovechkin is only 32, but McDavid doubts it. Ovechkin would have to play until he's 40 and average 35 goals a year for the next eight.

"He isn't slowing down, but Gretzky put up a crazy amount of goals," McDavid said. "That'll be interesting."

FOUR SURE

Former Edmonton Oil Kings forward Curtis Lazar has struggled to gain NHL traction after being a first-round Ottawa pick in 2013 (17th overall), but he may finally have found his role on the Flames' fourth line.

"For me, it's the mental battle. For so long in my career it's been, 'Am I in, am I out (of the lineup)? How long am I going to play for,'" said Lazar, 23. "The four years in the NHL haven't been easy for me. It's been frustrating because I know the player I am. Now, I know my role and I'm embracing it. I'm playing hockey like I did with the Oil Kings. I'm taking the puck and trying things. I'm seeing improvements."

This 'n' that: Oilers winger Mike Cammalleri played his 900th NHL game against Calgary, where he played 216 games over two separate time frames. Only eight guys from the 2001 draft year, where Cammalleri was a second-round pick by Los Angeles, have played in more NHL games. Of those, only Jason Spezza, Ilya Kovalchuk, Jason Pominville and Mikko Koivu have more points ... Calgary's fourth-line centre, Matt Stajan, 34, played in his 996th game. He's the only Flames' piece left from the blockbuster Jan. 31, 2010, trade where Dion Phaneuf went to the Leafs. Calgary got Stajan, Niklas Hagman, Jamal Mayers and Ian White. Toronto got Phaneuf, Keith Aulie and Fredrik Sjostrom.

E-mail: jmatheson@postmedia.com

On Twitter: @NHLbyMatty

Edmonton Sun: LOADED: 03.14.2018

1103510 Edmonton Oilers

Edmonton Oilers Game Day: They've been on a roll against the Calgary Flames

Jim Matheson, Edmonton Journal

Edmonton Oilers star Connor McDavid didn't stickhandle around the obvious that his club can severely bruise the Calgary Flames' chances of a playoff berth with a win here Tuesday.

"We understand where they're at and it's a huge game for them," said McDavid. "We have the opportunity to put them in a tough spot."

The Oilers have won seven in a row against the Flames over the past two seasons with McDavid getting 12 points in that time-frame. They've won three games here at the Saddledome, and Calgary, which has a terrific road record (20-10-6) has been mediocre at home with a 14-16-4 log. They absolutely have to win this game.

"Yeah, these points for them are crucial," said winger Drake Caggiula.

They're on the outside looking in for a Western wild-card spot — two points back of Colorado for the last berth, with the Avalanche having two games in hand. This is Calgary's 71st game, so they're running out of runway.

"It's not about the six or seven games over the last 16 or 17 months, it's about what we can accomplish tonight," said Oilers head coach Todd McLellan, who believes in the here and now, not past results even if his club's had the Flames' number.

McLellan has seen a major improvement in his club's special teams. They were 4-for-11 on the power play on their just-completed, five-game home stand to move to 30th in that department after being the league's doormats for months. They've also killed off 15 of the last 16 power plays over the past six games.

"We've struggled on both of those things," said McLellan, "but we've actually won games because of our special teams lately,"

They've also had good goaltending from Cam Talbot, who has stopped 94 of his last 99 shots in Oilers' three-game win streak.

"He's been a calming influence for us," said McLellan.

Oilers' Bear impressively poised as he makes Battle of Alberta debut

Oilers begrudgingly embrace spoiler role

Rest of Klefbom's season hangs on shoulder's status

Aberg earns another shot on McDavid's wing

McDavid on a scoring tear

The Oilers will go with exactly the same lineup that beat Minnesota 4-1 Saturday night, which means Yohann Auvitu and Iiro Pakarinen are out and rookie Ethan Bear will get his first NHL game on the road after five at home.

Bear's played before at the Saddledome, home of the WHL's Calgary Hitmen, when Bear was playing for Seattle in junior, but this is his first taste of the Battle of Alberta, behind enemy lines.

Matthew Tkachuk, who tends to up the emotional thermometer in this series, won't play. He fell over Islanders' centre Matthew Barzal Sunday, and his neck and head snapped back as he hit the boards.

"You lose a guy like Chucky that hurts obviously, especially at this time of year," said Flames' coach Glen Gulutzan, who said he's out day to day without saying exactly what's wrong with the second-year winger. He could have a concussion.

Flames' centre Sean Monahan, who's been playing hurt, didn't skate Tuesday morning, but Gulutzan said the first-liner would play. Gulutzan said winger Kris Versteeg, who's been out since late November with a hip problem, isn't quite ready to return so he won't be taking Tkachuk's spot in the Flames' lineup. Instead it'll be Chris Stewart, claimed off waivers from Minnesota Feb. 26.

Oilers' keys to the game

1. LET THE GOOD TIMES ROLL

The Oilers have beaten the Flames seven straight times, sweeping the four meetings last season and the first three this campaign (3-0 opening night here when Connor McDavid scored three goals, 7-5 in Calgary when Oilers almost blew a 6-1 lead, and 4-3 in a shootout here in late January when McDavid got the winner).

In their last three trips to the Saddledome, Oilers have scored 19 goals.

2. NO PEST CONTROL NEEDED

Unless winger Matthew Tkachuk suddenly gets healthy, the Flames' No. 1 antagonist won't be playing.

Tkachuk, who has scored 49 points this season and is on their top power-play unit, tumbled over New York Islanders centre Mathew Barzal during their game Sunday and crashed awkwardly into the boards.

The Flames aren't saying what's wrong, but he could have concussion issues.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 14, 2018

3. PLAYMAKER, WHAT PLAYMAKER?

McDavid has been on a tear since Feb. 1 with 18 goals in 19 games, 33 on the season.

Only Winnipeg Jets winger Patrik Laine has been hotter than the Oilers' captain, who has four multiple-goal games (one four-goal night, one three, and two two-goal efforts) in his run.

He joins Wayne Gretzky (4), Glenn Anderson and Jari Kurri (2) as the only Oilers to have multiple 30-goal years before the age of 22.

4. RINSE AND REPEAT?

Ryan Nugent-Hopkins played his first game on McDavid's left-wing in the Oilers' win over Minnesota, scoring a goal and an assist.

Nugent-Hopkins has been a centre throughout his hockey career, from his junior days in Red Deer through his NHL years, but the Oilers have McDavid, Leon Draisaitl and Ryan Strome as pivot options as well, and they need just three of them in that spot.

It's a work in progress for Nugent-Hopkins on the wing, but he's quietly having a strong season with 35 points in 50 games.

5. A LESS RUSTY MIKE SMITH

The goalie has been the Flames' MVP, but he suffered a lower-body injury a month ago which kept him out of 13 games.

He was back against the Islanders on Sunday but predictably wasn't rock-solid. He still handled the puck well but gave up two goals in the first three minutes.

The Flames went 5-6-2 without Smith, who had a 2.53 goals-against average and a .921 save percentage before he was hurt.

The big match-up

MARK GIORDANO VS. CONNOR MCDAVID

The indefatigable Flames captain has been terrific for most of this season, playing almost 25 minutes a night.

He's got 36 points (plus 8, 11 even-strength goals) and he's the main reason partner Dougie Hamilton is having a banner year (15 goals).

He's usually out against McDavid, who's averaging 21:24 a game and has 65 even-strength points (tops in the league). It's always an interesting battle because Giordano plays an aggressive game.

Tonight's lineup

SPECIAL TEAMS

Oilers: PP 29-193 15.2%, (30th). PK 53-207 74.4% (31st)

Flames: PP 43-238 17.6% (24th). PK 44-233 81.1% (13th).

INJURIES

Oilers: Oscar Klefbom (shoulder)

Flames: Matthew Tkachuk (possible concussion), Marek Hrivik (upper-body)

E-mail: jmatheson@postmedia.com

On Twitter: @NHLbyMatty

Edmonton Sun: LOADED: 03.14.2018

1103511 Edmonton Oilers

Edmonton Oilers begrudgingly embrace playing spoiler against NHL teams chasing playoff berth

Robert Tychkowski

You can't spell spoiler without Oiler.

For 11 of the last 12 seasons, that has been the unofficial and unfortunate storyline here.

Stretch drives in Edmonton are not spent chasing dreams, but rather attempting to smash the dreams of everyone else.

And that's the case again now as the Oilers, having long since fallen out of the National Hockey League playoff race, search for reasons to get excited over the final 14 games of the season.

They'll have one Tuesday night in Calgary, where they can do serious damage to the Flames' post-season bid.

The Flames are still alive, but a wild-card spot is slowly slipping out of reach. Can the Oilers find a little joy in pushing them a little farther away from the life-preserver?

"I think we should," said Oilers defenceman Adam Larsson. "It's a Battle of Alberta. There is a lot of pride from the fans and the players. It's something we always think about.

"If we can make them miss the playoffs, great, but we're focusing on our own game."

That seems to be the mantra these days as the Oilers, winners of three straight games and six of their last nine, would rather make this about playing well themselves than ruining it for somebody else (even though that part of it would be kind of satisfying when it comes to some of their most bitter rivals).

Head coach Todd McLellan isn't one who thinks any team should celebrate being a spoiler for the simple reason it represents failure on your own part.

"When you embrace the spoiler role, it means that you've spoiled your own season is how I see it," said McLellan, who wants his team to still be excited about winning without losing sight of the fact they should have been doing this a long time ago.

"The motivation behind that is great; keep pushing and play hard and ruin it for somebody else, but when you get to that (spoiler) spot, you haven't done enough to make it a happy place for your own team.

"For me that's the spoiler role; we've spoiled our own season."

They say this needs to be more about showing they are really still a decent team and not the frustrating mess that somehow sunk to 13th place in the West.

"We want to finish strong," said Larsson. "You want to finish strong personally, you want to finish strong as a team.

"People forget sometimes how young this team still is. Obviously, we have some top guys, but they're still in their early 20s. They have things to learn, too. We do that as a group moving forward.

"We're still a young group that is trying to develop every practice and every game. We'll have some bumps, but looking at the end and to next season, we have to build as a group."

That's what the coach has been seeing so far. The Oilers have turned in some pretty solid games in the last week, and the mood in the room remains as upbeat as it can be when a season falls apart with two months to go. The commitment and the energy haven't taken appreciable dips at all.

"What we'll look for is a fall-off in those areas," said McLellan. "The first indication of it sliding is usually practice. I've liked our practices lately.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 14, 2018

The leaders have worked hard, they're trying to get better. They're trying to move the needle in a positive direction.

"It's hard to be at your best every night regardless of being in first place or trailing, but you have to try to bring that every night. We've got 14 games left and we expect good performances in all of them. I expect effort and professionalism."

The Oilers have had Calgary's number for two years now, going 3-0 against the Flames this season (3-0, 7-5 and 4-3 in a shootout) and 4-0 last year.

"The rivalry gets both teams up," said McLellan, who thinks there will be an emotionally charged atmosphere in Calgary given what's at stake and who's coming to visit.

"It's an exciting time to be playing, especially against your rival. We've had some breaks we've had some good goaltending ... there's really no pattern to our success against them every game has been different. Every game has taken on its own personality. We hope it continues Tuesday."

E-mail: rychkowski@postmedia.com

On Twitter: @Rob_Tychkowski

Edmonton Sun: LOADED: 03.14.2018

1103512 Edmonton Oilers

Duhatschek: Flames need to right the ship against Oilers to get back in playoff race

By Eric Duhatschek Mar 13, 2018 1

CALGARY — If misery truly does love company, then it'll be a crowded house Tuesday when the Calgary Flames play host to the Edmonton Oilers. In September, it looked as if a meeting between the two provincial rivals would be critical to their respective playoff hopes, but it hasn't turned out that way. Edmonton is in the midst of a lost season, playing better lately, but far too late for it to matter, other than to see if Connor McDavid can defend the Art Ross Trophy he won for the first time last year. The Oilers are playing loose, they're trying different looks on their top line, and mostly, whenever they play the Flames, they look like the '85 version of the team, and not the disappointing 2018 edition. It's been seven consecutive wins for the Oilers over Calgary, which means Glen Gulutzan (0-6-1) is still looking for his first victory against Edmonton since taking over the coaching duties in Calgary two years ago.

Gulutzan was all business Monday, interrupting a brief 22-minute practice by explaining to his players, in expletive-filled detail, what he expected from them, with just 12 games to go in the regular season and badly needing some wins, if they hope to earn a playoff berth in the NHL's Western Conference. TSN's Jermain Franklin helpfully counted the 20-some f-bombs Gulutzan dropped during Monday's practice — which was vaguely reminiscent of his infamous stick toss into the stands months ago that actually helped propel the Flames on a win streak. Gulutzan made a lot of specific teaching points to his players during practice, but what came through was he wanted to see smarter decisions from the group as a whole, and the most pertinent observation was his conclusion: "The best players are the best gamblers," said Gulutzan. "They know when to double down and they know when to fold."

An interesting bit of tactical advice. The Flames playoff hopes are hanging by a thread following Sunday's 5-2 loss to the New York Islanders, which marked the ninth time in the past 11 games they've lost at home. That old bromide — home sweet home — may look good embroidered in a picture frame hanging on your granny's wall, but home

has been a mostly sour experience for the Flames who, for whatever reason, cannot string together any sort of consistent streak at the Scotiabank Saddledome, where they are 14-16-4 this year. Maybe it is time for a new building, they can't seem to get much done in the old one.

The Flames welcomed back a familiar important face for Sunday's game against the Islanders, goaltender Mike Smith, who'd missed a month of action with a mysterious undisclosed lower body injury. Smith gave up three in the first period, four in all, and the rust that you might expect would form with so lengthy an absence was visible early on. He improved as the game went on, but the Flames know they just cannot keep getting behind early and then chasing the game, because too often, they don't have the firepower to do it.

For Monday's practice, the lines were a mix-and-match jumble, Sean Monahan and Mikael Backlund getting the day off, nominally for recovery purposes. Matthew Tkachuk's absence might be of greater concern. He left Sunday's game after cracking the back of his head on the ice and his availability for Tuesday's date with the Oilers is uncertain. The only good news is that Kris Versteeg, who has been out since Nov. 24 recovering from a surgical procedure on his hip, was back practicing and could make his return to the lineup. Versteeg has missed the past 48 games.

As the separation in the overall standings becomes more acute, and teams are legitimately out of the playoff race, the notion of playing "spoiler" got a good workout last week when the Flames were in Ottawa. Senators' coach Guy Boucher dismissed playing spoiler as a loser term, arguing smartly that it shouldn't matter who the opposition is; if you're out of playoff contention, then the remaining quarter of the season represents a dress rehearsal for next year and maybe some lessons can be learned on the way.

It's a sensible perspective, and the only thing it doesn't take into consideration is that sometimes, animosity does creep into a rivalry between two teams and so, if one club can actually spoil the party for a fierce rival, well, there's something to be said for that. It spices things up a little for Edmonton-Calgary on a Tuesday night in mid-March that should feature plenty of emotion.

"Honestly, it's a good rivalry and it's a team where we don't like each other, but at this time of year, it doesn't matter the opponent, we have to find a way of getting two points," team captain Mark Giordano said Monday. "They're a team that's playing well and has a lot of firepower. We know what they have over there. But every team is going to have the same sort of obstacles. We just need to find ways of getting points. That's the bottom line right now."

"It's a good night, the crowd'll be into it and there'll be emotion in the game — but we've got to find a way to win it."

Giordano said he understood the Flames' margin of error is disappearing fast, even though they do have 10 of their 12 remaining games against Pacific Division opponents, including two against the San Jose Sharks and one each against the Anaheim Ducks and the Los Angeles Kings.

"Every time you lose at this time of year, it's tough not to dwell on it — but we can't," said Giordano. "We were pretty focused out there today. We hadn't practiced in a while, so we wanted to clean some things up. I just feel like, it's tough to do with every loss because your margin does become smaller and smaller, but we have to let it go and play the next game. The best way to do it is, after the game, you go through your mistakes and you try to clean them up, but once you come to the rink tomorrow, with a new day and a new game, you've got to let it go. We had 13 games left (as of Sunday). We weren't going to win 13 in a row. But we have to put some sort of streak together here. We know that as a team. That's why the losses seem so much more difficult at this time of year."

It takes a lot of discipline to get up the next morning after a discouraging loss and see if they can get things going. The Islanders scored on all three of their first period chances, which forced the Flames to chase the game again. Christopher Gibson finally gave the Islanders a decent night of goaltending and you had a pretty good idea that a team that had lost



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 14, 2018

eight in a row, four in regulation, was due for a break to go the other way. There is a certain randomness to results that can perplex and frustrate; it's hard when you have the run of play for the most part and still end up on the wrong side of the score. The problem, of course, is that you eventually run out of games. Calgary has 12 to go, two with the Oilers. In three previous meetings with Edmonton this year, the Flames have a single point — earned in an overtime loss — to show for their efforts.

"Sometimes, you put everything you can at a team and it just doesn't go in," said Versteeg, who was watching from the sidelines during the Islander loss. "This time of season, you have to have a short memory and you have to learn quickly to overcome your mistakes. I think we have that."

All of the Flames' rivals in the Pacific Division — Vegas, San Jose, Los Angeles, and Anaheim — were in action Monday night, turning Versteeg into an interested observer. Even though you want to focus on the task at hand — winning your own game — you also need to monitor what else is happening around the division and hope you get help elsewhere.

"I think you have to be a little bit (of a standings watcher) just to understand the desperation of this time of year," Versteeg acknowledged. "I'm definitely looking. In fact, I've been watching the whole time because I really didn't have anything else to do. It's crazy how one day you're in and the next day you're out. It's been a crazy race."

The Athletic LOADED: 03.14.2018

1103609 Websites

The Athletic / Mathew Barzal's journey from Vancouver youth hockey to the NHL comes full circle

By Arthur Staple Mar 13, 2018

VANCOUVER — One by one, the kids raced to their seats by the glass. Rogers Arena was still relatively empty on this Sunday afternoon, but as the group of young hockey players from the Burnaby Junior Islanders filed in, things got loud.

