



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 19, 2018

THE NEWS & OBSERVER

Hurricanes find a way to hold on in 4-3 win at Islanders

Carolina, who blew third period home leads in its last two games, gets a goal by Trevor van Riemsdyk with 6:49 left to win in Brooklyn

[March 18, 2018 Field Level Media Article, NHL, Sports](#)

Trevor van Riemsdyk scored the tiebreaking goal with 6:49 left in the third period Sunday night as the Carolina Hurricanes edged the New York Islanders, 4-3, in a battle of nosediving Metropolitan Division teams at Barclays Center.

Van Riemsdyk's shot banged off the crossbar and into the net for the Hurricanes, who won for just the fourth time in 15 games (4-9-2). Jaccob Slavin, Lee Stempniak and Victor Rask also scored for Carolina. Goalie Scott Darling recorded 26 saves.

Anders Lee scored twice and Josh Bailey added a goal for the last-place Islanders, who have lost 11 of 12 (1-7-4). Goalie Jaroslav Halak made 35 saves.

The Hurricanes took advantage of some tough luck and carelessness by the Islanders to take a quick 2-0 lead.

Slavin was credited with the first goal 2:50 into the game, when his slap shot snaked through a gaggle of players in front of Halak, ticked off the skate of Islanders defenseman Adam Pelech and caromed past Halak.

Stempniak doubled the lead 1:54 later when he intercepted Nick Leddy's clearing pass near center ice and fired a shot that sailed under Halak's stick hand.

The Islanders tied the score with two goals in a span of fewer than two minutes just beyond the midway point of the second.

Bailey cut the gap in half at the 10:29 mark when he got a stick on a shot from just inside the blue line by Ryan Pullock, who set up the score by retrieving a long rebound of a shot by John Tavares. Lee produced the equalizer just 1:53 later on a power play by putting back the rebound of another Tavares shot.

But the Hurricanes broke the tie a mere 102 seconds later when Rask swooped in and tucked a rebound of a Joakim Nordstrom shot into the right corner of the net.

Lee tied the game on the power play again 8:05 into the third, when he got his stick on Bailey's pass into the crease and nudged the puck beneath Darling.

The Hurricanes, who allowed nine total goals in their last two third periods in crushing home losses, found a way to finish Sunday with van Riemsdyk's goal — his second with Carolina and fourth game-winner among 10 career goals.



Van Riemsdyk lifts Hurricanes past Islanders, 4-3

Posted 9:04 p.m. yesterday
Updated 9:06 p.m. yesterday

By ALLAN KREDA, Associated Press

NEW YORK — The Carolina Hurricanes simply outplayed the New York Islanders in a matchup of teams headed for a spring without playoff games.

Trevor van Riemsdyk scored the go-ahead goal late in the third period and Scott Darling made 26 saves as the Hurricanes beat the reeling Islanders 4-3 Sunday.

Final 1 2 3 Tot

[Carolina](#) 2 1 1 4

[NY Islanders](#) 0 2 1 3

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

Three Stars

1: [Victor Rask](#), Car (1G, 1A)

2: [Jaccob Slavin](#), Car (1G, 1A)

3: [Anders Lee](#), NYI (2G)

STATS



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Van Riemsdyk's second goal of the season came on a long slap shot with 6:49 remaining to help snap Carolina's three-game losing streak and continue the late season swoon by the Islanders, who have just one win their last 12 games.

Jacob Slavin, Lee Stempniak and Victor Rask also scored for the Hurricanes.

"Our group has mental toughness," Hurricanes coach Bill Peters said. "We were real good 5-on-5. It was a good team win."

Anders Lee scored twice and Josh Bailey had a goal and an assist for New York. John Tavares had three assists and Jaroslav Halak finished with 35 saves.

Rask's goal with just under six minutes remaining in the middle period gave Carolina a 3-2 lead heading, before Lee tied it on the power play at 8:05 of the third with his second of the game and career-high 35th of the season.

Lee took little solace in his personal achievement as his team faces another spring without the postseason.

The Islanders are 1-7-4 in their last 12 games. They will almost certainly miss the playoffs for the second straight year after appearing three times in four years.

"It's painful because we work extremely hard and we don't have much to show for it," Lee said. "That's why this is so frustrating."

The free-falling Islanders came out with virtually no energy and the Hurricanes notched two quick goals. Slavin opened the scoring at 2:50 when his shot from the point found its way through traffic and past Halak.

Stempniak, playing in his 900th NHL game, made it 2-0 at 4:44 with an unassisted goal from the high slot, his third of the season.

Bailey narrowed the deficit to 2-1 at 10:49 of the second, tipping a shot by defenseman Ryan Pulock past Darling. It was Bailey's 18th goal this season.

Lee tied the score at 2, knocking in a rebound on the power play at 12:22 of the second. Tavares and rookie Mathew Barzal assisted. Barzal, who leads all rookies with 73 points, has 54 assists.

Carolina outshot the Islanders 13-6 in the first period and 17-11 in the second before a quiet late-afternoon crowd of

10,688 at Barclays Center. The Islanders are last in the league in average attendance with just over 12,000 fans per game.

The Islanders announced in late January they would split games between their former home — Nassau Coliseum — and Brooklyn for the next three seasons before moving into a yet-to-built arena at Belmont Park in 2021.

But they have struggled at home this calendar year, going 4-11-1 over their last 16 games at Barclays Center after a 12-3-3 start on home ice.

Despite his team's poor results, Islanders coach Doug Weight continued to look for positives as his first full season as coach winds down.

"We fought to tie the game but they got the fourth one and we couldn't tie it," he said. "They came out hard but we had some good opportunities. We battled back."

The Hurricanes have also slumped in recent weeks to again fall from the playoff chase in the Eastern Conference. Carolina hasn't reached the postseason since 2009. They came into Sunday's contest 3-9-2 over their previous 14 games.

The Islanders were coming off back-to-back losses in a home-and-home set with Washington. They started the game with Tavares unusually on left wing with Barzal at center and Jordan Eberle on right wing.

But following Carolina's two quick strikes, Tavares were reunited with his wingers Lee and Bailey. Tavares' status is one of many clouds hanging over the Islanders since the 27-year-old captain could become an unrestricted free agent this July and could leave the franchise with no return.

NOTES: The Islanders scratched D Dennis Seidenberg and D Brandon Davidson, along with F Ross Johnston. ... Carolina scratched D Noah Hanifin because of an upper body injury. ... Carolina improved to 8-3-3 in their last 14 games against Islanders and the Hurricanes are 24-9-7 since the start of the 2008-09 season against New York. ... Lee's tying goal in the third came about 40 seconds after Carolina forward Sebastian Aho was whistled for hooking Islanders defenseman Sebastian Aho.

UP NEXT

Islanders: Host Pittsburgh on Tuesday night.

Hurricanes: Host Edmonton on Tuesday night.

'Total team effort' dooms Hurricanes in another season to forget

Posted 1:31 p.m. yesterday
Updated 8:08 p.m. yesterday

By Adam Gold, 99.9 FM The Fan radio host

For the first time in a week in which the Carolina Hurricanes took three leads into the second intermission, the Canes managed to drag the game across the finish line for two points. Though the outcome will have little impact in the standings, that die has been cast, it was certainly nice to see them finish off a team with a quality final period.

With that said, [Sunday's 4-3 win over the Islanders](#), another Metropolitan Division team headed for an early offseason, doesn't do much to change what we've seen all year long.

The Hurricanes have been a collective failure.

It's been a total team effort. From top to bottom, the Canes have underachieved in every measurable way. It cost former General Manager Ron Francis his job. It may yet cost head coach Bill Peters his. And it will undoubtedly see a roster shake up, assuming that new owner Tom Dundon can find



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the right candidate to take on the job of GM — something that has not gone well out of the gate.

The Canes are playing out the string on what will soon officially become their ninth straight season without postseason hockey. Saturday night, in front of yet another bi-partisan crowd at PNC Arena, Carolina suffered its latest come-from-ahead loss, this one, by a 4-2 score to the Flyers.

While it wasn't identical to Tuesday night's house-of-cards collapse to the Bruins, it bore enough of a resemblance to that gut-wrenching 6-4 setback.

"It sure felt that way," a visibly dejected Jordan Staal told me after the game. "It felt very similar, (pause) disappointing, (long pause) frustrating."

But it's what Staal said later that set off alarms inside my head and confirmed what many of you long-suffering fans have probably wondered about over the last half of the season. In answering a question about a "culture of losing" Staal responded by saying that, "there's a lot of players in this room that care..."

"A lot of players" is not "everyone."

Maybe that's looking for something that isn't really there, but having been in the locker room as much as I have this year, I have to admit that I've wondered just how many of the Hurricanes are physically sickened by not only THAT the team is losing but HOW they've lost so many of these games.

For his part, head coach Bill Peters agreed.

"Some guys are fully vested and some guys aren't where they need to be," Peters said after the game. When I asked him about weeding out those players, he suggested that this was an end-of-the-season issue. But is it really?

There have been at least a half dozen games this year in which the Canes were simply embarrassed by an opponent. Whether it was in Toronto during that odd, mid-afternoon, weekday start to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the NHL. Or the 7-1 pasting in Boston. Or home no-shows against the Golden Knights or Penguins.

Maybe it was gruesome late-game collapses like happened in January to the Capitals on the very day Dundon was introduced as the official majority owner. Or maybe it was back in December in San Jose when the Hurricanes coughed away a 3-goal lead. Then twice this week, third-period leads melted down in a sea of attention-to-detail atrocities.

Either way, this season has largely been one self-inflicted wound after another. And I'm not certain that the team has complete buy-in to the mission at hand. Well, that's not entirely true. I'm certain that there isn't.

The Hurricanes haven't come close to playing with the defensive execution that allowed a lesser-talented team to compete longer into the season and — more specifically —

deeper within each game a year ago. This season, they've played so few games according to the designed plan that it's fair to call those flukes.

These problems didn't just pop up over the last two or three weeks, they've been evident and blatantly obvious all year long. So this isn't an end-of-the-season issue, it's been an ALL SEASON issue. And when Peters as well as departed General Manager Ron Francis failed to address it, it became an end-of-the-season issue in that it effectively ended their season.

I'm not a "bring up the kids from Charlotte" guy. My understanding is that most of them, maybe all of them, are not ready for prime time. But that doesn't mean you couldn't use the Checkers as more of a motivating tool for the players here who were SUPPOSED to be better than they were. Why not put Victor Rask and his perpetually anemic performances through waivers and then send him to the American Hockey League for a week or so? Sit Noah Hanifin the next night after his shocking turnover led to the unraveling of the team against the Caps in January. Use Justin Faulk as an example that even a captain gets a game off when things repeatedly go awry with his responsibilities.

No one is saying that those players are incapable of competing and succeeding at a high level. But if you allow your kids to get away with not doing their homework then it really falls on you every bit as much as it does on them.

To my untrained eye, there has been a lack of honesty within the entire group this year. A belief that they'd somehow pull it together and return to the structured way they performed a year ago, when poor goaltending and a lack of goal-scoring were the two reasons they failed to punch a playoff ticket. Too many conversations included phrases like, "if we outwork the other team we're dangerous," or, "when we play the way we're supposed to," or "we're in good shape considering the schedule," or "and we haven't played our best hockey yet," or blah blah blah blah blah.

Trades are hard to make. Other teams have to want what you're willing to make available. You have to be ready to admit you might have made a mistake in player evaluation. Then the exchange must make sense in all areas. But one thing isn't hard and that's holding players accountable, and other than two nights when Rask was a de-facto member of the fourth estate and watched from the press box with us, there have been exactly zero instances of negative consequences for repeated mistakes.

If I had a dollar for every time I heard "we just have to learn from it and move on," I wouldn't have to write these columns because I'd have long-since retired. It's pretty clear that too many on this team are incapable of "learning from the mistakes" because they keep getting made.

And THAT is as much about the messaging as it is the players who aren't receiving the message.



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Recap: Hurricanes Edge Islanders

Van Riemsdyk scores in third to lift Canes to 4-3 win

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

March 18th, 2018

BROOKLYN - A resilient Carolina Hurricanes club fought through two lost leads to defeat the New York Islanders, 4-3.

[Jacob Slavin](#), [Lee Stempniak](#) and [Victor Rask](#) tallied for the Canes in the first two periods, while [Trevor van Riemsdyk](#) rifled home the game-winner in the third.

Here are five takeaways from tonight's game in Brooklyn.

One

The unfortunate storyline in the Hurricanes' last two games has been the team's inability to preserve a lead in the third period.

The same was true tonight, both in the second and third periods, but in both instances, the Canes were able to not let that mentally break them. And, unlike in the last two games, the Hurricanes came away with two points.

"It goes back to the last couple of games where we have let down. This locker room wants to play with a lot of pride out there and not let that happen again," Slavin said. "That's what it was for us tonight. We didn't want to let that happen again, and we wanted to get the two points at the end of the night."

"I think our group has mental toughness," head coach Bill Peters said. "We've had a few gut punches. You've got to pick yourself up off the canvas and keep going. That's what we did today."

Two

The Hurricanes brought a 3-2 lead into the third period, a one-goal advantage that was erased by Anders Lee's second power-play goal of the game.

Same old story, right?

Not so fast. Five minutes later, van Riemsdyk stepped up with the puck and rifled home a shot from the top of the faceoff circles to give the Hurricanes a 4-3 lead, and they clamped it down from there.

"We know what's happened. You don't run or hide from it. You just learn from it. It's been a tough learning experience the last couple of games," van Riemsdyk said. "You don't like giving those up. But I think this time we did a good job of not panicking and being like, 'Oh, crap.' It was more of just

shaking it off. We came right back, pushed the pace and got the fourth."

Three

The Islanders erased the Hurricanes' 2-0 lead in the second period, with goals from Josh Bailey, on a redirect, and Lee, on the power play, scored 1:53 apart.

Especially after the events of the last two games, that could have crumbled the Hurricanes, but they pressed on. Not even two minutes after Lee's goal tied the game, Rask tapped home a rebound on the far side of the net, his 14th goal of the season, to put the Hurricanes back on top, 3-2.

"He was going to the net hard and very committed to doing it right," Peters said.

Four

If there was any indication of how the Hurricanes felt after Saturday night's 4-2 loss to Philadelphia, look no further than the first five minutes of tonight's contest. The Canes jumped on the Islanders, who were idle on Saturday night, early and built a two-goal advantage before the game was even five minutes old. Slavin scored his second goal in as many nights just 2:50 into the game, a point shot that bounced off the skate of Adam Pelech and in.

"Is to games considered a goal-scoring streak?" Slavin asked. "I'll take it."

Nearly two minutes later, Stempniak walked in with the puck, shot and scored, a noteworthy way to punctuate his 900th career NHL game.

"We were on our toes early. We were getting in their zone and sustaining pressure. I think we had a bitter taste in our mouth from last night, so we wanted to come out strong in the first period," Slavin said. "It was definitely a response for us. ... We wanted to make sure we were playing our game and getting off to a good start so we could play a full 60."

Five

Especially on the second half of a back-to-back, grabbing a first-period lead helped the Canes build a game on the road early. And not having to chase the game was likely a mental benefit for a team that had suffered two straight heartbreaking losses.

"That's a key to come out on time and get those leads. We don't like giving them up, but I thought we did a good job of bouncing back each time," van Riemsdyk said. "When they tied it in the third, we didn't panic, found a way to get the fourth and held on."



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"It allowed us to settle in. Everyone got a chance to play," Peters said. "It's huge. It allows you to get started, and you're not chasing the game."

Up Next

The Hurricanes will host a pair of Western Conference teams this week with the Edmonton Oilers in town on Tuesday followed by the Arizona Coyotes on Thursday.



SB NATION
CANES COUNTRY

Recap and Ranker: Canes edge Islanders 4-3

Wow, Joakim Nordstrom recorded a point!

By [Justin Lape@LankyLape](mailto:JustinLape@LankyLape) Mar 18, 2018, 7:51pm EDT

The [Carolina Hurricanes](#) topped the [New York Islanders](#) 4-3 in a 5 p.m. matchup in Brooklyn on Sunday. [Scott Darling](#) turned aside 26 shots and [Sebastian Aho](#) committed a penalty on [Sebastian Aho](#). You read that right.

The Islanders almost struck just seconds into the game after a shot from the point from [Ryan Pullock](#) careened off the back of the boards and struck Darling's back. Less than three minutes in, [Jaccob Slavin](#) fired a shot from the point that found its way in to put the Hurricanes up 1-0. The Hurricanes kept the momentum going when [Lee Stempniak](#) fired a wrist shot between the two circles that beat [Jaroslav Halak](#).

