



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 18, 2020

## THE NEWS & OBSERVER

### Hurricanes announce plan to compensate event staff at PNC Arena

By Chip Alexander

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Don Waddell, the Canes' president and general manager, announced the decision Tuesday. Hourly staff will be compensated based on their expected workload during the Canes' final seven March and April regular-season games at PNC Arena.

The funding will come from Hurricanes owner Tom Dundon, the Carolina Hurricanes Foundation and from a donation by the Hurricanes players. Dundon said Saturday that he had not asked the players to participate in the compensation plan but they wanted to be a part of it.

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next three days putting the spread sheet together, everybody who was on those spread sheets for the seven games. We added up the totals and I presented it to him this morning and it took him three seconds he said, 'Let's move forward, let's pay them.'

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## THE ATHLETIC

### Canes GM Don Waddell: On paying employees, the Stanley Cup and player's health

By Sara Civian

These few weeks dealing with a global pandemic have been terrifying on a worldwide scale — especially when sports, which many of us use to cope with reality, are postponed.

But at the same time, this unprecedented event has shown us how willing certain folks are to step up and help each other. Count the Carolina Hurricanes in as helpers. They announced Tuesday they will compensate PNC Arena and Hurricanes event staff for wages lost due to the NHL season's pause.

The Athletic spoke with team president and GM Don Waddell on the phone Tuesday about that process, how he sees the rest of the season playing out and how injured Canes players are progressing.

First of all, how are you doing? What are you doing to stay busy?

We've actually had a lot of work to do, and now we can focus on some of the business side of some things I've kept on the back burner. Right now we're working on the new practice

facility, then obviously, we're working on our building lease extension on (PNC Arena).

What were you thinking when members of the Utah Jazz tested positive for COVID-19, knowing the Hurricanes were in such close proximity?

First of all, I knew it was just a matter of time before an athlete got it. This isn't a virus that is just going to avoid an athlete — or anyone. When we hear that, obviously, you want to take all the precautionary actions you can. We obviously didn't know they tested positive until a few days later — we found out in Jersey. The hotel assured us everything was washed and clean. Our doctor (Josh Bloom) said it's less than 1th of a tenth of one-thousandth percent chance (the Hurricanes would actually get the virus) — very slim but was a chance. I talked to both John (Forslund) and Zack (Brame) yesterday and they're feeling as they normally would.

From there, what was the decision-making process like in terms of canceling the season?



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What was the timeline leading up to the decision to compensate arena employees?

Tom (Dundon) and I talked last Thursday (right when the season was "paused").

I said, "Tom, I don't know if we want to talk about this right now, but we have a lot of people who this is their livelihood, then the part-time employees work these extra hours." My staff that handles that had to figure out who was on the schedule for what games, a lot of spreadsheets and (figuring specifics out). We finally came up with it late last night — here's what we have, let's pay everyone for the games they were going to work, etc.

(Dundon) took about three seconds and said, "Let's do it."

I know some players stepped up in the effort to compensate workers. I was wondering if you knew specifics about who or what they were planning to do.

I don't have all the particulars right now. (Captain) Jordan Staal reached out and said that if the Hurricanes were going

to do something, he'd like to have the players contribute. They've (collectively) contributed to a dollar amount, and that shows the true character of our organization.

Tom's writing the big check.

What's your personal opinion on how the rest of the season should play out?

You want to play as many games as you can, because that's best for the league. But that's thinking 45 or so days, realistically. I'm always on the positive side in thinking we're gonna get back, but you always listen to the experts — and the most important thing is the Stanley Cup playoffs. The most focal point is on the playoffs. If we have to bypass regular-season games and go to the playoffs? So be it.

As unfortunate as all this is, could there be a silver lining in how the injured Hurricanes players are progressing?

For sure, Dougie Hamilton, now, 12 weeks he'll be coming up here soon (in recovery) — and I can see him back as soon as early April. He'll be back on the ice and working his way back. Brett Pesce, I don't think it will matter a whole lot (because the recovery timeline is too long).

James Reimer and Sami Vatanen were getting close as it was.



## Gold: If the NHL does return, will the fans be allowed in?

By Adam Gold

"Remember, I played in Atlanta those last couple of years they were in the league."

It's a whole new NHL world, or at least it will be when — "if" is probably more accurate — the sport returns sometime later in the year. Carolina Hurricanes legend Erik Cole joined Adam Gold on the latest edition of the Canes Corner podcast and talked about the possibility of the game returning without fans in the building.

Think about just how different things are already. Before canceling the events, the NCAA was intending to hold the men's and women's basketball tournaments without fans. Former Vice President Joe Biden, now a Democratic candidate for president, gave his speech following a trio of primary victories to nothing but a television camera from his home in Delaware. Late night television shows have also been impacted.

"They pan to the audience and it's interns, writers and people who work behind the scenes", Cole says. "And I kind of think that's what it would be in some of these NHL arenas."

Theoretically speaking it shouldn't matter where games are played. Both teams have to deal with the same ice, the same puck, the same referees. But, numbers don't lie, there are only a handful of teams with better records on the road than at home and the support from fans is one of the most important factors. Missing that would be hard getting used to. "There would be no atmosphere, it would be hard", Cole laughed, "no building off the crowd's energy...it can make the other team feel like the home team is breathing down their neck."

Of course, as many have joked at Carolina's expense, though no longer, there have been many buildings in which it felt like there was no one in the stands. Before moving to Winnipeg, that franchise was known as the Thrashers, and they often played in front of what appeared to be an invitation only crowd in Atlanta.

Plus, without the crowd, who would scream "Refs you suck"? "Sometimes, on the bench, I think I started the 'refs you suck' chant", Cole joked. "I definitely tried to get the fans into the booing. I'd start booing or I'd boo along with them."



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## Carolina Hurricanes to compensate event staff for missed home games

By Lauren Brownlow

President and GM of the Carolina Hurricanes Don Waddell announced today via press release from the team that the PNC Arena and Hurricanes event staff will be compensated for lost wages in the seven home games canceled in the month of March.

The money, per the release, will come from owner Tom Dundon, the Carolina Hurricanes Foundation and a donation from the players meant to supplement other lost income sources from these workers during this hiatus.

"Our part-time event staff are a vital part of the gameday experience at PNC Arena," Waddell said in the release. "We know that the season being paused has created a lot of uncertainty, so Tom, the players and the Foundation have stepped up to help these employees through this unprecedented situation."

The COVID-19 outbreak has shut down almost the entire sports world, including putting the hockey season on pause. The Hurricanes have around 1400 part-time staffers that help put the games on, and Waddell joined Adam and Joe on 99.9 the Fan to talk about the decision to compensate workers.

"We rely on about 1400 part-time staff to work all our games and events at the arena. Obviously, people were planning on their schedule to work these hockey games. Most of these people count on us for daily income to pay their bills, buy their food and support their families," Waddell said. "We had seven home games that were canceled in the months of March that were all scheduled out by our staff. So we felt the right thing to do was let's pay our part-time staff all the money they would've received if they would've worked the games."

Waddell told Adam and Joe that he and his staff had spent the last three days crunching the numbers to get to a total to present to Dundon.

"It's a big number, I've got to be honest," he said.

"This morning I presented it to him and he said, 'It's the right thing to do. Let's move forward with it.' The players have come up with a contribution from their own end. Our players are this way. They've helped people out before. They're very generous. They know a lot of the part-time staff and know what it means to them. Same with our (Carolina Hurricanes) Foundation. Our Foundation generates revenue off team performance and what our team does, so they felt it was appropriate for the Foundation, since the players were putting money in also, that they would match that and put it all in the kitty," Waddell said.

"Initially we talked, do we pay 100 percent? Do we pay a percentage? But at the end of the day, we just said we're going to pay everybody their full-go rate for all seven games."

The release also stated that the Hurricanes' food service, VAB Catering, will make a large food donation to the Inter-Faith Food Shuttle, which is providing emergency food to families that are affected by the shutdown.

The NHL season remains on pause, Waddell told Adam and Joe - but he specified that a lot could change, in spite of the CDC saying the avoid gatherings of 50 or more for eight weeks.

"The update is send your players home if they want to go home. The CDC mandate for the 60 days is good, but it doesn't mean that if we talk in 30-45 days and things are looking better, we can't start bringing players back and start preparing for the start of whatever the season is going to look like.," Waddell said. "So it doesn't stop you from training and doing all of those things if in the next 45 days, things look like they're headed in the right direction."



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**SB NATION**  
**CANES COUNTRY**

## Carolina Hurricanes to compensate PNC Arena part-time workers during NHL pause

The Hurricanes will help arena staff make ends meet while the NHL season is suspended.

By Brian LeBlanc

It took a couple of days to iron out the details, but the Carolina Hurricanes are indeed doing the right thing.

The team announced on Tuesday that they would be compensating PNC Arena part-time staff for missed shifts in March due to the NHL pausing the season in the wake of the coronavirus outbreak. According to the team, staff will be compensated "based on expected workload" for the duration of March. Compensation will be provided by Hurricanes owner Tom Dundon, the Carolina Hurricanes Foundation, and from Hurricanes players who have pooled together to donate to the cause.

"Our part-time event staff are a vital part of the gameday experience at PNC Arena," Hurricanes president and GM Don Waddell said in a statement. "We know that the season being paused has created a lot of uncertainty, so Tom, the players and the Foundation have stepped up to help these employees through this unprecedented situation."

In addition, the arena's food service provider, VAB Catering, will make a donation to the Inter-Faith Food Shuttle Thursday at 10:00. Waddell said earlier this week on the Canes Cast that the arena has more than \$300,000 in unused food for events postponed or cancelled, and that unused food will be donated to the Food Shuttle.

Part-time staffers at PNC Arena are employed by Gale Force Sports and Entertainment, the management company operated by the Hurricanes that operates and manages the arena. The staff includes ushers, media and locker room attendants, some concession workers, security staff, ticket takers and members of the ice crew.

The announcement made reference to the seven home games that have either been missed or will be missed by the end of March. There is one additional home game on April 3 that was not mentioned in the release, which is included below.

CANES TO COMPENSATE EVENT STAFF FOR LOST WAGES

PNC Arena to make food donation to Inter-Faith Food Shuttle on Thursday

Don Waddell, President and General Manager of the National Hockey League's Carolina Hurricanes, today announced that the team will compensate PNC Arena and Hurricanes event staff for lost wages due to the 2019-20 NHL season being paused because of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) crisis. Hourly staff will be compensated based on expected workload during the team's final seven March regular-season home games.

Funding will come from Hurricanes owner Tom Dundon and the Carolina Hurricanes Foundation. In addition, Hurricanes players have made a generous donation to help supplement the incomes of the event staff employees, understanding that many may be losing from other sources during this time.