They all sported No. 13 Islanders jerseys as well — perhaps an odd sight so far from Long Island, but not especially. Everyone — from the kids to their parents to a host of other folks who have played a role in Mathew Barzal's rise from Vancouver youth hockey standout to Calder Trophy candidate — was here to watch Barzal's current team practice a day before his first game home as an NHLer.

"Honestly," his father Mike said in a bemused tone, "We hoped maybe he'd have a chance to play a few games in the NHL one day. Never anything like this."

To those of us in the lower 48, especially in Islanders country, Canada is simply the hotbed of hockey. We may all assume that every big Canadian metro, whether Montreal or Toronto or Calgary or Vancouver, produces boatloads of great young hockey players year after year.

But in Vancouver, it's simply not the case. According to Hockey Reference, British Columbia has produced the fewest (384) NHL players of the six major Canadian provinces; there's only seven BCers in the Hall of Fame, and one of those, Steve Yzerman, was born in Cranbrook but grew up outside of Ottawa and went on to the Ontario Hockey League.

"Everybody likes hockey in Vancouver, watching the younger kids coming up but nobody's super, super into it," said Ryan Nugent-Hopkins, who came out of the Vancouver suburb of Burnaby to be the first overall pick in 2011. "Even when you get drafted into the WHL, both of us (himself and Barzal) went first, there's expectations after that but you don't really feel it or hear it all the time. There might be a few articles in the paper, but other than that there's not a ton of pressure. Which I think is a good thing.

"I know some of the guys growing up in Toronto, there's a lot of pressure. People follow guys from 14, 15, as soon as they get drafted into the OHL, people are watching every move they make. It's a lot different. We still have a good group of players coming from Vancouver. They're still passionate about hockey but it's different. It's not even close."

As if to illustrate that point, Nugent-Hopkins was chatting with two reporters in the Oilers dressing room last week. Toronto native Connor McDavid walked in the room and was immediately surrounded by cameras and iPhones, a perfect scene to capture what Nugent-Hopkins was saying.

Barzal was told Nugent-Hopkins' view on the sleepiness of Vancouver and whether that might be better for a young hockey player.

"I actually kind of prefer the attention," Mathew Barzal said. "You always want to compare yourself to the best from around the country, wherever. I'm just a competitive guy."

The first taste of Barzal's competitive side came at a tournament held in a mall in West Edmonton. The Brick, as it's known, brings teams of 10-year-old hockey standouts from across North America. Pretty much every player of any renown over the past three decades has played in the event.

Barzal got to play there twice, the first time as an underager — a nine-year-old in the mix with the 96s, the birth year of the 2006 Brick team from Vancouver.

"He came with us on a team that had (Canucks forward) Jake Virtanen on it," said Jon Calvano, who coaches the Vancouver Vipers youth team that represents the area in the Brick. "That team struggled quite a bit. But Mathew got a taste of that level at age nine and the next year he was really prepared for it.

"The '97 (birth year) even had some great players — Mitch Marner was there, Dylan Strome. And Mathew wanted to be not only the best player on his team, from Vancouver, but the best player there. From then on, there was no quit in him."

There's a YouTube clip from that 2007 event, with Barzal neatly roofing a goal against a team from Minnesota. He wears No. 97, as he did throughout his youth hockey days; no one in the WHL wore high numbers, he said, so he chose No. 13 when he got to Seattle in 2014 because of Pavel Datsyuk.

Barzal was named the top forward at the event.

"I think that was the moment we thought, 'Hey, maybe there's a chance,'" Mike Barzal said. "Now, he's living his dream."

Calvano has worked with Barzal since then. In addition to youth coaching, Calvano runs Elite Level Development, a skills program for high-level players. He works with many NHLers from Vancouver in the offseason.

Barzal has always been special.

"There are some guys who do the drills and they do them well, but there's not much talking about it," Calvano said. "Mathew has always been one to ask questions. 'Why am I doing this? How's it going to help me?' He wants to know that everything he does is to help him get better."

Mike Barzal was a pretty good player as a teenager. He grew up in the Okanagan, a more rural region east of Vancouver; he played for Penticton in the BCHL alongside a dual-citizenship kid named Brett Hull, who scored 105 goals that season.

When it came time for his son to take up the game, Mike and his wife Nadia were already settled in Coquitlam, a Vancouver suburb just beyond Burnaby. The shuttling between rinks for games and practices and events is a tradition well-known to every hockey parent, no matter the setting, and the Barzals were happy to do it for their hockey-crazed son.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 14, 2018

"He played some lacrosse too, but we had to choose between spring hockey and lacrosse once he got old enough and he went with hockey," Mike Barzal said, "I'm not sure that's always the right thing to do, focusing so early on one sport."

In addition to Calvano, Mathew Barzal added another local coach last summer: Three-time ice dancing Olympian Victor Kraatz, who had only half a dozen sessions with Barzal but has seen real improvement in the young man's skating this season.

"You never know when you work with someone, how far can they take a skill," Kraatz said. "There's lots of kids who play hockey. Who has that one piece of information, who can take what you've tried to help them with to set them apart from everyone else? You just never know who that's going to be. He's just such a hard-working individual – hard-working and smart at the same time. That's in his favor. He doesn't mind spending more time than necessary on things. It's a great attitude."

After practice on that Sunday, the horde of Junior Islanders – they do get support from the Isles, who employ Rob Ward, one of the youth club's coaches, as an amateur scout – screamed for autographs and pictures. A few members of the Vancouver media chatted with Barzal, as did some from Seattle, where he played three years in the Western League, culminating with a WHL crown and a trip to the Memorial Cup last year.

"Last year was a great year for him in Seattle, as much as it stung to go back," Calvano said. "He admitted it though, he was a little in awe of the players in the league, the limelight. And getting to the Memorial Cup, being a leader, it helped him. This has been great to see."

After dinner at home that Sunday night, the game finally arrived. If you walked the concourse at Rogers Arena between periods, you saw one Barzal Islanders jersey for every Sedin Canucks sweater. The Barzal fans were everywhere.

He had two assists in the game and a few more plays where, as has been customary this season, Barzal looked to wow the crowd but ended up overdoing it. At a gathering of friends and family in the arena restaurant afterward, Nadia looked and sounded relieved.

"I'm glad we all got through it," she said as Mathew mugged for selfies with his friends nearby, a reminder that he's still only 20.

After he made it through the Vancouver spotlight, the Islanders went on to Edmonton, where Nugent-Hopkins – who skates with Barzal and several other Vancouver-born NHLers in Burnaby during the summer – and McDavid awaited.

McDavid, of course, went first in Barzal's draft year.

"It's like I don't even consider him a '97," Barzal said. "He's on another planet and has been for a while."

Barzal could have gotten his old No. 97 sweater back when he joined the Islanders but felt it belonged to McDavid now in the NHL.

Barzal made it to the top of the heap in Vancouver. McDavid is a reminder that Barzal has more challenges ahead, more stars to try and eclipse to fuel that competitive fire that burns ever so brightly in him.

He recalled that he'd only been on the ice at Rogers Arena once in his youth, when his Burnaby Winter Club team got to accompany the Canucks for their skills competition in 2011. He was in awe of the Sedins and said Raffi Torres said some encouraging words.

Here he was on that Sunday the week before last, chatting with a group of kids around the same age he was when he got to skate in the same building.

"Whenever you have a local guy making it, a lot of the kids draw inspiration from it and hopefully they will work as hard as him," Kraatz said. "Just to be inspired as a kid, to see someone that grew up as you did, played where you play, to make it this far. Sometimes little things can move mountains – they come to this practice and they will try that little bit harder next time they get on the ice."

The Athletic LOADED: 03.14.2018

1103610 Websites

The Athletic / On the ridiculousness that is performative anger in hockey

By Justin Bourne Mar 13, 2018

For the second time this season, Glen Gulutzan has found himself in the hockey world's news for a frustrated rant aimed at his hockey club. Now, let me be clear about one thing, in hockey terms, his "rant" Monday was just about the farthest thing from some snapshot, as he seemed more annoyed than angry. But after his previous display — where he hucked his stick into about the 19th row or beyond — it's easy to tie the clips together and build some "ol' Gully's losin' it" narrative.

Here's the video from Monday, in which he's making the point that when you have numbers on your side, you can get creative, when you don't, don't just throw the puck away on some hope play that has a good chance of being a turnover. The short version of this is "Don't be an idiot, you idiots."

#FLAMES COACH #GLENGULUTZAN SWORE MORE THAN A FEW TIMES WHILE TALKING TO HIS TEAM ABOUT PLAYING THE RIGHT WAY AT PRACTICE MONDAY. . WATCH THE FULL VIDEO ON BARDOWN.COM

A POST SHARED BY TSN (@TSN_OFFICIAL) ON MAR 12, 2018 AT 11:30AM PDT

He's annoyed, but again, it wasn't this:

HE THREW HIS STICK! "LET'S %**#**% GO!" – FLAMES HEAD COACH GLEN GULUTZAN TODAY AT PRACTICE.

A POST SHARED BY TSN (@TSN_OFFICIAL) ON JAN 5, 2018 AT 11:55AM PST

The first one is coaching. The second is something that's ingrained in hockey culture, which I find kind of embarrassing: performative anger.

This topic is near and dear to my heart, as I'm not the most serious guy. I like to think I have a good grasp on when it's time to buckle down and be serious — there's a lot at stake a lot of nights in pro hockey, granted — but in general I like to have a good time, have a laugh, and not take life so seriously. I'd chat with opponents at faceoffs, I found it possible to have a laugh on the bus after some losses, and even with the team trailing, I never saw the point in throwing water bottles and slamming gates. (We get it, buddy, you're trying hard and want to win, message received. I do too.)

For many, many (most?) of my coaches, this drove them crazy. You see, there's something coaches know that players don't — and I'm here today to let you in on this secret. Okay, look around, is it just you and me? Okay, lean in. Here's the secret: If you give up a goal, or worse — lose a game — the Ghosts of Hockey Past descend from the heavens and consume your soul and send you back to your family a hollowed husk of a man, destined to winlessly roam the earth forevermore.

I guess.

The whole "look how mad I am" thing is easily one of the worst parts of hockey culture. In a sport where you play a ton of games over the course of a season, and you practice just as many times, and you travel together and eat together and spend your lives together, having to pretend to be angry because your team lost X amount of hours ago is a fruitless exercise. The second you get to your hotel room with your roommate — no matter who that teammate is — that shtick is over, and the mask



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 14, 2018

drops. It's over. Wanna watch Friends? Friends is funny, that Gunther sure is weird.

There might be a captain or two who publicly goes through the leadership motions of pretending to be upset when a teammate smiles after a loss, but that's simply because hockey has ingrained it in them and told them that to lead, they must be infinitely affected by the pain of losing. But largely it's all just a show for the coaching staff and management because nobody wants to look like they don't care — and let me be clear: just because you aren't breaking sticks and punching walls doesn't mean you don't care.

So here are some of hockey's rules on being angry, and when you need to put on your "grrrrr" mask because your team is never going to win again (also because your team is now soulless, thanks to the aforementioned hockey gods of yore).

Your team lost. You can't believe it. These f****ing guys in here, I tell you. And the f****ing refs, man. That was bullshit.

You didn't have a great night personally. Imagine what a coach would think if he saw you post a minus two on a Saturday night, then he overhears you talking about going out after the game with a few teammates. What, you're not going to go home and maintain the pout on the couch until you get a chance to prove to me you can Do Better? You must not care about this team.

Practice is going poorly (even if it's not your fault). Oh I'm sorry, those two D can't make a f****ing pass and you and Smitty think something's funny, and that this isn't entirely dire?

Oh man brace for it ... a losing streak. So, when you lose a single game, the Expected Anger Quotient (EAQ) should take you through only about until you get home. The next day at the rink might be a little quieter, a little more serious, but you're usually clear to regain function as a human with varied emotions. But a losing streak ... the longer it goes on, the longer you're expected to behave with a singular focus in all situations. During a slide, you can be at a team meal on the road, where everyone eats buffet-style food and sits together, and jokes and laughter will legitimately draw the ire of some coaches. Oh I'm sorry, are you not focused on tonight's game? Not sure if you've noticed, CHAD, but we've lost five straight f****ing games!

Any of these infractions can lead to a loss of power-play time, general ice time, you may get scratched, I've seen it all. When things are going poorly, some coaches act personally slighted by shows of personality.

Now, an important note here is that there are passionate people who legitimately get angry. And there are plenty of times where it's totally justified — I'm not talking about those moments. I've punched walls (I put a hole in my door in Utah, that was cool), I've snapped sticks, I've fought teammates in practice. It's a competitive, emotional game, and it's all too easy to have the red mist descend and lose it.

But I've also had a coach:

Pin me against the glass in practice with his stick under my throat

Throw objects at a teammate for asking a trainer what the intermission game was

Gulutzan his stick

Take a waist-high slapshot at a teammate for messing around in practice

Rip pictures off walls

Throw books

Call me things that would not aid their careers if heard publicly today

Bag skate the team when we got back to our rink because someone laughed on the bus after a road loss

And much, much more!

Were some of those things out of genuine anger? Absolutely, 100 per cent, no doubt about it. Were they all? No chance, hard zero, not the case. Some of it is attempts to generate a wake-up call, some of it to demonstrate that when things are going poorly it is not the time to smile. It is "Oh you think that's funny do you?" to the nth degree.

I recognize that list sounds horrible, but that's the general environment, and when you're steeped in it for so long, it has context and doesn't seem so awful. My true issue is rooted in the dishonesty that comes with stripping away the human element and expecting players to put on the angry act, given that the season is long and hockey is a game the involves a tremendous amount of luck.

Few goals are scored, bounces happen on every shift that could go either way, refs calls are subjective, the schedule dictates how you feel some games, so ... barring the really pathetic showings, I never saw any point in the expectation of near-silence after a loss. You should hear the change room on days after wins, or even before practice. It sounds like someone unleashed a flock of turkeys in there. After a loss, there's nary a word spoken for that fear of looking like you aren't ready to commit seppuku over your second period turnover. It's really hard to turn the page when the culture asks you to pout.

I can't imagine thinking differently than: "It's a damn game, man, and there's probably another one tomorrow. It's quite likely that even during a loss, everybody tried. And we'll try again tomorrow." It should be fine to discuss if anyone wants to go for enchiladas without the fear of reprimand from the staff. Yet still, you have coaches thinking he wants to go for enchiladas, eh? Well if that's where his heads at, he can think about them from the pressbox tomorrow. Why?

The worst part about this all is easily this: It's way worse at the junior and lower pro levels than in the NHL. In the NHL, there's almost an element of being a teammate with your coach. Often players are making, whatever, three times the money their coach does, and they have more years on their deal. They're more stable in their situation than the bench boss, so sure, if they'd like to laugh at some guys barb after a loss, or discuss the preferred enchilada joint, the coach really can't or won't really give it a second thought. Everyone needs each other, and everyone is pretty sure of their situation within the organization.

John Tortorella is angry. (Charles LeClaire-USA TODAY Sports)

Also at the higher levels, you're generally dealing with older players, who usually feel much more confident in not going through the performative anger motions. They recognize how silly it is, and know it's not necessary. But at the junior level, the power dynamic is so different, in that the coach holds all the cards. They can singlehandedly make and break careers, so boy, you better show them that your single mission in life is to make it and nothing else matters, or they'll find "someone who wants it more."

This exists, I expect, in varying degrees in a number of different professions, particularly other sports. When you're paid to do something, it's expected you take it seriously, and I absolutely agree with that. Personally, because of how hard I worked to earn them, I'm as proud of the successes I've had in the game as I am anything that isn't family-related. That stuff mattered to me, and was serious, even though my lighter daily attitude may have belied that reality.

I just believe that the best environments, where players are free to be who they really are, will foster the most success. I believe that when players feel that they can be themselves in all situations it helps to form better relationships, which leads to better communication, which leads to everyone having more information, which leads to more success.

I've been this guy, and I've seen teammates do it too: You go into the coaches office, and you feel like you have to answer their questions with what they want to hear, rather than just ... answering the questions. You're guessing, like a game show, trying to show that you are who they want you to be. What should I have done there coach? Um ... I should've uh ... tried harder? ... is that right? You clam up, and don't offer the staff any additional information, because you just want to get the hell out of



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 14, 2018

there, because of that expectation in hockey that everyone fit into a certain mold.

Look at the love for guys like Jonathan Toews — by the way, is it any wonder “Captain Serious” is beloved by just about everyone in hockey? — and Sidney Crosby, who eat, sleep, and breathe hockey. The guys who appear to have mental loops in their brain that just go want Cup want Cup NEED CUP NEED CUP.

Of course all coaches want guys who are like that, but it's a joke to believe that's who everyone is. Some guys dwell on their failures, others are able to move on quicker. People are different, and most thrive when they aren't treated as a round peg getting hammered into hockey's very square hole.

But, that's the culture of this sport, and I don't see it changing anytime soon. And so, when the losses pile up, and your scoring drought drags on, remember kids: If you don't show the man with the whistle that that loss in game 37 cost you your soul, you could lose ice time, games, even your career. So make sure you work on that frown, because as a wise man once said, “you can't win 'em all,” even though some think you should.

The Athletic LOADED: 03.14.2018

1103611 Websites

The Athletic / Pronman: Evaluating Ryan Merkley — the good, the bad and the ugly

By Corey Pronman Mar 13, 2018

Today we're going to talk about Ryan Merkley, a defenseman for the Guelph Storm, the first overall pick in the 2016 OHL draft and often discussed prospect for this upcoming NHL draft. He's an elite puck-mover, marred by notable deficiencies in his game on and off the ice.

The Good

Merkley is one of the best hockey players at 17 years of age I've ever seen.

People's first Google search of him often come up with this goal he scored against Kingston last season.

TODAY'S MATCHUP IS @RYAN_MERKLEY'S TEDDY BEAR GOAL VS @GIVANISMITH24'S END-TO-END RUSH AGAINST THE STEELHEADS!

VOTE: [HTTPS://T.CO/YHSYCCQ470](https://t.co/yhsyccq470)
PIC.TWITTER.COM/WHMUDCFJX

— GUELPH STORM (@STORM_CITY) MAY 9, 2017

I don't think that kind of dangler video accurately portrays his game, though. His offensive IQ is special, and he has all the potential to be one of the best playmakers of his generation.