Despite the quick start, the score remained 2-0 after the first 20 minutes of play. The Hurricanes played well in the neutral and defensive zones, holding the Islanders to just six shots on goal.

Sebastian Aho and [Justin Williams](#) got off to a quick start in the second period with an early chance on a give-and-go passing play but Halak stood his ground. Around the 12:37 mark, the Hurricanes had a three-on-one chance but Teuvo Teravainen's pass to Aho missed the mark, although they did earn a power play. Despite some good puck movement and chances, the Canes did not capitalize.

The Islanders got onto the board after [Ryan Pullock](#) fired a shot from the point that was tipped out front by [Josh Bailey](#) for his 18th goal of the season. After the goal, the Islanders quickly gained entrance again into the offensive zone and drew a penalty as [Derek Ryan](#) was whistled for tripping. On

the ensuing power play, Andres Lee tied the game at two apiece after putting home a rebound from a [John Tavares](#) shot.

But shortly after, [Victor Rask](#) scored his 14th goal of the season after he followed up on a rebound chance to give the Hurricanes a 3-2 lead. [Joakim Nordstrom](#) recorded two assists through two periods of play, one each on the goals by Slavin and Rask, tying his point total over the last 58 games combined.

Early in the third period, the Islanders sprung for a two-on-one opportunity but the "one" in this case was [Brett Pesce](#), who broke up the chance with no harm done. Around the half way point of the final frame, Lee deflected a puck past Darling to tie the game at three apiece.

The teams traded chances but it would be Trevor van Riemsdyk who would break the tie with a bullet from the point with 6:49 left to play. The lead would hold despite a late push from the Islanders.

Truthfully, though, this win means little for the Hurricanes at this point, as they sit far outside the second wild card spot with only ten games to go. If anything, it continues an alarming trend for this team over the past few seasons. Lose enough to get knocked out of contention while still winning just enough to ruin the franchise's chances at a game breaker in the [NHL Draft](#). Your consolation prizes? [Haydn Fleury](#) and Ryan Murphy. Congrats, I guess.

The Hurricanes will turn their attention to the [Edmonton Oilers](#) who come to Raleigh on Tuesday night. Coverage begins at 7 p.m. on Fox Sports Carolinas.



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Checkers Suffer Setback Against Binghamton

Written by Nicholas Niedzielski

Published: March 18, 2018

The Checkers couldn't replicate their success in Sunday's rematch with the Binghamton Devils, closing out their home stand with a 4-1 loss.

The contest was filled with penalties, starting right off the opening whistle. Josiah Didier laid a hit on John Quenneville 10 seconds in that earned the Checkers' blue liner a game misconduct as well as a major penalty. The Devils converted once on their five-minute man advantage, the notched another tally minutes later on a separate power play.

The Checkers joined in the power-play festivities later in the frame, with the red-hot Greg McKegg snapping a quick shot to extend his point streak, but that would be all the home team could muster. Charlotte was handed eight man advantages in the contest but went scoreless on seven of them, while the Devils notched their third of the opening period shortly after McKegg's strike. A late empty-netter would stretch the visitors' lead to 4-1, where it would stay until the final horn.

QUOTES

Coach Mike Vellucci on what went wrong in today's game
Specialty teams. They went 3-for-5 and scored on their first three opportunities that they had. The penalty kill was atrocious and our power play wasn't much better in only going 1-for-8.

Vellucci on the early penalties affecting the team's momentum

If we kill them all, we get the momentum. We just didn't kill them and that's our fault. You've got to earn your own momentum and we didn't earn it. You've got to compete and you've got to skate. We looked tired, and they looked better than we did.

Vellucci on the power play not working
Z missed a couple of chances that he could have buried and he let up just a little bit. We just passed too much. We were looking for the pretty play when sometimes you've got to get

that ugly one.

Philip Samuelsson on the game

If you give up three goals on the penalty kill, you're not really giving yourself the best chance to win. Right now our penalty kill is just not getting the job done.

Samuelsson on playing with five defensemen for the majority of the game

We're professional athletes and we're supposed to take care of ourselves. I know for me personally the more I play the more I get into a nice little groove. I don't think that's an excuse that we're looking for.

NOTES

With 10 games to go, the Checkers remain seven points ahead of Bridgeport in the playoff race. Bridgeport (3 p.m. start) was trailing Providence 4-1 after two periods ... The Checkers tied their season high for power-play goals allowed in a single game, set three times previously, in the first period alone ... Excluding the empty netter, all four of the game's goals were scored on the power play. Binghamton converted five of 10 chances in the two-game series ... The Checkers lost for second time in their last eight games and for the fourth time in their last 16 games at Bojangles' Coliseum ... Charlotte finished the season series with Binghamton at 2-2-0 ... McKegg has nine points (4g, 5a) in nine games as a Checker, including an active five-game point streak (4g, 2a) ... Lucas Wallmark extended his assist/point streak to a career-long six games (1g, 9a) ... Valentin Zykov extended his point streak to eight games (7g, 4a), tying his career long set earlier this season ... After missing the previous game due to suspension, Checkers defenseman Josiah Didier earned a game misconduct for interference just 10 seconds into the game ... Forward Andrew Miller and defenseman Jake Chelios missed the game due to injury ... Forwards Mike Ferrantino, Nick Schilkey, Zack Stortini and Sergey Tolchinsky, defenseman Tyler Ganly and goalie Callum Booth were healthy extras.

UP NEXT

The Checkers hit the road for a two-game set in Laval this Friday and Saturday.



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Hurricanes defeat Islanders, close gap for wild card in East

Van Riemsdyk breaks tie in third period to help Carolina end three-game losing streak

by Brian Compton [@BComptonNHL](#) / NHL.com Deputy Managing Editor

March 18th, 2018

NEW YORK -- [Trevor van Riemsdyk](#) broke a tie with 6:49 remaining in the third period, and the Carolina Hurricanes moved closer to the second wild card into the Stanley Cup Playoffs from the Eastern Conference with a 4-3 win against the New York Islanders at Barclays Center on Sunday.

[Victor Rask](#) and [Jaccob Slavin](#) each had a goal and an assist for the Hurricanes (31-30-11), who are nine points behind the New Jersey Devils for the second wild card with 10 games remaining. [Scott Darling](#) made 26 saves to help Carolina end a three-game losing streak.

"I think our group's got mental toughness, I really do," Hurricanes coach Bill Peters said. "We've had a few gut punches here this year, we've had a few here recently. You've got to pick yourself off the canvas and keep going, and that's what we did here today."

[Anders Lee](#) scored twice for New York (30-32-10), which has one win in its past 11 games (1-6-4) and is 12 points behind the Devils with 10 games left. [Jaroslav Halak](#) made 35 saves.

"We love coming to the rink together every day, and certainly it hasn't been a whole lot of fun. We're not getting the results, and that can beat you down," said Islanders captain [John Tavares](#), who had three assists. "I think it's just important to focus on one day at a time and just try to obviously be professional, play with a lot of pride and play hard and try and find a way to get out of this thing."

Van Riemsdyk gave Carolina a 4-3 lead when he took a pass from [Teuvo Teravainen](#) and beat Halak with a slap shot from the slot for his second goal in 69 games this season.

"It's been a tough learning experience these last couple of games," van Riemsdyk said. "We don't like giving those up, but I think this time we did a good job of not panicking."

Lee tied it 3-3 with his second power-play goal of the game at 8:05 of the third period when he redirected [Josh Bailey](#)'s feed from the right face-off circle for his NHL career-high 35th goal of the season.

Rask broke a 2-2 tie when he stuffed Slavin's rebound past Halak at 14:04 of the second period.

The Islanders erased Carolina's 2-0 lead when Bailey and Lee scored 1:53 apart in the second. Bailey redirected [Ryan Pullock](#)'s slap shot from the right point at 10:29 before Lee scored on a power play at 12:22 to make it 2-2.

Slavin gave the Hurricanes a 1-0 lead at 2:50 of the first period when his wrist shot from the left point deflected off [Adam Pelech](#) and got past Halak. It was Slavin's third goal in the past five games.

[Lee Stempniak](#) made it 2-0 when he intercepted [Nick Leddy](#)'s cross-ice feed from the Islanders blue line and sent a wrist shot from the slot past Halak at 4:44.

"It was a good comeback; they worked," Islanders coach Doug Weight said. "We had some good opportunities, we just couldn't get the last one. It was a tough one to give up with six minutes left, but the second period was good. They came out hard, and we arguably could have a couple more. The power play was good and we got back in the game."

"Just finding ways to let it slip away from us, but no, I'm not worried about [the team quitting]."

Goal of the game

Van Riemsdyk's goal at 13:11 of the third period.

Save of the game

Darling's save on a redirection by Tanner Fritz at 8:01 of the first period.

Highlight of the game

Stempniak's goal at 4:44 of the first period.

They said it

"We were on our toes early. We were getting in their zone and sustaining some pressure. I think we had a little bit of a bitter taste in our mouth from [Saturday] night, so we wanted to come out strong in the first period." -- Hurricanes defenseman [Jaccob Slavin](#)

"[Quit] is the last word that should be used. We take pride in what we do. We play hockey for a living. There's a lot of strong guys in this room that, you know what, this is pretty



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painful. It [stinks], but we come in and we work hard. We work extremely hard. We just don't have much to show for it, so that's why it feels as bad as it is." -- *Islanders forward Anders Lee*

Need to know

The Hurricanes were without defenseman [Noah Hanifin](#), who sustained an upper-body injury during a 4-2 loss to the Philadelphia Flyers on Saturday. He was replaced by [Klas Dahlbeck](#). ... Stempniak played his 900th NHL game. ...

Hurricanes' Aho commits hooking penalty against Islanders' Aho

New York defenseman draws infraction on Carolina forward with same name

NHL.com [@NHL](#)

March 18th, 2018

The Hurricanes' Sebastian Aho takes a hooking penalty on the Islanders' Sebastian Aho in the 3rd period

[Sebastian Aho](#) took a penalty against [Sebastian Aho](#) on Sunday.

Sebastian Antero Aho, the Carolina Hurricanes forward, hooked Sebastian Johannes Aho, the New York Islanders defenseman, during the third period of their game at Barclays Center on Sunday.

Lee's second goal was his 200th NHL point. ... The Islanders have scored five power-play goals in their past two games.

What's next

Hurricanes: Host the Edmonton Oilers on Tuesday (7 p.m. ET; FS-CR, SNW, NHL.TV)

Islanders: Host the Pittsburgh Penguins on Tuesday (7 p.m. ET; SN, TVAS, MSG+, ATTSN-PT, NHL.TV)

"A little Sebastian Aho-on-Sebastian Aho crime," Brendan Burke of MSG Networks said on the Islanders broadcast.

The Ahos may have the same name, but they're unrelated and each hails from a different country -- Antero Aho is Finnish and Johannes Aho is Swedish. Sunday was their second head to head meeting on the ice, the first came during the Islanders-Hurricanes game Feb. 16 in Raleigh, North Carolina, and the penalty was the first time they came together on the ice.

Johannes Aho may have drawn the penalty, but Antero Aho got the last laugh with the Hurricanes 4-3 victory.

NHL general managers to discuss coach's challenge at meetings

Offside rule, impact of crackdown on slashing also on agenda

by Dan Rosen [@droseennh](#) / NHL.com Senior Writer

March 18th, 2018

BOCA RATON, Fla. -- The coach's challenge for goaltender interference is among the topics on the agenda for the NHL general managers meetings Monday through Wednesday at Boca Beach Club.

"Obviously, this year, while there continues to be a high level of satisfaction and pride with where the game is and how competitive the product is, I think everybody is looking at the meeting as a valuable opportunity to discuss the coach's challenge for goaltender interference," NHL Deputy Commissioner Bill Daly said. "Is it working? How can we make it better? How can we make it more consistent? Are there things we can be doing better? Those are all things that I'm sure will generate lots of opinions and lots of discussion. I'm looking forward to it."

The NHL, initially at the request of the GMs, approved prior to the start of the 2015-16 season an expansion of video review to include coach's challenges for goals scored off plays that potentially involved goaltender interference and offside.

A group featuring members of the NHL Hockey Operations Department, officials, coaches and general managers met

Jan. 27 during 2018 Honda NHL All-Star Weekend in Tampa Bay to discuss goaltender interference and reviews.

NHL Commissioner Gary Bettman said the consensus of that meeting was the League needed to give a refresher to officials to not search for something that might overturn an initial call of a good goal on the ice, but instead to look to see if there is a better call to be made.

"Take a good look, but don't search to death," Commissioner Bettman said at the time. "The presumption should be the call on the ice was good unless you have a good reason to overturn it, and you shouldn't have to search for a good reason."

But goaltender interference is still drawing close attention from the League, GMs and coaches, some of whom have publicly asked for clarification to the rule and the review process because of indecision they have on when to challenge.

"It's about always trying to get better and coming up with different avenues to do it," St. Louis Blues GM Doug Armstrong said. "What our job responsibility is as managers is to try and evolve with the game to make it as consistent as possible. That's what I think we're working towards, and I give the League credit, they're pushing and prodding and trying to make it that way."

"This is the evolution of the rule. It's hard to talk too much about it until you hear everyone's opinion."



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The GMs aren't going into the meetings with the intention of trying to make a recommendation for significant changes to the goaltender interference rule or the review process because of the subjective nature of the call.

"Regardless of how a call is made or the determination, you're always going to have a dissenting point of view," Calgary Flames GM Brad Treliving said. "Certainly, when your team is involved, you try to be partial, try to look at it objectively, but it's normal and conceivable that you're looking through your team lens on it. That tends to skew it. It'll be a good conversation and I'm sure we'll leave there, everybody, with a refresher and more clarity than when we arrived."

The GMs will also discuss the offside rule, potentially to look for a more liberal interpretation of possession and to

determine if skates off the ice should be deemed inside if they have broken the vertical plane of the blue line.

In addition, the GMs will be updated on how the League-mandated crackdown on slashes to the hands has impacted the game this season, and they are expected to discuss the nature of fights that occur after hits that are deemed to be clean.

"I expect a thorough and healthy discussion, as always, on all aspects of the game," Deputy Commissioner Daly said. "It's a unique opportunity for the group of individuals who live this game every day to spend time together and discuss the state of the game and the League, what's working well and what can be done better."

Fleury using patient approach to make impact with Hurricanes

Rookie defenseman, 21, gaining valuable experience in top-four role

by Mike G. Morreale [@mikemorrealeNHL](#) / NHL.com Staff Writer

12:00 AM

[Haydn Fleury](#) viewed himself as a big man with good skating ability when he was selected by the Carolina Hurricanes with the seventh pick in the 2014 NHL Draft.

He's worked his way to become something much more as an NHL rookie this season.

"Ever since I got drafted, I think I've kept progressing each year and gotten better at the little things they keep telling me to work on," the 21-year-old defenseman said. "I think when I first got drafted, I was just a big guy that could skate but now I feel I'm more well-rounded. I can defend against good players and play against other team's top players."

Fleury (6-foot-3, 221 pounds) was No. 9 in NHL Central Scouting's final ranking of North American skaters eligible for the 2014 draft. He was projected to be a two-way defenseman with high marks in his acceleration and speed.

"Haydn initially impressed with his skating and his reliable two-way game," Hurricanes director of amateur scouting Tony MacDonald said. "He has very good size and reach and his skating allowed him to quickly retrieve pucks and exercise the option of making the first pass or rushing the puck end-to-end making clean entries into the offensive zone."

"At the time, he was building his overall game under the guidance of a demanding coach (Brent Sutter of Red Deer in the Western Hockey League) who did not tolerate short cuts."

Fleury has earned the trust of Hurricanes coach Bill Peters to the point that he can play in a top-four role.

"Our defense corps is interchangeable, but [Fleury] is a big guy, skates well, has a good stick and has a good first pass," Peters said. "There's more offense in him, but that'll come once he gets more comfortable at the NHL level."

The Hurricanes have taken a patient approach with Fleury, who spent four full seasons in Red Deer, played in the Memorial Cup and represented Canada at the 2016 IIHF World Junior Championship. He also had 26 points (seven goals, 19 assists) and a plus-16 rating in 69 games for Charlotte of the American Hockey League last season.