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On Thursday at 10 a.m., PNC Arena's food service, VAB Catering, will make a large food donation to the Inter-Faith Food Shuttle. The Raleigh-based non-profit is currently focused on providing emergency food to families affected by the Coronavirus crisis.

The NHL paused the 2019-20 season on March 12 due to the COVID-19 outbreak. Tuesday morning, the league announced that players and traveling hockey staff should continue to self-quarantine through at least March 27, either in their NHL cities or hometowns. Team facilities are closed during the quarantine period, though consideration will be given to allowing clubs to re-open them to players after March 27, depending upon world developments. The Hurricanes medical staff will continue to monitor all players and staff, but no player, team staff member or arena employee have exhibited any signs of COVID-19 at this time.

### TODAY'S LINKS

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## SportScan

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

1172683 Carolina Hurricanes

Hurricanes announce plan to compensate event staff at PNC Arena

BY CHIP ALEXANDER

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1172684 Carolina Hurricanes

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By Sara Civian Mar 17, 2020 6

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The Athletic LOADED: 03.18.2020

1172744 Websites

The Athletic / How the ECHL and its players are grappling with cancellation amid COVID-19

By Scott Wheeler Mar 18, 2020

When the news finally came on Thursday evening, David Pacan was at his apartment in Etobicoke, Ont., waiting to hear the inevitable but hoping it couldn't be true.

The ECHL season was cancelled due to the outbreak of the novel coronavirus. Not paused. Not suspended. Cancelled.

Among the first things that came to his mind was that his Brampton Beast, two points away from securing a playoff position and third in their division with eight regular season games remaining, weren't going to get to go on that playoff run after all.

Quickly, though, real-life, non-hockey consequences began to creep in. In the days after the cancellation, the PHPA, the union that represents ECHL players, had met with the league to discuss next steps. In those meetings, the two parties agreed that player salaries would be terminated as of Monday, March 16.

Pacan, one of the league's leading scorers in each of the last four seasons, a 2009 Chicago Blackhawks sixth-round draft pick, 2013 ECHL All-Rookie Team selection and veteran of more than 500 pro games, was among the first to speak out.

HEY @BIZNASTY2POINT0, THE @ECHL DOES NOT WANT TO PAY US FOR THE REST OF THE SEASON. PLEASE MESSAGE ME SO WE CAN FIGURE THIS OUT.

— DAVID PACAN (@PACMANTWOTWO) MARCH 15, 2020

In a league where many players are on week-to-week, low-paying contracts, the implications of three weeks of lost salary are real — and immediate.

"With everything going on, it's been tough, not just on us as players but just kind of the whole world right now. It's not limited to hockey players. But as I found out that they didn't want to pay us, that was a big hit to us, because we're one of those leagues that some of us, a lot of us, live paycheck to paycheck," Pacan said on a phone call.

The ECHL's collective bargaining agreement with the PHPA stipulated a \$13,300 weekly salary cap for a roster size of up to 20 players for the 2019-20 season, with a weekly salary floor of \$10,100. In 2019-20, the weekly minimum salary was set to \$480 for players who'd played in fewer than 25 games and \$520 for everyone else, not including per diems (\$44 a day for when teams are on the road).

Pacan guesses he's going to be out \$3,000-\$4,000 for the remainder of the regular season, which represents a significant portion of his salary without accounting for what he might have made during the playoffs. Because most ECHL players work part-time summer jobs as trainers or hockey camp instructors, incomes that are also now likely to be lost, he worries about the livelihood of his peers.

"It's ridiculous. A lot of guys try to save money in this league for weddings or young kids and three weeks to us is a big deal for us. A lot of guys are taking it pretty hard right now," he said.

"You're losing the money from the summer job and from the last three weeks. If you were planning on getting married or saving for a home, that's on hiatus. That little bit of money goes a long way to us."

Pacan considers himself one of the lucky ones. His wife works for a roofing company that provides a necessary secondary income they can lean on.

"To be honest with you, her work might also be on hold, but we do have a secondary income which is huge for us. Maybe somebody else doesn't have a secondary income. Not everyone's situation is the same," he said. "I doubt anyone can live off the money they make in the ECHL, to be realistic. I don't think they can live off of it in the summer. It's a pretty stressful time."

On the morning of Monday, March 16, the last official day of the ECHL season, more than 3,000 kilometres (1,800 miles) east of Pacan's Etobicoke apartment, Dean MacDonald, the owner of the Newfoundland Growlers and operator of their parent company, Deacon Sports and Entertainment, was trying to make sure his players could get home.

He and the Growlers players had been meeting "five times" a day and he had just wrapped up one phone call when he hopped on another. The players were getting their physicals done as part of the mandatory procedures they had to follow before leaving the team.

MacDonald, at this moment, is worried he may not be able to get everyone off the island before the circumstances change.

"I'm very nervous that there's going to be a national edict to stop travel. The good news for us is there's a whole lot more people trying to get back to Newf than leave Newf so that helps a little bit. It's a bit of a Rubik's cube to be honest with you and I wish I could say that everything's going to operate with military precision but it's all new and every half hour there's a new government mandate," MacDonald said. "It's hectic but I'm pleased the players are in pretty good spirits. People are starting to realize this is bigger than us."

MacDonald's first reaction when he heard the news was "Holy smokes, are they going to shut down the skies? How do we get a bunch of guys who are literally 20, 21, 22 years old home?"



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Now he's in scramble mode.

The Growlers are the only team in the ECHL where trains and buses aren't an option for any of their players to get home, save the three Newfoundlanders on the team. In recent days, domestic and international flights out of Newfoundland have been cancelled. Among other things, they're also worried about borders being shut to their American players, of which there are nearly 10.

"My guess is as this thing is unfolding, the (players) are starting to get nervous and they're nervous not only for themselves and their own wellbeing but that of their families. So the first thing on a very human level is 'How do we let these guys know that we're going to get on this as fast as possible to get them home?'" MacDonald said.

"We've got a great sense of urgency because if the skies shut down then you have a whole bunch of players who are really stranded. That's not to say we can't take them into our homes and look after them because as Newfoundlanders we can but the priority is getting them home safe. Time is the real issue here. Would we like to take a week or two to see how this unfolds? Yeah, that would be nice, but whoa, you're putting players at risk. We wanted to be very up front with our players and to be blunt, the odds are this is going south so let's get everyone rolling."

With help from the Maple Leafs, the Growlers were able to make arrangements for the players.

"They've got to be one of the top organizations in professional sports. They do the right thing," MacDonald said. "I have yet to see them on any matter I've dealt with them not do the right thing. In that regard, we're very fortunate."

But the situation is complex and MacDonald is fully aware of why the ECHL had to operate independently of the NHL and AHL in coming to the decision to cancel.

The financial implications for the ECHL could have been severe had the league attempted to wait out COVID-19 or return to play at a distant future date. And, most importantly, there are people and public safety at play.

"Everyone in our league will take a significant financial hit, so that's no fun, but in light of what's happening, as you're living it and realizing that the season is being cancelled, particularly for a team like us that's playoff-bound as the defending champs, you start looking at what's happening around you and you realize that this is a sport and we're there at the leisure of our fans and at this point our fans have a whole lot more to worry about than whether our team is playing," MacDonald said.

"It's just a new world order – or better said: a new world unorder. We just don't know what's coming down the pipe but we have a moral obligation to do that right thing and it's as simple as that."

Across the sports world, that moral obligation has included many owners in the world's biggest professional sports leagues promising to continue to pay their players and part-time event staff. For MacDonald, the Growlers, and teams across the ECHL, that's a more complicated proposition.

"The first order of business is our own staff so we've got to try to pretend that the season just ended early and we didn't make the playoffs so now we go into the preparation for next year. Our arena has been closed so there's nothing to be done there right now. There's not very many teams making any money in the ECHL. We don't have TV rights or the revenue streams that the big guys have and that's just kind of where it is," MacDonald said.

Earlier in the morning, he'd talked to one of his players about that reality in an effort to be open and transparent. Everyone had to come to terms with the fact that the Growlers, the defending Kelly Cup champions, were not going to be able to repeat. They all knew that was the easier pill to swallow than the realities of everything else that cancellation would mean for the players and the owners.

"The vast majority of teams in our league don't make money. It wasn't a one-way street. Both the league and the PHPA sat down and said 'look, we've got all these teams that are marginal financially that if we ask for more out of them and they have to fold operations, well as a union next year you're going to have less spots for ECHL contracts because it's a smaller league,'" MacDonald said.

"So have you really accomplished anything when the season was going to be ending soon anyways? That's the logic of it. I see both sides of it. There's a quid pro quo here where there's a few weeks salary lost from a player perspective but there's also going to be 26 teams next year versus 20 teams next year and I've got jobs now for a lot more people than I would otherwise from a union perspective."

By Tuesday evening, as the league prepared for life after cancellation, ECHL commissioner Ryan Crelin, in his second year on the job, was thankful for the PHPA's cooperation throughout the craziness of the preceding week.

"Collective bargaining takes months, maybe years, and we had hours," Crelin said.

He knew when NBA player Rudy Gobert was revealed to have contracted the virus that things were going to have to move quickly. Once the NBA moved to suspend its season, it was Crelin's job to follow their lead, get on the phone with the NHL, and move forward, together, as a sport.

After the ECHL suspended its season, he took 24 hours to catch his breath before convening the league's board of governors. The PHPA, he said, recognized the extraordinary times the two parties were in.

"There were a lot of moving pieces. You've got more ordinances coming out, more states and provincial governments are making decisions, and all the while the hockey in you wants to find a way to return to play and keep the playoffs alive. But at some point, you start hearing the same thing from both sides of the aisle as it relates to our league and it's not an easy decision but it was the right decision," Crelin said.

They also had to navigate what was already in the ECHL-PHPA collective bargaining agreement about the termination of a season.

"We're trying to dot our Is and cross our Ts. So we invoked the end of season and you can talk about economics, but what about player safety and travel bans being put in place? We have European players, we have Canadians in the United States and Americans in Canada. There was just so much uncertainty," Crelin said. "I believe we hit the pertinent points. There will no doubt be some pieces to pick up here but we'll work as partners in hockey to figure that out."

MacDonald hopes the damage to the league will be minimal, even if he acknowledges it might not be.

"It's like being hit by a hurricane," MacDonald said. "We'll pick up the pieces after it comes through and life goes on."

Meanwhile, Pacan is hopeful that some kind of severance can be worked out for ECHL players. His last few days haven't been easy. He knows he's not alone and he recognizes that things will get worse before they get better. But he's trying to remain hopeful.

"You can think about all the money we're losing from playoffs as well but at this point we just want the money from the regular season," Pacan said.

"It has been a tough situation. (Our PHPA reps are) trying their best. There's a lot of teams that don't make as much money as certain teams so it's difficult from that standpoint. But we're hopeful that something will happen and it's always good to be vocal about it as well and to try to get as many guys on board as we can to try to help out the situation."