I wasn't 100 percent sold on the hype the first few times I watched him. I saw a very skilled player, but not this blow you away elite talent I've heard so much about. But the more I've watched, the more I've been persuaded he could be something special.

On one play (I couldn't get the video for it), I watched him get the puck on the right side of the offensive blueline, with his Guelph teammate Cam Hillis skating behind the net, Merkley fired a shot towards the net, except it wasn't on goal, but a few inches to the side, where Hillis was skating towards and flubbed a one-timer. I was 50/50 whether that was a shot or a pass. I asked NHL scouts who have been watching Merkley for a while

with one saying, “It was no doubt a pass. He makes plays nobody else in the CHL can make.”

#CHLTPG: GORGEOUS HR PASS FROM RYAN MERKLEY SPRINGS LW VLADISLAV KOTKOV WHICH PUT TEAM CHERRY ON THE POWER PLAY. TEAM ORR STILL TRAILS 4-0 IN THE 2ND.
PIC.TWITTER.COM/TIW2PFKALU

— STEVE KOURNIANOS (@THEDRAFTANALYST) JANUARY 26, 2018

I've gone through about one-quarter of his games this season, and you see the way his elite brain works in other regards. About half his point shots are not on net but perfectly aimed at a teammate's stick to get the right angle on a deflection. He skates into a lane not to avoid pressure, but to open a gap to feed a pass. Here are a few examples of the plays he makes regularly.

He stares down the goalie, and I'm not sure whether or not he sees that the defending player wearing No. 28 doesn't have his stick in the lane to block a cross-ice pass, but he fires a bullet no-look pass onto a teammate's stick leading to a goal.

He loves to make those kinds of plays. He can do that for two reasons. First, it's his skating. He's not an elite speedster, but he walks the blueline so well with his edges and explodes well with his first few steps. Often he can go from a standstill to skating by a checking forward who tries to attack him at the offensive blueline.

Second, it's his passing ability. He's always looking to make a play, and he can execute with hard, crisp passes consistently.

Here are a few clips from a game I was at last weekend against Sarnia.

You can't see this from the video but his teammate Isaac Ratcliffe is breaking past the defenders at center ice. Merkley realizes that he has a step and flips the puck over everyone, with Ratcliffe catching it on a bounce.

Later in that same game, Ratcliffe feeds Merkley at the point. The video does not show this incredibly well, but it was a super tight play. Merkley and the defending forward get to the puck within a split second, and Merkley reacts so quickly to make the defender and the next player miss. He then finishes the play with a cross-ice pass.

Even later in that game, again obstructed by the video, he gets the puck behind the net, sees Sarnia is on a change, spots his teammate standing up at the offensive blueline and reacts so quickly to fire a slap pass up the ice through a tight seam past several checkers. He misses his teammate who later recovers it, but it's the read and reaction that drew my attention.

When Merkley is playing like this, he can look at the same level of guys like Quinn Hughes, Adam Boqvist, Andrei Svechnikov and Filip Zadina, if not above them. Merkley was the PP quarterback for Team Canada at the Ivan Hlinka tournament and was very successful at doing so. He's the best offensive player on his OHL team while being one of the youngest players in his 2018 draft class. He's been one of the best players in his age group for years. But alas, there is more to discuss.

The Bad

I think most people who have watched Merkley play over the years know where this is going with the small, offensively gifted defenseman.

The fact that Merkley almost never appears on Guelph's penalty kill is not by accident. This is also not a team flush with elite defenders that they couldn't afford an extra good defenseman. He's troublesome in his own end. Him being 5-foot-11, 170 pounds doesn't help matters, but he can get boxed out quite easily and doesn't win many battles. Here's one example:

And then there are times he makes godawful decisions in his own end, with and without the puck. Some of the puck decisions you can live with



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 14, 2018

because you want your playmakers trying things. However, other times stuff like this happens:

That was a shorthanded goal.

It would be one thing if he was small and not really refined defensively, but now and then his effort wanes off the puck. He takes a long loop getting back if he was up in the attack or half-heartedly closes on a check as he blows by him.

I will say, though, despite being small and slight, he's not afraid to engage physically, using his speed to close on guys and occasionally lay out punishing hits.

So, he's got some real defensive issues, but he's a special offensive talent. Why are people saying it would be so controversial for him to be a top 10 pick?

The Ugly

People who know me, know I tend to be more progressive when it comes to player evaluations. I like skill. I don't like pluggers. I want stars, not two-way, third-line centers. I study player's stats, I don't care too much about their leadership traits.

With that said, I think there are reasonable concerns about Merkley as a person. Everyone makes mistakes, on and off the ice, especially as a teenager, but concerns about his character date back to his pre-OHL days.

First, he got into a very public dispute last season with the former Guelph coach Jarrod Skalde.

The Sudbury Star described the incident: "Much of the rink's attention went to the Guelph bench after that. Last year's No. 1 overall pick, Ryan Merkley, coughed up the puck on three separate rush attempts during a power play, then turned the puck over again on a five-on-one that [Dmitry] Sokolov capitalized on for the first goal of the game. That led to a bench argument between the Merkley and Storm head coach Jarrod Skalde, who banished his budding star to the dressing room for the remainder of the period."

Merkley being cut from Canada's World Under-18 team last spring was believed to be due to a personality conflict, as well.

He's known as an emotional person. His body language on the ice is often poor, and he has emotional outbursts at times. He was suspended for a handful of games recently for this play.

I mean it's hockey, things get chippy; he got irritated for getting hacked at so he hacked back. People can argue that play either way, but it's more a reinforcement that he can let his emotions get the best of him.

Recently he was a healthy scratch in an attempt by his team to send a message.

GEORGE BURNETT ADMITTED RYAN MERKLEY WAS A HEALTHY SCRATCH TODAY: "HE UNDERSTANDS WHY AND THAT WILL STAY BETWEEN RYAN AND I."

SAID HE IS STILL A HUGE PART OF THE TEAM AND THE TEAM NEEDS HIM AT THE TOP OF HIS GAME.

MERKLEY POLITELY DECLINED TO COMMENT.

— TONY SAXON (@SAXONONTHESTORM) FEBRUARY 25, 2018

Most hockey folks in the Ontario area I've talked to either say they wouldn't go near him due to these issues, or that they love him but acknowledge he's a tough kid to deal with. There have been other rumors of issues behind the scenes regarding his behavior, and his treatment of teammates and coaches. But a lot of that stuff is hard to verify and might just be gossip. It contributes to a whirlwind of issues that have followed Merkley through the years and the overall concerns about whether he can mature enough to be a professional hockey player.

"He's got a bright future if he wants one," said Guelph's GM George Burnett to The Athletic.

My Take

With Merkley, you ride the wave. I've seen his awful games, I've seen his elite games and there's been several of both this season. You can't just focus on one end of the spectrum. He has to be smarter in his risk-management and control his emotions better, as well as tighten up his defense. But he can dominate a game like few can from the back end. You look at the average of that wave and, on the ice, it's a very good player but probably not an elite one.

While Merkley has earned a lot of the criticism directed his way, I do think part of the criticism is due to playing under a microscope. He's a No. 1 pick in the OHL who plays a risky style of game and plays an hour away from Toronto. There are players, both overseas and in different provinces, in this draft class who I've heard serious character questions about from NHL sources whom I haven't seen a sentence written about in regard to character.

While some are worried Merkley's off-ice issues combined with questionable defensive play will hurt his development the way it hurt recent OHL draft pick Tony DeAngelo, it's not that simple. Heck, Eeli Tolvanen had major character concerns placed on him last season by NHL scouts, and how is that going right now?

Projection is a tricky business. There are no absolute rules. I can't guarantee Merkley will be a star, nor can I guarantee he will flame out. There are many cases where it goes either way and it's about balancing the probabilities.

On questionable defense, maybe he's like Ryan Murphy, whose defensive issues have followed him through the pro game. Or maybe he's like John Klingberg, who in his early 20s turned his game around and has become an elite NHL defenseman on the back of his high-end offensive gifts.

On character, maybe Merkley doesn't mature and he flames out early on as a pro. However, there are a number of cases over the years where that doesn't happen.

I was talking to a scout in Sweden earlier this season about 2018 draft prospect Adam Boqvist, who several NHL scouts also think is a guy with personality issues (yet the scouting industry also has as a consensus top 5-7 pick), and he referenced Erik Karlsson to me. Not in saying that Boqvist will become as good as Karlsson, but that Karlsson was also considered a one-dimensional defenseman with personality flaws when he was 17 in Sweden. Now, he's one of the most beloved players in the league, who also seems to be rather good at hockey.

Character issues take an incredibly hard job — projecting 17-year-old hockey players on their talent — and add on an extra layer of complexity. Evaluators do the same thing they do with other attributes: look at history and see what issues are and are not a problem for projecting the player out. However, hockey scouts are not psychologists, and too often I can see guys talk themselves into believing pure B.S. in that area.

Tom Tango, the current senior data architect for MLB Advanced Media gave the best take on this issue I've seen about trying to quantify the intangibles in a player in the context of a baseball player:

"What it comes down to is we all quantify intangibles. I'm sure you are a great worker at work, and I'm sure you do a lot of little things that simply aren't being noticed. They somehow all add value or contributions to your company. A lot of intangible things that we simply can't properly value, but we know is there. However, you are being paid right? Presumably, someone with the exact skillset as you, but without the intangibles would get paid a bit less than you? How much less? 1 percent less? 20 percent less? That's your boss putting a value on your intangibles, and that is you putting value on your intangibles. I'll bet anything that a person's intangibles will make up less than 5 percent of that person's total compensation."



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 14, 2018

And that's basically my take in this instance. There's a discount you put on a guy like Merkley due to his issues.

Suggestions I've heard over the past few months that some teams might not have him ever listed as a draft prospect is completely nuts to me (although I've also heard from some NHL teams who feel his issues are overblown and have him in their top 10). The discount on character issues can't be that severe, barring something like a criminal record. Merkley's track record is shaky, but it does not suggest a player devoid of value.

Maybe that value discount is 5 percent off what a player with his skill set would be without the issues. Maybe it's 10 percent if you're very conservative, or very concerned about Merkley and really value a good locker room guy. But it's not 30 or 50 percent. That doesn't reflect the reality of how the real world works when it comes to valuing people's abilities and production, even in a team environment.

Instead of being a top 5 pick in this draft, Merkley in my mind is probably around the 7-15 range, the next tier so to speak of in the 2018 draft. I feel that's a reasonable balance between his elite abilities while considering the risks in him as a person and his defensive game. We could argue around the margins there, but I would be hard-pressed to find a reasonable argument that he is not a legitimate first-round pick.

The Athletic LOADED: 03.14.2018

1103612 Websites

The Athletic / How subtle moves have changed the Blue Jackets' vital signs and led to a resurgence

Aaron Portzline Mar 13, 2018 9

Despite what you've been led to believe, Blue Jackets coach John Tortorella does have the capacity for subtlety. At least twice this season, when his club was teetering on the brink of collapse, Tortorella changed the narrative and changed the outlook.

When the Jackets were gripping their sticks during a four-game losing streak in early February, the directive was put forth to shoot first and ask questions later. The barrage of shots — highlighted by a whopping 158 in a three-game stretch from Feb. 10-14 — seemed to lighten the mental load on several players, leading to the early stages of a warming offense.

Later in February, Tortorella played a different card when it became clear to him that several of his players were melting under the lofty expectations created by their 2016-17 success, both as players and as a team.

Fifty wins. 108 points. 247 goals scored. A playoff berth clinched with 11 games left in the season. No way the Blue Jackets were going to get close to those numbers in 2017-18.

"What we've done to this point has taken us to this point," Tortorella said near the deadline. "Do I think a lot of our guys can play better? Yes, I do. So let's take the opportunity, in the games we have left, to forget about all the other stuff, all the numbers, whatever, and just play to the best of our ability."

It sounds simple enough. But the Blue Jackets, now buttressed with trade acquisitions Ian Cole, Mark Letestu and Thomas Vanek, seem to have taken it to heart.

The Jackets, who are 6-2-0 since the trade deadline, have won five in a row, tied with Tampa Bay for the longest current streak in the NHL.

In a broad sense, an air of confidence — missing for months now — has begun to descend upon the players. More specifically, many of the major issues that saddled the club have improved dramatically, and the turnaround began prior to the trade deadline.

A closer look at the issues ...

1. POWER PLAY

For the first three months of the season, the power play was the power plague.

Since Jan. 11, the Jackets are 10th in the league with a man-advantage, clicking along at 21.2 percent. They scored two power-play goals in Monday's 5-2 win over Montreal, and they've looked more comfortable with a man-advantage lately than at any point in the season.

What changed?

The Jackets decided to take Alexander Wennberg off the half-wall and move him net-front on the power play, allowing Artemi Panarin and Cam Atkinson to take the left and right walls, respectively, on the first unit.

Here's power-play coach Brad Larsen on moving Wennberg down low:

"The one thing we found is we were trying to fit three guys into two spots. Cam, Wennberg and Panarin. They all want to be on the half-wall. They can't all be on the half-wall.

"The one thing with Wenny, his best asset is his passing. You get on that half-wall, you can pass, but we wanted a little bit more shooting if we could get it. He has a good shot, but his default is he wants to pass, and he's good at it. The other thing he is, is really brave. You watch him block shots, he's not scared of the puck one bit.

"Now he gets to do what he's really good at. It's not earth-shattering, it's trying to put guys in the spots you'd think would be best."

Tortorella said Jarmo Kekalainen first mentioned the idea of putting Wennberg in front of the goalie a few weeks prior to the switch. He'd seen him play there in Sweden before the Blue Jackets drafted him in 2013.

"I said to someone the other night, it took us two years to figure out the best position for Wenny on the power play," Tortorella said. "All we did was complain about him, complain about him ... he wouldn't shoot, he wouldn't shoot ... we had him in the wrong position."

2. PENALTY KILL

There was a stretch in late January and early February when the Blue Jackets looked lost killing penalties, where their lack of confidence was obvious. They allowed a power-play goal in seven consecutive games, killing only 7 of 16 in that span.

Since then, the Blue Jackets have killed 88.2 percent of their penalties (seventh best in the league) and they look confident. Cole has definitely helped with this.

3. SCORING

Through 54 games, the Blue Jackets had scored 135 goals, a 2.48 average. Only woeful Arizona and Buffalo scored fewer goals.

In the past 16 games, dating to Feb. 10, the Jackets have scored 52 goals, good for eighth in the league. It's a 3.25 goals-per-game average that's above the 3.01 they averaged last season.

Who's leading the way? It's the players you would expect, but, specifically, some of the players who got off to such brutal starts this season.

Panarin has 7-11-18 in those 16 games, and Seth Jones has 6-8-14 and Pierre-Luc Dubois 4-9-13. Those three have been leading the Blue Jackets all season, though.

As for the guys who have struggled ... Cam Atkinson has 5-8-13 in that span, Boone Jenner has 3-8-11 and Wennberg has 2-9-11. This, of course, is much closer to the production that was expected.

4. LINEUP STABILITY



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 14, 2018

The Blue Jackets continue to endure their share of injuries. Josh Anderson is out at least a couple more weeks with a knee injury. Jones missed the third period of Monday's game, and his availability for Thursday in Philadelphia is unknown.

But the lineup has started to take shape and make sense in a way that never happened early in the season.

Adding two bottom-six forwards — Letestu and Vanek — has allowed the Blue Jackets to form four lines that can play and produce. A Matt Calvert-Brandon Dubinsky-Mark Letestu trio gives them a fourth line that can check and do some damage, similar to last season.

Weird how this stuff works sometimes. For the first four months of the season, Sonny Milano was in and out of the lineup and up and down 1-71. Now it's not even a question that he's going to play. Milano and Oliver Bjorkstrand have flanked Nick Foligno on the second line, and it's worked.

Acquiring Cole and keeping Jack Johnson at the trade deadline has made life easier on Blue Jackets assistant coach Brad Shaw, too. He has three pairs he can play in any situation. That has not been the case this season until recently.

5. FACEOFFS

As of Feb. 1, the Blue Jackets were 28th in the NHL in faceoffs, winning just 47.6 percent. To that point, only Dubinsky could be counted on to win big draws.

In the past month, however, the Jackets have won 51 percent of their draws at even strength and 51.7 percent of their draws on the power play.

Jenner (66 percent), Dubinsky (57.1) and Letestu (51.3) give coaches three options, but there's flexibility within the Blue Jackets' lines, too.

Dubinsky and Letestu both play on the fourth line, so they each can take draws on their strong sides. Same with Jenner and Wennberg on the third line.

The Athletic LOADED: 03.14.2018

1103613 Websites

The Athletic / Now a star for the Wild, Jared Spurgeon has had to prove himself at every turn

Michael Russo Mar 13, 2018

Bruce Boudreau was in his Xcel Energy Center office that first summer after being hired as Wild coach when he got up and took a walk around the facilities.

Jared Spurgeon, working out, spotted Boudreau and walked up to introduce himself.

"One thing I never knew is how small Spurge was," Boudreau said hours later as he made the rounds at the State Fair.

Even now, nearly two years later, the diminutive defenseman still could be mistaken for a baby-faced teenager who has trouble growing facial hair or a Wild player's little brother hanging in the locker room.

Yet, he's 28. With three kids. In his eighth NHL season. And unequivocally the best small defenseman in the NHL yet still one of the league's most unsung in part because he's overshadowed by All-Star, often-Norris-Trophy-contending defense partner Ryan Suter.

When Boudreau was hired, Spurgeon was one of the Wild's selling points from general manager Chuck Fletcher and his lieutenant, Brent Flahr, during their sitdown interview in California.

All summer long, when Boudreau would ask reporters what they thought of the team, the coach would hear about Spurgeon this and Spurgeon that.

And then Boudreau saw Spurgeon for the first time in street clothes, and was like, WTF?

"The first time I saw him, I said, 'You guys are telling me this 5-foot-6, 140-pound guy is all that?'" said Boudreau, sprinkling in a little hyperbole with Spurgeon's size, last weekend.