"I think it's been a long process but I've enjoyed it," Fleury said. "In my last two years of junior hockey, I got to play World Juniors and in the Memorial Cup. I enjoyed the time in Charlotte with a great group of guys and I think I've just kept getting better each year. I hope that continues."

Hurricanes defenseman [Justin Faulk](#) said it takes time to become comfortable at the NHL level, but he sees the strides Fleury has made.

"It's a tough league to come into as a defenseman and it's getting harder and harder with how the game is going," Faulk said. "I know it's getting younger, but it's tough and I think [Fleury] is developing pretty well. He's getting good away from the puck which is probably the hardest part to figure out when you first get into the League."

Fleury, the only rookie to play at least 15 games for the Hurricanes this season, has also earned time as a penalty-killer. He is averaging 16:36 of ice time, including 54 seconds per game on the penalty kill, and is fourth on Carolina with 84 blocked shots and seventh with 74 hits.

"I think my season's going well," Fleury said. "It started off really good with getting my feet wet and I kind of hit a little patch there when I got my game back. I went to Charlotte to play one game during the NHL All-Star Game break and felt good about myself there. I think the last month has been good; I'm just trying to make plays."

"It's a different kind of league up here and I think the offense will come. The numbers aren't really there, but I feel more comfortable with the puck and am getting some good chances to score."

Fleury hasn't scored yet but has six assists and 74 shots on goal in 57 NHL games.

"For me, he's right on target (in his development)," Peters said. "I'm not in the business of rushing guys, especially



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defensemen. I've seen that happen too many times and know how that looks in the end so we've been very patient with him but patient in the right way.

"He's playing in our top four, and when he's moving his feet and active, he's a very good defenseman."

So long as he keeps skating hard and focuses on a sound defensive game, Fleury understands the offense will return.

He had 134 points (30 goals, 104 assists) in 259 WHL games.

"Coach Peters tells the defensemen to keep skating, especially with me," Fleury said. "He's always telling me, 'You're a big guy who can skate, so you've got to be able to use those long legs and get them going every night.' I've tried to follow that advice."

TODAY'S LINKS

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SportScan

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

1104386 Edmonton Oilers

Last call for Edmonton Oilers defenceman Oscar Klefbom

Robert Tychkowski

Published: March 18, 2018

Updated: March 18, 2018 7:29 PM MDT

TAMPA — Oscar Klefbom didn't want his season to end this way.

Not prematurely, as he goes under the knife to repair a troublesome shoulder.

And not with a loss on the road.

Unfortunately, he has to accept both as he and the Oilers part ways after a 3-1 loss to the Tampa Bay Lightning. The team continues on to Carolina while Klefbom flies back home for a date with the doctors.

"This was it," he said in a quiet Oilers dressing room. "I had a long time to prepare myself for this, but it just feels empty. Two more games, one more game and now that's it, I'm done."

"It's hard to lose the last game of the season for me. This was a tough one."

Klefbom made his desire to play as long as he could very clear when he asked to stay on Edmonton's blue line right up until the operating table was ready.

Once they told him there was no risk of doing further damage to the shoulder, the choice between shutting it down last week and playing until the last minute was no choice at all.

"I want to be out there helping the guys," he said after a playing a team high 25:21 and posting a team high five shots against the Lightning. "This is what I want to do, play a lot of minutes against good teams."

"It's going to be tough, a frustrating time watching games from the press box or the locker room. But at least it's only 10."

He says it is a small consolation that the Oilers have been better lately.

"We played some good hockey the last couple of months, we've stepped it up a lot," he said. "It doesn't matter in the standings, we're not going to make the playoffs, but it's nice to show hockey people that we're a better team than we showed early in the season."

KUCHEROV PULLS AWAY

Connor McDavid lost some ground in the scoring race Sunday when Tampa's Nikita Kucherov scored a pair of goals while his Lightning teammates kept McDavid off the scoresheet for just the second time in the last 10 games.

Tampa coach Jon Cooper made no secret of the fact they were game planning for the Oilers captain.

"McDavid is a special player, you have to limit his touches and the time he can skate with the puck and where he can skate," said Cooper. "Our philosophy was: 'Let's play in their end, make him have to defend. And if he gets out of the zone, let's hope he's already spent 35 or 40 seconds in the defensive zone and he's a little tired going up ice.'"

"The guys did a heck of a job playing in their zone, but as you can see it just takes him a second. You saw a lot of the things he can do on the power play, the passes he can make. (Shutting him down) was a big key for us."



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McDavid is now in a three-way tie for second place at 89 points with Evgeni Malkin and Nate MacKinnon, four points back of Kucherov.

AL TOGETHER NOW

Oilers backup Al Montoya is 2-2-2 in six starts with the Oilers after a 37-save performance in Tampa.

He's not going to win a lot of games with one goal worth of run support, but he was one of the better Oilers in this one.

"He played great, he made some point blank saves on some great chances," said centre Ryan Strome. "He gives us a chance to win. But if you score one goal you're not going to win against those guys."

Montoya had no chance on Tampa's first goal, a deflected point shot, and even less chance on their second, a point-blank laser beam from Kucherov after a sudden turnover behind the Oilers net.

Kucherov ripped one top shelf before Montoya even knew he had the puck.

"I didn't even know where he was," he said. "That wasn't one of his better goals, it was one of his freer ones."

Late hits: Ty Rattie is turning into Mr. Opportunity in his call-up with the Oilers. He has two goals in two games, an empty netter at 19:10 of the Saturday game and a centering pass that went in 14 seconds into Sunday. Technically, it's two goals in 64 seconds ... Pontus Aberg, who lost his spot on the first line after missing practice Friday, might be out of the punitive stage of his press-box assignment, but now has to wait for an opportunity to get back in the lineup somewhere else ... Defenceman Kris Russell (hand) missed his second game in a row but with Klefbom heading back to Edmonton and Andrej Sekera leaving Sunday's game after being hit on the foot with a shot, he might have to hurry back ... Zack Kassian sat out Sunday after being hit hard into the boards Saturday.

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1104387 Edmonton Oilers

Edmonton Oilers fall short in upset bid against Tampa Bay Lightning

Robert Tychkowski

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TAMPA — The Edmonton Oilers have been good lately, but they're not that good.

Hoping to continue the momentum that lifted them to 4-1-1 in their last six, the Oilers bit off more than they could chew Sunday when they took on a Tampa Bay Lightning team 33 points ahead of them in the standings.

"Right now, they're a better team than we are," Oilers head coach Todd McLellan said after a 3-1 loss. "We see the work we have to do to catch up. It can be done and it will be done."

"But at this point, I thought they had a little more in the gas tank than we did."

The Oilers put up a decent fight against the second-place team overall, but their season-long struggle with the power play sunk them again. Edmonton went 0-for-five with the man advantage, missing on three-straight third-period power plays, including a two-man advantage for 28 seconds.

Nikita Kucherov scored the winning goal on a second-period power play and then added the insurance marker between third-period penalty kills, as the Lightning improved to 49-19-4 and the Oilers fell to 31-36-5 with 10 games to go.

"We played them in Edmonton where it was a back and forth game and we didn't want to do that again," said Oilers goalie Al Montoya, who stopped 37 of 40 shots. "I thought we weathered the momentum, but they got a couple of bounces that went their way and that was the difference."

Despite both teams playing their second of back-to-back games, this one had a lot of jump from start to finish, with Tampa controlling the first 40 minutes and Edmonton pushing hard in the final 20, but unable to convert on 14 third-period shots.

"We had a lot of pressure in the third period, created a lot of momentum with our power play, but their goalie had a good night and unfortunately we couldn't execute, and that's what counts," said defenceman Oscar Klefbom. "It's hasn't been good enough."

After having given up a goal on the first shot of the game an incredible 13 times this season, the Oilers turned the tables for a change, striking first at the 14-second mark when Ty Rattie's centering pass went in off goalie Louis Domingue.

"If you had a microphone on the bench when that went in, some of the comments were pretty comical," said Tampa coach Jon Cooper. "The big joke was that we felt we had a lot of time to come back."

"But how about our goaltender? He comes in, gets a tough break and lets that one in and then doesn't give up another one for the rest of the night. That says a lot about how mentally tough he is."

Victor Hedman tied it late in the first period when his point shot hit a stick on the way past Montoya. The Bolts took their first lead on the power play when Kucherov put a bullet an inch inside the post and under the crossbar at 2:24 of the second.

The Lightning pulled away everywhere but the scoreboard. They were up 30-16 on the shot clock at the second intermission but only had a 2-1 lead.

The Oilers, who also trailed 2-1 after 40 before coming back to beat the Florida Panthers 4-2 on Saturday, couldn't find the same magic this time. They had all kinds of opportunity with three-straight power plays, but couldn't get anything past Domingue.

Kucherov made it 3-1 at 11:34.

"We can talk about the chances and the looks and the shots," said McLellan. "But the power play still has to get a goal."

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1104388 Edmonton Oilers

Edmonton Oilers starting to figure it out, just in time for the end of the season

Robert Tychkowski

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SUNRISE, Fla. — Here Come the Oilers is a slogan typically used as a punch line for Twitter memes of spectacular wipeouts as fans do their best to find humour in another lost season.



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Oilers fall behind 2-0 early? Post a clip of a skateboarder crashing face first into some shopping carts and slug it Here Come the Oilers.

But there might be a little truth to it as the team picks up speed down the stretch drive.

The Oilers are 4-1-1 in their last six games after beating one of the hottest teams in the NHL on Saturday. Their penalty kill snuffed 15 of the last 16 opposition power plays. They've held their opponents to one goal in three of their last five games.

In short, they don't suck. As much.

Critics will argue the more appropriate slogan for this surge is Too Little, Too Late, and that's totally accurate — the Oilers will be first to admit they should have played like this when it counted — but while a strong finish can't fix the season, it's still better than wrapping up the year with a collection of comedic face plants.

"At this time of year, the position we're in, without a doubt it sucks, but we still have some games here to improve as a group and it's nice to see us string together some wins," said Oilers winger Zack Kassian.

"I wish we would have had this in October-November. It's a little too late, but at the same time, it is a bright thing to see that guys aren't giving up."

It isn't fun for anyone that while the rest of the NHL is ramping up for the playoffs, Edmonton is getting ready to shut it down for the season, but the Oilers say they have been able to live vicariously through the urgency of others, which helps.

Everyone they play these days seems to be in a life-and-death struggle, and that helps the Oilers get motivated, too.

"We're just trying to focus on ourselves right now," said Connor McDavid, who picked up three points in Saturday's win over Florida and has the winning goal in four of Edmonton's last seven victories.

"It seems like every team we play is in a desperate playoff position and we're trying to get up for them too. The last teams we've played, Minnesota, Calgary, these guys (Florida), they're all in a dog fight for the playoffs. You have to understand their intensity and match it."

Areas that used to be killing the Oilers — special teams, bad starts, goaltending — have turned the other way lately.

Yes, it's easier to play when the pressure is off, but there are also a lot of teams that have pulled the chute in March and April, too.

"It's a little bit of the pride factor," said head coach Todd McLellan. "We're all really disappointed with where we are in the season but we're not going to roll over and play dead. We plan on trying to get better and move the needle in the right direction. I think we've done that. We haven't won all the time but we've done that on most nights."

"Special teams have been better. We've won games on the power play and the penalty kill was evident tonight (six-for-six, with a shorthanded goal). I think Talbs (goaltender Cam Talbot) has settled in and become a calming influence. When we were jumping around and out of position, he was able to make some tremendous saves and get us whistles when we needed them."

None of this will undo the pain of missing the playoffs for the 11th time in 12 years, nor will it help anything next year.

But if they have to play the remaining games anyway, they might as well not suck.

"We're playing good as a group, we have a bunch of lines going and some chemistry and we're committed to defence," said Talbot. "You see a lot of guys coming back hard and taking away those odd-man rushes."

"And anytime it means a lot to the other team, we want to come in and play our best and not make it an easy road for them. We've been playing some good hockey as of late and we need to keep it going for these last 11 games."

Edmonton Sun: LOADED: 03.19.2018

1104389 Edmonton Oilers

Lowetide: The Oilers at the Republic of Finland

By Allan Mitchell Mar 18, 2018

Long ago, the unique relationship between the Edmonton Oilers and the Republic of Finland may have seemed unusual, out of place. The great early NHL success of team and nation (while playing for team) forged a union that remains strong to this day. In hockey terms, another Finn on the roster is universally considered good fortune in the city, and for good reason.

A nation far across the sea sent its very best to the NHL and a disproportionate number of Finns landed in Edmonton over the years. The WHA Oilers had two: Juha Widing (a Swede born in Finland); And the barely comprehensible Risto Siltanen, whose slap shots from the point did irreparable damage to a generation of Edmontonians' hearing. The loud noise made by his errant shots from the point slamming against the boards is still ringing in the ears of the collective.

The list of famous hockey names from Finland warms the memory and boggles the mind: Jari Kurri, the Hall of Fame two-way winger who was here for all of the golden years; Esa Tikkanen, who was one of the truly unique personalities in the history of the game, and a helluva player; Janne Niinimaa, whose silky outlet passes ignited the offence; Matti Hagman, brought in specifically to ease the transition for the phenom Kurri, he provided leadership and helped establish the responsible play of those great 80's teams; Jussi Markkanen, who stepped in during the Stanley Cup Final in 2006 and played brilliantly. If you're an Edmonton Oilers fan, Finland hockey has special meaning for you.

The Oilers and Finland at the draft (since 2008)

Total players drafted by Edmonton 2008-17: 77

Total Finnish players drafted by Edmonton 08-17: 6 (7.8 per cent)

Until the 2016 draft (more in a minute) Edmonton had gone away from Finland for most of this decade, with the interruption coming in lottery country and a surprising name falling to the club. Finland's track record since 2008 ranks well down the list of Edmonton's draft activity:

The WHL (24.6 per cent).

The OHL (15.6 per cent).

Sweden (9.1 per cent).

The NCAA (7.8 per cent) and Finland.

The QMJHL (6.5 per cent).

Over most of the period under discussion (2008-17), the NHL was drafting Finland at about a 4 per cent rate, so the Oilers are still mining the area hard compared to other teams in the league.

Teemu Hartikainen, chosen in the sixth round (No. 163 overall) in 2008. Big winger whose heavy boots were mentioned in his draft day scouting report, he had good hands and made the NHL for 52 games before being dealt. Settled in with Ufa of the KHL, where he posted a 22-goal season in 2018-19.

Toni Rajala, chosen in the fourth round (No. 109 overall) in 2009. Very small skill winger who was absolute fire during the lockout season for the Oklahoma City Barons. He was a victim of managerial changeover, would have liked to see him hang around for the entire entry deal. Currently posting offence in the Swiss league.



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Samu Perhonen, chosen in the third round (No. 62 overall) in 2011. Edmonton rarely takes a goalie as high as the third round, Stuart Skinner is the only goalie since 2011 to be chosen as high. Perhonen was an inconsistent performer after his draft, but has settled in as a solid goalie in Finland's top league (Sm-Liiga) in recent years.

Frans Tuohimaa, chosen in the seventh round (No. 182 overall) in 2011. Although chosen several rounds after Perhonen, Tuohimaa was the better goalie prospect as things turned out. He is currently a quality regular in the Sm-Liiga.

Jesse Puljujarvi, chosen in the first round (No. 4 overall) in 2016. Enormous talent just scratching the surface of his ability. He has great 5x5 per 60 scoring rates with Leon Draisaitl (2.52) and Connor McDavid (1.93), with a growing chem while on the ice against the soft parade with Ryan Strome (1.62). He's a splendid young player who should blossom in the coming months.

Aapeli Rasanen, chosen in the sixth round (No. 153 overall) in 2016. Similar to the Hartikainen selection in that speed is the issue but there's plenty to like if the boots work well enough. He's been featured in most of the international tournaments and was a regular on Finland's U-17, U-18 and U-20 (twice) World Junior teams. He was productive as a two-way forward (freshman season) for Boston College and is at least a slight candidate to turn pro this summer (at age 20). Edmonton needs centres for the farm.

Curio

The Oilers, since 1979, have enjoyed enormous success from drafting players out of the Sm-Liiga, Finland's top league. Jari Kurri was the first, Jesse Puljujarvi the most recent, with Esa Tikkanen, Jani Rita and others thrown in along the way. The curio is this: Why did Edmonton go away from Finland?

The answer might be Jesse Niinimaki, who the organization clearly loved leading up to 2002's draft. Although he had been ranked as a later-round selection, Edmonton plucked him inside the first round. The expectations were too much, leading to some painful experiences for player and organization in the years following.