Above all else, Pacan also recognizes that he's one of the lucky few who gets to play hockey for a living — or part of a living.



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"It's always nice playing hockey and doing what you love and getting paid for it but it's still a job for us. We have to provide and pay bills," he said. "Right now, I'm just trying to remain hopeful that something will come out of this."

PHPA executive director Larry Landon did not return requests for comment for this story.

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1172745 Websites

The Athletic / Analyzing different playoff formats to determine the fairest option

By Dom Luszczyszyn Mar 18, 2020

With the NHL on pause as the world collectively fights a global pandemic, there are more questions than answers regarding what the immediate future holds for the remainder of the league's season. It's murky, given the vast unknowns, but the obvious hope is that eventually the world returns to normal and hockey returns with it. What that will look like though is a big mystery.

In an ideal world, the league resumes and finishes its 82-game season, but as the COVID-19 situation gets more serious and the suspension timeline grows longer, that's becoming more unlikely by the day. Based on the information we have now – plus the fact the playoffs would need roughly two months to play out – the likeliest scenario seems to be that the NHL will have to forego the rest of the regular season and skip straight to the playoffs.

Assuming that's the case, the big question is one of equity: what's the fairest way to distribute playoff spots in an unfinished season where no team has clinched yet?

There are essentially two schools of thought. Either the top eight in each conference advance as seeded or the league gives some of the top teams a bye and uses some time to orchestrate play-in game scenarios to figure out the rest of the seeding. No matter what the league does though, there's simply no way to please everyone and make it perfectly fair, but the league can still aim to make things as fair as they possibly can.

Before the NHL suspended play, these were the playoff odds from five different sources: The Athletic, Hockey Viz, MoneyPuck, Sports Club Stats and Hockey Reference.

All five agree that there are 10 teams with playoff chances greater than 90 percent – all of which average to 94 percent or higher – and all five agree that there are nine teams whose chances are lower than five percent, eight of which are effectively at zero percent. There should be no debate that the 10 teams in the first group deserve a spot and that the nine teams in the second group should be out. This is the math based on the first 70-or-so games, and while the NHL doesn't have to abide by playoff odds from five independent sources, it should respect what each team has done so far to make a decision that honours their play to date. The math measuring playoff odds unanimously reinforces those results and that shouldn't be ignored. If the NHL were to run its own models, it would likely come to the same conclusion.

It's the 12 clubs in the middle where there's a bit more disagreement in the math and it's those 12 where the debate about what's fair and what isn't will and should be held.

The way to measure equity is pretty straightforward. If the Minnesota Wild had a 53 percent chance of making the playoffs based on the average of five models, then immediately going to the playoffs would

drop the team to zero. That would mean 53 percentage points lost by such a decision. On the flip side, the New York Islanders at 55 percent would see a 45 percentage point gain. Add all the absolute differences up and you get a playoff format's total inequity.

If fairness is the goal (and that is a huge if given the likely revenues lost this season), then the best playoff format would be the one with the lowest total inequity. I measured five potential formats: 16-team, 18-team, 20-team, 22-team and 24-team – the latter four of which would feature play-in games.

The two biggest playoff pools – 22-team and 24-team – would mean either a restructuring of the format to go back to conference seeding (yay!) or re-ordering teams based on divisions (boo!) and according to Sportsnet's Chris Johnston, there's a belief that the NHL will opt for the latter. That means the Eastern Conference's eighth-place team, Toronto, would be a six-seed and the Western fifth-place team, Edmonton, would be the fourth seed. Equity already doesn't seem to be the highest priority.

That would leave the following play-in scenarios based on the four different playoff pools.

It's not a bad lineup of matchups, headlined by a Western Canada tilt between Calgary and Winnipeg and it's easy to see too why the NHL would be tantalized by the idea of a No. 5 versus No. 12 matchup given the two potential matchups on the docket (as well as the market size of the 12-seeds). Whether they deserve it is an entirely different story.

The idea that the NHL would subject two teams above 95 percent playoff chances to "earn" their spot against two teams that are at three percent or worse would be completely asinine. It would render the first 70 games of this season moot, allowing random variation to be the ultimate decider. In a play-in game, Pittsburgh's playoff odds would drop from 96 percent to 63 percent while Dallas would go from 96 to 62 percent, a misguided transaction that would see Montreal jump from 0.1 percent to 37 percent and Chicago from three percent to 38 percent. It's these kinds of decisions the NHL should very much avoid if the season returns.

For a No. 5 versus No. 12 series to be equitable to each team's current chances, the 12-seed would need to win four straight games against the No. 5 seed, something they have a three percent chance of doing and something the NHL probably won't have time for (not to mention it would be even more gimmicky than a straight-up play-in game).

The NHL's solution to combat random variation will likely be to have each play-in matchup decided by a three-game series, but that won't be enough to dissuade randomness. In fact, it would likely just be a waste of time the league probably won't have. Surprisingly, extending a series to three games can actually be a detriment to the favourite in a close series (which most of these are) due to the power of home-ice advantage, which adds about 10 percentage points from an away game.

The turning point from where a three-game series is more beneficial to the favourite is if that team's odds in a single game on home ice is 60 percent, and though that applies to the two No. 5 versus No. 12 series, it would only be an added benefit of just over one percent. It's not enough.

As a result, having a three-game series for each matchup would be slightly less equitable in every playoff format compared to just a simple one-game playoff. That should be really helpful knowledge given the time constraints the NHL will likely be under, though if the goal is to recoup gate revenue then it's an understandable decision as there is little discernible difference between playing one or three games with the current matchups.

There is, however, a sizeable difference depending on how many play-in scenarios the league uses. Compared to just handing the top 16 teams a playoff spot where the total inequity is 425 percentage points, every single scenario that involves play-in games – yes, even the 24-team monstrosity – is a significantly more just option than no play-in games at all. The more the merrier.

In the chart below, blue means the team benefits from the scenario, red means the scenario is a detriment.



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Surprisingly, a 24-team playoff isn't the worst option available, but only because it's less just to eliminate Minnesota and Florida than it is to hand Montreal and Chicago a life raft. That the trend in equity completely reverses course in going from 22-team to 24-team should say it all, as it's a needless injection of randomness to the paths of four teams that deserve their current place in the playoff picture.

The evidence is clear. The NHL should increase the playoff pool with play-in game scenarios, especially if one game is as good as three probabilistically. The decision will come from where to draw the line as 18 teams is too strict and 24 teams is too lenient – 20 or 22 teams looks to be the sweet spot. There are pros and cons for both though, enough to make sure not every team is perfectly happy.

The main difference between 20- and 22-team playoffs is which teams get the short end of the stick. The 20-team playoff is a bit more generous to teams closer to the bubble, but the Rangers losing 22 percent and the Leafs gaining 22 percent isn't exactly fair, nor is gifting Vancouver a spot the Canucks are 37 percentage points away from. A 22-team playoff handles some of those injustices but veers a little too much in the opposite direction where the detriment is now on the teams closest to a spot while the benefit is almost exclusively towards teams currently on the outside. That isn't fair either, even if it's in total a bit more equitable and only one team sees a 20 percentage point or higher benefit/detriment compared to three for 20-team.

There is one way to improve that and make sure Arizona isn't given such a substantial benefit it doesn't deserve and that's leaning into a gimmicky scenario as outlined above. Make the 11-seed earn it by winning both games in a two-game playoff. The optics aren't great for Toronto to gain another advantage given the team is being gifted a sixth seed it doesn't deserve to maintain divisional balance, but based on every team's current playoff odds, a move like that would go a long way to make things fairer across the board. Toronto's and New York's odds difference would drop to four percentage points, Vancouver's would go to 14 percentage points in the other direction and Arizona would drop to eight percentage points. That would leave Carolina as the only team above 15 percentage points and no teams above 20. The total inequity: 115 percentage points. That's about as good as you're going to get without getting even more creative.

No matter what the case is, every solution sucks. The whole situation does. But if the NHL does resume, it will have to make some tough decisions. Its goal should be making one that doesn't sully the first 70 games and creates the fairest landscape for every team. It won't be an easy one.

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1172746 Websites

The Athletic / The Video Room: Auston Matthews' goal-scoring hit next level thanks to one-timer

By Mitch Brown Mar 18, 2020

The best players are the best because they continuously improve. Sometimes, they get faster, leaner, or stronger. Others, they refine a skill to make it their own and bring their game to another level.

Auston Matthews is one of these players. After being the No. 1 pick in the 2016 draft, he reinvented his shooting mechanics – even though his shooting was his defining skill. He did it again the following offseason, taking the curl-and-drag wrister and making it his own.

Last summer, Matthews did it again, adding a one-timer. But after much early-season hype (Matthews scored on two one-timers in his first three

games), it took the better part of three months for Matthews' to start hitting the one-timer consistently. From December 21 – the game that Mitch Marner took William Nylander's place alongside Matthews – to when the NHL hit pause on the season, he had 11 goals on one-timers.

The best way to understand the importance of the one-timer is through the addition of the curl-and-drag wrister. Before the curl-and-drag wrister emerged as Matthews' defining weapon in 2017-18, he was already one of the league's most diverse finishers. A deceptive wrister gave Matthews range, but he primarily scored around the net in just about every way possible: Backhand-forehand transitions through traffic, one-handed deflections, tip-ins with a defender on his back, shots placed high, low, and through limbs of the goaltender, and he was always ready to shoot with a weight shift crafted for every scenario. If there was one defining skill, it was Matthews' catch-and-release and two-touch shooting, which comprised of 17 of Matthews' 44 goals in his rookie season (and playoffs).

Matthews wasn't content to just be a 40-goal scorer. So, he added the curl-and-drag, a shot that provides a solution to two of hockey's trickiest problems: A well-positioned defender and a well-positioned goaltender. The curl-and-drag motion of the shot sets-up the defender to be used as a screen, blocking the goaltender's sightline of the puck. The motion simultaneously changes the angle of the shot, giving the shooter the edge in the shooter-goaltender chess match.

Plenty of players have used the curl-and-drag wrister, set-up defenders for screens, or changed the angle in their shooting motion before Matthews. But he's perhaps the best at combining all three with such velocity. Of the 21 curl-and-drag wristers he's scored on his career, no two look the same. He's used the curl-and-drag in catch-and-release shots, picking corners, shooting five-hole, or aiming between the blocker and torso.

The curl-and-drag wrister gave Matthews another tool to score with; it gave Matthews a larger finishing range. The curl-and-drag is primarily (but not exclusively) used on the strong-side, as the motion brings the puck closer to the middle of the ice. So, the shot didn't open up the right side of the ice (Matthews' off-side) any more than previously. Which, honestly, wasn't a big deal – Matthews still shot and scored plenty from the right side of the ice, but there was a tiny bit of a room to improve.