Jared Spurgeon

To be fair, Spurgeon's at least two inches taller and 30 (OK, probably 25?) pounds heavier.

But, Boudreau continued, "Then you watch him play and he plays like he's 6-1, 210, with great hockey IQ. It took me a little bit (to realize how good he is) but not too long. He's extremely smart, positions himself extremely well. Can skate. Doesn't put himself in a position to be out of position. His defense partner helps him quite a bit, too. They work out together really well."

Spurgeon is used to this, of course.

His entire life, every time he has tried out for a team or has been on a professional team with significant changes behind the bench or upstairs, he feels like he has to prove himself all over again.

This was a kid, along with his childhood bosom buddy and now Wild teammate Tyler Ennis, that was cut from their AAA bantam team as a teenager.

Of course, Spurgeon concedes, "I weighed probably 100 pounds, 120 pounds wet."

He added with a giggle: "I haven't grown much since."

But this was also a kid that somehow slipped to the sixth round for the New York Islanders to take him in the 2008 draft after he won the Memorial Cup with former Wild defenseman Justin Falk and undrafted, undersized star Tyler Johnson — now with the Tampa Bay Lightning — in Spokane.

This was a guy that two years later somehow wasn't signed by those same Islanders. The Wild, who invited him to development camp and then prospect camp and then signed him as a free agent, should send them weekly 'Thank You' notes for that decision.

This was a kid that when somebody with the Wild slipped to a certain reporter in Nov. 2010 that Spurgeon was being recalled to make his NHL debut on his 21st birthday Nov. 29 in Calgary, the reporter DIDN'T WRITE IT because he thought his source was joking.

Yet, more than seven years later, Spurgeon ranks fourth in Wild history with 508 games played. Behind only Suter in all three categories, he ranks second all-time among Wild defensemen with 149 assists, 205 points, and a plus-52. His 791 shots are third behind Suter and Brent Burns, who has only three more and also played some at forward. His 22 power-play goals are behind only Burns' 26.

Yet, when Boudreau took over for Mike Yeo, when former assistant coach Rick Wilson first focused his eyes on him, when Hall of Famer Scott Stevens took over for Wilson and Bob Woods for Stevens after that, Spurgeon had to prove himself all over to each.

"You always have to prove yourself," Spurgeon said. "Even though there are so many good smaller players, there's still a little stigma that smaller players can't play. There are still people that want big guys and think they're the only ones that can play. But if you work hard and if you have the skill and determination, you can play in this league no matter your size."



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 14, 2018

On the NHL's second-highest scoring blue line, Spurgeon is having another strong season. Among defensemen, he's second behind Matt Dumba's 10 goals with nine, tied with Dumba behind Suter's 41 assists with 28 and ranks third with 37 points (Suter has 47 and Dumba has 38).

On a very bad puck possession team this season (the Wild rank 26th in the NHL in score-adjusted Corsi), Spurgeon has been the Wild's best defenseman in terms of controlling shot attempts for and against. His 50.97 score-adjusted Corsi rating is tops among all Minnesota blue liners and fifth among all Minnesota skaters. Likewise, he's first among defensemen and fifth on the team in his relative Corsi rating (+4.69 percent), meaning the Wild are much better than their average when Spurgeon is on the ice versus off of it.

Spurgeon is first among Wild defensemen and fourth on the team with an expected goals-for percentage of 59.91. That means based on the shots the Wild generate and allow when Spurgeon's on the ice, they would be expected (based on shot locations and types) to score 59.91 percent of all goals.

Of all NHL defensemen to have skated at least 300 minutes this season at 5-on-5, Spurgeon is first in expected goals-for percentage. It also shows that Spurgeon — and the Wild, for that matter — is great at limiting opponents to shots from the outside.

Since 2015, Spurgeon is first among all Wild defensemen with a Corsi rating of 50.61 and first among all Wild defensemen with a relative Corsi rating of +3.31. Over that same time period, he's first among Wild defensemen and third among all Wild skaters with an expected goals-for percentage of 56.96. League-wide, Spurgeon is first since 2015 in expected goals-for percentage among all NHL defensemen who have skated at least 1,000 minutes. (Suter is second, by the way.)

What all this shows is Spurgeon's positioning and hockey sense is off the charts. The subtle plays he makes — keeping his stick in the lane, applying puck pressure at the proper time, knowing where his exit is in the zone to navigate forecheck pressure — all put the Wild in a position to consistently score more than they get scored against. His point totals notwithstanding, the things he does on a regular basis go a long way in winning hockey games.

Just consider this stat: Since 2013, Spurgeon ranks 33rd in the NHL with 8,061 minutes played and 26th in the NHL with an average ice time per game of 23 minutes, 18 seconds.

Of the 36 NHLers who have logged at least 8,000 minutes in that span, Spurgeon has taken the fewest penalty minutes with 64.

Just imagine how good one has to be to log this much ice time, be this undersized and rarely have to compensate by hooking, holding and interfering with obstruction penalties.

Spurgeon grew up studying smaller defensemen like Dan Boyle and Brian Rafalski, but how does somebody who's a 5-8 defenseman function so well in the NHL?

How does he routinely go into the corners with bigger forwards and come out with the puck?

"It comes from within," said Woods, the Wild assistant who coaches the defensemen and changes them during games. "He's got a big heart. He's out to prove something every night, and I think that really motivates him. He wants to win. He's a competitive guy and does the little things, and when you're smart you never put yourself in bad situations. That's what you notice with him. He's always in position, he's always got a good stick and he just makes the right plays. He is so, so intelligent. And he's got offensive ability to him too."

Spurgeon has proved that throughout his Wild career and scored one of the biggest goals in Wild history when he tied Game 7 of the Western Conference quarterfinals against Tuesday's opponent, the Colorado Avalanche, with 2:27 left in regulation. That forced overtime, a game in which Nino Niederreiter scored the winner to advance the Wild into the second round against the Chicago Blackhawks.

What's most interesting is Spurgeon says he never truly felt comfortable with his standing in the Wild organization until he signed his most recent four-year, \$20.75 million extension in Dec. 2015. He has two years left remaining in that contract.

"It's because you never really know," Spurgeon said. "You can get injured. The coach may not like you. So you have to prove yourself night in and night out. To this day, you're just trying to get better all the time. Until I got through that second full contract (three years, \$8 million), it was always in the back of my mind that if I didn't play well, I could be sent down (to the minors).

"You're always having to prove yourself. You can never really be settled, and you always want to be better, especially at those points where you have a whole new coaching staff. When Mike Yeo came here, I had him in the AHL, so he sort of knew what I had. After that, you better prove yourself to everybody by just going out and playing your game and hopefully the coach likes you."

Woods admits he was skeptical after he was hired last offseason, saw Spurgeon for the first time and tried to digest how this was the same defenseman Boudreau drooled over all summer.

"I think everybody would, but when you get to know Jared and watch how he is as a professional, it doesn't surprise you one bit that he's this good," Woods said. "He's one of those guys that you look at him and he's paying attention in every meeting, to every detail. He's just an intelligent person and he's competitive. He doesn't let size be an issue with him. You look at him, he doesn't back down from anybody. He's really special to work with."

Boudreau entered this season wanting to spread the wealth and maybe split Suter and Spurgeon by having a more offensive pair in Suter and Dumba and a shutdown pair with Spurgeon and Jonas Brodin. That's the way the blue liners played all training camp until the final practice before opening night when Suter and Spurgeon were reunited.

"They're just both special players," Woods said of Suter and Spurgeon. "They have chemistry together, they work well. They eat a lot of minutes, which is very helpful, and you know you can put them out against anybody. It just made sense."

Not bad considering Suter admits he never he even heard of Spurgeon when he signed with the Wild in the summer of 2012. Not bad considering Spurgeon never dreamed he'd one day be an NHL vet of eight years and one of the sport's great defensemen.

"Growing up you just want one NHL game, so this is pretty cool," he said.

The Athletic LOADED: 03.14.2018

1103614 Websites

The Athletic / On the streaking Blue Jackets and the fickle fortunes of puck luck

By Tom Reed Mar 13, 2018

Sergei Bobrovsky played exceptionally well in the Blue Jackets' 5-2 win, but during the game's defining sequence, he was closer to robbing a Huntington Bank ATM on the main concourse than any of the Canadiens' shooters.

Early in the second period, Canadiens forward Nikita Scherbak roared through the slot, cut to his left and looked as though he would fire the puck. A desperate Bobrovsky slid to his right and dropped to his belly in an attempt to take away a low shot or a pass through the crease.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 14, 2018

But Scherbak held on to the puck and circled the net, while the goaltender's momentum carried him helplessly away from his crease. Scherbak centered the puck to Artturi Lehkonen for what appeared to be a tap-in goal, one that would have trimmed the Montreal deficit to 3-2. As Lehkonen flipped a backhand toward the yawning cage, Blue Jackets defenseman Zach Werenski — who wasn't even facing the shooter — had the puck carom off his stick.

"To be quite honest, I didn't really see it," Werenski said of the puck. "I knew Bob was out of the net, and I was just standing there and trying to take up some room. It hit my stick."

Werenski located the puck just before the Canadiens' Andrew Shaw took a whack at it. The defenseman cleared it to safety.

Seventy-one seconds later, Blue Jackets winger Boone Jenner collected his own rebound and scored to give the home team a 4-1 lead. Instead of a one-goal game, the Blue Jackets took a three-goal advantage en route to a crucial two points in the Eastern Conference playoff race.

"It's crazy how that works sometimes, and it was a big goal in the game," Werenski said.

The Blue Jackets didn't just have puck luck on their side Monday. They walked it around the floor of Nationwide Arena like a prize-winning terrier at a dog show.

Nick Foligno banked in a first-period shot off the stick and skate of Canadiens defenseman Jordie Benn. Meanwhile, Montreal couldn't catch a break as rebounds and loose pucks near the Columbus net trickled agonizingly out of reach on the way to a fifth consecutive loss.

So much planning and hard work goes into every game, but in hockey — where pucks and players are going a million miles an hour like protons and electrons inside an atom — sometimes it just comes down to lucky bounces.

The Blue Jackets, winners of five in a row, need not apologize. They have been on the other end of it. Just ask David Savard, who Feb. 6 was struck by an errant puck in the cheek and lay on the ice as the Capitals scored a game-winning goal in the final minute of regulation to beat the Blue Jackets, 3-2.

200TH CAREER GOAL FOR @BACKSTROM19!
PIC.TWITTER.COM/BL2U9CWUUS

— NHL GIFS (@NHLGIFS) FEBRUARY 7, 2018

The hockey gods are fickle, but often fair. They reward the team that's playing well. Right now, that describes the Blue Jackets, who are 6-2-0 since the NHL trade deadline and getting contributions from everyone.

Does Foligno believe in puck luck?

"Oh yeah, but I think it's just mental," the captain said. "When you are in the frame of mind that you're confident in the plays you are making ... it just works. That skate blade might (be) there and boom, it's in the net. Or, it chips off that guy's shin pad to another guy (on your team)."

Nobody can harness puck luck and, despite wonderful advancements in the field of hockey analytics, it's impossible to quantify or predict. But players around the league will tell you it often sides with the clubs who are in form.

The British have a saying that somewhat applies: Fortune favors the brave.

The Blue Jackets spent January and February playing nervous hockey, too often just waiting for something bad to happen. They were pumping 50 shots on goal and not scoring. The power play was a two-minute exercise in futility.

Monday night, the Blue Jackets tallied four-plus goals for the fifth time in the past eight games. The power play converted on its first two chances. Alexander Wennberg, who seemingly gave up scoring for Lent, has 10

points in his past seven games, including a goal and three assists against the Canadiens.

"I think when you work hard, you create your own luck," Werenski said. "We have been working hard as of late."

Make no mistake, the Blue Jackets were more lucky than good Monday. Their puck management, particularly in their own end, was poor. Defenseman Ian Cole, who's been excellent since arriving at the trade deadline, made an uncharacteristic bad pass that led to a Jonathan Drouin breakaway goal.

But the Blue Jackets kept working. They blocked 20 shots, and Bobrovsky got them home with 38 saves. The defensive corps overcame the loss of All-Star Seth Jones, who aggravated an upper-body injury, and Markus Nutivaara played well in his return to the lineup for a "nicked up" Ryan Murray.

"I still thought we were on our heels too much," John Tortorella said. "Bob certainly played well in that third period."

The Blue Jackets coach agreed the early second-period sequence was one of the game's pivotal moments. His goaltender was out of the play and the Canadiens appeared poised to make it 3-2. Who knows where the game goes from there.

"It was really important," Tortorella said. "The puck kind of hit (Werenski's) stick. I'm not even sure he tried to. I think it just hit his stick."

WERENSKI DOES A PRETTY GOOD BOBROVSKY IMPRESSION,
EH?#CBJ PIC.TWITTER.COM/JQPKBFW9XM

— 1ST OHIO BATTERY (@1STOHIOBATTERY) MARCH 13, 2018

Asked whether Werenski should be fitted for goalie pads, Bobrovsky smiled and replied:

"He will do what he do and I will do what I do. ... It definitely feels good when you turn your head and the net is empty and somebody stop a goal. You get a good feeling, of course."

At the other end, Jenner got his own break as the rebound goalie Charlie Lindgren allowed came right back to the Blue Jackets winger. Earlier in the season, the puck hops over Jenner's stick or he fires the second chance wide. Instead, he potted the gift for his eighth goal.

"Throughout the year, we've dipped and kinda gone up and down," Jenner said. "It's the time of year when we want to lock down our game. Obviously, we want to be in the dance in April and obviously we want to feel good about how we're playing."

The club's good fortune extended beyond Nationwide Arena on Monday as the Flyers, Panthers and Hurricanes, teams battling for a postseason spot, all lost.

And so the surging Blue Jackets, four points above the playoff bar, head to Philadelphia with a chance to draw even with the Flyers, who sit third in the Metro Division.

They will need a much cleaner performance to extend their win streak to six. They will need Bobrovsky on top of his game and in his crease. They will need their best players to remain hot.

Maybe the puck luck will travel, but the Blue Jackets can't count on it.

The Athletic LOADED: 03.14.2018

1103615 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Smith turns in virtuoso performance when Flames need it most



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 14, 2018

Mark Spector | @sportsnetspec March 14, 2018,

CALGARY — There are different kinds of goalies, and the Calgary Flames have seen both over the years.

They had Miikka Kiprusoff, who would say as much after a shutout as he would after he'd let in six. The quiet Finn we called "Turku Broda" did his leading on the ice, and left the 'rah, rah' stuff to everyone else.

Then there is current netminder Mike Smith, who allowed four goals on 26 shots against the New York Islanders Sunday night, then walked into a post-game media scrum and let his teammates have it.

"It's right here: mental," the 35-year-old said after Sunday night's loss, pointing to his temple. "Every guy has got to play out of their comfort zone. Our top guys have got to do the little things it takes to win — block shots and chip pucks. And our bottom six guys have got to contribute offensively and do the little things also.

"We can't have any passengers if we're going to right the ship here and make a big push."

It was a scolding scolding that only a true leader could, or would, deliver. But Smith is a guy who'd banked enough credit this season to say what needed to be said, regardless of outcome or performance.

Then, on Tuesday, he did what real leaders do, following up with a 1-0 shutout of the Edmonton Oilers, putting his team on his back in a must-win game at the Scotiabank Saddledome. Smith robbed Ryan Strome twice and Ryan Nugent-Hopkins once on the toughest three saves of the night by either 'tender.

It was a virtuoso performance when his team needed it the most, snapping a seven-game losing streak versus Edmonton and picking up two points in the Western Conference playoff race on a night where Dallas lost in regulation and Los Angeles fell in a shootout at Arizona.

"It starts with your play on the ice," Smith said. "It's hard to talk in the room to you (media) guys, when you don't go out there and do your job."

Cam Talbot was magnificent at the other end as well, beaten only on a deft backhand by Johnny Gaudreau, who snuck in behind the Edmonton defence to earn far more time and space than a scorer of his pedigree requires.

"I made some big saves but couldn't match Mike," said Talbot, who stopped 31 shots to Smith's 28. "After last game, he was very vocal about their starts and he came out and settled them down and made the huge saves when he needed to. Credit to him — he played a hell of a game. Usually when you only give up one you're in pretty good business."

This was a character check for Calgary, a team that had won just once in regulation time at the Saddledome in its last 11 tries. After 40 minutes the Flames held a scant 1-0 lead, which was fitting when you consider the current state of their playoff chances. But this moment came with some gravity.

The Flames had 78 points prior to puck drop of Game 71 against Edmonton. Dallas (80 points) had already completed a 4-2 loss at Montreal, and was boarding the charter for a back-to-back in Toronto Wednesday. The Los Angeles Kings (81 points, third in the Pacific) were playing backup goalie Jack Campbell at Arizona and were trailing 2-0 after 20 minutes before eventually salvaging a point in a shootout loss.

This was pure opportunity for Calgary. A 20-minute push, and its playoff hopes wouldn't only live another day, they would grow a little with just 11 games left in Calgary's season.

Smith opened the period with the save of the night, doing the splits to stop Nugent-Hopkins' hard one-timer off a brilliant feed by Connor McDavid, who was held pointless despite being the most dangerous skater on the ice Tuesday.

From there the Oilers pressed, but Calgary played the way a winning team is supposed to play. Even with Talbot on the bench and Dougie Hamilton in the penalty box for the final 1:53, Calgary played like a team that simply wasn't going to allow these points to get away.

"To see guys lying down, blocking shots, guys getting over the red or the blue and dumping pucks in...", marveled defenceman Travis Hamonic. "We had a one-goal lead and we were riding our goalie, and we felt we didn't need to win the game 5-0.

"Come playoff time, this is how you win games."

That's exactly what Smith said on Sunday.

It ain't bragging, if you can back it up.

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 03.14.2018

1103616 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Canadiens win overshadowed by Shaw's scary collision

Eric Engels March 14, 2018, 12:45 AM

MONTREAL — It was one of the best performances the Montreal Canadiens have offered all season and, in the end, it was completely clouded by a potentially devastating injury to one of their fiercest competitors.