After the Niinimaki experience, it was several years before the organization used a selection on a Finn, and even longer before a cherished pick was used on one. Teemu Hartikainen (six years later) represented the first trip back, perhaps Puljujarvi's success represents a new day for the Oilers and Finland.

Names in play for 2018

Jesper Kotkaniemi is a skill centre with size who plays for Assat (Sm-Liiga). Corey Pronman had very good things to say about him during his mid-winter draft rankings for The Athletic, he is a player who could go in the range of Edmonton's projected first-round pick. He can also play wing, that may have some appeal to the Oilers.

Rasmus Kupari is a playmaking centre for Karpas (Sm-Liiga). Unlike Kotkaniemi, Kupari hasn't been able to impact the pro league as much this season. He looks like a worthy first-round pick based on the verbal surrounding him. He might be an option for Edmonton should the team decide to trade down on the draft floor.

Up next: The Oilers finally jump into the final draft frontier.

The Athletic LOADED: 03.19.2018

1104338 Arizona Coyotes

Arizona Coyotes head coach Rick Tocchet to attend mother's funeral, miss Monday's game

Richard Morin, Published 3:43 p.m. MT March 18, 2018

Coyotes head coach Rick Tocchet traveled to Toronto on Sunday to attend his mother's funeral and will not be behind the bench for Monday's game against the Calgary Flames, the team announced Sunday.

Tocchet had taken a leave of absence on Monday to spend time with his family and his mother, Norma, who died on Wednesday at the age of 93 due to complications from brain cancer.

The first-year coach returned to the Valley on Thursday and was behind the bench for the Coyotes' last two games on Thursday and Saturday.

"I'm a routine guy," Tocchet said before Thursday's game. "That's the way my mom would want it anyway."

Although he will miss Monday's homestand finale while he is in Toronto, Tocchet is expected to rejoin the Coyotes in Buffalo ahead of their game on Wednesday against the Sabres.

Tocchet, who played for six teams over an 11-year NHL career, said on Thursday that his mother was as pure a hockey fan as there was.

"I never deserved a penalty," Tocchet said. "I never had a bad game. It was always the coach's fault. I could do no wrong. In her eyes, I was like (Wayne) Gretzky and (Mario) Lemieux put together."

Coyotes assistant coach John MacLean, who assumed head-coaching duties on Tuesday against the Los Angeles Kings, will serve as the interim coach on Monday.

Coyotes prospect Dylan Strome continues to fill the scoring sheet in Tucson.

On Saturday, in just his 47th game playing with the Coyotes' AHL affiliate in Tucson, Strome notched his 50th point of the season in a 2-1 win for the Roadrunners over the Stockton Heat. The 21-year-old center assisted on Michael Bunting's goal at 4:36 of the first period.

Of the 16 players to register 50 points in the AHL this season, only two players have done so in fewer games than Strome – who has scored one goal in 11 games with the Coyotes this season.

"I think he's starting to understand what it takes," Van Ryn said last week of Strome. "The first year for anybody is tough, and it's long. We've pushed Dylan harder than he's ever been pushed before, and especially within his practice habits. ... Now he's at the point where he's pushing himself hard every day in practice and he's competing hard."

"This is a guy that plays against top lines and top (defensive) pairs every night and he still manages to be over a point per game. I think Dylan's kept his head on. His growth has really come on."

Strome's 1.06 points-per-game average leads all first-year players in the AHL. Teammate Nick Merkley (1.05) ranks second among AHL rookies.

Last week, Coyotes President of Hockey Operations and General Manager John Chayka said the team was still evaluating a window in which they could recall Strome to the big club. The Coyotes have 11 games remaining on their schedule.

"We still have an opportunity to get a segment of games with which to take a look at him," he said.

Chayka also said he's noticed improvements from Strome in areas where he had been exploited at the NHL level.

"Dylan's a great player," Chayka said. "He's just a young player. I think what I've seen from him is a more mature game and a mature body in terms of the physical side of things. I think he's doing great things in the weight room and with (skating coach) Dawn Braid."

"He's a talented player and one of the top scorers down there, and he's going through the learning process as a first-year pro of what it takes. And I've seen a lot of progress in that area."

Crashing the net



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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After Saturday's 3-1 loss to the Minnesota Wild, Tocchet lamented the team's recent inability to get players to the front of the net in an effort to create scoring chances.

In the first period, the Coyotes seemed effective at having their defenseman fire shots in from the blue line, but the Arizona forwards were unable to connect on a redirection in front of the Minnesota net.

Tocchet said the Coyotes will need to find a way to establish a net-front presence in the future.

"We're getting some chances," Tocchet said after Saturday's game. "But I don't think we're getting enough net-front (presence). That's something where over the summer, we've got to find (people) to go to the net. That's the thing where we're getting shots but we don't have anyone in front of the net.

"To win in this league, you've got to get to the net. As much as we played well, I just thought our net-front presence wasn't there."

Tocchet admitted that his team is currently in the midst of a goal-scoring drought, and part of that can be attributed to the wingers sticking too close to the boards and not creating chances near the crease.

"You're going to go through stretches," Tocchet said. "Sometimes you're not going to score. But every game you have to get people to the net and I thought there were (about) seven opportunities when we were off to the side."

Monday's game

Flames at Coyotes

When: 7 p.m.

Where: Gila River Arena.

TV/Radio: Fox Sports Arizona/KMVP-FM (98.7).

Outlook: Losers of two straight, the Arizona Coyotes (23-37-11) wrap up a five-game homestand on Monday against the Calgary Flames (35-28-10) at Gila River Arena ... The Flames entered play on Sunday with 80 points on the season, four points out of a playoff spot in the Western Conference; Calgary was playing the Vegas Golden Knights on Sunday ahead of their Monday night tilt in Glendale ... This is the third of four meetings between the teams this season, with the Coyotes slated to visit Calgary again on April 3; the Flames are 2-0-0 against Arizona this season and have outscored the Coyotes 8-2 over the two games ... The Flames are led in scoring by forwards Johnny Gaudreau (81 points), Sean Monahan (63) and Matthew Tkachuk (49), as well as defenseman Dougie Hamilton (41) ... With former Coyotes goaltender Mike Smith drawing the start for the Flames on Sunday in Vegas, Calgary backups David Rittich (8-5-0, 2.78) and Jon Gillies (2-2-0, 2.79) are both candidates to start on Monday.

Arizona Republic LOADED: 03.19.2018

1104339 Arizona Coyotes

Coyotes announce coach Rick Tocchet will miss Monday game vs. Flames

BY ARIZONA SPORTS

MARCH 18, 2018 AT 3:30 PM

Arizona Coyotes head coach Rick Tocchet will miss the team's home game on Monday against the Calgary Flames to attend his mother's funeral, the team said Sunday.

Assistant coach John MacLean, who filled in for Tocchet when he took a leave of absence to be with his mother last week, will coach Arizona before the head coach returns Wednesday for a game against the Buffalo Sabres.

Tocchet's mother, Norma, 93, passed away last Wednesday after a battle with brain cancer.

The Coyotes coach stepped away from the team two days prior before returning for Arizona's morning skate on Thursday leading into a game against the Nashville Predators.

The Coyotes have gone 4-3-1 in the month of March and enter the game against the Flames hoping to end a two-game losing streak.

After facing Calgary at 7 p.m. on 98.7 FM Arizona's Sports Station, Arizona begins a six-game road trip Wednesday at 4 p.m in Buffalo.

Arizona sits at the bottom of the NHL standings with 57 points, a point shy of the Sabres and two points shy of the Vancouver Canucks.

Arizona Sports LOADED: 03.19.2018

1104340 Arizona Coyotes

Former Coyotes G Mike Smith enjoying playoff push with Calgary Flames

BY CRAIG MORGAN | MARCH 18, 2018 AT 1:40 PM

UPDATED: MARCH 18, 2018 AT 5:16 PM

Mike Smith was sidelined from Feb. 11 to March 11 with a lower-body injury. In that span, the Calgary Flames went 5-6-2, allowing 42 goals (the seventh worst mark in the NHL).

When Smith left the lineup, Calgary was in third place in the Pacific Division. As the Flames goalie drove to the airport on Saturday afternoon for the team's two-game trip to Vegas and Arizona, the Flames were four points behind the Los Angeles Kings for fourth place in the Pacific, and four points behind the Dallas Stars for the second Western Conference wild card spot.

Smith had just allowed six goals on 20 shots in a 7-4 loss to the San Jose Sharks at the Scotiabank Saddledome on Friday, so when asked by phone how he felt, he responded with his customary wit.

"After last night, not so good," he said. "Health-wise, I'm doing pretty well. Obviously, I missed a month of the season and you don't feel perfect when you come back but you get more comfortable as time goes on. For an old guy, the body is still reacting pretty well."

Despite the subpar performance against the Sharks, Smith entered Sunday's game against the Golden Knights tied for ninth in the NHL in save percentage (.919) among goalies who have played at least 35 games.

Forward Johnny Gaudreau has had a wondrous season with 23 goals and 81 points. Sean Monahan has 30 goals, but when talk turns to Calgary's MVP this season, Smith is near — if not at — the top of the list. No player has been more important to the Flames' fortunes.

"Real important," Flames general manager Brad Treliving said. "He's been important all year. It was a big blow when we lost him for a month."

Had Smith missed a month, the narrative around the Flames might be different, but Smith acknowledged that the Flames aren't where they thought they'd be, much less outsiders who projected them as a playoff team.



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"The season is not over so there is still time left, but we all think we should be further up in the standings and in a playoff spot and we're not so there's disappointment to this point," he said. "I think we have underachieved to a certain extent this year.

"We've had winning streaks where we felt everything was clicking and going well but we've gone the other way where it seemed like nothing has gone our way. The consistency part has been our Achilles heel this year."

By and large, Smith has been a rock for Calgary.

"You'd always like to be better," he said. "As you get older, you strive for perfection and you know how hard I can be on myself. There's always a learning curve that goes along with any change, even at this point in your career, but I think for the most part I've played fairly consistent, which has always been the goal."

Smith missed his team's first meeting with the Coyotes in Glendale on Feb. 22 due to the injury. He played Sunday in Vegas, raising the possibility that he would not take the ice on Monday at Gila River Arena, the only other meeting between the teams this season in Arizona.

"We'll see what happens there," he said. "Points right now for us are huge and I had a month off so it wouldn't be out of the question to play both but that's not for me to decide."

The Coyotes traded Smith to Calgary on June 17 for the rights to defensive prospect Brandon Hickey and a 2018 third-round pick that becomes a second-round pick if the Flames make the playoffs.

Smith admitted to mixed emotions at the time of the trade, but he felt it was time for a change.

"I didn't ask out by any means but when you get asked for your trade list you start weighing options," he said. "I came to a team that needed a goalie and had the opportunity to win. That in itself was exciting. Playing meaningful games at this time of year is what you want to do, especially as your career gets to the latter end. You want a chance to play in the playoffs again.

"It's been fun to play in a Canadian market to be honest with you. They are so passionate about the game, so knowledgeable and so respectful of you as a player and a person away from the rink. It makes it that much more fun to go to the rink and prepare for every game."

Smith said he, his wife Brigitte, and their four kids (ages 6, 5, 3 and 1) have settled into life in Calgary.

"The first few weeks were a bit of a change when the snow flew," he said. "My boys had skied here and there with my wife and her family so they had seen snow before but not on a consistent basis. With this year being one of the record snowfalls in 40 years in Calgary, it's been unique, but you find fun things to do anywhere you play.

"One thing about living in Arizona, you don't get to skate on outdoor rinks and go tobogganing and enjoy the Canadian lifestyle. It's kind of the way my wife and I grew up so it's fun to share that with my kids and kind of ground them a little more and show them where we came from and what we did as kids."

Even so, Smith said coming back to Arizona still feels special.

"When you spend six years of your career in one place it's hard not to have emotion and attachment to that city," he said. "Arizona will always hold a special place in my heart because of the time I spent there and the friends I met.

"My kids were pretty well all born in Arizona. They still ask, 'When are we going back to Arizona?' They have fond memories and friends that are there.

"The run we had the first year I got there was special, probably one of the higher points of my career, getting to the conference finals. It's the place that put me on the map for being a starting goalie in this league. For that, I'll always be grateful."

Flames at Coyotes

When: 7 p.m., Monday

Where: Gila River Arena, Glendale

TV: FOX Sports Arizona

Radio: 98.7 FM Arizona's Sports Station

Records: Flames — 35-28-10. Coyotes — 23-37-11.

Season series: Flames lead 2-0

Injury report: Flames — Matthew Tkachuk (upper body) is day-to-day but did not travel with the team for its games at Vegas and Arizona. F Marek Hrivik (upper body) is on injured reserve. Coyotes — C Laurent Dauphin (lower body) is out indefinitely.

Wild scouting report: The Flames lost at Vegas on Sunday. They are four points behind the Los Angeles Kings for fourth place in the Pacific Division and four points behind the Dallas Stars for the second Western Conference wild card spot. ... Forward Johnny Gaudreau has eight points (three goals, five assists) in his past seven games. Gaudreau leads the Flames with 58 assists and 81 points. ... Center Sean Monahan leads the team with 30 goals.

Arizona Sports LOADED: 03.19.2018

1104420 Ottawa Senators

What's left for the Senators to play for? Well, how about this

Ken Warren

Published: March 18, 2018

Updated: March 18, 2018 4:29 PM EDT

A single point separates the Ottawa Senators and Montreal Canadiens as the two Canadian franchises limp to the finish of a thoroughly disappointing season.

Both are facing an early spring full of questions.

Nothing they do in the final three weeks is going to make a difference in the overall standings. Win all the remaining games and they won't make the playoffs. Lose all the remaining games and it's unlikely they'll finish last overall, with the best odds to draft Swedish defenceman Rasmus Dahlin first overall at the entry draft.

Yet the reactions to Saturday night defeats were drastically different. Senators coach Guy Boucher couldn't say enough about his team's willingness to compete against the Columbus Blue Jackets in a 2-1 loss. Canadiens coach Claude Julien couldn't say enough about his team's unwillingness to battle in a 4-0 romp by the Toronto Maple Leafs.

Give the Senators some credit. At least they're finding some reasons for motivation.

As they begin a three-game homestand Tuesday against Florida, Postmedia provides 5 Reasons To Watch.

1—No Doubting Thomas: Erik Karlsson's future in Ottawa will be a questioned until the NHL draft and/or free agency season, but the continued strong play of Thomas Chabot — Karlsson Lite, anyone? — provides hope for another long-term star on the blue line. Chabot, 21, is gradually reducing the hiccups in his own end, while maintaining his offensive presence in a top-4 role. "I really like his game, it's a solid two-way game and that's rare for a youngster to be able to do that," Senators coach Guy Boucher said following the loss to Columbus. "We know he's got the speed and stickhandling abilities, but right now, he's also



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complementing that with a really solid defensive game. That's pretty impressive."

Meanwhile, the final stretch will continue to be a trial-by-fire test for defenceman Ben Harpur, 23. He owns a guaranteed NHL salary next season, but he's going through a good game/bad game inconsistency.

2—Chemistry Experiments: Like much of the team, Matt Duchene and Mike Hoffman were out of gas in Saturday's 2-1 loss to Columbus, but they've had something special going for a few weeks now, combining for 12 goals and 10 assists in 11 games. Nothing is forever, of course, but if they continue to produce together in the final three weeks, it provides a sense of comfort heading into next season. If Ryan Dzingel is able to play immediately after taking a Hoffman shot off the helmet Saturday, he'll return to that line. If not, the Senators might very well consider recalling Colin White from Belleville of the AHL, giving him another look alongside Hoffman and Duchene. White figures to be part of the Senators' roster out of training camp next season, but will he be in a top six role?

3—The goaltending rebound: The mind of an NHL goaltender can be a scary place, with so much bouncing around in that space. But maybe, just maybe, Craig Anderson and Mike Condon will be able to take positives into the summer, pushing out some of the negatives from a terrible opening two-thirds of the season. Lately, they look more like the 2016-17 tandem that backstopped the Senators to the playoffs. Anderson has regained his winning edge, 4-0-1 in his past five starts. Condon's save percentage has jumped to .906. "It has been a tough year for them, like all of us," said Boucher. "But in the last two months, they've been serving themselves and the entire team. We need to get all our game ready, prepared and confident so that next year when it starts, we know where we're going right off the start."