Enter: The one-timer. The one-timer is that tiny bit of improvement, but it has a significant impact. The one-timer went from zero percent of Matthews' goals in 2016-17 to 27 percent this season, essentially replacing the catch-and-release and two-touch finishes in Matthews' scoring output.

When in position for a one-timer, Matthews doesn't have to catch the pass anymore. Already one of the league's quickest shooters before the one-timer, Matthews doesn't need a half-second to catch and shoot the puck anymore – he can simply hammer it. Here's an example:

Last season, Matthews usually took that pass and stepped in before shooting – but by then, Jets goalie Connor Hellebuyck's likely ready for the shot, and a defender is pressuring Matthews. Instead, it's a perfectly placed one-timer over the goaltender's shoulder and just under the bar.

It's no coincidence that Matthews' one-timer scoring skyrocketed when Marner moved up to the top-line. While both Marner and Nylander are masterful space creators by drawing so much attention to themselves, Marner's a better playmaker. Marner spots the trailer with more consistency, and layers his passes with more deception, giving Matthews all the space that he needs to tee-up the one-timer.

The Marner effect is also apparent in what Marner does away from the puck. Marner, with his constant motion and attention to detail, has such a strong off-puck gravitational pull. He makes the little plays, like activating into the middle lane or tying up a stick that creates space for his teammates behind him. That space gives Matthews' more space for the one-timer.



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More important than shooting ability for scoring goals is the ability to get open. Matthews is exceptional at relocating without the puck to shoot. He finds pockets of space all over the ice with such frequency that there's no discernible preferred location other than "the slot." With his strength and dexterity, he's able to occupy even the tiniest pockets while keeping his body readied for a shot.

The one-timer allows Matthews to relocate to pockets of space further away from the net, without a loss in scoring threat. He's added more range as a shooter – yet again – turning him into a threat to score from anywhere in the offensive zone. Now, Matthews can use the top left of the circle not just for curl-and-drags, but also for one-timers. In the clip below, Matthews' feet are pointed toward the corner while he shoots short-side on a spin-around one-timer – that's incredible dexterity.

On the topic of shooting dexterity, the best at taking one-timers adjust to the pass. Alexander Ovechkin, for example, isn't getting spoon-fed perfect passes from John Carlson and Nicklas Backstrom every power play – he's adjusting to receive every pass in his wheelhouse. And it just so happens that his wheelhouse is larger than anyone else in the NHL. Matthews isn't Ovechkin-good at adjusting to the pass, but he's near the top of the league already.

Here's an example of Matthews' ability to one-time tricky passes. With Marnier creating space behind him, Tavares makes a cross-ice pass to Matthews that's headed just a bit behind Matthews' skates. Since the pass reception requires the player to be off-balance, most players turn this pass into a catch-and-release shot. For Matthews, it's a one-timer, shaving that split-second off to increase the likelihood of a goal.

The mechanics behind that shot are special. With both toes pointed toward the corner, Matthews can't have his hips square to the pass. Much of the power in a one-timer comes from the rotation of the hips, the 90-degree-or-so twist of the hips facing the puck and turning toward the net. Matthews has no hip rotation in that shot. The power's coming from his upper-body and feet. That's unreal.

The other part of adjusting to the pass is physically moving to be square to the pass. Matthews is a master of tracking the play, and he's applied to setting up the one-timer. It's especially noticeable on the power play, where Matthews makes little shuffles to end up in the right place just as the pass comes to him.

The one-timer has changed the complexion of the Leafs power play, with Matthews able to one-timer shots from both Marnier and Nylander on their off-sides. Since the game that Matthews' found his one-timer in late-December, the Leafs power play is 31.8 percent, with Matthews scoring six goals and adding five assists.

While Matthews' one-timer has been a story all season, the goals are just starting to come. Matthews wasn't taking one-timers last season – now, he has one of the best one-timers in the NHL. His ability to adapt to the pass and shoot anywhere around his feet without any loss in power or placement is rare; it's the type of improvement that only elite athletes seem capable of.

The addition of the one-timer hasn't come at a loss of Matthews' exceptional finishing talent around the net — it complements it. He can still make those crazy deflections with a defender on his back. He's still picking corners with a wrist that combines deception and an insanely quick release. And he's made significant improvements to his defensive game in these past couple months.

Can Matthews hit 60? We may not find out this season but with this one-timer added to seemingly infinite shooting arsenal, it may be in his future.

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1172747 Websites

The Athletic / LeBrun: Why the idea of an August-September playoff scenario makes sense

By Pierre LeBrun Mar 17, 2020

The NHL is going to need some out-of-the-box thinking to salvage – if even possible – its 2020 Stanley Cup derby.

And it appears that's the exact approach some rather important stakeholders are currently taking.

According to my TSN colleague Frank Seravalli, some of the NHL's top players have brainstormed about what a possible resumption of play might look like and what they've come up with is an August-September playoff scenario.

To be clear, this isn't an official proposal from the NHL Players' Association, at least not yet, just a few NHL players spit-balling at this stage. But it's interesting.

This schedule would afford the league much more leeway as health authorities attempt to corral the COVID-19 threat over the coming weeks and months.

As I also reported in our "Insider Trading" segment on Tuesday, it just so happens that one NHL governor – who asked to remain anonymous – has also endorsed a similar version of the August-September playoff schedule and has already pitched it to NHL commissioner Gary Bettman.

One of the concerns the governor pointed out to me on Tuesday was his fear that if the NHL resumed play in May or June, and a player tested positive, it would ground everything to a halt and end the season, this time for good.

That's why he feels strongly that waiting longer is important. Not that health experts are saying the coronavirus is going away anytime soon. All signs point to it getting worse before it can get better, but one hopes that by August, a better plan to fight the virus will be in place. Let's hope!

Here is the loose timeline in this idea:

Proposal for re-starting season

Training camp

Early July

2019-20 season ends

Late July

Playoffs

August-September

Draft, free agency

October

2020-21 season begins

November

October just happens to be the month most NHL owners in many U.S. markets try to schedule as few games as possible in a normal NHL season. As this governor points out, it's making the best out of a tough situation by having the offseason in that month.

There are ways to truncate next season, for starters by eliminating the "bye" weeks and the All-Star Game set for South Florida. Two moves that would require the players' blessing.

But even the August-September playoffs can be tightened up. As one NHL GM suggested to me on Tuesday, you can schedule more back-to-backs in the same city. Currently, TV dictates that some series get



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spread out more. The bottom line is that there are ways to get a best-of-seven series played quicker.

A key element in all this is the Tokyo Olympics, which remain on at this point (we'll see in the end), scheduled for July 24-Aug. 9. One would think the NHL would want to avoid overlapping with the Games as much as possible.

Now, as Seravalli reported, the players' idea has some regular-season games involved before the playoffs, which would be played in July. This would allow the players to get up to speed, given the long layoff, while also evening-up the regular-season games played by each team. Sure, there would be a short training camp but some actual games before the playoffs would benefit them.

One team executive I spoke with on Tuesday doesn't like the idea of regular-season games. He says we're almost already at the point, given the CDC's recommendation of an eight-week social shutdown, where jumping right to the playoffs makes the most sense.

Especially, he says, because it makes very little sense for some non-playoff teams to come back after such a long layoff just so they can play a handful of games.

Now there are all kinds of format ideas being kicked around both within the NHL head office and from NHL team executives. Should the league come back with a 20-team playoff? Twenty-two teams? Twenty-four teams?

Again, this particular team executive would prefer going straight to the 16-team playoff.

"It doesn't work for me that a team might come back after all this time and play a best-of-three, let's say, and be out in two games and that's it," he argued.

It's worth repeating, who knows when we'll have NHL hockey again. We just don't know with any certainty where this global health threat is headed.

But count me in as someone who likes the concept of August-September playoffs. It's far enough away to at least maybe have a chance of happening.

It beats the alternative, no hockey until next season, which will happen if playing games in May and June is not an option.

Early days yet, but this latest idea is one I can live with.

The Athletic LOADED: 03.18.2020

1172748 Websites

The Athletic / Burnside: Six best hockey games I have covered

By Scott Burnside Mar 17, 2020

So, we have some time on our hands, no? And it's good to be diverted, to think of happier times. So in the void left by the NHL's decision to pause the season as a response to the spread of COVID-19, I got to thinking about games that left an impression on me. Games I was lucky enough to have been in attendance for that will stand the test of time now and long into the future.

The only restriction on this (and to separate it from a list I'll provide later about classic games you should be watching during this downtime) is that it had to be a game I was covering.

So, without further ado, my top six games (with a few honorable mentions thrown in for good measure).

1. Colorado Avalanche vs. Detroit Red Wings, Joe Louis Arena, March 26, 1997

I'd been a sports writer for less than three months when I made my way to the cramped press box at Joe Louis Arena for this late-season game between arch-rivals Detroit and Colorado. What I didn't know about being a columnist, and specifically a hockey columnist, was, well, a whole lot. As an epic night of bloodshed, bad blood and vengeance unfolded, no one could have imagined that this would be seen as a defining moment for a Red Wing team that had become chronic underachievers – especially not a neophyte sports scribe. I've never been one to subscribe to the thought of a hockey fight as any kind of defining moment for a player or team, but on a night that saw Darren McCarty exact mighty revenge on Claude Lemieux for his devastating, dirty hit on Kris Draper in the 1996 playoffs and numerous other side bouts – including the unlikely spectacle of Mike Vernon duking it out with Patrick Roy and Igor Larionov throwing down with Peter Forsberg – well, it's not hard to see why this moment would be something the Red Wings would harken back to a few months later as they marched to their first Stanley Cup since 1955 and first of back-to-back championships. Among the curious elements of a night full of curiosity was the fact that McCarty, who basically hunted Lemieux down and throttled the legendary agitator, who was a virtual non-participant in the altercation, was assessed only a double-minor for the transgression. In true poetic justice, McCarty would score the overtime winner in a 6-5 Red Wing decision. My only regret? That I'd written the game column in a manner befitting the implications of the event. Not the last time I've had that regret, I can say.