With 11:02 remaining in the third period, and with the Canadiens leading the Dallas Stars 3-2, Canadiens forward Andrew Shaw charged in on Stars defenceman Greg Pateryn and collided helmet to helmet with him at the Dallas blue line. Pateryn, incensed, got up after the hit and jumped on top of Shaw, punching him twice and slamming his head into the ice before realizing that he was unconscious.

"He was knocked out as soon as he hit me," said Pateryn. "He knocked himself out when he hit me. I didn't realize he was knocked out until he was on the ice and his eyes were in the back of his head.

"You play like that, that's what happens sometimes."

Julien on Pateryn comments: "Comments like that don't deserve a response. They speak for themselves."

— Eric Engels (@EricEngels) March 14, 2018

Playing like that has been Shaw's trademark over his seven years in the NHL. It helped him win two Stanley Cups in Chicago and incited Canadiens general manager Marc Bergevin to trade for him and sign him to a six-year, 23.4 million contract in the summer of 2016.

But you have to think all of that's in jeopardy if this latest hit proves to be a concussion for Shaw.

It was on a similar play to the one we saw in Tuesday's game that Shaw suffered his second concussion in the span of four months—when he hit New York Rangers defenceman Brady Skjei in Game 1 of last year's playoffs. Their heads collided but Shaw wasn't knocked out on that play and didn't present any obvious symptoms.

A game later Shaw took a crosscheck to the head from defenceman Brendan Smith. And it was only after absorbing two big hits from defenceman Dan Girardi and getting knocked around in a fight with Smith three games later that he was finally diagnosed by team officials.

Shaw later admitted he had suffered silently with symptoms in the lead-up to those final blows, concealing symptoms and lying to doctors about his condition.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 14, 2018

"They put you through the protocol and you focus to make sure you pass every protocol you can," he told Sportsnet back in September. "All of us, not just me, we're all hockey players; we have that nature of wanting to play, wanting to be there for the team. We don't want to miss games and we push ourselves so hard to make sure we're not missing games. I would come in and try to act normal just to get by and I'd go home and keep everything to myself. You tell everyone you're feeling fine, but deep down you know there's something wrong with you."

There was no doubt something was wrong with Shaw after his collision with Pateryn, just as it was obvious on Dec. 12 of 2016— when Shaw took a vicious check to the head from Boston Bruins defenceman Torrey Krug that knocked him out of action for a month.

"I saw his eyes rolling back and he just looked like he wasn't there coming off the ice," said one Canadiens player after Tuesday's game.

Livestream every single game of the 2018 Stanley Cup Playoffs—blackout free—plus all 162 Toronto Blue Jays games, key Raptors & NBA Playoffs matchups and the 100th Mastercard Memorial Cup, all in one subscription.

It was a morbid scene that sullied a gutsy 4-2 win for the Canadiens.

They had come off a demoralizing six-game road trip. A 5-2 loss to the Columbus Blue Jackets Monday punctuated their 1-3-2 record over the last two weeks. And yet they managed to stifle a desperate Dallas team.

Artturi Lehkonen scored two goals, Brendan Gallagher managed his 26th and Nikita Scherbak put the game on ice with a gorgeous solo effort while Pateryn looked on from the box with 10:34 to play.

This was one worth celebrating, but concern over Shaw's health was sobering.

"The doctors evaluated him and I'm told they're continuing to evaluate him," said Canadiens coach Claude Julien. "But it's clear that he's banged up right now. They didn't give me any indication as to whether or not it's a concussion or what it is exactly.

"All I can say is that it was a heck of a collision and he was clearly shaken."

Shaw also left the ice favouring his left leg. A knee injury on that side had recently kept him out of action from Jan. 13 to Feb. 28. And it's impossible to fathom him being available to the Canadiens any time soon.

It's been that kind of year for this team, with starting goaltender Carey Price currently sidelined by concussion; with No. 1 defenceman Shea Weber out until next training camp after Tuesday's surgery to repair a tendon in his left foot was successfully completed; with 19-year-old defenceman Victor Mete done for the season after breaking a finger on Mar. 2; with captain Max Pacioretty unlikely to return after suffering a knee injury in that same game Mete got hurt in; with forward Ales Hemsky suffering post-concussion symptoms since Oct. 20; and with forward Phillip Danault (headaches) and defenceman David Schlemko (upper-body injury) day-to-day.

The losses have dominated the headlines this season. Between the injuries and the 42 games the Canadiens have dropped out of the 70 they've played, it's been rough. A big win over Dallas would've been a welcome change in the conversation.

Unfortunately, the image of Shaw being carried to the Canadiens room, appearing as though he was on another planet, is the one that resonates.

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 03.14.2018

1103617 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Canadiens win overshadowed by Shaw's scary collision

Eric Engels March 14, 2018, 12:45 AM

MONTREAL — It was one of the best performances the Montreal Canadiens have offered all season and, in the end, it was completely clouded by a potentially devastating injury to one of their fiercest competitors.

With 11:02 remaining in the third period, and with the Canadiens leading the Dallas Stars 3-2, Canadiens forward Andrew Shaw charged in on Stars defenceman Greg Pateryn and collided helmet to helmet with him at the Dallas blue line. Pateryn, incensed, got up after the hit and jumped on top of Shaw, punching him twice and slamming his head into the ice before realizing that he was unconscious.

"He was knocked out as soon as he hit me," said Pateryn. "He knocked himself out when he hit me. I didn't realize he was knocked out until he was on the ice and his eyes were in the back of his head.

"You play like that, that's what happens sometimes."

Julien on Pateryn comments: "Comments like that don't deserve a response. They speak for themselves."

— Eric Engels (@EricEngels) March 14, 2018

Playing like that has been Shaw's trademark over his seven years in the NHL. It helped him win two Stanley Cups in Chicago and incited Canadiens general manager Marc Bergevin to trade for him and sign him to a six-year, 23.4 million contract in the summer of 2016.

But you have to think all of that's in jeopardy if this latest hit proves to be a concussion for Shaw.

It was on a similar play to the one we saw in Tuesday's game that Shaw suffered his second concussion in the span of four months—when he hit New York Rangers defenceman Brady Skjei in Game 1 of last year's playoffs. Their heads collided but Shaw wasn't knocked out on that play and didn't present any obvious symptoms.

A game later Shaw took a crosscheck to the head from defenceman Brendan Smith. And it was only after absorbing two big hits from defenceman Dan Girardi and getting knocked around in a fight with Smith three games later that he was finally diagnosed by team officials.

Shaw later admitted he had suffered silently with symptoms in the lead-up to those final blows, concealing symptoms and lying to doctors about his condition.

"They put you through the protocol and you focus to make sure you pass every protocol you can," he told Sportsnet back in September. "All of us, not just me, we're all hockey players; we have that nature of wanting to play, wanting to be there for the team. We don't want to miss games and we push ourselves so hard to make sure we're not missing games. I would come in and try to act normal just to get by and I'd go home and keep everything to myself. You tell everyone you're feeling fine, but deep down you know there's something wrong with you."

There was no doubt something was wrong with Shaw after his collision with Pateryn, just as it was obvious on Dec. 12 of 2016— when Shaw took a vicious check to the head from Boston Bruins defenceman Torrey Krug that knocked him out of action for a month.

"I saw his eyes rolling back and he just looked like he wasn't there coming off the ice," said one Canadiens player after Tuesday's game.

Livestream every single game of the 2018 Stanley Cup Playoffs—blackout free—plus all 162 Toronto Blue Jays games, key Raptors & NBA Playoffs matchups and the 100th Mastercard Memorial Cup, all in one subscription.

It was a morbid scene that sullied a gutsy 4-2 win for the Canadiens.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 14, 2018

They had come off a demoralizing six-game road trip. A 5-2 loss to the Columbus Blue Jackets Monday punctuated their 1-3-2 record over the last two weeks. And yet they managed to stifle a desperate Dallas team.

Artturi Lehkonen scored two goals, Brendan Gallagher managed his 26th and Nikita Scherbak put the game on ice with a gorgeous solo effort while Pateryn looked on from the box with 10:34 to play.

This was one worth celebrating, but concern over Shaw's health was sobering.

"The doctors evaluated him and I'm told they're continuing to evaluate him," said Canadiens coach Claude Julien. "But it's clear that he's banged up right now. They didn't give me any indication as to whether or not it's a concussion or what it is exactly.

"All I can say is that it was a heck of a collision and he was clearly shaken."

Shaw also left the ice favouring his left leg. A knee injury on that side had recently kept him out of action from Jan. 13 to Feb. 28. And it's impossible to fathom him being available to the Canadiens any time soon.

It's been that kind of year for this team, with starting goaltender Carey Price currently sidelined by concussion; with No. 1 defenceman Shea Weber out until next training camp after Tuesday's surgery to repair a tendon in his left foot was successfully completed; with 19-year-old defenceman Victor Mete done for the season after breaking a finger on Mar. 2; with captain Max Pacioretty unlikely to return after suffering a knee injury in that same game Mete got hurt in; with forward Ales Hemsky suffering post-concussion symptoms since Oct. 20; and with forward Phillip Danault (headaches) and defenceman David Schlemko (upper-body injury) day-to-day.

The losses have dominated the headlines this season. Between the injuries and the 42 games the Canadiens have dropped out of the 70 they've played, it's been rough. A big win over Dallas would've been a welcome change in the conversation.

Unfortunately, the image of Shaw being carried to the Canadiens room, appearing as though he was on another planet, is the one that resonates.

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 03.14.2018

1103618 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Person of Interest: Maple Leafs' Andreas Johnsson

Rory Boylen | @RoryBoylen March 13, 2018, 4:17 PM

The Toronto Maple Leafs called up a couple of players on emergency basis Tuesday, including Andreas Johnsson, who is often considered the team's best prospect yet to make his NHL debut.

When Sportsnet's Luke Fox asked Travis Dermott in mid-February which player on the Marlies could most easily make the jump to the NHL, the defenceman chose the 23-year-old Swede.

"That's a guy who could easily transfer into the NHL. He's got the elite speed, elite hands, elite mind for the game. If he got thrown into a couple NHL games," Dermott said in a recent Quick Shifts article, "he'd excel if not do just fine."

Andreas Johnsson will make his NHL debut for #leafs tomorrow, per Mike Babcock.

— Chris Johnston (@reporterchris) March 13, 2018

Johnsson will play his first game for the Leafs on Wednesday night at home against the Dallas Stars and in practice on Tuesday he was skating on a line with Tomas Plekanec and Kasperii Kapanen.

A skilled speedster with seemingly huge upside, Johnsson was selected with the 10th-last pick in the entire 2013 NHL Draft. Since then, he's shown excellent progression and is hoping to join the likes of countrymen Henrik Zetterberg and Patric Hornqvist as seventh-round picks that turned out to be hidden gems.

Here's what you need to know about Andreas Johnsson.

Age: 23

From: Gavle, Sweden

Height: 5-foot-10

Weight: 190 pounds

Position: Left wing

Shoots: Left

Drafted: 202nd overall by Maple Leafs in 2013

Contract status: Last season of entry-level contract. Set to be RFA this summer.

A DECORATED PLAYER IN SWEDEN'S TOP LEAGUE

Even though he was a seventh-round pick in the NHL draft, Johnsson left the SHL very accomplished for such a young player.

In his first year in the league, right after being drafted, Johnsson scored 15 goals and 24 points in 44 games and was named the league's rookie of the year. He was the top-scoring junior-aged player in the SHL that season, finishing three points ahead of Alexander Wennberg (in six fewer games), a player who was taken 14th overall in the same NHL draft as Johnsson and posted 59 points in the NHL last season.

William Nylander, who was picked eighth overall by Toronto the year after Johnsson was drafted, scored seven points in 22 SHL games in 2013-14.

The following season, Johnsson took another step and was third in scoring on Frolunda, leading the team with 22 goals.

In 2015-16 at the age of 21, Johnsson finished tied for fifth in SHL scoring with 44 points in 52 games, seven points shy of the league leader, and again led his own team with 19 goals. That season, Johnsson's Frolunda team won the league championship, though his scoring dropped off to just four points in 16 playoff games.

So how did a player selected so late in the NHL draft come on so suddenly and significantly in Sweden's top league, blossoming into one of Toronto's best prospects? Prior to his draft year, the knock on Johnsson had to do with his ability to keep up to game speed and that he lacked the drive seen in other players. But as it turned out, Johnsson had a case of undiagnosed asthma which, after proper medication, became less of an impediment. Once it was addressed, Johnsson exploded as a top-line producer.

HE GOT A CONCUSSION IN HIS SECOND NORTH AMERICAN GAME

Following his Swedish League championship, Johnsson left Frolunda and joined the AHL's Toronto Marlies for his first taste of North American action, which also happened to come in the Calder Cup Playoffs. He went pointless but earned two shots in his first game, and was on the receiving end of a devastating check in Game 2.

Johnsson was diagnosed with a concussion after this play and his 2015-16 season ended on that note.

His season started on time in 2016-17 after a full recovery, and in his first game of regular season action Johnsson scored two goals against the Utica Comets.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 14, 2018

HIS RISE AS AN AHL STAR

Johnsson scored three times in his first two regular season AHL games but, like any goal scorer, his production came in fits and starts. After scoring his third goal on Oct. 16, 2016, he didn't score again until Nov. 29. That 15-game goalless drought was the longest he's experienced in two AHL seasons, though he had two more goalless streaks of eight and nine games toward the end of 2016-17.

His 20 goals as a first-year AHLer ranked second on the team and his 47 points in 75 games were third. But he didn't fully arrive as a star in the league until this season.

The longest Johnsson has gone without a goal in 2017-18 is just four games and he's the leading goal scorer (26) and point-getter (54) for the first-place Marlies in 54 games played. He was named to the all-star game and scored two points.

He is the highest-scoring under-24 player in the AHL over the past two seasons.

WHAT'S HIS WEAKNESS?

There is a lot to like in Johnsson's game. He brings speed, all sorts of scoring upside and spoke about the strengths in his game at Tuesday morning's skate.

"Trying to be as intense as I can," he said. "I'd rather shoot before I pass ... fast."

Maple Leafs coach Mike Babcock acknowledged the great season Johnsson is having in the AHL and that the team didn't have the room to give him a shot in the NHL lineup. But now he's here, leap-frogging opportunities for Matt Martin, who has lost his full-time lineup spot, and Josh Leivo, who has spent the past two seasons with the NHL team, but has only gotten into 28 games.

With so much optimism around Johnsson's game and the label of "best Leafs prospect not yet in the NHL," what potential negative is there to his game?

Andreas Johnsson, for all his strengths, takes too many minor penalties. Leads all non-Ciune Marlies forwards. Early Laval PP in the second.

— Scott Wheeler (@scottcwheeler) March 12, 2018

As Johnsson mentioned, he likes to bring some intensity to his game, which on its face isn't a bad thing for an NHL hopeful to have. But sometimes that style can cross the line and it's led to too many penalties for the skilled player. He has 53 PIMs in 54 games this season, the third-most on the Marlies.

IT'S JOHNSON, NOT JOHNSON

When he first came to North America for a Marlies playoff run in 2016, it turns out just about everyone was spelling his name wrong. Even the nameplate on his new jersey had "Johnson" on it, but it wasn't until the following fall that he corrected everyone to add an extra 's' in there.

Leaf draft pick F Andreas Johnson is now Johnsson. Too polite to point out spelling error here for years, but getting razzed in Sweden.

— Lance Hornby (@sunhornby) September 17, 2016

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 03.14.2018

1103619 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Down Goes Brown: Imagining the ideal 2017-18 NHL playoffs

Sean McIndoe | @DownGoesBrown March 13, 2018, 9:43 AM

It's too early to start thinking ahead to how the 2018 playoffs could play out. It's always too early. Even when you're down to the final week of the season, it's too early. As soon as you start looking forward to a matchup that's all but locked in, the hockey gods will notice your happiness and reach down to smite it.

Remember a few years ago when we were all but assured of the first Toronto/Montreal matchup in 34 years, and then it all fell apart on the season's final day? That's because somebody out there got excited and ruined it. (That was me. I did that.)

So if your knee-jerk reaction to the premise of this post is "It's too early, dummy," then yes, you're right. But we're doing it anyway, if only so we can squeeze some enjoyment out of what might happen before we're hit with the inevitable letdown of what actually does.

Because here's the thing: The 2018 playoffs are shaping up to be fantastic. With a break here or there, we could get some truly amazing matchups. And not just in the first round, but all the way through. So today, let's go through the realistic scenarios and try to settle on the best possible way that the entire tournament could play out.

We're coming at this from the perspective of a neutral fan — obviously, your ideal playoffs would be the one where your team wins the Cup by going 16-0. And the matchups have to be plausible, so we can't move anybody up or down too many spots in the standings just to create a dream pairing. But as we'll see, we don't really have to. With just a few tweaks to the current standings, things get really interesting in a big hurry.

ROUND ONE

The matchup: #3 Maple Leafs vs. #2 Bruins

Let's start with an easy one, since this matchup has felt like it was inevitable for most of the season. There's plenty to like here. It's an Original Six matchup, it's two good teams who've had some entertaining games recently, and there would be some fun matchup questions, like Auston Matthews vs. Patrice Bergeron.

And of course, the ghost of 2013 would hang over everything. The Maple Leafs' legendary collapse in that series would be front and centre, even though most of the current roster wasn't around for it and Mitch Marner doesn't even look like he was born yet. Toronto fans will get sick of hearing about "It was 4-1" pretty much immediately, but it will add plenty of extra drama for everyone else.

Ideal outcome: This is a little trickier. If you're someone who doesn't like the Maple Leafs — and lord knows, there are plenty of you — then your ideal outcome here is a seventh game in which Toronto blows a 5-1 lead, followed by all their fans abandoning society forever and going off to live in the woods. But we're trying to build the best possible tournament, so we'll give the Maple Leafs a redemptive win.

The Jeff Blair Show

Kadri, Rielly thriving with clarity brought about by Babcock

Originally aired March 12 2018

Audio Player

The matchup: #WC2 Panthers vs. #1 Lightning

Florida's late-season charge to an unlikely playoff berth rolls on. They were a dozen points out in January, but have stormed back to make things interesting. They're a fun underdog story, led by the ageless Roberto Luongo. And if they go on a run, we all get to throw rats at people.