Perhaps a push from behind in training camp will add to the motivation. Filip Gustavsson, the 19-year-old goaltender acquired from Pittsburgh in the Derick Brassard trade, will close out the season in Belleville. Marcus Hogberg, 23, will also push to get a shot.

4—The depth dimension: We're working on the theory that Marian Gaborik won't be around and that there's a good shot Bobby Ryan won't be on the roster next October, either. There should be an opening on the Senators top two lines.

Lately, though, there's intrigue developing on the bottom end of the forward lines.

Magnus Paajarvi could be in position to earn a contract next summer, but there are no givens if he slumps in the final weeks. The Senators' forward depth is improving. Max McCormick, who has a guaranteed NHL contract next season, has regained his fourth-line edge. Come training camp, White, Filip Chlapik (who scored twice for Belleville Saturday), Logan Brown and Drake Batherson will be in the running for an NHL spot. Alex Formenton might fit into the equation, too, but he has another year of junior eligibility remaining.

5—The numbers race: Entering Sunday's games, Karlsson was only two points behind John Klingberg of Dallas and one behind Washington's John Carlson. With a strong finish, the Senators' captain will win the defence scoring title for the fourth time in five years and the sixth time in eight years. That, alone, shouldn't be enough to earn him the Norris Trophy, but it is a sign that his surgically repaired foot is improving. Karlsson also trails Mark Stone by six points in the team scoring race. The Senators should be in no rush to return Stone from his leg injury, meaning that Karlsson could win the team scoring title for the fifth consecutive season.

Ottawa Sun LOADED: 03.19.2018

1104469 Websites

The Athletic / The aura of Shea Weber explored, explained and defined

Arpon Basu

Mar 18, 2018

Shea Weber's value to a hockey team is like a piece of abstract art; you need to look at it in just the right way to see its beauty.

Yes, you can look at goals and assists, both for and against, and look at a variety of other numbers that show how effective Weber can be and where some of his weaknesses are, but that is not where his value ends. In fact, it barely even scratches the surface.

There are few players around the NHL that have an aura about them anymore. For the few who do, it is generally because of their offensive exploits, the things we can watch them do on the ice with our own eyes that make us marvel at their skill, their gifts. Sidney Crosby has an aura. Connor McDavid already has one as well. But so does Weber.

Except Weber's aura is difficult to appreciate from the outside because much of it stems from things we can't easily see on the ice, or things we can't see at all off the ice.

But it's there. And it's unmistakable.

This Canadiens season has been a disaster, and Weber injuring his foot in the opening game in Buffalo was a big factor. Not the only factor, far from it, but a big one, probably bigger than most realize because of some of the intangible ways in which he helps his team.

"Well, I didn't realize it was only two and a half months for Webby," coach Claude Julien joked at the end of February when asked about Weber's absence. "It feels like it's been a whole year."

With Weber having surgery to repair torn tendons in his left foot Tuesday, the hope is he will be ready in time for the start of training camp. If that recovery were to take longer and leak into the start of the regular season, the Canadiens will be in deep trouble because they can't afford to start next season without his unique skill set.

Without his aura.

Weber's aura is often described as a "presence" by teammates, coaches and even opponents, though few are able to define it. But whatever it is, Weber's teammates believe it helps them win. Whether it actually does is irrelevant because that belief is what is important; it is what makes Weber important.

"I think when you talk about a presence, that's what he has," Brendan Gallagher said. "It's an intimidating guy when you play against him, you know what it's like because he's going to hit you every single shift, he's going to finish you, he's tough to play against, you've got to be aware of him."

"When he's on your team, I think you look around the locker room and you just notice it. The presence is kind of hard to describe, it's just known in this group that he has it."

It is indeed hard to describe; several players couldn't come up with anything, Artturi Lehkonen did but only knew how to say it in Finnish and refused to do so because he feared the translation would be botched.

But Andrew Shaw didn't hesitate. He knew immediately.

"I've got one word to describe him for you: dad. He's the dad of the room," Shaw said. "He comes to work, he works hard, he competes, does all the little things right, doesn't let any little detail go unnoticed in his game and then he makes sure everyone's pulling their weight and everyone's comfortable. I mean, he'd have the young guys over for dinner all the time, making sure they have home cooked meals."

"I always look at him as the dad of the room."

There are two distinct perspectives of Weber's presence and Shaw described one of them, that of the teammate. The other is very different, and it comes from the opponent.



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This is an attempt to define the two sides of Shea Weber's aura.

Weber the teammate

When Victor Mete arrived at Canadiens training camp last fall, he entered an intimidating situation, one that could have easily impacted his performance and derailed his entire camp. Generally speaking, veteran players in training camp fighting for NHL jobs are not necessarily thrilled to see a 19-year-old performing well, because there is competition among teammates and it can be fierce.

Weber, however, was not fighting for a job in training camp, and he was immediately selected by Julien to be Mete's, well, dad.

Mete was paired with Weber throughout camp, filling a role that was one of the biggest question marks heading into the season, and doing it well. There were all sorts of things Mete had to learn on the fly, situational tactics that were nothing like what he was used to in junior hockey, and Weber was always there to make sure he was comfortable with it. At one point, Mete didn't fully grasp how the Canadiens defend a 3-on-2 break, so Weber told him not to worry about it, just play them how he was used to playing them and he would read off him.

"It made me feel comfortable," Mete said. "Obviously I come into camp not knowing anybody at all, just some of the younger guys that I came with, and then him being such a good d-man in the league known by everybody as one of the best defencemen, taking me under his wing, not knowing me at all and just kind of showing me ways I can get better to make the team. He was always teaching me things where I can be better.

"Even in the beginning of the season, if I had any questions I would just go ask him. Everything, I just kind of went to him."

Off the ice, it was the same thing. That whole uncomfortable dynamic of being the young guy trying to steal a job? Weber took care of it.

"He kind of just invited me to everything, really," Mete said. "Like, I remember one of my first dinners in Montreal was at his house, actually. He invited me over with (Lehkonen) for dinner, so we went there, he made us steaks and we kind of just spent the day there.

"Then the next day we just went out, kind of the boys, just out to eat and he organized that kind of thing. He just tried to involve me in everything that they were doing. Obviously, me being new and not knowing anybody and them knowing each other and not seeing each other all summer, you kind of want to just hang out with the guys a bit. So him doing that and inviting me to all those things was probably the main thing."

This is Weber's thing. The thing we don't see, but the thing that makes him so revered by his teammates. Gallagher felt it long before he was even Weber's teammate when he met him in Kelowna, British Columbia in the offseason through Josh Gorges. One random day after that, Gallagher was in Kelowna and Weber invited him to spend a day on his boat, out of the blue, barely knowing him.

"It's just something that he does," Gallagher said. "It's not a switch that he's turning on and off. He's doing it day after day. It's just who he is. It's not an act, it's just genuinely what he is."

What Mete experienced last fall with Weber has precedent. Speak to any number of players on the Nashville Predators about Weber's influence on them, and they will speak with a level of reverence that is rare. Rare in how consistent the tone is from player to player, and how obviously sincere it is.

When it was suggested to Ryan Ellis during the 2017 playoffs that he was essentially replacing Weber because he was partnered with Roman Josi, Ellis got very uncomfortable. That notion was not one he wanted to entertain for very long.

"Obviously you're not going to be able to replace a guy like that on your back end, so you have to more or less do it by committee," Ellis said then. "I think he was a big, key part of this franchise for a long time; he was leaned on heavily. But once the trade all went down it was about

everyone chipping in to replace him not only on-ice, but his off-ice stuff too."

That off-ice stuff benefited Seth Jones when he first arrived in the NHL with the Predators, just as it did with Mete in Montreal, and now he is one of the top defencemen in the league with the Columbus Blue Jackets at age 23.

He credits Weber for setting him on the right path to where he is today, and doing it immediately.

"He came every day ready to go, and me being a young guy, being drafted there in Nashville set me up for success," Jones said. "I actually lived with him my first couple of months there, through training camp and my first month in the league, or six weeks. Just watching him every day, we had a lot of young defencemen there; Josi, the captain now, (Mattias Ekholm and Ellis were there as well, so we were all kind of the young guys and he was the veteran that kind of showed us the way. Josi is obviously the captain now and he's turned into a great player, and I think Shea had a lot to do with the way that he developed."

This is not something Weber learned in the NHL. He arrived like this.

Dan Hamhuis was still a young defenceman in Nashville when Weber got there in 2006, but he was still the one who helped him adapt to the NHL and spent a lot of time as his defence partner before Weber settled in to a partnership with Ryan Suter. According to Hamhuis, Weber didn't need that much help to let his leadership qualities shine.

"He's always been that guy," Hamhuis said. "He's obviously developed more into a leader as he's gotten older, but from those early years in Nashville you could see that he was going to be a future captain somewhere, and it wound up coming true. He just knew what was important. He was just professional right away, very respectful of teammates, respectful of coaches, respectful of the game, the way he prepared for games and just his personality and the way he got along with guys are all traits you would want to have in a captain. Then it's just that people are naturally drawn to him, and you could tell early."

Hamhuis left the Predators as a free agent to sign with the Vancouver Canucks in 2010 after playing only four full seasons with Weber. But even at that point in his career, when Weber was 24, Hamhuis could see that presence that has been attached to Weber for so long. That aura.

"I mean, his stature physically is certainly a part of it, but I think his heart is a big part of it too," Hamhuis said. "He really, genuinely cares for his teammates, he's always excited to see them in the morning. He's not the most talkative guy, but he would make new guys, young guys, feel very much a part of the team and make them want to be a part of the team because he always seemed so excited, with a big smile and a sturdy slap on the back. It sounds like a small thing, but those things go a long way."

There remains a chance the Canadiens will be looking for a new captain next season. The decision, should one need to be made, is not likely to be a difficult one.

Weber the opponent

The National Hockey League Players Association released its annual player poll last week and 435 of the more than 500 NHL players polled provided a response to the following question: Who is the most difficult player to play against?

Sidney Crosby came first, just ahead of Connor McDavid, with Patrick Kane a distant third. Makes sense, each of those players has an ability to make you look awful at any given moment. But in fourth place was a different category of player. It was Shea Weber.

This should not come as a huge surprise because players and coaches – the people directly in the game – have always had a high opinion of Weber and his ability to impact the game in a way they are uniquely positioned to appreciate. Within minutes of him being traded to the Canadiens – eight minutes, to be exact – Jonathan Toews thanked him on Twitter for leaving the Central Division.



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HEY WEBS GOOD LUCK IN MONTREAL THANKS FOR LEAVING OUR DIVISION! #RELIEF

— JONATHAN TOEWS (@JONATHANTOEWS) JUNE 29, 2016

Dallas Stars coach Ken Hitchcock has seen plenty of Weber over the years, whether it was while he coached the St. Louis Blues or as a member of the coaching staff for Team Canada. He is also one of the more eloquent coaches in the league when it comes to breaking down the game.

"Shea's impact on the game is a combination of who he takes out of the game on the opposition and how he makes you pay for mistakes because he can score from distance," Hitchcock said. "But for me, his sturdiness and his competitiveness remove a lot of people from the game. It's not fun to play against guys like him, so he removes a lot of good players from the game because he's just so hard on you."

One of the players who knows what Hitchcock is talking about better than most is his captain in Dallas, Jamie Benn. As division opponents for years, Benn saw tons of Weber. And he actually enjoyed it.

"Webs is one of my favourite players to play against because he's so competitive," Benn said. "But he thinks the game well. The game is so fast but he's always two steps ahead and it seems like he always knows what the forwards are thinking."

Over Weber's final four years with the Predators, from 2012-13 to 2015-16, Benn was the Stars leading scorer. He had 288 points in 286 games over that span and emerged as one of the top power forwards in the NHL. The first time he led the Stars in scoring was the lockout-shortened 2012-13 season, so that was also the first time he drew Weber as his primary matchup whenever the Stars faced the Predators. Over those four seasons, Weber was on the ice for roughly 73 percent of Benn's total 5-on-5 ice time against the Predators, or 155:41 of head-to-head hockey.

For a player like Benn, at the height of his offensive powers, that should have been ample time to put up big numbers. But in those 155 minutes playing against Weber, Benn had one goal and three assists in 15 games. That's it. The Stars as a team scored six goals in those 155 minutes, while the Predators scored 11. There were obviously four players on the ice with Weber in that matchup, but the numbers are still startling considering Benn scored 110 goals over the final three seasons of our sample.

In 2014-15, over the first four Stars games against the Predators, Benn had one assist. Weber sat out the final game of the regular season, which just so happened to be against the Stars, and Benn just so happened to score three goals and an assist in a 4-1 win. Imagine that.

"Just coming through the neutral zone, if you have the puck his gap is so good," Benn said. "I mean, it's just little details of the game, but his gap is so good, his stick is so good. Then if you put the puck behind him, he's obviously tough to get around, he's going to hold you up. Then if you're fortunate enough to get it in the corner, he's got 230 pounds coming right into you. That weight, his size and strength, when it's leaning on you it takes a toll. Throughout a game when you're playing 20, 25 minutes against a guy, it's difficult to play against."

So, why on earth would Weber be one of Benn's favourite guys to play against when it sounds about as fun as a root canal?

"Well, you want to play against the best," Benn said. "It doesn't sound like fun, but it was fun to play alongside him at the Olympics and compete against him in practice and with him being in Nashville for many years, we saw a lot of each other and we usually had a couple of smiles on our faces while we were going at it. But it's the best part of the game when you compete against the best, and he's definitely one of the best."

This is what the Canadiens missed this season. This is what makes up Weber's aura, that ability to strike fear in opponents and make teammates feel that much stronger. It is difficult to quantify, yes, but it is something that becomes easier to appreciate when you watch Weber

play on a regular basis and when you talk to his teammates and opponents.

His unique abilities in the room should be valuable to the Canadiens over the coming years, when more and more players who were in Mete's position at training camp will be added to the team, and Weber will be there to welcome them.

"I think there's just something to be said for doing the right thing over and over again," Gallagher said. "Day after day, I think that's what he does. Probably a lot of guys in Nashville learned from him, a lot of young guys here. When he comes in, he has a presence. He does the right thing day after day and you understand the success he's had in his career and why he's had it.

"When you're pushing to get to something and you can see a guy that's accomplished all those things, when he works there's really no excuse for other guys. It kind of just pushes your whole group to do more and be better."

There are many things not to like about Shea Weber on a rebuilding team. He will be 33 when training camp begins next fall. His contract and \$7.857 million cap hit runs through 2026, when Weber will be 40. In a game that is getting faster, Weber's speed is not one of his strengths.

But Weber's other strengths, his brain, his physical brawn, who he is as a person, his work ethic, those are things that still hold tremendous value to the Canadiens, and will continue to hold value for years. In a sense, while it may appear that having Weber on a rebuilding team is less than ideal, it could be argued that a rebuilding team is the perfect place for him.

A place where his aura can shine, and where his younger teammates can soak in the rays.

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The Athletic / John Tavares on looming offseason decision: 'There's a time and place for those thoughts'

By Arthur Staple

Mar 18, 2018

EAST MEADOW, N.Y. — There was John Tavares on Saturday afternoon, playing the wing with Mathew Barzal at Islanders practice.

The season — and possibly Tavares' Isles career — has 11 games to go and the team is all but eliminated. Tavares has a choice to make this coming offseason, to stay and sign what would likely be the richest current contract in the NHL or test free agency as the biggest name to hit the market in years.

Doug Weight has a decision to make as well. And, starting with Sunday's game against the Hurricanes, the Islanders coach is ready to see what life would be like without Tavares in the middle.

"It's an experiment," Weight told reporters after Saturday's practice. "Moving forward it gives them some experience together. I'm excited to see it."

This is not how anyone — Tavares, Weight, Islanders general manager Garth Snow or co-owners Scott Malkin and Jon Ledecky — envisioned the end of this season. When Tavares and agent Pat Brisson informed Malkin last offseason that the Isles captain wanted to play out the final



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year of his current contract, the Islanders owners chose not to give Tavares and his camp a deadline to decide before exploring other options such as a trade at the 2017 draft.

It was a gamble that had the potential to tie the franchise's hands if the season went south. After a good start to the year and a huge win for the organization on Dec. 19, when the Islanders won the rights to develop a new arena at Belmont Park, things have indeed turned sour.

Looking back, Tavares wouldn't say if he'd have approached things differently had he known how disappointing 2017-18 would be.