2. Washington Capitals vs. Pittsburgh Penguins, Game 2 of Eastern Conference semifinal, Verizon Center, May 4, 2009

For the first few years after the 2004-05 lockout, I was on hand for pretty much every Sidney Crosby/Alex Ovechkin clash while working for ESPN.com. We narrowly missed a Crosby/Ovechkin playoff clash in 2008 when Philadelphia beat the Caps in overtime in Game 7 of the first round of the playoffs (Joffrey Lupul scoring the OT winner on the power play, for those keeping track at home). But we finally got Sid and Ovi head-to-head in the playoffs for the first time the following year. The second-round series went the distance and remains one of the best I've had the fortune of covering, but Game 2, in particular, was in and of itself the equivalent of Ali vs. Foreman or Godzilla vs. King Kong – a heavyweight battle between the two young faces of the game. Here's how the scoring went: Crosby, Ovechkin, Crosby, (David Steckel), Ovechkin, Ovechkin, Crosby. The crazy thing is that the 4-3 Washington win gave the Caps a 2-0 series lead heading into Pittsburgh for Games 3 and 4. I remember writing (boldly I might add) that there was a new power in the Eastern Conference and that power was Ovechkin and the Capitals. Not quite. Crosby and the Penguins had a different narrative in mind as they won four of the next five games and went on to win the Stanley Cup. The two great rivals have met three other times in the playoffs (2016, 2017 and 2018) with the winner of each of those series going on to win the Stanley Cup. But on this night in 2009, the full range of both iconic players' skills was on display, creating an indelible image that will remain for years.

3. Canada vs. USA, 2010 Vancouver Olympics, Canada Hockey Place, Feb. 28, 2010

It's hard to imagine ever being part of an event as super-charged as the gold medal game at the 2010 Olympics in Vancouver. Perhaps the greatest hockey tournament anywhere, anytime, ended with one of the greatest showdowns of all time. What sticks with me was the entire atmosphere in Vancouver leading up to the gold medal game between host Canada and the upstart Americans. The city and indeed the entire country were on tenterhooks the entire time. The U.S. had beaten Canada in the round robin and there was a "team of destiny" vibe surrounding Team USA heading into the gold medal game. The finale was set for 12:15 p.m. local time and people had been lining up for hours to get into bars and restaurants to watch the game. Pierre LeBrun and I, who had been sharing a cramped one-bedroom unit at a downtown hotel which in and of itself warrants a movie treatment or at least a "Saturday Night Live" skit, walked to Canada Hockey Place about three hours



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before puck drop. The lineup for security was already enormous. LeBrun spied Marc-Andre Fleury and his family languishing in line. Fleury was the third goaltender for Team Canada and not dressing, so Pierre helped facilitate their entry to the arena. What sets this game apart from any other game I've covered is that once the game started there was the sense that every single person inside – and maybe outside, too – was holding their breath for the entire game. With each break in action the crowd exhaled and then seemed to hold it in again as Canada took a 2-0 lead in the second period. LeBrun and I had Corey Perry in the winning-goal pool (a random draw) and I remember turning to LeBrun with about three minutes to go and the score 2-1 Canada saying, never mind the money, let's see some more hockey. I wasn't kidding. Really. Moments later Zach Parise scored to tie it with 24 seconds left in regulation and send the game to overtime. If I'm being completely honest, there was a sense of both wonderment and sadness when Sidney Crosby scored the golden goal 7:40 into overtime because it was a game that you simply never wanted to end.

#### 4. Tampa Bay Lightning vs. Boston Bruins, Game 7 of Eastern Conference final, TD Garden, May 27, 2011

Probably the greatest 1-0 game I've ever had the fortune to cover and one of the most gripping playoff games in more than 20 years of sitting in playoff press boxes. This series was terrific overall. A year earlier Boston choked up a 3-0 series lead against Philadelphia and it looked like they were going to be one-and-done against a pesky Montreal team in the first round this spring. Tampa was enjoying its first brush with success under new ownership and a new GM in Steve Yzerman. This conference final went back and forth and is noteworthy for, among other things, likely saving Mike Smith's career as he came in mid-series to spell a wearying Dwayne Roloson. But it was Roloson who returned to the net for Game 7 in Boston, squaring off against soon to be playoff MVP and Vezina Trophy winner Tim Thomas. Both were veteran netminders proving that age was, indeed, relative. In fact, Roloson, whom I have always had friendly interactions with, at one point refused to answer a question I posed about his age in a scrum. Later he would pull me out of the media workroom to ask if I liked his joke. He thought it hilarious that my colleagues thought he was annoyed with me. Both Thomas and Roloson were heroic in Game 7. The game was like liquid. No penalties (although if you ask Tampa officials there were simply no penalties called, but I digress). Boston carried the play and Roloson was steadfast, stopping 37 shots. But the one stop Roloson didn't make, off Nathan Horton's stick midway through an intense third period, was enough. Thomas pitched a 24-save shutout for a 1-0 win and sent Boston to the final and ultimately a Stanley Cup.

#### 5. Chicago Blackhawks vs. Boston Bruins, Game 6 of Stanley Cup final, TD Garden, June 24, 2013

This was a terrific Stanley Cup final series right from the get-go, as the Bruins were looking to prove their seminal Cup win two years earlier was no fluke and Chicago was a dynasty in the making. After Milan Lucic scored midway through the third period to give Boston a 2-1 lead with time ticking down, it appeared almost certain that the series would head back to the United Center for Game 7. Funny what you remember. In the press box, my ESPN.com colleagues were scrambling to figure out assignments for postgame but also trying to make plans to get ourselves back to Chicago. Craig Custance, now of The Athletic, was on hand and was tasked with booking flights for himself, LeBrun and me. LeBrun and I were hammering out our respective columns to set up what we anticipated would be a banner finale to a season that had begun with a soul-sucking lockout. While we were doing that, Bryan Bickell scored with 1:16 left in regulation to tie the game off a great feed from Jonathan Toews with Corey Crawford on the bench. Just 17 seconds later Dave Bolland swatted home a loose puck after a point drive hit the post to the right of Boston netminder Tuukka Rask to give Chicago the lead. It was as though every single person in TD Garden had been gut-punched. As the clock ticked down and the Blackhawks began to celebrate what would be their second of three Stanley Cups between 2010 and 2015, I remember thinking this was a game that reminded us that humans,

whether they're coaches or players or plain old scribes, plan and hockey gods laugh.

#### 6. Los Angeles Kings vs. Chicago Blackhawks, Game 5 of Western Conference final, United Center, May 28, 2014

This entire series would be near the top of the greatest of all time, let alone just the ones I've covered. An epic seven-game set that wasn't decided until Alec Martinez's overtime winner in Game 7 in Chicago. But even before that, there was Game 5. Los Angeles was up 3-1 in the series and looking to roll over the defending Stanley Cup champs in the conference final to avenge its loss the previous season in the conference final round. Game 5 was epic in every way but specifically will be remembered for one of the greatest stretches of overtime action that we've ever seen, highlighted the league's two premier franchises at the time, both at the peak of their considerable powers. Throughout the series, coaches Darryl Sutter (Kings) and Joel Quenneville (Blackhawks) were content to match power against power with Los Angeles' top center, Anze Kopitar, regularly squaring off against Chicago's Jonathan Toews regardless of which building the teams were playing in. It was old school Los Angeles grinding and pounding away at the speedy, skilled but gritty Blackhawks. The Kings erased a 3-1 first period Blackhawks lead and eventually took a 4-3 lead into the third before Ben Smith tied it early in the final regulation frame. Jonathan Quick and Corey Crawford were outstanding, facing a total of 99 shots and both recording 40 saves on the night. Michal Handzus scored off a great feed from Brandon Saad and some misdirection from Patrick Kane, who drew the second assist at 2:04 of the second overtime. The first overtime took just 26 minutes in real-time to play, and when I looked down at my notebook at the end of the first overtime period, I had written only this: OT. That's how good this game was.

#### Honorable Mention

- Wayne Gretzky's last game in Canada, April 15, 1999: A game in which he was named first, second and third star, and fans spontaneously cheered "one more year" and the Senators lined up for a chance to shake Gretzky's hand when it was over, ending in a 2-2 tie.
- Preseason game between Toronto and Detroit, 2000: Scotty Bowman called me into his office at Joe Louis Arena to ask me if I was there to write about how Dave Manson had bitten (allegedly) Martin Lapointe.
- March 29, 2001: When Flyer fan Chris Falcone, enraged after Toronto tough guy Tie Domi squirted water at him through the penalty box glass, ended up toppling into the penalty box and was, briefly, thrashed about by the legendary NHL brawler. Those of us in the press box in Philadelphia had the best view in the house. I still remember linesman Kevin Collins possibly saving Falcone's life by guiding Domi out of the box.
- April 22, 2012, in Philadelphia: When the Flyers eliminated the hated Penguins in the opening round of the playoffs in a game that featured simultaneous fights between Crosby and Claude Giroux, and Kris Letang and Kimmo Timonen. Enough said.
- June 16, 1998: Game 4 of what might have been the most lifeless final series of all time but featured one of the most emotional postgame scenes ever when Detroit captain Steve Yzerman took the Stanley Cup from commissioner Gary Bettman after the Red Wings swept the Capitals and set it on the edge of Vladimir Konstantinov's wheelchair. Konstantinov, of course, suffered permanent injuries after a limousine crash that followed the team's Stanley Cup win the previous June. A picture of that moment hangs in my office as a reminder of the randomness of life.

The Athletic LOADED: 03.18.2020

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# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 18, 2020

Sportsnet.ca / Ottawa Senators player is first NHLer to test positive for COVID-19

Sportsnet Staff | March 17, 2020, 11:07 PM

Five days after the NHL announced it would pause its 2019-20 season, the first player in the league has tested positive for COVID-19.

According to a statement released late Tuesday, a member of the Ottawa Senators has tested positive. The player has mild symptoms and is in isolation.

"The Ottawa Senators are in the process of notifying anyone who has had known close contact with the athlete and are working with our team doctors and public health officials," the statement says. "As a result of this positive case, all members of the Ottawa Senators are requested to remain isolated, to monitor their health and seek advice from our team medical staff."

On Thursday, March 12, the NHL paused its season due to the ongoing coronavirus outbreak, but none of its players had tested positive for the disease until now. A day before the NHL's decision, the NBA suspended its season following the news that Rudy Gobert of the Utah Jazz had tested positive and it was later discovered his teammate, Donovan Mitchell, had as well. One member of the Detroit Pistons and four members of the Brooklyn Nets were also found to have the virus.

In the days leading up to the shutdown, the Senators played all three teams from California, including the San Jose Sharks on March 7. That game was played one day after Santa Clara County, which includes the city of San Jose, recommended large gatherings be cancelled after 20 cases of COVID-19 were found in the region.

The Senators also played the Los Angeles Kings at Staples Center, one day after the Nets played the Los Angeles Lakers in the same building. That game between the Senators and Kings was the final NHL game before the league shut down.

The #sens sent a couple players to Belleville to "self-isolate" immediately after that California trip and there's some relief in their AHL circle tonight that the positive COVID-19 test wasn't from that group.

— Chris Johnston (@reporterchris) March 18, 2020

While this is the first instance of a player testing positive, a part-time employee at the Sharks' arena SAP Center and one full-time office staff member for the Vancouver Canucks have also tested positive.