But here's the best part. If they sneak into the last wild-card spot, look what's waiting for them in the first round: The first ever Battle of Florida.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 14, 2018

The two teams have been in the same division for nearly a quarter of a century and have never met in the playoffs. Our ideal post-season makes it happen.

Ideal outcome: Underdog stories are great. Also great: the Lightning, who should win the series easily. Sorry, Panthers.

The matchup: #2 Penguins vs. #3 Flyers

This is a good rivalry that could use some rekindling, and there's no better way to do that than with a first-round matchup.

These two teams have met in the playoffs three times during the cap era, but not since 2012. You might remember that as one of the crazier playoff rounds in recent memory, featuring games that ended with finals like 8-4, 8-5 and 10-3, and plenty of bad blood along the way.

A repeat performance is too much to ask for, but anything that even came close would be fantastic.

Ideal outcome: As much as the Flyers would love to be the ones to end the Penguins' reign, we're going to send the defending champs a little deeper into this bracket. Pittsburgh wins.

The matchup: #WC1 Devils vs. #1 Capitals

Look, they can't all be dream matchups. But Devils/Caps would give us a nice old-school Patrick Division pairing, not to mention a fun Taylor Hall vs. Alex Ovechkin head-to-head, which would lead to a bunch of "best left winger in hockey" takes that would make Johnny Gaudreau fans really mad.

But if you wanted to swap in the Blue Jackets or Hurricanes here, go ahead. It won't really matter, because...

Ideal outcome: The Capitals have to advance for the second-round matchup we all know is coming.

Livestream every single game of the 2018 Stanley Cup Playoffs—blackout free—plus all 162 Toronto Blue Jays games, key Raptors & NBA Playoffs matchups and the 100th Mastercard Memorial Cup, all in one subscription.

The matchup: #2 Jets vs. #3 Wild

Like the Battle of Florida, this is another natural geographic rivalry that's never actually happened in the post-season. This year looks like the year that changes, with the odds of these teams meeting in the first round creeping past the 50-percent range.

Ideal outcome: Sorry, Minnesota, but this year's Jets are way too much fun to only last a round.

The matchup: #WC2 Flames vs. #1 Predators

Realistically, you could pair just about any team with the Predators and end up with a great series, because the Predators are as entertaining as they come. If you want to swap in Dallas or the underdog Avalanche here, that works, too.

So why are we going with the fading Flames instead? Is this some sort of blatant Canadian homer pick, thanks to this post appearing on the website of the league's national-rights holder?

[Glances nervously at Sportsnet TV executive hovering nearby.]

Uh, no. We just really like the Flames. Simple as that.

Ideal outcome: We can't have an ideal post-season without at least one major first-round upset, and it's tempting to slot that in here. After all, the Predators did it to the Blackhawks last year, and a Calgary win here would set up a classic Smythe Division showdown with the Jets in round two. But since we're already pushing things by having the Flames here at all, we'll concede that the loaded Predators can't leave the party this early. Nashville moves on.

Sportsnet's newest podcast is a weekly deep dive into the biggest hockey news in the world. New episodes every Wednesday.

The matchup: #2 Sharks vs. #3 Ducks

The three-way Battle of California has been fun for years. These two teams have actually met only once in the playoffs, back in 2009 when the underdog Ducks knocked off the Presidents' Trophy-winning Sharks in the opening round. That series is probably best remembered for how Game 6 got started.

But even with just the one post-season matchup, the games between these two always seem to feature some extra intensity.

Ideal outcome: Nearly a decade after the Ducks broke their hearts, let's give the Sharks their payback win.

The matchup: #WC1 Kings vs. #1 Golden Knights

We saw these two teams hook up last month in an old-fashioned home-and-home that was all sorts of fun. The Kings won both of those games, but would go into this series as heavy underdogs.

Ideal outcome: The Kings pull off the upset.

I know, I know. I'm going to lose some of you here. The Knights have been one of the season's best stories. They're not just the best expansion team in NHL history — they're probably the best ever in any sport.

But that's why an upset here works. To borrow a local term, the Knights are already playing with house money. Do you really want to see an expansion team win the Cup? Maybe, since that would be a hilarious own on the other 30 teams that let it happen. But it would feel like too much, too soon, and the backlash would probably be ugly.

No, it's better for all of us if the Knights get to continue being the lovable overachievers. And that means they have to eat some early playoff disappointment, if only to give them something to overcome next year. And a shocking loss to the Kings would give Vegas their first honest-to-goodness rivalry.

Let's not get greedy. The Knights have been great, but it has to end sometime.

Fantasy Hockey Pool

Play the Sportsnet Fantasy Hockey Pool for your chance to score big with over \$22,000 worth of prizes to be awarded!

ROUND TWO

The matchup: #3 Maple Leafs vs. #1 Lightning

You'd have the best team in the league against its biggest market. Steven Stamkos against the team he spurned. Steve Yzerman against his old Norris Division foes. Jon Cooper's humour against Mike Babcock's scowl. And an absolute ton of offensive young talent that could turn this into a track meet.

Other than the two teams having the same uniforms, it would be just about perfect.

Ideal outcome: I'm a Leafs fan, so of course I'd want to see Toronto pull off the upset. There's plenty of reason to think they could do it, too. And I feel like there may be other factors that I'm missing.

[Notices that Sportsnet TV executive is ominously cracking his knuckles.]

...Right. That, too.

But still, this year feels like it's a little early to pull the trigger on the Leafs making a full-fledged Cup run. The team is young, and while windows are hard to predict, they should have plenty of time. The Lightning are young, too, but they're a team built for right now. Having them win a close series here would inject a little adversity into the feel-good Leafs' story, and raise the stakes on a rematch or two down the line.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 14, 2018

Toronto fans starved for a championship push already have the Raptors to rest their hopes on. We can make them wait one more year for the Maple Leafs to get to that level. The Lightning get the nod here.

The matchup: #2 Penguins vs. #1 Capitals

The Pens/Caps rivalry is starting to feel like a cruel social experiment. How many times can you have the same team face the same opponent with the same results before they crack? We thought we might find out last year, when there were rumblings that the Capitals might blow it all up after another crushing loss to the Penguins. But cooler heads prevailed, at least temporarily. Do we even want to find out what would happen if the Caps lost to the Penguins yet again?

Ideal outcome: Yes, yes we do. Pens in seven. Preferably on an Ovechkin own goal in overtime.

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

The matchup: #2 Jets vs. #1 Predators

You've got two teams loaded with skill and speed. One is trying to get back to the final after falling just short of a championship a year ago, while the other would be trying to get out of the second round for the first time ever. And it would all play out in front of quite possibly the two loudest fan bases in the entire league, playing "Can you top this?" with the decibel levels as the series went back and forth.

And if you're still not sold, did you see that game a few weeks ago?

Hook it into my veins.

Ideal outcome: Seven games, end-to-end action, and a whole bunch of sideline reporters holding the smoldering remains of sound-level meters in their hands.

[Looks up at Sportsnet executive now tapping a baseball bat in his palm.]

Also, the Jets win.

The matchup: #WC1 Kings vs. #2 Sharks

Round two of our post-season Battle of California, and this one is the main event. It would be the fifth time in eight years that these two teams crossed paths, including the 2014 series that saw the Kings come back from 3-0 down on their way to their second Cup win. So you've got history, lots of bad blood, and two equally matched teams.

Ideal outcome: Assuming he's back by this point, Joe Thornton would be easily the league's best Old Guy Without a Cup story. The Kings already have their rings, so let's nudge Jumbo at least a little closer to his.

Dimitri Filipovic provides entertaining and thoughtful dialogue about the game of hockey with an analytical edge. Not as nerdy as it sounds.

ROUND THREE

The matchup: Penguins vs. Lightning

What would happen if you took roughly half of the best players in the league and dumped them all into one playoff series, with a trip to the Stanley Cup final on the line? Hockey heaven, pretty much. We got this exact matchup in the 2016 conference final, and it turned into a seven-game classic. But that one still felt like it left something on the table, so bring on the rematch.

Ideal outcome: This one really depends on whether you're getting sick of the Penguins' mini-dynasty, or would want to see them take a run at the first three-peat in 35 years. Symmetry says we should give the Lightning the nod here, as payback for their 2016 loss, and that would work well. But while you really can't go wrong with either team, we're going to send the Penguins back to the final one more time.

The matchup: Sharks vs. Jets

This would be a dream matchup for fans of musical theatre-based puns, not to mention an opportunity for Thornton and Brent Burns to take Patrik Laine aside and deliver some hard truths about beard maintenance. But it would also make for a great series, with the up-and-coming Jets facing a Sharks team that's running out of chances.

But there'd be another layer to this matchup. Remember back in January when some Sharks players called Winnipeg the league's worst city to play in? Winnipeg fans sure do. And while that whole controversy felt a little bit contrived, it led to some genuine bad feelings that the rest of us would make sure to dredge up during a playoff series.

Mix in Evander Kane returning to face the team that got tired of his act, and there'd be plenty to chew on.

Ideal outcome: Here's a secret about Canadian hockey fans: We don't actually want another Canadian team to end the country's Cup drought. We want our team to win. If that can't happen, the last thing we want is to see some other Canadian city get to be the one that brings the Cup home. That's what makes the annual "Canada's Team" story so lame — it misses the point of how bitter and vindictive most of us are.

But it feels like the Jets could be the one exception to the rule. The team is good enough that a Cup run wouldn't feel like a fluke, but not so good that their fans are already spoiled. They wouldn't have bought their way to a title thanks to a big market, but also haven't lucked into a bunch of lottery wins that make their success feel undeserved. They're an entertaining team, but they don't get shoved down your throat by the national media. Plus, it's Winnipeg. Who hates Winnipeg? (Other than the people who live there.)

Within a year or two, the Jets will be so good that they'll be easy enough to hate. But this year feels like their window. If any team could actually unite the country's fans behind them — or at least, not unite us all against them — this feels like the one.

Let's find out. Winnipeg wins and heads to the Stanley Cup final.

Join Jeff Marek and Sam Cosentino for all the CHL and NHL prospect talk you can handle.

STANLEY CUP FINAL

The matchup: Jets vs. Penguins

Sidney Crosby has been to four Stanley Cup finals, but never against a Canadian team. That could end this year, in a matchup between two of the league's highest-scoring teams. In a way, this one would feel a lot like those Oilers/Islanders finals in the early '80s, with the veteran champs fighting to hold onto the torch rather than pass it to the young heir apparent. But would it be like '83, with the grizzled vets teaching the kids a lesson in how to win? Or '84, with the new generation staking its claim?

Ideal outcome: That's your call. Our job here was to deliver the 15 best matchups we could find, and that's what we've done. Whether that dream tournament ends with Crosby and the Penguins raising a third straight Cup or with the Jets earning their first can be up to you. There's no right answer here.

(Sure there is: Jets in seven.)

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 03.14.2018

1103620 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / The significance of Alex Ovechkin's 600th goal: Can he topple Gretzky?

Rory Boylen | @RoryBoylen March 13, 2018, 12:44 PM



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 14, 2018

Alex Ovechkin went into Monday night's game against the Winnipeg Jets tied with Patrik Laine for the league lead with 40 goals. By the end of the night, Ovechkin had outscored Laine 2-1 to take sole possession of the top spot, but also hit a career milestone as he reached 600 goals on his career.

It was another impressive and historical marker for the 32-year-old sniper.

Youngest to 600 Career Goals in #NHL History:

Wayne Gretzky – 27 years, 302 days

Mario Lemieux – 31 years, 122 days

Alex Ovechkin – 32 years, 176 days

— Sportsnet Stats (@SNstats) March 13, 2018

Ovechkin reached the 600-goal mark in his 990th career NHL game, making him the fourth-fastest and third-youngest to the mark in the history of the league.

In an era where far fewer goals are scored than in the heydays of Wayne Gretzky or Mario Lemieux or Brett Hull, Ovechkin stands out on a level that more closely compares to those Hall of Famers of the past than the top scorers of today. Since entering the NHL in 2005-06, Ovechkin has 195 more goals than the next-highest scorer, Sidney Crosby. And while Ovechkin averages 0.61 goals per game in his career, Steven Stamkos's 0.50 average is a distant second for active players who have participated in at least 300 games.

According to NHL.com, some other significant notes around Ovechkin at 600:

- Ovechkin has scored the opening goal of a game 109 times, tied a game 112 times and put his team ahead 208 times (including 22 overtime goals). Additionally, Ovechkin has pulled his team within one goal 53 times and given the Capitals a two-goal lead on 112 occasions.
- Ovechkin has scored 44 of his goals in the opening five minutes of a game – including 10 in the first 60 seconds – and 76 in the last five minutes of regulation, with 35 of those coming in the final minute.
- Ovechkin's 119 career multi-goal games are tied for 16th on the league's all-time list (with Luc Robitaille); Jari Kurri and Bobby Hull share 14th place with 121 apiece, while Gretzky holds the record with 189. Since 2005-06, Ovechkin has 39 more multi-goal games than the next-closest player (Sidney Crosby: 80).
- The road to 600 goals has seen Ovechkin score in 46.2 per cent of his appearances (457 of 990 GP). That includes 99 contests with exactly two goals, 16 with exactly three goals and four with four goals – a total of 119 multi-goal performances (20 hat tricks)

It's worth noting, too, that as much as 19-year-old Finn Patrik Laine is compared to Ovechkin because of the similarity in their release and for their propensity to score, Ovie still stands out. Though Laine has 77 career goals, which is the third-most ever scored by an NHL player in their teens, Ovechkin never played in the league before he turned 20. A late September birthday, what would have been Ovechkin's rookie season was cancelled by the 2004-05 lockout and the following year he scored 52 as a first-year player.

Ovechkin is asked if he sees a "young Ovi" in Laine. "I'm still young," Ovechkin says back.

— Isabelle Khurshudyan (@ikhurshudyan) March 12, 2018

And while Laine's achievement is certainly impressive, he's still well off the furious pace set by Ovechkin. While No. 8 became the fourth player in league history to hit 600 in less than 1,000 games, at Laine's current pace, the Jet would hit roughly 540 in his 1,000th game.

Alex Ovechkin leads the NHL in goals since 1998-99 despite beginning his NHL career in 2005. He is the only player in the NHL to score 30 or more goals in each season since 2005-06 and his average of 0.61 goals per game is fifth in NHL history (minimum: 300 games played).

— CapitalsPR (@CapitalsPR) March 13, 2018

Amazingly, it's actually not unreasonable to compare Ovechkin to Gretzky as an all-time goal scorer. While "The Great One" had much better numbers early in his career, he last hit 40 goals in his age 30 season and the 30-goal mark in his age 33 season. At 32, Ovechkin has a shot to hit 50 for the eighth time in his career (one shy of Gretzky), and he hasn't scored less than 32 in any season, shortened or not.

During the 2016-17 season, Sportsnet's Elliotte Friedman asked Ovechkin about the possibility of one day breaking Gretzky's all-time NHL goals record of 894.

"I don't think somebody will beat this record," Ovechkin said at the time. "In this hockey right now, in this league, I think it's impossible."

If Ovechkin is able to chase down Gretzky, he has to make up most of his ground in the back half of his career and there are already signs his pace is catching up. While Gretzky hit 600 goals in 272 fewer games than Ovechkin, it took the Capitals star only 189 games to get from 500 to 600, whereas it took Gretzky 143 games to make that leg of the journey.

Gretzky scored 91 more goals in his career after turning 33. Ovechkin, who will be 33 at the start of next season, needs 295 more to pass Gretzky's record. If he's able to score eight more times in his final 13 games this season to hit 50 on the year, Ovechkin would need to average 36.875 a year over the next eight seasons, taking him through his age 40 season, to reach 895. Considering he's only scored less than 36 three times in his career (once in a 48-game season), it's not completely outrageous to suggest that passing Gretzky is a possibility.

It's still a longshot, of course.

Health, more than anything else, may be the biggest factor behind where Ovechkin ends up on the all-time list when his career comes to an end — and he's missed only 28 games in 13 seasons to date.

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 03.14.2018

1103621 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Shoulder injury a source of frustration for Leafs' Auston Matthews

Chris Johnston | @reporterchris March 13, 2018, 1:47 PM

TORONTO – The shoulder separation that's put Auston Matthews on the sidelines for nearly three weeks is an obvious source of frustration for the Toronto Maple Leafs centre.

And not just because it's his third different injury absence of the season. The 20-year-old has also dealt with a similar shoulder issue in the past.

"Yeah, I have," Matthews revealed Tuesday. "A long time ago."

That means he has a pretty good understanding of the road ahead.

Matthews still hasn't been cleared for contact – he donned a red sweater yet again at practice – and that's an essential step before he can rejoin the Leafs lineup. It's not just a matter of getting back playing, however, but how long it takes him to feel comfortable in game situations.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 14, 2018

There's no guarantee he's back to feeling 100 per cent before the playoffs begin next month.

Even with a shoulder harness, players that suffer a second-degree separation often experience discomfort well beyond the rehab period. It can be an annoying, painful injury.

Matthews didn't initially realize how bad of shape his shoulder was in after getting sandwiched between Cal Clutterbuck and Adam Pelech in open ice on Feb. 22. The double hit came one shift after he'd scored his 28th goal of the season to tie a game with the New York Islanders late in regulation.

"Pain in my shoulder," said Matthews, when asked what he felt in the moment. "That's about it."

It was nothing more than a case of being in the wrong place at the wrong time.

"I think just because there was contact from both sides," he said. "It's tough to brace yourself from both sides there, so it was just kind of a flukey play and unfortunate. But, you know, it happens."

Matthews is doing his best to stay positive during an absence that now stands at six games and counting. There's no reason to expect him back until next Tuesday, at the earliest, meaning he'll likely sit out at least three more.

Unlike the concussion and back injury that sidelined him earlier this season, Matthews has at least been able to skate with teammates – a small consolation while he works to regain strength in his shoulder.

"I've felt better every day," said Matthews. "It's nice to get on the ice with the guys and kind of take reps ... instead of just skating by yourself. You can get your timing and stuff back, which is a big key when I return to play."