"I don't know what would have changed if I would have signed, with the way the season has gone on the ice," Tavares told The Athletic on Saturday. "I think that's totally separate from playing and what lies ahead. I don't really see the connection between the two."

It's certainly not a burden Tavares need carry, considering that Islanders ownership did not have to grant his request for an indefinite hold on contract negotiations. League sources told The Athletic that Malkin has made regular visits to Brisson's office in Los Angeles since last season, up to just a few weeks ago; Snow made it clear in an interview last month that he was not trading Tavares before the Feb. 26 deadline, despite the Isles' already sinking playoff hopes.

"You could see them waiting through the offseason," a league source said, "but once they got the new arena or towards the (trade) deadline, it's surprising they didn't say, 'We need an answer here or we have to think about moving on.'"

Ledecky and Malkin declined interview requests, as did Snow. None of the three were used as sources for this story.

Weight's relationship with Tavares is well known and certainly played a role in his getting the full-time head coaching gig last April. He said he hasn't discussed Tavares' pending decision with his captain, who scored his 32nd goal of the year in Friday's 6-3 loss in Washington.

As to whether it's been a distraction for Tavares, Weight didn't see that.

"You've really got to ask John that," Weight told The Athletic. "You knew at the beginning – he says the right things, he handles it well, we say the right things – but you know at some point, whether it's adversity for our team, whether it's his play, whether it's the media saying, 'Oh my god, five teams want to give him \$15 million!' Whatever it was, there's something that was going to create a stir, create some more commotion and possibly more in his head."

"He's done as much as he could to keep it away. I don't think it's been a topic of discussion. It's probably been a lot less than I thought it would be. I told you guys I didn't think it would be, but honestly in my head I was like, 'Oh boy.' Maybe it's because we are where we are, I've got my own things to worry about."

"I don't think it's been apparent to me that's what's going through his head, but it's more a question for him. It's hindsight – would we handle it different? Would he? I don't think either would. He was pretty focused on what he has, how he wants to approach this and he stood by that. We did as well. At the deadline we were (four) points out. So I don't know if it would've changed."

Tavares said the decision has crossed his mind, but not as much as he would have anticipated.

"Probably a little less than I thought it would," he said. "Obviously the second half here, last 2 ½ months have been tough. Things have not been trending in the right direction for us, so that's been tough. But you get so invested on a daily basis, just trying to be ready to play, play at a high level, be consistent, it's hard to really think about that a whole lot. You want to invest everything you have in every game, being the captain, worrying about so many different things, trying to accomplish what we set out to do at the beginning of the year. There's a time and place for those thoughts or to assess things and they come in periodically, but not as much as I thought they would."

The ultimate irony may come after these final 11 games. Malkin and Ledecy hired Weight and kept Snow after last season's playoff miss in part because both men are tight with Tavares. The owners may have made other moves, personnel or otherwise, to engender as much goodwill with Tavares and his camp as possible, though that was mostly hope, not certainty.

And now, with fans calling for Snow's head on an hourly basis, Malkin and Ledecy may feel compelled to make a front office change just months before Tavares chooses to stay or go. There has been no indication from the hockey community at large that a change is coming; the Hurricanes' missteps in moving Ron Francis aside as GM and starting a hurried search in the past week that had to be halted in recent days for lack of candidates have certainly been noticed by the Isles owners.

Whether there is change coming or not, one thing is clear: If Tavares leaves for nothing on July 1, Malkin and Ledecy may certainly hold Snow accountable. But this has been ownership's main focus outside of the arena since last season and the GM has had very little to do with the process of convincing Tavares to stay.

Seeing the captain depart would reflect poorly on Snow's track record with the team over 12 years, but it would also leave the relatively new owners looking foolish for letting Tavares run the process and then run off to another organization with no assets to show for it.

"It's out of my control," Tavares said regarding Snow's job status. "I'm here to play hockey, be the best player I can be for the Islanders. Those things are above my head. I just try to have the right attitude every day, not take this for granted, enjoy the group we have, the staff we have. Ever since I've been here I've been treated great, just tried to come out and give everything I can. We wish we'd have more success, but anything that happens, anything that has happened is out of my control."

Asked whether these last dismal three months have tilted his decision, Tavares, as ever, wouldn't give much away.

"Everything plays into it, like I've said," he said. "At this point, I'm not thinking about it like that. I'm still trying to be the best player I can be. Every loss, every point that goes by, the (playoff) chances get slimmer and slimmer, but you still keep going out there, trying to have fun, keep the right attitude and focus for our group. There's a time and place when that other stuff will occur, whether it's sooner or later, I can't say."

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The Athletic / Dellow: How 5-on-3 goals are scored in 2017-18. (No, Calgary, not like that.)

By Tyler Dellow

Mar 17, 2018

The Flames suffered another crippling blow to their playoff aspirations on Friday, dropping horrific 7-4 decision to the San Jose Sharks that had a lot of the hallmarks of a bad Flames loss this season. A blowing lead. Poor goaltending. Poor special teams. The Backlund line getting PDOd.

If you were looking for the most unedifying sequence of the night, well there were a lot that you could pick. My personal choice would be a 45 second 5-on-3 in which the Flames seemed entirely unaware that they were permitted to move in order to create a shot. Here it is, in all its glory. Such as it is.



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A few things worth noticing in here:

Dougie Hamilton and Mark Giordano never flip sides to enable one timers.

Calgary has three left-handed forwards, which means that Johnny Gaudreau is playing on the left side of the ice, unable to one-time a puck on a back door play and facing a tougher angle to make a back door pass.

Once the Flames are set up, Sean Monahan basically doesn't get off the goal line, which prevents him from curling and attacking the net.

I'm a handedness obsessive, so one of the first things I'm looking for when I watch a power play is the lanes created by the handedness of the players. A screenshot is useful here, particularly because there was absolutely no movement over the course of the power play. Everyone basically just stood in place.

That's Sean Monahan with the puck to Martin Jones' left. Micheal Ferland, a left shot, is the net front player. Johnny Gaudreau, another left shot, is off to Jones' right. On the points, you have Dougie Hamilton – in position for a low-to-high one timer – at the top of the circle to Jones' left. You have Mark Giordano on the point to Jones' right.

Long time readers probably won't be surprised to learn that a 4F1D has historically tended to score more at 5-on-3 (20.6 GF/60) than a 3F2D (18.4 GF/60). Nothing has been less productive than a 3F2D with three left-handed forwards, which has produced just 15.3 GF/60 since 2010-11. The sample size is small there (82.62 minutes) but, for the reasons set out below, there are hockey reasons to expect less with that mix of players. (This is an aside but if basically nobody is doing what you're doing – 3F2D with three left-handed forwards accounts for just over four per cent of 5-on-3 ice time – and you're not getting results and you look bad, why are you doing it?)

The problem with what Calgary did is that it reduced the likelihood of scoring a goal in the way that the vast majority of 5-on-3 goals are scored. If you're going to run counter to the mob, you'd better be right. In order to illustrate this, I tracked down as much video from 5-on-3 goals this year as I could. I went 56 for 59 in that department.

One Timers

Fourteen of those goals were one timers.

Watching these videos, you can see that the Flames weren't remotely set up to generate a one timer at 5-on-3. Neither Hamilton nor Giordano are in position to take one (with the exception of a high-low play, which is discussed below). There's no rotation that might open one of them up to take it or create an opportunity for Monahan to take one. Their decision to ice three left-handed forwards means that they can't generate a one-timer from Gaudreau's side of the ice – he's on the wrong side to do it.

In other words, this represents about a quarter of this year's 5-on-3 goals. Calgary didn't get remotely close to being in position to generate a goal this way.

Back door

A huge, huge volume of goals at 5-on-3 are generated by back door plays or by players attacking the net in a situation where they make another play or attempt a back door play, fail, and it ends up in the net off of the chaos created by the back door play.

We'll start with the back door plays that worked. As you watch these, you may want to look for plays that involve a right-handed player on the right side of the ice or a left-handed player on the left side of the ice (like Gaudreau last night), as opposed to a right-handed player on the left side and a left-handed player on the right side.

Fourteen back door plays. Fourteen back door plays that involved a left-handed shot on the right side and a right-handed shot on the left side. Put another way: fourteen setups that were not what Calgary was doing last night. As you can see from the video, there seems like a pretty

obvious hockey reason for this – it's easier to make that hard pass across the front of the net on your off side and it's easier to one time that pass on your off side.

Here's four more 5-on-3 goals scored from situations where a back door play was attempted or available. I won't put readers to the effort of counting: it's four more plays where there's a left handed guy on the right side and a right handed guy on the left side. Of particular interest is the Flames goal in there. I'll screenshot that formation below.

Well would you look at that. It's Kris Versteeg on the left side, Monahan in the middle and Gaudreau to the goalie's right. There's even a one-timer option on the defence, with Mark Giordano on his off side and TJ Brodie on the same side as Versteeg.

Sometimes teams don't go all the way across to the back door – they use the man in the middle. Here are the three goals scored like that this year, all coming from a forward making a pass on his off wing.

Sometimes you get the defence making a pass diagonally through the box – a sort of back door play starting higher up the ice. There've been three of those this year. Two of them have involved a player on his off side going to another player on his off side. One's involved significant movement. The Flames achieved neither of those things on their 45 second 5-on-3 last night.

3-on-2 up high

There's an interesting little group of seven 5-on-3 goals that can be broadly summarized as "Create a 3-on-2 higher in the zone and kick the puck out to the flank to beat the defenders, followed by an attack at the net." Again, you need some movement and someone getting off of the goal line, which Calgary didn't have last night.

Particularly interesting in this batch of videos: watch the Winnipeg Jet in front of the net take the goalie off his near post twice, with Blake Wheeler shooting into an area that he knows the goaltender will have vacated.

So that's a lot of goals that the Flames weren't really set up to score last night. I'd call it 41, although they could have had the back door play from Monahan to Ferland in the middle, which has produced a few goals this year.

Low to High

Finally, something that Flames were set up to score with last night. The idea here is simple: make a pass from down low to a shooter higher in the zone, who can take advantage of the goalie being off of his angle. Problem: there haven't been very many goals scored like this in 2017-18. I only found four and that involves a generous definition – one of these was a goal that went around the net and came out the other side.

Now, in fairness to what Calgary's attempting from a strategic point of view: we can't say for "certain" that trying to set up passes from low in the zone to high in the zone is worse than going east/west, whether for a one-timer or in order to set up a back door pass from this data. In order to know for sure, we'd need data on how the puck moved prior to the pass for each shot. When Colleague Iyer's passing project has more data, this is something we'll be able to look at more closely.

Deflected point shots

The Flames were in position to do this, with two of the 5-on-3 goals in my sample from this year having been scored on deflected point shots.

Other

Finally, you've got a collection of five odd-ball plays. Two faceoff wins followed by a player beating the goalie with quick shot. (The Flames won the faceoff at the start of their 5-on-3 but proceeded to fail to establish possession.) A rush. Brock Boeser coming off the bench. A play into the slot from a forward on his off side to a forward who could one-time the puck (the Flames didn't have their players right to have that play last night.)



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So when you go through how 5-on-3 goals have been scored this year, an incredible volume of them have been scored in ways that weren't available to Calgary based on who they chose to put on the ice last night and how they chose to play.

So: whose fault is this? Well, loathe though I usually am to suggest that coaches blew something, they have to eat some of the blame. At the very least, the coaches were responsible for the decision to put Ferland, Gaudreau and Monahan on the ice, which took away the possibility of that backdoor right/left pass.

I looked back at another extended 5-on-3 the Flames had recently and it's similar. Four of the players are the same, with Matt Tkachuk taking Ferland's spot. There's not a lot of rotation to create one-timers. Of particular note in these videos:

1:43 remaining in 5-on-3: Bad rotation doesn't lead to one-timer. It's the only rotation towards a one-timer that the Flames attempt in this sequence and it's awfully half-hearted looking. And bad.

0:54: Flames get the 2-on-1 down low but because they have a pair of left-handed shooters in Matt Tkachuk and Gaudreau, they don't get a back door play.

0:13: The Flames again create a 2-on-1 down low and again, because of the handedness, don't create a chance.

You have to have a little bit of sympathy to coaches when it comes to 5-on-3. It's an extraordinarily good opportunity to score a goal but it occurs so infrequently that it's hard to justify devoting scarce practice time to it. The Flames, to pick an example, have played just under ten minutes of 5-on-3 time this year. How much time should the coaching staff devote to it?

At the same time, they really haven't looked like they're getting the big picture stuff right the last two times they've had a 5-on-3. The personnel choices/locations don't seem to make sense. The mix of forwards and defencemen and handedness is a bad bet historically. What the players are doing doesn't seem like it's particularly likely to produce goals.

If the Flames miss the playoffs, which is looking very much like it will be the case, it's going to be a death by a thousand cuts type situation, much more so than in Edmonton, where the Oilers have suffered from some gaping wounds. 5-on-3 won't be the only one and it won't be the most important one but the Flames look to be chasing a bad strategy and getting what they deserve.

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The Athletic / Jacob Trouba's value to the Jets is clear to everyone, especially his agent

By Murat Ates

Mar 18, 2018

On Jacob Trouba's first shift back from ankle injury, he made a crisp breakout pass from Winnipeg's goal line to a streaking Mathieu Perreault.

As is the norm for Trouba, his pass was tape-to-tape. Perreault corralled it easily and slid it over to Andrew Copp, who gained Chicago's blue line in a play that took just three and a half seconds.

On Trouba's second shift back from ankle injury, he made an even crisper breakout pass to a streaking Brandon Tanev. The Jets' speedster

didn't take the puck cleanly but did push it to Jack Roslovic across the Blackhawks blue line. This time, Winnipeg went from own zone to o-zone in just under two seconds.

The Jets forwards cycled the puck back to Trouba, whose point shot turned into an offensive zone face-off. That offensive zone face-off turned into a second Trouba point shot and this time Joel Armia tipped it past Anton Forsberg for Winnipeg's second goal of the night.

Despite going down by a goal early, Winnipeg rallied for five goals – two of them assisted by Trouba – before the first period was over.

"It felt good," Trouba said after the game was over and Winnipeg had won 6-2. "It felt better than I was expecting."

It looked pretty good, too.

That's the kind of 5-on-5 heat map you're used to seeing from the 2017-18 Winnipeg Jets. Given that they had been average by most metrics when Trouba and so many others were injured, you may have missed this kind of dominance.

You're not alone.

"We got off to a little bit of a different start there with the goal (against)," Trouba said, "But nothing really changed on the bench which was nice to see. I kind of missed being part of that."

If Paul Maurice missed having his number one right-handed defenseman back in the lineup (as I am sure he did,) he resisted the urge to throw Trouba over the boards as often as is usual for the stalwart defender. Trouba played just 14:47 in his first game back, good for fifth among Jets defencemen.

Was it enough?

"Yeah, I guess," Trouba said, laughing. "There's enough players that can fill the void that you're not thrown right back into the fire and expected to go nuts. You can kind of – not ease your way back in – but go as comfortable as you feel."

Make no mistake, Trouba normally plays a lot more than 14:47. Including Thursday night's game, Trouba has averaged 22:01 in all-situations in 2017-18. That is second only to Dustin Byfuglien on this year's club.

While Trouba certainly looks forward to reclaiming his role as a Winnipeg workhorse, the pending restricted free agent acknowledges the benefit of a measured return.

"(Being a workhorse) is what I'd prefer but it's nice to be able to have that luxury – to be able to come back in and not go overboard and push it to the max. It's a good luxury to have."

I would suggest that having Trouba back is a good luxury for Paul Maurice to have.

Trouba skates well, plays physically, and leads regularly used Jets defencemen in even-strength offense with 1.2 5-on-5 points per 60 minutes. That 5-on-5 scoring rate is good for 28th among all NHL defencemen who have played at least 100 minutes.

Trouba's tape-to-tape breakout passes against Chicago were no fluke, either. According to the 15 games of zone exit data Corey Sznajder has tracked this season, Trouba leads all Jets defencemen in exit passes per 60 minutes. That's heady stuff.

Here is the offensive zone looks like with and without Jacob Trouba on the ice:

The hot and cold zones are unblocked shots relative to league average. With Trouba, the offensive zone is lit aflame – particularly in the low and centre slot, the most dangerous region of the zone. Without him, Winnipeg has been pretty good but not quite so dominant.