Characterized as a pandemic by the World Health Organization, the COVID-19 outbreak has led to cancellations and postponements across the sporting world and closed international borders as countries try to slow its spread.

NHL commissioner Gary Bettman has remained hopeful that the NHL will be able to finish its season and award a Stanley Cup in 2020. On Monday, players previously directed to remain in quarantine in their NHL cities were told they could go home, but to remain in quarantine once there.

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Sportsnet.ca / Breaking down the NHL's best shooters, what it means to be an elite sniper

Andrew Berkshire | March 17, 2020, 5:00 PM

Before the season began, we took a look at the best shooters in the NHL at 5-vs-5 using the previous season's data, breaking things down into four different types of analysis in order to get as broad of an understanding of what creates goals at even strength and who excels in each area.

With the NHL's season on hold, now is a great time to revisit that analysis and others like it to see how things have shaken out in 2019-20 so far.

Like I mentioned back in September, there will always be an element of goal scoring that's lost in the data, some players are just more talented than others and will score at a much higher rate on shots that may not be exceptionally dangerous for an average player. Patrik Laine fits into that mould for example.

The most accurate way of viewing this would be to say who are the best high-volume shooters in the NHL at 5-vs-5, and because there is an opportunity afforded by more ice time, we're going to use pro-rated statistics to make sure we don't miss a young player who may be ripping up the league in limited minutes. With that said, we also want to control for sample size as well, so we'll limit this to forwards who have played at least 500 minutes at 5-vs-5, which gives us a group of 336.

With all that out of the way, let's start with the best forwards at creating pure shot volume — every shot has a chance to beat a goalie, right?

Last season's even strength shot volume king has not been unseated, with Brendan Gallagher producing a nearly identical stat line in comparison to last season — though he has put a slightly higher percentage of his attempts on net. Through injuries and another tumultuous season in Montreal, Gallagher remains the picture of shooting consistency at 5-vs-5, a strong reminder of why he has earned his reputations as one of the fiercest offensive zone competitors in the sport.

Like last season, there are three other players who have managed over seven shot attempts every 20 minutes of ice time, though they are completely different than last season. Filip Forsberg, Viktor Arvidsson, and Timo Meier have all fallen back a bit, while Max Pacioretty, Alex Ovechkin, and Nathan MacKinnon have taken off.

Pacioretty is the only player of the group of four who has hit the net on a higher-than-league-average percentage of his shot attempts, but Ovechkin and MacKinnon being significantly below league average should tell you that missing the net or having your shots blocked are not big mitigating factors in scoring goals.

Volume is great, but now it's time to drill down on the quality side of things, looking at the top 31 players (in honour of the league's 31 teams) in scoring-chance production, to see what kind of quality chances they're producing with their shots on net.

One of the fun parts of doing analysis like this is you get to say things like "Garnet Hathaway? Who?" Well Garnet Hathaway has played limited minutes for the Washington Capitals, and the journeyman has played a very specific role — namely getting to the front of the net. He only has nine goals to show for it this year, but per minute he's scoring at a similar pace to John Tavares at 5-vs-5. Tavares is having an off year, and I think we all know Hathaway isn't elite at 28 years old, but that's a nice little secret tucked away in your depth forwards heading into the playoffs for Washington.

Hathaway is an extreme outlier, but following him are two of the best net-front players in the NHL in Brady Tkachuk and Gallagher, both experts at fighting for space and making teams pay for letting out rebounds.

At the other end of the spectrum is MacKinnon, who isn't that shy about getting to the net front, but much prefers to shoot from the high slot where he has more space to move and pick his spot. Many players that fans would consider snipers are those who shoot more often from the high slot for these reasons.



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Meanwhile the best goal scorer of his generation, and in my opinion, of all time, has a surprisingly balanced approach. Ovechkin is known for shooting from the so-called Ovi Spot, but that's mostly a power-play thing. At even strength, he's just as likely to crash the net as he is to rip a one-timer from there.

Going one layer deeper, let's look at how these players get their scoring chances. Who benefits most by creating off the rush for example?

Ordering by the combination of the three factors that create higher-quality scoring chances, we get another different name at the top of the list in Pittsburgh Penguins scoring machine Jake Guentzel. Constantly playing with either Sidney Crosby or Evgeni Malkin certainly helps get Guentzel a shocking number of good looks at the net, but you don't see Zack Kassian on here (no offence to him), so credit where it's due — Guentzel is a part of the reason why he's a chance machine at even strength.

Right behind Guentzel is a familiar name in Gallagher, who was also second on this graphic last season behind Arvidsson. Part of it is going to be the pure volume of shots that Gallagher takes, but he doesn't lack for quality at all. Attacking in equal proportion off the rush and off the cycle, Gallagher forces himself into the conversation any way you slice it.

With a very similar profile to Gallagher, two Maple Leafs are next in line. Auston Matthews is not a surprise — he's been the NHL's leading even-strength goal scorer since he entered the league. But how about William Nylander? For a guy who many claim can't hit the net, Nylander's first 30-goal season isn't a mirage — he's creating a high volume of high-quality chances.

After them comes the premier rush attackers in the league, with Connor McDavid and MacKinnon using their blazing speed to put defenders on their heels on a consistent basis. Both players have been less than impressive off the cycle this season, likely due to a drop in quality of linemates due to injury for MacKinnon, and for McDavid, due to the Oilers deciding to put Draisaitl on his own line.

Lastly, what about pre-shot movement? Not just in general, but how well do these players quickly turn a pass into a shot on net? Let's look at one-timers.

Here is where we see one of the NHL's scoring leaders this season suddenly move from the middle to the top of the pack, as David Pastrnak has blown his competition away with his quick release after his teammates find him with cross-ice passes. Pastrnak has a wicked one-timer, and the Bruins have leaned into that on a systemic level, which allows him to produce strong but not game-breaking levels of scoring chances, and to make bank on a ridiculous number of them.

Guentzel is right there behind him, another sign of the great teammates he plays with and his ability to finish their plays off. Guentzel hasn't drawn into a game since Dec. 30, and you've got to think the Penguins miss him mightily.

Last season's leader in percentage of slot shots that are one-timers was Sean Monahan, and he's next up here. He's actually increased his one-timers a little bit, but Pastrnak and Guentzel have just been other worldly.

Last season the one area where Matthews wasn't among the top of the pack was in getting one-timers, where just over six per cent of his slot shots were of that type, but this season has seen a big change, with one-timers rocketing up to 15 per cent of his total shots on net from the slot. If you're looking for a reason why he's gone from scoring at about a 45-goal pace per 82 games to 55 this year, that would be what I would point to.

On the other end of the spectrum, McDavid was on pace for a third straight 40-goal season with just over four per cent of his scoring chances being one-timers. Someone get this guy a linemate who can pass.

This is also the area where Gallagher falls back a fair amount, but it's interesting to note that while last season only about four per cent of his shots from the slot were one-timers, this season he's close to 9.5 per

cent, more than double. Phillip Danault growing as a playmaker has really helped Gallagher in that area, and Gallagher's game diversifying a little bit beyond just being a net-front guy helps as well.

One weird outlier here is MacKinnon, who seems to have to do a lot of work on his own within the slot area, but creates a lot more danger from the perimeter than most forwards as well nearly 20 per cent of his shots from the outside being one-timers.

Even with all this information to draw on, I'm not sure a clear front-runner emerges here. Gallagher may have the best case, but with a career shooting percentage under 10 per cent, and shooting below his career average this year, can we really call him the best even strength shooter? In the end, how much you value the inputs that create goals compared to the actual goals themselves is a personal choice.

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1172751 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Rick Vaive laments Matthews' missed shot at Maple Leafs goals record

Chris Johnston | March 17, 2020, 4:34 PM

TORONTO — Rick Vaive still remembers the date: March 24, 1982.

He doesn't even need to look it up.

That was the night he became the first player in Toronto Maple Leafs history to score 50 goals in a season and part of his march to setting the franchise record at 54.

It was a special time in Vaive's career and his life, and it was something he was looking forward to reliving in the weeks ahead with Auston Matthews in hot pursuit of his place in history. Then everything came to an abrupt halt when the spread of the COVID-19 virus forced the NHL to pause its season.

"I think he had a good shot at it," Vaive said of Matthews during a Tuesday afternoon phone conversation. "Maybe he wouldn't have got to 54 or 55, but certainly he would have got to 50. Then, now, who knows? Obviously I don't think they're even going to play regular-season games, they'll go right to the playoffs if they do resume.

"I feel bad for him because the circumstance is out of his control."

In the grand scheme of what's happening in the world right now, hockey records obviously matter little. But with a season unexpectedly halted in its final stages, it ranks high on the list of compelling storylines likely never to be seen through.

Matthews had 47 goals through 70 games when everything stopped — already tied for the seventh-best total in Leafs history. That put him on pace for a 55-goal season which would have established a new benchmark for the 103-year-old franchise.

"No one ever wants their records broken, but he was on the verge of doing that," said Vaive. "I thought it would have been unbelievable. The fact that it's been 38 years and a guy of his calibre is able to do it and that I could be there.

"It would have been a pretty special moment for him and for me. And for the organization as well."

Vaive fondly remembers having Frank Mahovlich come into the dressing room at Maple Leafs Gardens the morning after he first hit the 50-goal milestone by beating St. Louis Blues goaltender Mike Liut.



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Just 22 at that time — like Matthews is today — he'd raised the bar on Mahovlich's previous franchise-best of 48 goals from 1960-61.

"He came in and congratulated me and said 'That's unbelievable' and got pictures taken with me," said Vaive. "For me that was an unbelievable moment because, you know, it's Frank Mahovlich. I watched him for so many years."

Vaive intended to share a similar exchange with Matthews if he wound up passing the baton this spring, and was even willing to travel to road games if the Leafs centre got in a position to do it.

Those two actually discussed the pursuit during the team's "Blue and White Gala" event in January. They were seated at adjacent tables, with their backs to one another, when Vaive leaned over and said: "Are you going to break the record or what?"

"He said 'Well, I've got a lot of work to do.' And I said 'Yeah, but I think you're going to be able to do it. You've got a lot of games left and you're a talented player, you've got a great shot, I'm pretty sure you're going to be able to do it.' He said 'Well, we'll see.'"

It meant something to the three-time 50-goal man just to have that kind of banter with Matthews.

Vaive was following the chase closely and doesn't like the fact that Matthews will likely never get a shot at the final 12 games to try and score eight more goals.

"You know what, I feel bad for him because of what has happened," he said. "I'm sure he's disappointed because he's not getting the opportunity to see if he can do it or not."

For Vaive, who is currently observing a period of self-quarantine at home in Niagara Falls, Ont., it's a reminder of how much needs to go right to score 50 goals at any level of professional hockey.

You need good health, and some bounces, and a year where you play a lot of games.