Livestream every single game of the 2018 Stanley Cup Playoffs—blackout free—plus all 162 Toronto Blue Jays games, key Raptors & NBA Playoffs matchups and the 100th Mastercard Memorial Cup, all in one subscription.

But there was a clear sense of disappointment in his voice while he spoke with reporters for the first time since the injury. It's been a sophomore season of stops and starts, and he could end up sitting out 20 games or more in Year 2 after playing all 82 as a rookie.

"It's obviously frustrating, there's no question about that," said Matthews. "Stuff happens. Everything happens for a reason, I guess. You just kind of stick with it and, like I said, do your best to get back. To get healthy. I've been doing a good job of staying in shape with my conditioning, working with the trainers and stuff."

"We'll see how it goes."

This being Toronto, there's no shortage of pop theories floating around about why this latest injury absence might actually be a good thing for Matthews. (Spoiler: It's not). The player was quick to shut down any suggestion that he'll benefit from the extra rest once the playoffs arrive.

"No, I don't really buy into that notion," said Matthews. "I'd rather play."

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 03.14.2018

1103622 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Bobby Ryan on trade rumours with Erik Karlsson: 'We thought we were gone'

Sportsnet Staff | @Sportsnet March 13, 2018

Perhaps the biggest trade that didn't happen at the Feb. 26 NHL deadline was the Ottawa Senators moving Erik Karlsson. The 27-year-old defenceman has one more season on his contract before he becomes eligible for unrestricted free agent status and as the Ottawa Senators contemplate going into a rebuild, Karlsson is the player likely to bring back the most in a trade.

As the deadline approached, rumours swirled that Senators GM Pierre Dorion was trying to package Karlsson with Bobby Ryan to get the latter's contract (four years left at \$7.25 million) off the books. And it turns out, Ryan believed he and Karlsson had been moved on Sunday, the day before the deadline.

According to an Ottawa Sun article by Don Brennan, Ryan thought they were headed to a Western Conference team.

"I heard on Sunday it was done and somebody backed out at the last second," Ryan told Brennan. "Karl and I were like, 'pack it up'. We thought we were gone. That's just the way it goes. Then you're like, I've got to move again?"

"I guess I'll just wait and see how it goes in the summer. That's all you can do."

Boomer & Warrenner in the Morning

Stephen Brunt on the Ottawa Senators: 'It's a tire fire'

The Vegas Golden Knights were a Western Conference team often linked to Karlsson in rumours, and the Colorado Avalanche were a secondary team mentioned in the same breath.

The Senators were rumoured to be interested in making all sorts of deals, including the possibility of moving either Mark Stone or Mike Hoffman. In the end, the team traded Derick Brassard to Pittsburgh in a three-way deal that landed Ottawa goalie prospect Filip Gustavsson and two draft picks, then flipped Ian Cole and Nick Shore for prospect Nick Moutrey and a couple of picks.

After the deadline passed, owner Eugene Melnyk sent a letter to Senators fans in which he appeared to commit to rebuilding the team. The extent of this could be found out this summer, when more trades tend to happen since teams are looking to add to or re-shape their rosters, and can go over the cap by 10 per cent in the off-season.

"Enduring a tough year has given us a chance for clear-eyed evaluation. This is an ongoing process but I can tell you one thing: we are not looking to just tweak our lineup nor mortgage our future for stop-gap solutions," Melnyk wrote.

"The kind of change required to reclaim our standing needs a change in approach, requires difficult decisions and commitment to a plan. As an organization, and community, it meant saying goodbye to some very good players this year – quality men who gave their all on the ice and in the community."

"As a team, we need to get younger, faster and more skilled. We have already announced several key steps to making that happen."

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 03.14.2018

1103623 Websites

TSN.CA / Rosen called up as flu bug sidelines regulars

Mark Masters



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 14, 2018

TSN Toronto reporter Mark Masters checks in daily with news and notes from Maple Leafs practices and game-day skates. The Leafs practised at the MasterCard Centre on Tuesday.

Nikita Zaitsev remained sidelined due to illness at Tuesday's practice and fellow defenceman Travis Dermott joined him in sick bay as a flu bug makes its way through the Leafs dressing room.

"Just trying to constantly wash your hands and do whatever you can to stay healthy," said centre Nazem Kadri. "We're around each other so often it can be difficult."

Roman Polak continued to skate alongside blueline partner Jake Gardiner at practice while Calle Rosen was recalled from the Toronto Marlies on an emergency basis and slotted in beside Connor Carrick.

Head coach Mike Babcock wasn't sure if Zaitsev or Dermott would be available for Wednesday's game against the Dallas Stars at the Air Canada Centre, but the team's medical staff will update the coaching staff on Wednesday.

"They're checking them out to see what's going on," he said.

Rosen hasn't played in the NHL since October when he got a four-game audition before being sent to the minors.

"Like a lot of guys who think they're going to play in the National Hockey League and then they go down, he struggled for a bit," Babcock said. "But, he's an elite skater, got a great brain. He's playing a way stronger game. I don't know if he's stronger, but he's playing a way stronger game and that's confidence. That's probably just knowing where to go and where to stand."

Leafs Ice Chips: Flu bug hits 'D' as Zaitsev, Dermott miss practice

Nikita Zaitsev missed Saturday's game due to illness and also sat out practice on Monday and Tuesday. Now, Travis Dermott has joined him on the sidelines as the flu bug makes its way through the Leafs room. Calle Rosen was called up on an emergency basis on Tuesday and could play on Wednesday against the Dallas Stars.

Leafs Ice Chips: Flu bug hits 'D' as Zaitsev, Dermott miss practice

Nikita Zaitsev missed Saturday's game due to illness and also sat out practice on Monday and Tuesday. Now, Travis Dermott has joined him on the sidelines as the flu bug makes its way through the Leafs room. Calle Rosen was called up on an emergency basis on Tuesday and could play on Wednesday against the Dallas Stars.

Babcock compares Ovechkin to Bossy

Washington Capitals captain Alexander Ovechkin scored his 600th career goal on Monday night, further solidifying his spot among the greatest scorers in NHL history.

"It's amazing," said Babcock, "the puck just goes in when he has it. He can get it off legs, through legs, around people like nothing I've ever seen. Obviously, (Mike) Bossy is a guy I watched as a kid lots and there must be lots of guys like that, but that's who I think of, a guy who can shoot it in the end and the guy in Winnipeg (Patrik Laine) looks like he's following right behind that."

Kadri often gets the tough matchups for the Leafs and has butted heads with Ovechkin on many occasions. Where does the Great Eight rank in terms of the great goal scorers he's faced?

"Probably the best," Kadri said. "That shot's like nothing I've ever seen before. It's incredible the areas of the ice that he decides to shoot the puck. I couldn't even dream of shooting the puck in those circumstances."

Players and coaches reflect on Ovechkin's milestone

Less than a day after Alex Ovechkin became the sixth player in league history to score 600 or more career goals, the Leafs, Flames, and Stars talked about his outstanding career, and his latest career achievement.

Lines at Tuesday's practice:

Forwards

Hyman-Nylander-Marner

Marleau-Kadri-Komarov

van Riemsdyk-Bozak-Brown

Johnsson-Plekanec-Kapanen

Martin, Matthews

Defencemen

Rielly-Hainsey

Gardiner-Polak

Rosen-Carrick

Leivo-Moore

Goaltenders

Andersen

McElhinney

Power-play units at Tuesday's practice:

Rielly

Bozak-Kadri-Marner

van Riemsdyk

Gardiner

Marleau-Johnsson-Nylander

Komarov

TSN.CA LOADED: 03.14.2018

1103624 Websites

TSN.CA / Matthews working his way back from 'fluky' injury

Kristen Shilton

TORONTO – Slowly but surely, Auston Matthews is working his way back into the Maple Leafs lineup.

The 20-year-old centre suffered a shoulder injury in a collision against the New York Islanders on Feb. 22 and has been rehabbing with a vengeance ever since. Tuesday marked the second straight day he was involved in a full practice, although Matthews has yet to take part in all the Leafs' drills at normal speed.

"I'm feeling fine. Felt better every day," Matthews said in his first media availability since the injury. "It's nice to get on the ice with the guys and take reps and be [involved] rather than just skating by yourself, so you can get your timing and stuff back which is a big key in returning to play."

Matthews was succinct in detailing what being sandwiched between the Islanders' Adam Pelech and Cal Clutterbuck felt like, saying it was "pain in my shoulder, that's really it." He's dealt with a similar injury many years ago, but Matthews admitted to not sensing immediately there was a problem that would sideline him.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 14, 2018

"[You're] taking contact from both sides – tough to brace yourself from both sides," he said. "[It was] kind of a fluky play. Unfortunate, but it happens."

This will be the longest leave of the season for Matthews, who previously missed four games with a back ailment in November and six games with a concussion in December.

Mike Babcock said Matthews won't play until after Wednesday's game against Dallas, with Buffalo (on the road Thursday) and Montreal (at home on Saturday) coming up on the schedule.

Babcock has also said before that players need at least one full practice at regular speed before they can return. If that holds true for Matthews, the Leafs aren't scheduled to practice again until Sunday, so his earliest potential game for a return would be Tuesday in Tampa.

"It's obviously frustrating, there's no question about that," Matthews said of missing time. "But stuff happens. Everything happens for a reason I guess. You just stick with it and do your best to get back and get healthy. I've been doing a good job of staying in shape and [working on] my conditioning with the trainers as well as rehabbing."

That's been the primary difference for Matthews this time around. His first two injuries didn't allow him to skate right away, but the separated shoulder didn't hold him back from keeping his legs moving each day while the Leafs took off on a 10-day road swing right after it happened.

Since they returned, Matthews has been back on the ice with his teammates in a red non-contact sweater, at first for only a limited 10-12 minutes before progressing to staying for the entirety of this week's practices.

"He's coming every day. I can tell just by the amount of physical contact he was in today versus yesterday," Babcock said. "He's going in the right direction feeling good and he'll be over-ready before he gets in."

Toronto has put up an 8-6-2 record without Matthews to date, including 2-2-2 over this last absence, which proves they can at least survive without him. With the Leafs firmly ensconced in a playoff spot as the Atlantic Division's third seed, there's little need to rush Matthews back into action.

But Matthews bristled at the suggestion it might be a good thing he's getting rest now prior to the postseason ("I don't really buy into that notion; I'd rather play"); rather he's gunning to re-claim his spot on Toronto's top line sooner rather than later.

"It's not fun watching when you can be out there," he said. "We went through a tough stretch there but it was a good win for us against Pittsburgh on Saturday and hopefully we can continue that tomorrow."

TSN.CA LOADED: 03.14.2018

1103625 Websites

TSN.CA / Johnsson set for Leafs debut on Wednesday

Kristen Shilton

Andreas Johnsson had been waiting for the phone call he got Monday night ever since he was a hockey-obsessed kid growing up in Sweden, watching NHL highlights every night.

It was the Maple Leafs' front office on the other end, telling Johnsson he'd been recalled to the big club for the first time in his career. The winger will make his NHL debut on Wednesday against the Dallas Stars.

"I didn't expect the call. It was just an energy rush through the whole body, felt excited," Johnsson said after practice on Tuesday. "Couldn't really sleep last night."

Johnsson leads the AHL Marlies in points this season with 54 (26 goals, 28 assists) and also leads the team in power-play goals (eight). Johnsson skated on Toronto's fourth line with Tomas Plekanec and his former Toronto Marlies linemate Kasper Kapanen on Tuesday. He also filled Auston Matthews' vacated spot on the Leafs' second power-play unit.

His debut Wednesday will be the culmination of a long road for Johnsson, who took his time translating success in the Swedish Hockey League on to North American ice.

Johnsson was drafted in the seventh round, 202nd overall, by the Leafs in 2013. He was named the SHL's Rookie of the Year in 2014-15 after putting up 24 points (15 goals, nine assists) in 44 games with Frolunda HC.

The Leafs signed Johnsson to a three-year, entry-level contract on June 4, 2015. He stayed in Sweden for the 2015-16 season, finishing sixth in SHL scoring with 44 points (19 goals, 25 assists) and helping Frolunda win a fourth league championship.

The Leafs brought Johnsson over to North American at the end of that season for the Marlies' playoff run. In just his second game, Johnsson took an elbow to the head from the Albany Devils' Dan Kelly and missed the remainder of the season with a concussion.

The injury continued to hamper Johnsson the following season in his first full AHL campaign. He amassed only 15 points (seven goals, eight assists) in the first 31 games, but finished strong with 27 points (10 goals, 17 assists) in the final 31 games, and added six more points in 11 playoff games.

"It's been very tough," Johnsson said of generating offence in the AHL. "First when I got here, I scored three goals the first weekend so I thought, maybe this is a piece of pie. But it's really tough, and I had a really long drought [of 15 games without a goal right after]. You have to be good every game and work hard and create a lot of chances because you don't get that many opportunities every game."

Johnsson boasts a feisty edge and a knack for getting to the front of the net, reminiscent of what James van Riemsdyk does nightly for the Leafs.

While confirming Johnsson will play on Wednesday, head coach Mike Babcock didn't delve any further into whether Toronto plans to keep him around after that. The Leafs already have three extra forwards – Josh Leivo, Matt Martin and Dominic Moore – waiting for chances of their own.

"[Andreas has] had a good year. We haven't had a lot of opportunity to give him a chance even now," said Babcock. "Obviously we're going to have to sit someone else to do it so that makes it hard. But we have an opportunity here this week with three games so we'll have a look at him and therefore if we need him at playoff time, we have an understanding of what he can do."

The Leafs are allowed four recalls following the trade deadline, with Johnsson their third. There is no limit on the number of emergency recalls a team can make, and the Leafs needed to make one of those as well on Tuesday.

With both Nikita Zaitsev and Travis Dermott battling illness, Calle Rosen was brought up as an emergency recall hours before practice.

Rosen was sent to the Marlies initially after training camp, and then recalled following the Leafs' season opener in Winnipeg. He skated in four games with the club from Oct. 7 – 17, tallying one assist, before being returned to the AHL.

Like Johnsson, fellow Swedish import Rosen struggled adjusting to the North American game since coming over from the SHL last summer, but Babcock is pleased with his development of late.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 14, 2018

Whether he plays against Dallas will depend on the health status of Dermott and Zaitsev ahead of puck drop. If both can't go, Rosen will slot in with Connor Carrick.

"He's an elite skater, has a great brain and he's playing a way stronger game," said Babcock. "I don't know if he is stronger, but he's playing a way stronger game and that's confidence. That's knowing where to go and where to stand. He's getting better and better and that's what you want."

TSN.CA LOADED: 03.14.2018

1103626 Websites

TSN.CA / Matthews working his way back from 'fluky' injury

Kristen Shilton

TORONTO – Slowly but surely, Auston Matthews is working his way back into the Maple Leafs lineup.

The 20-year-old centre suffered a shoulder injury in a collision against the New York Islanders on Feb. 22 and has been rehabbing with a vengeance ever since. Tuesday marked the second straight day he was involved in a full practice, although Matthews has yet to take part in all the Leafs' drills at normal speed.

"I'm feeling fine. Felt better every day," Matthews said in his first media availability since the injury. "It's nice to get on the ice with the guys and take reps and be [involved] rather than just skating by yourself, so you can get your timing and stuff back which is a big key in returning to play."

Matthews was succinct in detailing what being sandwiched between the Islanders' Adam Pelech and Cal Clutterbuck felt like, saying it was "pain in my shoulder, that's really it." He's dealt with a similar injury many years ago, but Matthews admitted to not sensing immediately there was a problem that would sideline him.

"[You're] taking contact from both sides – tough to brace yourself from both sides," he said. "[It was] kind of a fluky play. Unfortunate, but it happens."

This will be the longest leave of the season for Matthews, who previously missed four games with a back ailment in November and six games with a concussion in December.

Mike Babcock said Matthews won't play until after Wednesday's game against Dallas, with Buffalo (on the road Thursday) and Montreal (at home on Saturday) coming up on the schedule.

Babcock has also said before that players need at least one full practice at regular speed before they can return. If that holds true for Matthews, the Leafs aren't scheduled to practice again until Sunday, so his earliest potential game for a return would be Tuesday in Tampa.

"It's obviously frustrating, there's no question about that," Matthews said of missing time. "But stuff happens. Everything happens for a reason I guess. You just stick with it and do your best to get back and get healthy. I've been doing a good job of staying in shape and [working on] my conditioning with the trainers as well as rehabbing."

That's been the primary difference for Matthews this time around. His first two injuries didn't allow him to skate right away, but the separated shoulder didn't hold him back from keeping his legs moving each day while the Leafs took off on a 10-day road swing right after it happened.

Since they returned, Matthews has been back on the ice with his teammates in a red non-contact sweater, at first for only a limited 10-12

minutes before progressing to staying for the entirety of this week's practices.

"He's coming every day. I can tell just by the amount of physical contact he was in today versus yesterday," Babcock said. "He's going in the right direction feeling good and he'll be over-ready before he gets in."

Toronto has put up an 8-6-2 record without Matthews to date, including 2-2-2 over this last absence, which proves they can at least survive without him. With the Leafs firmly ensconced in a playoff spot as the Atlantic Division's third seed, there's little need to rush Matthews back into action.

But Matthews bristled at the suggestion it might be a good thing he's getting rest now prior to the postseason ("I don't really buy into that notion; I'd rather play"); rather he's gunning to re-claim his spot on Toronto's top line sooner rather than later.

"It's not fun watching when you can be out there," he said. "We went through a tough stretch there but it was a good win for us against Pittsburgh on Saturday and hopefully we can continue that tomorrow."

TSN.CA LOADED: 03.14.2018

1103627 Websites

TSN.CA / Canucks fighting the puck & frustration during scoreless stretch

Jeff Paterson

LOS ANGELES – There is an irony in asking Vancouver Canucks captain Henrik Sedin about the team's mounting score-less stretch or to be the one to end it. While one of the faces of the franchise and still the leader of this group, the 37-year-old has now gone 52 games without scoring a goal, and, right now, it feels like his team has done the same. So Henrik shouldn't be high on anyone's list of candidates to put an end to the Canucks drought which has now been extended to 152 minutes and nine seconds after back-to-back shutout losses in Arizona on Sunday and last night in Los Angeles.