Trouba has played more minutes with Blake Wheeler, Mark Scheifele, and Kyle Connor than he has with any other forwards. Add Trouba's



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regular partner Josh Morrissey to the mix and it's been a clear power vs. power situation whenever he's been on the ice.

Interestingly enough, Winnipeg has enjoyed just 47.0 per cent of shot attempts in 161 minutes at 5-on-5 with this five-man unit on the ice, yet have won in actual goals by a score of 9-6. The difference between possession and score is partly from percentages and partly from where those shots are coming from. Trouba et al. have 51.8 per cent control of high danger scoring chances. Overall, they have shot 9.5 per cent and have been backed by .935 goaltending at 5-on-5. For context, Tampa Bay has the highest team-wide shooting percentage at 9.4 percent and Nashville has the highest 5-on-5 save percentage at .936.

Compare Trouba's offensive zone heat maps to Winnipeg's results with him in its own end of the rink:

Opposing teams do shoot a fair bit with Trouba on the ice – in fact, Trouba and Morrissey give up more shot attempts per minute than any other regularly used Jets pairing. (Yes, that includes Tyler Myers and Dmitry Kulikov.)

Where Winnipeg enjoys a distinct advantage with Trouba on the ice is that the shots against come from so far away. You can see that in the heat map and, to put that in numerical context, Trouba and Morrissey enjoy 54 per cent of the high danger scoring chances as a pairing – an impressive feat which reinforces they (and their teammates) play great hockey in the most important areas of the ice.

To zoom in on Trouba one step further, here is his replacements chart from Hockey Viz. I use it instead of his with-or-without-you simply because the visual distinction is so clear:

Without Trouba, nearly all Jets defensemen play good, low-event hockey – Winnipeg controls the flow of play with relatively few shots for and against. Without those same defensemen, Trouba plays good, slightly higher event hockey – as a general rule, there are more shots on goal in both ends of the rink.

What does that mean?

Without context, the answer is not very much. Given that Trouba plays with good players against good players and is on the ice for a disproportionately high number of high danger scoring chances, it's good news. Winnipeg has been getting just what it should hope for from the 24-year-old defenseman.

Trouba is a keystone of Winnipeg's defensive unit. A long-term extension at reasonable dollars this summer would give the Jets both of a) security on their blue line and b) the opportunity for cap savings elsewhere on the right side.

Trouba's agent is Kurt Overhardt, the founder and CEO of Boutique Hockey Agency, KO Sports. I spoke to Overhardt on Friday evening about Trouba's injury, his holdout in 2016, and his upcoming RFA contract.

Interestingly enough, Overhardt came up on gameday of Trouba's first game back, courtesy the tail end of this unique quote from Maurice:

"If my car doesn't blow up when I start it, I'll take it as a positive," Maurice said when asked about the likelihood of Trouba playing. "He's very interested in playing tonight. It's all signed off on by everybody... His agent is on board and everybody wants to see Jake play tonight."

Trouba's agent hadn't heard Maurice's quote but laughed when I shared it.

"I do have a sense of humour," Overhardt explained. "I have a really good relationship with that organization – despite what some people say. And I have a lot of respect for Kevin Cheveldayoff."

When I asked whether it was normal for an agent to sign off on the health of a player, he explained, "I'm going to generalize – whether it's Jacob or any other client, you want to respect the guy's privacy but you want to

make sure that you're communicating to make sure that they're recovering."

"It's part of our job to make sure that our client's best interest is always taken care of. And part of that might be making sure that the healing process is going well."

Obviously, another big part of Overhardt's job is to represent Trouba at the negotiating table. He was polite when I asked if he and Kevin Cheveldayoff had begun talks regarding Trouba's next contract but had zero interest in sharing any information with me on the topic.

"One thing you're going to find about me is I rarely ever comment about someone's contract," Overhardt told me, "So I can't comment on that, with all due respect. I just don't discuss it."

Trouba is a restricted free agent this summer and is eligible for unrestricted free agency in the summer of 2020. With that in mind, what kind of term is Trouba looking for?

"I can't answer that."

Once again, Overhardt was polite, saying he wouldn't answer that question for any of his clients. But he offered no clues whether Trouba is more likely to pursue free agency two summers from now or to sign in Winnipeg long term.

Overhardt did have this to say when I asked what kind of tier he thinks Trouba in among his peers:

"I think he's one of the best young defensemen in the National Hockey League and I think he's going to play for a long time. I think he'll make an impact with the Jets and hopefully he'll help the Jets compete on the ice this year and next year. I just think his upside is huge."

If you wanted to take a microscope to that quote – one that was not in response to a question about Trouba's contract – you might see a foreboding answer in it. But given that I gave Overhardt many opportunities to speak in specifics about Trouba's intentions and he politely declined to comment, I'm not sure that level of de-contextualization of this quote is fair.

The one thing Overhardt commented on with certainty is that Trouba is much happier with his role on the Jets today than he was back in 2016.

"Jacob's said it himself," Overhardt said about Trouba's 2016 contract holdout. "I think he's made it clear a couple of times in the media. It was about minutes and it was also about playing on the right side and not having to switch back and forth. Yeah, that's all been dissipated and I think it's been asked and answered."

I shared Trouba's joking "I guess..." when asked if he played enough minutes on Thursday night. Overhardt laughed and then said, "I totally respect how they're easing him in. I think that's wise, but that's just my opinion. I think that's great."

In my opinion, Maurice was right to limit Trouba's minutes in his first game back from injury.

Overhardt was right – Trouba is an impact player who is going to help the Jets throughout the postseason.

It's not a shock that I also think that I'm right. Trouba is a keystone player for Winnipeg's defense corps. Whether he signs for two years and runs or commits for the CBA mandated maximum of eight years, the 24-year-old Trouba will help Winnipeg win for as long as he is a Jet.

There are no guarantees in this business, however. As Trouba's return makes a lot of things right for the Winnipeg Jets, I suggest that fans enjoy it however long it lasts.

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The Athletic / After a four-goal game, Evander Kane is looking like a superstar as he leads the Sharks to a vital win

By Kevin Kurz

Mar 17, 2018

CALGARY, Alberta — When Sharks general manager Doug Wilson pried Evander Kane away from the Buffalo Sabres at the NHL trade deadline on Feb. 26 for what was considered a minimal return, the accepted thought was that he acquired a skilled, fast and motivated winger with an ability to create offense.

The way it's been going since Kane's arrival though, that might have been underselling it.

The 26-year-old has looked like a bonafide superstar in the two-and-a-half weeks he's been in a teal sweater.

Kane scored four goals against the Flames on Friday, his first-ever NHL hat trick (plus one), and led the Sharks to an important 7-4 win at Scotiabank Saddledome that moved them much closer to a playoff spot. The Sharks will surely have to keep Calgary behind them in order to qualify, and now the Flames are a full seven points behind them in the Pacific Division standings.

In eight games with the Sharks, Kane has five goals and five assists for 10 points and a plus-five rating. More importantly, the Sharks are 6-2-0 since his arrival.

Kane's first period goal at the six-minute mark of the first period opened the scoring, when his slap shot from just inside the blue line beat Mike Smith after deflecting off of Dougie Hamilton's stick blade. The Flames scored the next two after that, but Kane tied it at 6:29 of the second period when he redirected a Dylan DeMelo floater through Smith.

The Sharks and Flames traded two more goals, but Kane gave the visitors the lead for good when he stayed with his own rebound at 16:32 of the second period after a slick backhanded dish from Chris Tierney behind the net.

After that one, Kane could be seen mouthing the word "finally" while celebrating with his teammates, as the winger had an NHL-high 27 career two-goal games without a hat trick. That monkey was finally thrown off his back, and he even added another goal for good measure early in the third period to give the Sharks a commanding 6-3 edge.

"Most two-goal games (without a hat trick), I've been reminded of that for awhile," said Kane, shortly after posing for a photo with Joe Pavelski and Brent Burns, while grasping four pucks. "It was great to be able to get the third, and especially in a real important game."

Pavelski knows what it's like to be stuck on a whole bunch of two-goal games without a hat trick. The captain had 22 two-goal games in his career before finally breaking through in Tampa Bay in 2014.

"Sometimes you don't know it will ever go in, because you get some good looks," Pavelski said. "For it to go in, it's nice. We didn't quite know (about Kane's streak), but not only did he get a hat trick, they were big goals for us at crucial times. He'll enjoy it for sure, and there will be more to come."

There was some doubt that Kane would even be able to play after he skipped the morning skate with a lower body injury. On Wednesday in Edmonton, Kane missed a few shifts in the first period for unknown health-related reasons.

But Kane figured the whole day that he would find a way to be in the lineup for what was arguably the Sharks' most important game of the season to date.

"It's pretty hard to keep me out of the lineup," he said. "If I can stand, I'm usually going to go."

Coach Pete DeBoer said: "When I talked to him this morning I felt like he would (play). He didn't want to skate this morning, so I just kind of left it at that, and felt that he probably would play unless he had a setback in warmup."

While Kane's contributions were easy to identify, arguably the key moment in the game came while he was in the penalty box. After Kevin Labanc's goal tied the game at 3-3 midway through regulation, Chris Tierney and Kane received minor penalties just one minute and 16 seconds apart, putting the Flames on a 5-on-3 power play for 44 seconds.

Marc-Edouard Vlasic made the key play on the kill, getting a stick in a passing lane and clearing the zone, while Pavelski blocked a Marc Giordano slap shot earlier in the advantage. The Sharks still possess the NHL's top-ranked penalty killing unit.

"I think the 5-on-3 kill probably changed the game," DeBoer said.

Vlasic said: "It was big for us. ... It's huge whenever you can kill a 5-on-3."

The Sharks also caught a break with the way Smith was playing in net. The goalie had been a thorn in the side of the Sharks in the past, entering with an incredible .940 save percentage in 25 career games, but he was downright miserable. Not only was Kane's first goal stoppable, but so was Labanc's from a sharp angle in the second. Tomas Hertl's goal late in the second period came only after Smith failed to corral a Justin Braun shot that wasn't coming in all that hard.

It was baffling that Flames coach Glen Gulutzan left Smith in after the Labanc and Hertl goals. It was downright irresponsible that Smith was still in to start the third, and after Kane's fourth goal just 1:02 into the final frame, Smith finally got the hook in favor of backup David Rittich after allowing six goals on just 20 Sharks shots.

"I think Smith was fighting it a little bit tonight," Pavelski said. "There were just pucks that were finding ways in the net."

Kane pointed out that the Sharks managed just four first period shots, but when they started creating more, the goals piled up.

"That's not how we want to play," Kane said of the opening frame. "When we did get pucks to the net, you saw what happened, we were scoring goals. I think we turned it on there in the second period and started putting a lot more pucks on net, and we were able to find the back of it."

No one found it more than him, as Kane tied a Sharks record for goals in a game that has been achieved just four times now in the 26-season history of the franchise.

"It's always a special night when someone can score three," Pavelski said. "For him to get that fourth, it's pretty cool to see. He's definitely made a huge impact on us as a team, and his teammates. He's been one of the guys driving the bus for the last week or two, and came up big for us tonight."

The Athletic LOADED: 03.19.2018

1104474 Websites

The Athletic / Devils GM Ray Shero found a No. 1 defenseman in Sami Vatanen and won another 'hockey trade'



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 19, 2018

By Corey Masisak

Mar 18, 2018

There are two kinds of trades in the NHL. There are trades, and then there are "hockey trades."

People get very excited about "hockey trades" because they don't happen very often. These are trades that involve quality NHL players going in both directions, with both clubs trying to adjust the roster and improve immediately. The other kind normally involves one team playing for now and one collecting assets for the future.

When the Devils added players like Marcus Johansson, Michael Grabner and Patrick Maroon, those were trades. But Adam Larsson for Taylor Hall was a "hockey trade."

General manager Ray Shero made another one at the end of November, sending Adam Henrique, Joseph Blandisi and a third-round pick to the Ducks for Sami Vatanen and a conditional third-round pick.

The deal made sense from both sides: With Nico Hischier and Pavel Zacha pushing their way into the lineup, the Devils were running out of room at center, but clearly needed some help on defense. Meanwhile, the Ducks were in desperate need of a center because of a rash of injuries, and, along with the Predators, have drafted and developed defensemen better than the rest of the league during the past decade.

Henrique has been a solid addition for the Ducks, but the 26-year-old Vatanen has become the Devils' No. 1 defenseman, and he's been one of the best in the NHL since mid-December.

Vatanen had a great 2014-15 season and a really good 2015-16, but his goals and points dropped off last year. He also got off to a bad start this season with four points in 15 games and the worst puck possession numbers on the roster.

One of the biggest problems for Vatanen in Anaheim was his deployment. It didn't matter who the coach was, Vatanen was often stuck playing with a partner like Kevin Bieksa, Clayton Stoner or Mark Fistric, guys who were always going to be a drag on his performance.

He did spend a lot of last season with Cam Fowler, but there were also almost 250 minutes at even strength with Bieksa or Stoner. He played less than 200 minutes with Hampus Lindholm over the course of five seasons, which could have been one of the best pairings in the league.

So to recap, Vatanen was a young player with obvious talent and potential whose production had dipped. There was also reason to believe he was being held back by the guy next to him at times. Meanwhile, the Ducks were desperate for a player the Devils felt they could live without.

If that sounds a little like the circumstances that Shero found the Oilers in before they traded Hall, it should. This might not turn out to be an all-time theft, but adding Vatanen and then unleashing him in John Hynes' system on the team's top pairing has been a critical development for the Devils.

"I feel like my game is going in the right direction," Vatanen said after the Devils blanked the Kings, 3-0, in Los Angeles on Saturday. "Last year wasn't very good and the beginning of the year wasn't maybe what I wanted, but when I got here I found the right track."

Why has Vatanen evolved into a No. 1 defenseman in New Jersey?

There are the obvious demarcations. He leads the Devils in average time on ice at 22:29 per game. His advantage over partner Andy Greene has swelled to near two minutes per contest, in large part because Vatanen has logged at least 23 minutes in 14 of the past 17 games.

The Devils recently played consecutive games against the three best teams in the Western Conference — Winnipeg, Nashville and Vegas. Those teams are fast, deep and skilled.

When it was time to match up against the best of the best, Hynes leaned on Vatanen. He averaged 26:14 of ice time in those three games, and it would have been even more had the Devils not opened a large lead in the third period against the Golden Knights.

"He's earned them," Hynes said. "We didn't give it to him right away, but he's playing some very good hockey right now and he can handle those types of minutes. You don't tell him, 'We want you to play 27 minutes.' He's usually a 22-23 minute guy, but he's increased his ice time with his performance."

There is also the offensive production. Vatanen didn't score a point in his first eight games after the trade. He said the transition period didn't actually last that long, but once the points started flowing they didn't stop.

Here's a look at the top 16 defensemen in the NHL in points since Dec. 18 — which happens to be the night Henrique and the Ducks came to Prudential Center.

Data: NaturalStatTrick.com

That list includes a who's who of Norris Trophy contenders and is almost exclusively No. 1 defensemen or guys who could be on other teams. It's a arbitrary start point for the other 15 players, but it's also almost half a season of Vatanen collecting points like a top-20 defenseman.

There's more to it than just points and ice time. A deeper look reveals just how Vatanen has been a critical part of New Jersey's offensive engine.

Here is a chart of the Devils' unblocked shots, relative to league average, when Vatanen is on the ice in 5-on-5 situations, from Micah Blake McCurdy's hockeyviz.com.

Red is good, blue is bad and the darker the area means more (or less) shots than league average. When Vatanen is on the ice, the Devils are getting a lot of shots at the top of the crease, which is the area where goals are scored at the highest percentage from. They're also getting a lot of shots from the area where Vatanen will typically be set up if they have control of the puck.

Now here's the same situation, only when Vatanen is not on the ice.

That's a lot more blue and less dark red. The Devils are still getting shots near the goal and from the left side (we see you, Taylor), but not at the same frequency and there's obviously less rubber reaching the goalie from top of the zone.

How does Vatanen affect the offense so much?

It's not just him bombing away from the point. He's not really a volume shooter. He's got 96 shots on goal in 47 games. That's the best per-game rate among the defensemen, but it's only fifth on the team overall.

Vatanen's overall package of skills — particularly his skating, passing and intelligence — all contribute to the Devils finding more and better shots when he's on the ice.

A couple of teammates at The Athletic combined to make the next visual demonstration of Vatanen's impact.

"Puck possession," at least until there is league-authorized tracking data for the puck and players on the ice, is defined by shot attempts. There has been tons of research done on how and why teams can create more shot attempts, and two valuable components are entering the offensive zone and exiting the defensive zone with control of the puck.