Somewhere on the other side of all this uncertainty brought on by coronavirus, he believes Matthews will line up those things yet again.

"I think he can do it," said Vaive. "I don't see any reason why he can't if the season goes right and he doesn't get hurt."

"Now he's just got to hopefully look towards next year and say: 'OK, well next year I'll give it another shot.'"

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1172752 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / How a flat salary cap could impact the Toronto Maple Leafs

Luke Fox | March 17, 2020, 11:36 AM

What a difference a week makes.

Just seven days before the NHL hit pause on its season — and, by extension, its hockey-related revenue — deputy commissioner Bill Daly flew to Boca Raton, Fla., to bring the general managers good news.

The league's salary cap was projected to jump up from 2019-20's \$81.5 million to somewhere between \$84 million and \$88.2 million.

An indefinite work stoppage and an unpredictable blow to the economy will certainly render those early cap guesstimates irrelevant and give GMs headaches.

While the NHL's cap ceiling has yet to dip since its introduction in 2005-06 (at \$39 million), there is concern among players and execs that it may flatten at \$81.5 million — or even regress. Horrible timing for the Torey Krugs and Taylor Halls of the world.

Historically, the most stagnant hockey's cap has been during the lockout-shortened 2012-13 campaign. Technically the ceiling dropped from \$64.3 million to \$60 million that season, but teams were permitted to spend a pro-rated \$70.2 million over those 48 games. (In 2013-14, the cap returned to \$64.3 million.)

All of this brings us to the most urgent COVID-19 question of all: "Yeah, but how does it affect the Toronto Maple Leafs?"

Even under that hopeful, increased cap, Kyle Dubas and capologist extraordinaire Brandon Pridham would've been facing some tricky issues:

- Upfront, Toronto has a pair of bargain-priced impending unrestricted free agents who've injected maturity and leadership into the group while delivering reliable bottom-six minutes. There is a case for trying to hang onto both Kyle Clifford (\$800,000 cap hit) and Jason Spezza (\$700,000), but would they continue to accept something near the league minimum?
- On the back end, the expectation is for UFAs Tyson Barrie and Cody Ceci to walk, clearing space for entry-level, cap-easing youngsters Rasmus Sandin and Timothy Liljegren. But surely two established veterans on the blue line — Morgan Rielly and Jake Muzzin, both lefties — isn't enough to contend. So, who do you add via free agency or trade? And at what price?
- Less clear are the fates of the club's restricted free agents, and there are some intriguing ones. While the underwhelming Denis Malgin (\$750,000) and minor-leaguers Jeremy Bracco, Pontus Aberg and Adam Brooks could be retained easily, winger Ilya Mikheyev (\$925,000) and defenceman Travis Dermott (\$863,000) are valuable talents in line for nice raises. Depth centre Frederik Gauthier (\$675,000) fills a void and has steadily improved. He, too, needs either pay bump or a suitable replacement, right?
- Technically, 2021 free agents are eligible to re-sign as early as July 1. In light of the new uncertainty, it makes sense for both players and executives to delay negotiations until there is a clearer cap projection. For the Leafs, this could mean playing wait-and-see with two core pieces: Zach Hyman and Frederik Andersen.
- Complicating the Leafs' 2020-21 cap picture are the raises already committed to Muzzin, Pierre Engvall, Justin Holl and Jack Campbell. Combined, that's an extra \$4.25 million of the cap those players aren't taking out of the 2019-20 pie — a sum Dubas surely would've thought absorbed by an increased ceiling.

Something's gotta give.

With the raises already given and the ones on deck, salary will need to be shaved to address the gaping hole on the right side of the blue line.

The nuclear option, of course, would be breaking up the Big 4 — William Nylander, Mitch Marner, Auston Matthews and John Tavares — but we don't detect any desire to do that, especially in light of Nylander's 31-goal breakout performance.

That puts the Maple Leafs' tradeable middle-class forwards on the same shaky ground that Nazem Kadri, Patrick Marleau and Connor Brown found themselves in during the 2019 off-season.

Trading one or more of Kasperi Kapanen (\$3.2 million through 2021-22), Andreas Johnsson (\$3.4 million through 2022-23) or Alexander Kerfoot (\$3.5 million through 2022-23) could alleviate Dubas's cap pressures while giving an opponent a proven NHL forward in his mid-20s with cost certainty.

Dubas & Co. have proven creative in finding ways to keep their high-priced, elite talent in blue and white, but those signings were made on the presumption that the ceiling would only go in one direction.



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A flat or reduced salary cap would present a host of fresh challenges.

There is pain coming.

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Sportsnet.ca / Zach Boychuk reflects on oddities of fan-less games in Swiss League

Eric Francis | March 17, 2020, 3:54 PM

Zach Boychuk still chuckles at the sight of the goofy green dragon roaming alone in the stands.

It was two-and-a-half weeks ago when the puck was about to drop on HC Fribourg-Gotteron's second game played without fans in attendance.

With tensions high and playoff implications on the line, the lone sound of skates scraping on ice was interrupted when an unexpected visitor walked into the 6,500-seat BCF Arena in Fribourg, Switzerland.

"Our mascot showed up and he started banging his little drum before the game like he normally does," said Boychuk, a 30-year-old forward from Airdrie, Alta., just outside Calgary, where he is now in quarantine.

"Both teams just started cracking up, laughing at this mascot. It was hilarious — the funniest thing ever. This green dragon is just banging away — even our coach is cracking up."

Outside of broadcast personnel, a few media types, the training staffs and doctors, no one else was privy to the surreal — and suddenly hilarious — scene brought on by early Swiss measures to curb the spread of COVID-19.

"It was really, really odd to play with no fans — you could hear every single player chirping one another," said Boychuk, a former 14th pick overall by Carolina, where he played the bulk of his 127 NHL games.

"The game meant so much, so it was so weird. Our coach ended up getting kicked out for yelling at the ref. Normally the crowd noise would have just drowned it out. But you could hear every single word so, boom — immediately tossed."

Their previous game, played in front of 17,000 empty seats in Bern, marked Boychuk's first return to the city in which his former club won last year's National League title, setting the stage for more oddities.

"I was supposed to get my championship watch from the team, and there were no fans there, so they just gave it to me after in a little bag," chuckled the junior star, who won two world junior titles and two Spengler Cups for Canada.

"I was like, 'Oh, thanks.'"

Shortly after the team's Feb. 29 game, the league postponed operations for two weeks, leaving him in limbo, near the Italian border in Fribourg.

"I think we were all hoping to play playoffs, but because of how close we were to Italy I think a lot of guys were getting pretty nervous about the situation," said Boychuk.

On Thursday, the Swiss League became the seventh in Europe to cancel its season, putting the wheels in motion for Boychuk and his girlfriend to make a mad scramble home ahead of U.S. President Donald Trump's ban on European flights.

He arrived in Calgary on Friday and went immediately to the family farm in Airdrie to be with his mother and step-dad, who just returned from Jamaica.

"We're basically quarantining together," he said of the group.

"We've been going for walks on gravel roads, staying away from people and doing workouts on TV."

Boychuk found out Monday the head coach of a team he played a recent exhibition game against tested positive for the coronavirus.

"As far as I know, nobody had coronavirus, but I don't think anybody really got tested," said Boychuk, adding he'll soon resume his tireless off-season social media work, which has earned him 860,000 Twitter followers.

The unknown is just the capper to a bizarre season in which the former KHLer wasn't signed until late December, when his season debut was delayed by a last-minute invite to be an injury replacement at the Spengler Cup, where he won his second gold.

"It was definitely a weird year overall," he chuckled.

"I was planning on a nice, warm vacation, but it looks like that's on hold for a while."

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1172754 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Comets GM dealing with hardship of brother's death, sending players home

Iain MacIntyre | March 17, 2020, 6:41 PM

The spectrum of what we in prosperous nations consider hardship has veered as sharply as our lives have in the last week, and not because we can't watch sports or buy toilet paper, although in both cases we sure wish we could.

But by any emotional measure, Monday was a very difficult day for Utica Comets general manager Ryan Johnson, whose big brother Greg — "my hero" — would have turned 49 on March 16 had he not taken his own life last July.

With his grief renewed over the loss of his brother, Johnson then had to send away his hockey family when the American Hockey League, in lockstep with the National Hockey League, extended indefinitely its suspension due to the coronavirus pandemic and dismissed its players to travel home.

Johnson couldn't even offer a proper goodbye. Nobody could, he said.

"It has been extremely hard," Johnson told Sportsnet on Tuesday from Nashville, where he's safely home with his wife and their two children. "Since this started, I felt a huge responsibility for the safety of my players and the safety of my staff."

"This was all done by phone and text. I just didn't want a congregation of guys in the dressing room. Everybody is paying close attention to (the coronavirus), and we just couldn't have that."

Johnson, whose other job title is senior director of player development for the Vancouver Canucks, the Comets' parent team, said he gave his minor-league players as much information as he could as professional hockey screeched to a halt from full speed over a couple of days last week.



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He helped coordinate travel, which included bringing goalie Richard Bachman back from Sweden where he was sent in February on loan to IK Oscarshamn, and getting Nikolay Goldobin, Olli Juolevi and Lukas Jasek home to Europe.

He talked to North American players about whether to fly or drive.

"I just tried to give them as much information as I could so they could make the decision that was best for them," Johnson said. "In the end, most of the Western Canadians just packed up their cars and started driving."

To get them their gear from the arena, Johnson arranged a pickup "window" for each player because he didn't want more than a couple there at a time. In some cases, trainer Damion Parmelee met them at the door with their equipment bags, so the players didn't even enter the building.

The last time the team was together was for an optional skate on Thursday, when coach Trent Cull and his players learned that Friday's home game against the Belleville Senators – and all future games, it turned out – had been postponed.

"No chance for exit meetings," Johnson said. "No chance just to get together to say goodbye. That was something that a lot of guys expressed a problem with – no chance to talk in person and say goodbye. It doesn't feel like there was closure.

"That was hard for me. I'm still trying to process this, and I'm not sure how to do it. If this is the end of the season, we know the team won't be the same. It's never the same.

"I care so much about these guys. From the moment we leave Vancouver (after NHL training camp), I let these players know 100 per cent that this is where I'm supposed to be, giving them the opportunity to grow as players and people and trying to help them any way we can. I'm not there to try to get myself another title or a promotion (to the NHL). I want them to use me to get there. Everything we do is to help them elevate themselves. We try to engage with their families and girlfriends so that they are part of this, too. I could see these guys grow, and I just wanted to see them have an opportunity to finish this. But at some point you realize the world is in a different place."

Jeff Marek and Elliotte Friedman talk to a lot of people around the hockey world, and then they tell listeners all about what they've heard and what they think about it.