However, running out of options in a desperate search for offence, Canucks head coach Travis Green turned to Henrik Sedin at Staples Center and placed his trust in the veteran centre. Sedin logged 17:47 of ice-time, the most he's seen in two months since a January 12th game in Columbus when the Canucks were missing Bo Horvat and Brandon Sutter.

The Canucks beat the Blue Jackets that night, but last night they continued down a dark path that has seen them score just three goals on a four game losing streak. And Henrik Sedin didn't have the answer during the game nor did he have many answers after it.

"We have to score goals," he said in what might be the understatement of the year in the National Hockey League. "We did a better job tonight, but it's not good enough. Travis gave our line the chance to get something going tonight and to maybe win this game for us and we didn't step up and that's got to fall on the guys that need to produce."

Seven times now in 70 games this season the Canucks have been unable to generate a goal. They've been blanked by New Jersey, San Jose, Anaheim, Winnipeg, Buffalo – and now in their past two outings in Arizona and Los Angeles. Last season, they were shutout 10 times including four times in their final 13 games of the season. And dating back to the start of the 2015-16 season, the Canucks have now been held off the scoresheet 26 times in 234 regular season games.

Since Jussi Jokinen scored midway through the second period of Friday's 5-2 loss to Minnesota, the Canucks have not found the back of



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 14, 2018

the net. They've given up seven straight goals since then. Jokinen was a healthy scratch at Staples Center on Monday meaning among the Canucks 12 forwards dressed in Los Angeles, not one had scored a goal since a March 5th victory over the New York Islanders.

Bo Horvat and Daniel Sedin have each gone five games without a goal. Henrik Sedin has now gone five games without a point. And those three likely represent the Canucks best hopes for offence in an injury-riddled line-up.

"I don't care who scores or who gets the goals," a visibly frustrated Henrik said. "Whatever. You want to see the battle level. That needs to be there every night. And also wanting the puck and wanting to make plays and wanting to be in the battle. I believe we could have had more guys tonight doing that. But it's a tough league. It's not going to come easy every night. We're in a tough building, on the road against a team that's battling for a playoff spot. Mentally, you have to be strong. You need to want to make plays and be that guy and want the puck on your stick because that's when things open up for other guys. It's easy to just hide when you get in a situation like this."

Perhaps no one is feeling the heat more these days than Sam Gagner. The versatile forward was signed to a three-year deal last summer to bolster the Canucks offence. That simply hasn't happened. Gagner has just seven goals on the season and has now gone 21 games without scoring despite having the Canucks best scoring chance last night.

Parked off to Quick's right early in the second period with a chance to tie the game 1-1, Gagner appeared to have half the net to shoot when he took a centering pass and drilled it high and wide of the target.

"I tried to keep it low and it just rolled on me and it went over the net," he recalled. "Obviously, it's frustrating getting shutout in back to back games and personally I've had Grade A chances to score. I have to find ways to put pucks in the net."

Gagner finished the night with three shots on goal, but four other attempts – including the best of the bunch – missed the target. At some point, guys like Gagner simply have to pull the trigger or this scoring drought, and the losses will continue as the challenge gets tougher with games against playoff bound teams like Anaheim, San Jose and Las Vegas up next on the schedule.

"I hate losing," he said. "When you have opportunities to put pucks in the net and give your team a chance to win and you don't, it's a tough feeling – especially when we're in the stretch that we're in. I want to be a big part of things. It's a tough thing going through losing seasons. You're in this to win. That's what you play for. But at the same time, you have to find ways to bring it. Every night is a new chance to compete and a new chance to play at the best level in the world. You have to find ways to get the most out of yourself every night even on back to backs and in tough situations."

Gagner has scored four times since December 1st, once on a 5-on-3 power play, once in 3-on-3 overtime and his two even-strength goals over that span came in the same game on December 28th against Chicago. Otherwise, it's been a remarkable dry spell for the 28-year-old who has twice had 18-goal seasons in the NHL including last year in Columbus.

Since his last goal on January 7th in Toronto, Gagner has registered 49 shots on net. That's fifth on the Canucks over that time frame. So he's getting opportunities, but not making the most of them. In fact, Gagner had the dubious distinction of being the NHL forwards that has taken the most shots without scoring since he last put a puck in the net.

And that, in one statistic, sums up Gagner's season and the Canucks current plight.

TSN.CA LOADED: 03.14.2018

1103628 Websites

TSN.CA / Statistically Speaking: McDavid finishing fast

Scott Cullen

McDavid keeps rolling; Rielly, Schwartz, Rantanen, Gustafsson, Boychuk and more in Scott Cullen's Statistically Speaking.

HEROES

Connor McDavid – Edmonton's superstar centre scored two goals and added an assist in Saturday's 4-1 win over Minnesota. He has 13 points (6 G, 7 A) during a seven-game point streak and sits four points behind Nikita Kucherov for the scoring lead. It's forcing people to address the notion of whether a player needs his team to make the playoffs in order to be considered for the Hart Trophy as Most Valuable Player.

Morgan Rielly – Toronto's puck-moving blueliner recorded three assists in Saturday's 5-2 win over Pittsburgh, giving him six assists in the past five games. He has a career-high 41 points this season.

Jaden Schwartz - The Blues winger put up a goal and two assists in Saturday's 7-2 win at Los Angeles. He has seven points (2 G, 5 A) in the past five games and has better than a point per game, with 49 points in 48 games.

Mikko Rantanen – The sophomore Avalanche winger tallied a goal and two assists in Saturday's 5-2 win against Arizona; he has 16 points (5 G, 11 A) in the past 10 games, and a nice 69 points in 67 games for the season. Linemate Nathan MacKinnon added a couple of assists against the Coyotes, and has 20 points (8 G, 12 A) in the past 10 games.

Erik Gustafsson – The Blackhawks blueliner, who received a contract extension last week, had a goal and two assists in Saturday's 7-4 loss at Boston then added two assists in Sunday's 3-1 win over the Bruins. He has six points (2 G, 4 A) in the past four games.

Johnny Boychuk – The Islanders defenceman put up a goal and two assists in Sunday's 5-2 win at Calgary, matching his production from his previous 23 games.

ZEROES

Jean-Gabriel Pageau – The Senators centre struggled (13 for, 25 against, 34.2 CF%, 6-18 scoring chances) and was on the ice for both goals against in Friday's 2-1 loss to Calgary.

Derek Forbort – The Kings blueliner had a rough game (13 for, 17 against, 43.3 CF%, 5-10 scoring chances) and was on the ice for four goals against in Saturday's 7-2 loss to St. Louis.

Thomas Hickey – The Islanders defenceman was stuck in his own end (7 for, 35 against, 16.7 CF%, 5-10 scoring chances) during Sunday's 5-2 win at Calgary.

Tristan Jarry – Pittsburgh's rookie netminder allowed four goals on 16 shots before getting pulled from Saturday's 5-2 loss at Toronto. He has a .888 save percentage in his past 11 starts.

VITAL SIGNS

Mike Smith – The Flames netminder returned to the lineup Sunday after missing a month with a lower-body injury.

Ryan McDonagh - Acquired from the Rangers at the trade deadline, the veteran blueliner finally made his Lightning debut after missing more than a month with an upper-body injury.

Mark Stone - Ottawa's star winger suffered a leg injury in Friday's 2-1 loss to Calgary.

Oscar Klefbom - The Oilers defenceman didn't play Saturday and will miss at least one more game as he recovers from a minor procedure.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 14, 2018

There has been widespread feeling that he's been playing injured for much of this season.

Anthony Duclair - The Blackhawks winger suffered a knee injury after a collision Saturday with Bruins winger Brad Marchand, who also missed Sunday's rematch with an upper-body injury.

SHORT SHIFTS

Jonathan Toews is scoring down the stretch for the Blackhawks.

Blackhawks C Jonathan Toews accumulated three assists in Sunday's 3-1 win against Boston, and has nine points (3 G, 6 A) in the past six games...Blackhawks RW Patrick Kane added a goal and an assist, giving him 11 points (3 G, 8 A) in the past 10 games...Penguins C Evgeni Malkin had a goal and an assist, while C Sidney Crosby added two assists in Sunday's 3-1 win at Dallas. Malkin has 24 points (9 G, 15 A) in the past 13 games and sits just one point behind Nikita Kucherov for the scoring lead. Crosby has 16 points (6 G, 10 A) in the past 14 games...Islanders LW Anders Lee scored a pair of goals in Sunday's 5-2 win at Calgary, and has five points (3 G, 2 A) in the past four games...Islanders D Nick Leddy added a goal and an assist, after posting two assists in his previous nine games...Islanders centres John Tavares and Casey Cizikas both chipped in a couple of assists. Tavares had three points (1 G, 2 A) in his previous eight games and Cizikas had one assist in his previous 10 games...Flames LW Johnny Gaudreau had a goal and an assist in Sunday's 5-2 loss to the Islanders. He has six points (1 G, 5 A) in the past four games.

Nazem Kadri and Mitch Marner have been clicking together over the past 20 games.

Maple Leafs C Nazem Kadri scored a pair of goals and RW Mitch Marner added two assists in Saturday's 5-2 win vs. Pittsburgh. Kadri has 22 points (12 G, 10 A) in the past 20 games and Marner has 24 points (13 G, 11 A) in the past 20 games...Canadiens LW Charles Hudon assisted on both Montreal goals in Saturday's 3-2 shootout loss at Tampa Bay. He has six points (1 G, 5 A) in his past seven games... Bruins C David Krejci scored a pair of goals in Saturday's 7-4 win over Chicago and assisted on Boston's only goal in Sunday's 3-1 loss at Chicago; he has seven points (5 G, 2 A) in the past seven games...Bruins rookie LW Jake DeBrusk added four helpers in those two games against Chicago, giving him nine points (2 G, 7 A) in the past seven games...Bruins RW Brian Gionta and C Sean Kuraly both contributed a goal and an assist. Gionta has six points (2 G, 4 A) in five games since joining Boston. Kuraly had no points in his previous 13 games...Bruins LW Brad Marchand chipped in a couple of assists Saturday, giving him 11 points (5 G, 6 A) in a five-game point streak...Coyotes RW Richard Panik had a goal and an assist in Saturday's 5-2 win at Colorado, giving him four points (2 G, 2 A) in the past five games.

Avalanche D Tyson Barrie, RW Blake Comeau and C Carl Soderberg each contributed a goal and an assist in Saturday's 5-2 win vs. Arizona. Barrie has 15 points (5 G, 10 A) in the past 10 games, Comeau has six points (1 G, 5 A) in the past six games, and Soderberg has eight points (4 G, 4 A) in the past six games...Blues C Ivan Barbashev, C Kyle Brodziak, D Alex Pietrangelo and RW Vladimir Tarasenko each had a goal and an assist in Saturday's 7-2 win at Los Angeles. Barbashev had two goals in his previous 11 games, Brodziak had two assists in the previous nine games, Pietrangelo has four points (3 G, 1 A) in the past five games, and Tarasenko has five points (3 G, 2 A) in the past five games...Kings C Anze Kopitar contributed two assists in Saturday's 7-2 loss to St. Louis, giving him 10 points (2 G, 8 A) in the past seven games.

Panthers LW Jonathan Huberdeau produced a goal and an assist in Saturday's 4-3 shootout win over the Rangers, and has eight points (4 G, 4 A) in the past nine games...Panthers C Vincent Trocheck added a couple of assists, and has nine points (4 G, 5 A) in the past nine games...Rangers C Ryan Spooner picked up a pair of assists in Saturday's 4-3 shootout loss at Florida; he has 12 points (2 G, 10 A) in seven games since he was traded to New York...Oilers LW Ryan Nugent-Hopkins contributed a goal and an assist in Saturday's 4-1 win

against Minnesota. He has four points (2 G, 2 A) in four games since returning to the lineup.

Columbus' Seth Jones is on a tear.

Blue Jackets D Seth Jones scored two goals in Friday's 3-2 win at Detroit, and has 10 points (5 G, 5 A) in the past eight games...Stars C Tyler Seguin added two assists in Friday's 2-1 win against Anaheim and one more assist in Sunday's 3-1 loss to Pittsburgh; he has 14 points (7 G, 7 A) in the past nine games...Wild C Matt Cullen and RW Charlie Coyle both had a goal and an assist in Friday's 5-2 win at Vancouver. Cullen has seven points (5 G, 2 A) in the past 11 games. Coyle also scored a goal in Saturday's 4-1 loss at Edmonton, giving him six points (2 G, 4 A) in the past seven games.

Sabres forwards Zemgus Girgensons and Jason Pominville had a strong showing (22 for, 5 against, 81.5 CF%, 8-0 scoring chances) in Saturday's 2-1 shootout loss to Vegas...Canadiens D Brett Lernout was called up from the AHL and had a solid game (21 for, 5 against, 80.8 CF%, 14-2 scoring chances) in Saturday's 4-3 shootout loss at Tampa Bay.

Marc-Andre Fleury is a huge part of the Golden Knights' success this season.

Golden Knights G Marc-Andre Fleury saved 32 of 33 shots in Saturday's 2-1 shootout win at Buffalo and has a .929 save percentage in his past six starts...Sabres G Robin Lehner turned away 33 of 34 shots in Saturday's 2-1 shootout loss to Vegas; he has a .946 save percentage in his past three starts...Oilers G Cam Talbot saved 32 of 33 shots that he faced in Saturday's 4-1 win vs. Minnesota, giving him a .928 save percentage in his past 11 starts...Blackhawks G Anton Forsberg turned away 31 of 32 shots in Sunday's 3-1 win over Boston. He had a .875 save percentage in his previous four games...Maple Leafs G Frederik Andersen stopped 29 of 30 shots in Friday's 2-1 win at Ottawa. He had a .864 save percentage in his previous five games...Blues G Jake Allen had 38 saves on 40 shots in Saturday's 7-2 win at Los Angeles; he had a .876 save percentage in his previous eight games...Maple Leafs G Frederik Andersen stopped 38 of 40 shots in Saturday's 5-2 win against Pittsburgh. He had a .860 save percentage in his previous four starts...Devils G Keith Kinkaid turned away 34 of 36 shots in Saturday's 3-2 shootout win at Nashville, and has a .934 save percentage in his past eight starts...Canadiens G Antti Niemi saved 32 of 34 shots in Saturday's 3-2 shootout loss at Tampa Bay, giving him a .932 save percentage in 13 games since he was acquired by Montreal.

FIRSTS

Matthew Highmore - The Blackhawks winger scored his first NHL goal, in his sixth game, Saturday's 7-4 loss at Boston.

FIRST NHL GOAL FOR CHICAGO'S MATTHEW HIGHMORE! 4-3 HAWKS! pic.twitter.com/Bzbi9zFQcl

— NHL Daily 365 (@NHLDaily365) March 10, 2018

Many of the advanced stats used here come from Natural Stat Trick, Corsica and Hockey Reference.

Scott Cullen can be reached at scott.cullen@bellmedia.ca

TSN.CA LOADED: 03.14.2018

1103629 Websites

USA TODAY / Capitals star's 13-year contract has been bargain

Kevin Allen, USA TODAY Sports



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 14, 2018

Alex Ovechkin was the NHL's first \$100 million athlete, and he's been worth every penny.

A decade ago, when the Washington Capitals signed Ovechkin to a 13-year deal with worth \$124 million, naysayers suggested the Capitals would regret that deal in the future.

We are now down that road, and no one in Washington is second-guessing any part of this contract.

When this deal was signed, Ovechkin had 130 goals in 2 1/2 seasons.

Last night, Ovechkin scored his 600th career goal, and during the 10 years of this deal he's averaged 43.7 goals per season in an era when scoring has become more difficult.

At 32, Ovechkin has three seasons remaining on his deal and there are no signs that his performance level is on the decline.

Ovechkin needs eight more goals this season to record his eighth season with 50 or more goals. Six of those will have come during this contract. Only four other NHL players (Steven Stamkos, Sidney Crosby, Evgeni Malkin and Corey Perry) have reached 50 goals in the last 10 seasons. Stamkos has done it twice.

Ovechkin, a nine-time All-Star, has clearly been the greatest goal scorer of this generation. You can't argue that.

According to ESPN.com, the Capitals are third in the NHL in home attendance in terms of percentage to capacity. The Caps are playing to 104.7% of capacity. How big of a role does Ovechkin's popularity play in that figure? We can assume it plays a significant one.

Ovechkin is charismatic. He can be entertaining in front of a microphone.

You can't argue how much passion he has for the game, although people like to try.

But Ovechkin hasn't won a Stanley Cup. One oddity of the NHL is that followers of the sport like to crow about how it is the ultimate team sport. You can't win with only one or two good players, they say.

But when their team doesn't win, they often assign blame to one player. People like to blame Ovechkin for Washington's postseason failings.

Of course, it's never that simple. Anyone who knows Ovechkin knows he cares greatly about the Capitals. You don't score as many goals as he does without being a driven performer. Anyone who watched him fight back emotion to answer reporters questions after the Capitals were eliminated last spring would never say he didn't care.

It's always difficult to pinpoint why teams win or don't win, but it's usually never as simple as one player being the reason.

Ovechkin has played a significant role this season in helping Washington exceed expectations. This team was supposed to take a half-step back because of player departures due to salary cap issues. With less than four weeks in the regular season, the Capitals sit in first place in the Metropolitan Division.

Ovechkin doesn't deserve all of the credit for that, just like doesn't deserve all of the blame when they lose. There are no absolutes in sports, including when it comes to long-term contracts.

Owners have long been fearful of long-term contracts, which is why today's Collective Bargaining Agreement only allows a maximum of eight years on a deal. Owners didn't want to see any more 13-year contracts.

But Ovechkin's deal proves they can work with the right athletes. This Ovechkin 13-year deal, paying an average of \$9.538 million, may end up being one of the fairest long-term deals in sports history. The Capitals were willing to pay full freight when Ovechkin was young, and he has consistently delivered like one of the league's top stars. Neither side has any right to complain.

USA TODAY LOADED: 03.14.2018