At age 44, Ryan Johnson manages with the same absolute conviction and selflessness with which he played 701 NHL games over 15 professional seasons, building a career on hard work and fearlessness.

He lives in Nashville because he learned to love the city when Greg played there and captained the Predators for the final seasons of his own 785-game NHL career, which was halted in 2006 by the discovery of a heart abnormality.

The boys grew up in Thunder Bay, Ont., and Ryan followed Greg to the University of North Dakota, then the Canadian national team program, the AHL and NHL.

"I can't lie to you and say this has been an easy time," Ryan said when asked about the last nine months. "The only way I've approached things most of my life is when I come across adversity, try to digest things and understand them, and then move forward and try to get better. I see adversity as a chance to get better."

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TSN.CA / NHL players spitballing late-July return, August postseason

Frank Seravalli

These are uncertain times for all, including the best hockey players on the planet.

But some of hockey's superstars have put their heads together, continuing to privately brainstorm a way for the National Hockey League to achieve some degree of certainty as to when the game will return.

Like you, they have seen reports from health experts that it may take until July or August for enough people to recover and build immunity to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Hoping to resume play in May or early June seems overly optimistic.

So, this group of players has concocted an unofficial proposal: Let's take a step back and chart out a return to the ice in late July. It's an idea that has pinged back and forth in text messages among a small subsection of some of the league's players, where it has gained traction and support.

The plan would be to open training camps in early July.

Players aren't fond of the idea of jumping right into the playoffs, so one idea is to begin a truncated conclusion to the regular season that wraps up by the end of July.

That would give teams with an unequal number of games played a chance to make their final cases for the postseason, while also providing "warm-up" contests for teams firmly in playoff position.

Then a two-month sprint for Lord Stanley would begin in August, with the Stanley Cup awarded by the end of September.

A three- to four-week transition period would follow in October with the draft, free agency and training camps.

Then the full 2020-21 regular season – a condensed, 82-game schedule – would commence in November with the Stanley Cup awarded again in late June, 2021.

The majority of players who have been presented with the proposal are in favour. It is now making its way to the NHL Players' Association and then potentially to the NHL.

The belief is the NHL would certainly consider and take any proposal made by players. The league isn't in a position to be closing the door on any idea at this point.

In fact, colleague Pierre LeBrun reported that one governor independently pitched the NHL on a similar proposal.

The two biggest concerns from the NHL's point of view will be broadcast network availability (NBC has exclusive rights to the Tokyo Olympics in the U.S. from July 24 - Aug. 6) and arena availability.

Yes, there are also questions to be asked about the length of time out of action (August through November) for teams that don't qualify for the playoffs in this proposal. Or about whether the time off during the transition period is enough for the two teams that go the distance. Or about how pending free agents will be protected during an unusual circumstance.

But the players' plan seems to check a lot of boxes.

1) This plan allows players and teams time to properly prepare, taking stress off athletes who feel the pull to continue to train at a time that it is not safe to congregate at the rink. It also allows for a defined "off-season" which would be March through June.

2) Waiting would minimize the possibility of the NHL returning in fits and starts – for instance, if the NHL attempted to return in May or June and then a player or team staff member tested positive for COVID-19 during that process.



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3) A July return would allow the NHL to properly market hockey's return and maximize revenue to be recouped, since hockey could likely then be played in full arenas. NHL players aren't keen on the idea of being awarded the Stanley Cup in an empty rink. But this would also give players and teams two runs at Lord Stanley inside 10 months.

4) Perhaps most significantly, this schedule would seem to preserve the integrity of the Stanley Cup. That is what NHL commissioner Gary Bettman mentioned in an interview on TSN 1050 Radio on Monday.

"The most important thing will be, if we come back, that the tournament or the competition that we put on has integrity and does justice to the history and tradition of the Stanley Cup," Bettman said.

Bettman said the NHL is "looking at every option."

"Frankly, there's way too much speculation," Bettman said. "We don't like to talk about things that we're just thinking about, but we are thinking about everything. But yes, everything is on the table."

This isn't speculation, this is what the NHL's best and brightest players are actually talking about.

Awarding the Stanley Cup in September would be strange. But annual rites of spring will likely be moved to the fall. The Kentucky Derby has been moved to Sept. 5 and the Masters will likely soon follow. It's going to take a lot of creativity and flexibility to come up with a plan in this imperfect world.

This idea from an invested group of players might mark the germination of the NHL's best bet.

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USA TODAY / NHL award winners if the season is canceled because of coronavirus: Artemi Panarin nabs MVP in close race

Vincent Z. Mercogliano

There's no telling when – or if – the NHL season will continue.

The league has been careful to call it a "pause," not a cancellation, while expressing hope that "we will be able to complete the season and award the Stanley Cup." The NHL told its players Monday they can go to their offseason homes but they must self-quarantine.

The priority is keeping fans, players, coaches and everyone else involved with the league healthy and safe amid the coronavirus pandemic. But we also know that many fans are cooped up at home and missing the escape you find through sports.

With that in mind, I tried my hand at picking regular-season award winners:

Hart Trophy (MVP): Artemi Panarin, New York Rangers

A casual fan could take a quick glance at the NHL's scoring leaders and conclude that Edmonton Oilers forward Leon Draisaitl should win. He leads the league with 110 points (43 goals and 67 assists), which is 13 points better than teammate Connor McDavid at No. 2.

Case closed? Well, not quite.

Panarin is tied for third in scoring at 95 points (32 goals and 63 assists), and the underlying stats reveal a compelling argument for the offseason's top free-agent prize.

According to Evolving Hockey, Panarin ranks as the top player in the league in Goals Above Replacement (GAR) and Wins Above Replacement (WAR). While there are legitimate questions about how those advanced stats calculate value for each player, there is a significant gap between Panarin and Draisaitl in GAR (24.9 vs. 15.4) and WAR (4.4 vs. 2.7).

Those stats, as well as numbers that indicate he's been more valuable defensively, such as goals against per 60 minutes (2.1 vs. 3.2), have helped Panarin gain traction around the league as a strong Hart contender – especially considering his ability to elevate his teammates.

Panarin averages 1.27 goals for per 60 relative to his teammates, while Draisaitl sits at 0.74. Simply put, Panarin has driven more production for his team. He leads the NHL with 71 points at even strength, with Draisaitl second at 66. Draisaitl leads the league with 44 power-play points, which have mostly come while on the ice with McDavid.

Since inking a seven-year, \$81.5 million deal with New York in July, Panarin has carried the youngest roster in the league into playoff contention. That impact tilts the scale in his favor.

Others considered: Draisaitl; McDavid; Nathan McKinnon (COL); David Pastrnak (BOS); Nikita Kucherov (TB).

Norris Trophy (defenseman): Roman Josi, Nashville Predators

The presumed favorite has been the Washington Capitals' John Carlson, who leads all defensemen with 75 points (15 goals and 60 assists). But this isn't an award for the top point-producer.

Josi ranks second behind Carlson with 65 points (16 goals and 49 assists), with Tampa Bay's Victor Hedman ranking third at 55 (11 goals and 44 assists). But both Josi and Hedman have outperformed Carlson in defensive metrics.

The Lightning average 1.97 goals allowed at five-on-five per every 60 minutes that Hedman plays and the Predators average 2.08 with Josi. The Capitals, on the other hand, average 3.0 goals allowed per 60 with Carlson on the ice. It's the same story with WAR, with both Hedman and Jose at 3.2, compared to 1.4 for Carlson.

When taking the full picture into account, Josi feels like the right choice. He's had a similar impact to Hedman in terms of preventing goals and he's had a better offensive season than any defenseman besides Carlson.

Others considered: Hedman; Carlson; Alex Pietrangolo (STL); Charlie McAvoy (BOS); Dougie Hamilton (CAR)

Vezina Trophy (goaltender): Connor Hellebuyck, Winnipeg Jets

While many of these choices are difficult, this one is obvious.

The 26-year-old has been the top-performing goalie in the league, posting a 31-21-5 record while tying with Montreal's Carey Price for most appearances with 58.

Despite the heavy workload, he ranks second in the league among goalies who have started at least 35 games with a .922 save percentage. Only Boston's Tuukka Rask is better at .929 while playing 17 fewer games.

But it's the difficulty of the shots Hellebuyck is stopping that really sets him apart.

Goals Saved Above Expectation determines how goalies fare based on the likelihood of a shot resulting in a goal. A rebound near the crease is a much higher percentage shot than a slap shot from the blue line. According to Evolving Hockey, Hellebuyck's GSAX for the season is 19.86, with no other goalie in double-digits.

Others considered: Rask; Andrei Vasilevskiy (TB); Jordan Binnington (STL); Carter Hart (PHI)

Opinion: Four reasons why Patriots dynasty is over



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Olympic athletes left scrambling as training centers close

NBA bracing for more positive coronavirus tests

Who will replace Tom Brady as Patriots' top QB?

Gallery: Sports world hit with cancellations

Calder Trophy (rookie): Cale Makar, Colorado Avalanche

This was shaping up to be a very interesting race between three promising defensemen.

Much of the NHL chatter has focused on Makar and Vancouver's Quinn Hughes, but having watched up close Adam Fox transform into the Rangers' No. 1 defenseman, I can tell you he belongs in the conversation. And the numbers tell a similar story.

Hughes leads all rookies with 53 points (eight goals and 45 assists), with Makar behind him at 50 (12 goals and 38 assists). The difference is that Makar reached his total in 11 fewer games, as he missed time with an upper-body injury.

Fox is tied for fourth among rookies with 42 points (eight goals and 34 points). His GAR of 14.9 ranks ahead of Hughes' 11.1, with Makar besting both at 15.8.

Makar's had the best all-around season, with better defensive results than Hughes and better point production than Fox. He leads the trio in points per game, GAR, GF%, CF% and a host of other categories. It comes down to how much you penalize him for only playing 57 games, compared to 68 for Hughes and 70 for Fox.

I don't think that's enough to take the award away from the most deserving player.

Others to consider: Hughes; Fox; Mackenzie Blackwood (NJ); Elvis Merzlikins (CBJ)

Jack Adams Award (coach): John Tortorella, Columbus Blue Jackets

Not only did the Blue Jackets lose potential Hart winner Panarin to free agency, but perhaps no team in the league has been as devastated by injury.

Last season's No. 2 scorer Cam Atkinson was limited to 44 games with an ankle injury, top defenseman Seth Jones has been out with a fractured ankle since Feb. 8 and a host of others have missed significant time. Still, with young goalies and a cast of relative unknowns, Tortorella kept his team in the mix with a low-scoring, grind-it-out style of play.

At the time the NHL paused the season, Columbus sat in one of the wild card spots in the Eastern Conference.

Others considered: Alain Vigneault (PHI); Craig Berube (STL); Dave Tippett (EDM); Bruce Cassidy (BOS)

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