Circumstances can force players to dump the puck in on offense or throw it off the glass and out on defense, but accomplishing those things while keeping the puck is likely to lead to more shot attempts.

This is Corey Sznajder's data, and he manually tracks a lot of things the NHL doesn't, like zone entries and exits, both for and against.



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Sean Tierney took Sznajder's data and created graphs for visual context. (Also, here is the start of Sean's thread with a breakdown of every team.)

Vatänen is good at both getting his club out of danger by carrying the puck out of the defensive zone, and also setting up the offense in a better position by carrying it into the offensive zone.

The chart above focuses on the defensive end, where Vatänen is above average at both exiting the zone and preventing opposing teams from entering it. That combination frustrates opposing offenses and leads to the best kind of defense — making the puck go in the other direction away from your net.

Most of those logos to the right and above Vatänen are the very best defensemen in the league, and fans could name them without needing to hover a cursor over them in Sean's original chart.

One last thing on Vatänen's work in his own end: Because of Vatänen's offensive ability and his size (he's listed at 5-foot-10 and 185 pounds), he's dealt with the typical concerns about his ability to "play defense."

Here's McCurdy's visualized data again, this time with the unblocked shots the Devils are giving up when Vatänen is on the ice at 5-on-5:

A reminder, blue is good and red is bad now. Here's what it looks like when Vatänen is not on the ice:

The Devils are clearly a better defensive team when Vatänen is on the ice.

There were other factors in the trade. Blandisi will be 24 this summer and, while he's been productive at the AHL level (75 points in 100 games), he might be running out of time to prove he can be more than bottom-six guy in the NHL.

The Ducks did get a third-round pick in 2018, but if Henrique signs a new contract with the Ducks, the Devils will essentially get it back, either in 2019 or 2020. Given where the Devils are in the standings this year and the age of some of Anaheim's highest-paid players, that could turn into an advantageous pick swap for Shero.

While Henrique's contract is up after next season, Vatänen has an extra year on his deal. A \$4.875 million cap hit is an acceptable value for a good No. 3 defenseman. It's a fantastic bargain for someone playing at an elite level.

Henrique was a popular player for the Devils. He also helped stabilize a Ducks team that was on the brink of disaster, and his 16 goals and 28 points in 47 games have helped Anaheim remain in playoff contention despite Ryan Getzlaf and Ryan Kesler missing a combined 73 games.

"It's been a great fit for me," Henrique said. "You never really know how it's going to work out until a little while after, but I think for both teams it is has worked out very well."

The Devils, after collecting a third straight win Saturday, remain in a playoff position in the Eastern Conference.

When Vatänen returns to Honda Center as a visiting player for the first time Sunday, it sure looks like Shero is on his way to "winning" another trade. It has improved not only this Devils team's chances of making the playoffs this season but improved the future outlook for the franchise.

The Athletic LOADED: 03.19.2018

1104475 Websites

The Athletic / Could Andreas Johnsson replace Leo Komarov (or James van Riemsdyk) next season?

By Jonas Siegel

Mar 18, 2018

He was the final player the Maple Leafs took at the 2013 draft — 202nd out of 211 overall.

Dave Morrison, then the director of amateur scouting for Toronto, described Andreas Johnsson as a "skilled, strong winger."

"Not tall. But he's got a thicker build. But very intelligent and skilled," said Morrison following a draft which started with the team picking Frederik Gauthier 21st overall. "We just wanted to take a chance on that skill."

Johnsson didn't think Saturday night was even possible at that point almost five years ago.

"It was during the night in Sweden," he recalled. "I hadn't talked to many scouts or anything so I didn't really have high hopes to get drafted."

So he went to sleep.

And when he awoke after what would have been an early night (the Swedes are five hours ahead of Eastern Standard Time, meaning Johnsson would've shut it down before 9 p.m. with the second day of the draft starting Saturday morning in New Jersey), Johnsson nervously checked his phone and learned that he'd been drafted in the seventh round by the Leafs. But he wasn't thinking the NHL was all that real even then. He was just hoping to land a spot as an 18-year-old with Frolunda of the Swedish Hockey League.

Only after coming to North America to play for the Marlies at the start of last season did Johnsson start thinking it was real, that he might actually get to play in the NHL for the Leafs.

Now it's a reality.

The 23-year-old scored his first NHL goal in his second NHL game against the Habs on Saturday and while his opportunity this year might not last beyond the regular season, he's a certain bet to be a regular for the Leafs next year. He might even replace Leo Komarov, a pending free agent, and if not him, then James van Riemsdyk, another player headed for unrestricted free agency (for the first time) in a matter of months.

"It's only up to me to show that I'm going to play here next year," Johnsson said.

Mike Babcock was almost incredulous that Johnsson hadn't only scored on a late feed from Zach Hyman in a rout of the Canadiens — the 12th straight win on home ice for the Leafs — but managed "seven shots or something."

The Leafs coach peered down at the game sheet just to be sure — though he needed an extra second to find Johnsson's No. 18.

"He had so many chances it wasn't even funny," Babcock said of Johnsson, who indeed had seven shots along with two more that missed the net and another one that was blocked. "Good for him, he's on the puck, he's smart with it, he's obviously not scared, he's quick — his first couple of steps are quick — it's good. You want to have as many players as you can."

You want to have as many players as you can to replace those that eventually have to leave.

That reality will start to confront the Leafs this summer when Komarov, van Riemsdyk, Tyler Bozak, Dominic Moore, and now Tomas Plekanec, all potentially depart, but also beyond that when rich second contracts for William Nylander, Auston Matthews and Mitch Marner kick in and money gets tight. Cheap, controllable talents like Johnsson will become more and more essential to the Leafs' annual pursuit of the Cup as time passes that way.

It's in part how Pittsburgh was able to finally reload around Sidney Crosby and Evgeni Malkin seven years after winning in 2009. The



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Penguins needed their stars, of course, including a former Leafs winger, but also depth contributors like Conor Sheary, Bryan Rust, and Jake Guentzel to chip in during Cup runs in 2016 and 2017.

The Leafs, if they're to reach those heights this year or down the line, will need those types, too — whether that's a Johnsson hitting or someone like Mason Marchment coming out of nowhere.

Johnsson obviously has a long way to go to carving out that kind of place in the league, but looks to have the wheels, skill, smarts and relentlessness to make a name for himself in Toronto.

Komarov could be out another two weeks with injury if a report on Hockey Night in Canada proves accurate, giving Johnsson an extended audition and training ground not just for next season but as an option for Babcock in the playoffs if injuries pop up. Babcock said that was the reason for bringing Johnsson up from the Marlies in the first place, though dissatisfaction with other left wing options — Josh Leivo and Matt Martin — as well as a sinking second power-play unit also likely had something to do with the decision.

Johnsson looks like an automatic first option off the bench come playoff time if injuries arise, having blown past Leivo and Martin, who were scratched again against the Habs.

Johnsson might just give the Leafs room to move past Komarov next season, too.

He might not be able to replace the defensive know-how that the trusted Finn offers, but he would inject more speed and skill to the Leafs top-nine forward group and another scoring threat if van Riemsdyk also happens to exit (which seems likely). Johnsson could conceivably line up behind Hyman and Patrick Marleau on the depth chart at left wing, join Hyman, Connor Brown and Kasper Kapanen on the penalty kill and even slide onto a second power play unit — which he's done in two games with Matthews sidelined.

It wouldn't be all that surprising if the Leafs tried to bring Komarov back on a cheap, short-term deal — given Babcock's affinity for him — perhaps in a fourth line role with plenty of penalty killing mixed in.

Either way, Johnsson will be playing for the Leafs next year, a fact all but confirmed by the Leafs head coach earlier in the week.

Johnsson seemed overwhelmed, if also overjoyed by his first week in the NHL. It wasn't unusual to see a big, wide grin across his face, though he was admittedly trying to stay serious and focused on keeping his spot with the Leafs, which came about somewhat unexpectedly earlier in the week.

Johnsson had been tearing up the AHL, already with more goals (26) and points (54) in 54 games for the Marlies than he had in 75 games as a rookie a year ago (20 and 47).

"I feel like the good thing is that we have the same system in the hockey," he said of the Marlies playing style under Sheldon Keefe. "So when I get here it's nothing new really, it's the same system and just meeting other guys and it's a higher pace. So it feels like they have really prepared me for this opportunity."

Johnsson memorably earned nine stitches above his right eye after a hit from Alexander Radulov in his first NHL game against Dallas and then got a chance to play higher in the lineup against Montreal on Saturday when Babcock shuffled around his lineup with Komarov still sidelined.

Johnsson seemed to especially enjoy the chance play with Nylander.

The two happily spoke Swedish on the bench when the conversation didn't include Hyman and English when it did.

Johnsson jumped up and down with giddy excitement after scoring his first NHL goal. He said the only time he felt that same rush of excitement on the ice was when he scored for the first time in the Swedish League.

It was pure exhilaration.

FIRST GOAL FEELING. PIC.TWITTER.COM/GFHAYFYJY

— NHL GIFS (@NHLGIFS) MARCH 18, 2018

He just hoped his family hadn't fallen asleep before the goal, which came with less than five minutes left in the 4-0 win. And if they did, well, it sure looks like they'll get many more chances.

The Athletic LOADED: 03.19.2018

1104476 Websites

The Athletic / With Seth Jones sidelined, Blue Jackets' depth on defense passes its first test

Tom Reed

Mar 18, 2018

A year ago, Ian Cole and the Penguins lifted their second Stanley Cup in as many seasons without the helping hands of their best defenseman.

Kris Letang missed the entire playoff run recovering from neck surgery to repair a herniated disk.

As long as Sidney Crosby, Evgeni Malkin and Phil Kessel remain ambulatory, the Penguins always are a threat to add to Pittsburgh's double-wide trophy case. But Cole, who joined the Blue Jackets at the Feb. 26 trade deadline, remembers how hard his old club leaned on the depth of its defensive corps.

If his new team is going to make back-to-back playoff appearances for the first time in franchise history, it might need to do the same in the final few weeks of the regular season.

The Blue Jackets outlasted the Senators, 2-1, on Saturday night at Nationwide Arena for their seventh consecutive win — and first without Seth Jones in the lineup. The All-Star defenseman missed the contest with an undisclosed upper-body injury, and coach John Tortorella said only that Jones was "day to day."

"Nobody needs to step up and be Kris Letang, nobody needs to step up and be Seth Jones," Cole said. "But everyone needs to elevate their game and play really solid hockey. I think we did that tonight."

Ryan Murray returned to the lineup after being made a healthy scratch Thursday in Philadelphia and played a strong 17 minutes with three blocked shots. Markus Nutivaara, who earned power-play time in the absence of Jones, scored the game-winner late in the second period with the Blue Jackets on the man advantage.

"Jonesy is definitely a key guy and you see we miss him, but we have depth in the D-zone, the defense," goaltender Sergei Bobrovsky said. "Guys were smart with how they stepped up tonight."

Depth defensemen are like divorce attorneys. Nobody wants to think about them until you need one. The feeling here is the Blue Jackets are fortunate to have several good ones on retainer.

The club isn't going to say anything about the extent or nature of Jones' injury, which first chased him from the third period of Monday's win over the Canadiens. The only thing we know is he took a stiff cross-check to the ribs after scoring the overtime winner March 8 against the Avalanche.

Rib injuries typically heal as quickly as bad feelings between rival mob families. If that's indeed the issue, Jones is likely to play in pain for the remainder of the season. His defensive partner Zach Werenski also is



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dealing with an upper-body injury that he's been playing through for several months.

Sorry if you were hoping to read about the joys of the Blue Jackets' season-best win streak, one that has them zeroing in on a playoff spot. But these are the unhealthy realities confronting almost every team in contention at this time of year.

The positive news is general manager Jarmo Kekalainen had the foresight to acquire Cole at the deadline and the good judgment not to trade away Jack Johnson when many thought Cole's arrival signaled Johnson's departure.

"There are going to be injuries and there's going to be instances when guys have to step up and fill roles to have a deep team," Cole said. "To have guys who can come in and play a great game of hockey and multiple great games of hockey is huge. It makes all the difference in the world when we can still roll three D-pair even without Seth Jones."

The Blue Jackets are six points above the playoff bar even as ninth-place Florida owns three games in hand. The breathing room might allow Tortorella to keep Jones out of the lineup Monday in Boston and Tuesday in New York against the Rangers. He hadn't missed a game all season until Saturday.

It helps when the club can plug in a Murray or Nutivaara depending on the situation. Both are competitors and neither has enjoyed being scratched from recent games.

"Yeah, it pisses me off a lot," Nutivaara said. "(But) you've got to keep smiling and hope the team is gonna win and you wait for your chance."

Murray was not nearly as graphic when he spoke to reporters Friday after practice, but Tortorella didn't mind putting words into the veteran's mouth prior to Saturday's game.

"He's pissed off," the coach said. "He wants to play. Right where we want him. Perfect."

The Blue Jackets also have Dean Kukan, Scott Harrington and Taylor Chorney on the roster. You can't have enough defensemen in March and April, a period on the calendar when the only thing truly healthy is the competition at the bottom of the depth chart.

Saturday's game ended with David Savard absorbing a pair of slap shots in the final five minutes and hobbling to the bench on a night the team blocked 16 shots. Such is the price of victory.

"You've got to be at your best in the games if you want to stay in the lineup," Nutivaara said.

The fun-loving Finn has played well in back-to-back contests.

Best known for his crisp first passes out of the zone and offensive instincts, Nutivaara is noticeably stronger in his second pro season. His one-on-one defending is improving. So is his willingness to engage power forwards like Wayne Simmonds as he did Thursday night in Philadelphia.

"Nutti to me looks like he believes he belongs here where last year he kind of followed and treaded water," Tortorella said. "I think he's trying to take control of his game. I thought he played well."

Nutivaara was pleased to be summoned to a power-play meeting prior to Saturday's game in which he quarterbacked the second unit. He ripped a point shot through a Thomas Vanek screen at 16:01 of the second period for a goal that held up as the winner.

Murray and Nutivaara partnered on the third pair. If Jones returns to the lineup in Boston, one of the depth defensemen will sit and stew in the TD Garden press box. That's just fine with Tortorella, who knows he's got a motivated player waiting for another chance.

A year ago, the Jackets lacked defensive depth at season's end and it led Tortorella to play neophyte Gabriel Carlsson in the opening-round

series loss to Cole and the Penguins. The coach has more trust in his reserves this spring, and they figure to be tested over the final 10 games.

These are hardly ideal circumstances. Werenski and Johnson did not look comfortable together. And if Jones misses considerable time, a second consecutive trip to the playoffs becomes in doubt. The Blue Jackets don't have Crosby, Malkin and Kessel to erase defensive lapses.

But the club is playing its best hockey at the right time. At least the Blue Jackets' confidence is at full strength.

The Athletic LOADED: 03.19.2018

1104477 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / NHL GM meetings meant to find common ground on goalie interference

Chris Johnston

March 18, 2018, 11:59 PM

BOCA RATON, Fla. – This is about politics as much as it is the rules of hockey.

Fostering a better understanding of how goaltender interference calls are made using video review is the primary objective as the NHL's general managers gather for three days of meetings at the Boca Beach Club.

Complaints have been commonplace this season. They've largely come from the coaches tasked with handling the "coach's challenge" decisions on plays where a goalie gets bumped before he's scored on.

It's created unrest across the league, with the NHL's hockey operations department growing frustrated because of the criticism while coaches and GMs continue struggling to get a handle on the standard being enforced. There's a growing chorus of those who'd like to see the calls standardized with a former referee or other qualified official rendering the final decisions from the video room, rather than having individual officials making the calls off a small tablet screen in the penalty box. But some of the key people involved don't support that step.

The league has been working through this issue all season. There was a last-minute meeting aimed at clearing the air during the all-star weekend in January and more recently the NHL has started sending out a report explaining the decision-making behind each ruling to GMs and head coaches.

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Still, there is a lot of grey involved in the subjective goaltender interference calls made off video replay. Pittsburgh's Mike Sullivan and Toronto's Mike Babcock are among the coaches who have spoken out after controversial rulings in the last few weeks.

They're not alone, either.

"It's confusing, at times," Montreal Canadiens coach Claude Julien said Saturday. "You're seeing something and you think it's the same and the next time around it's a different answer. For some reason there's something that they've seen that (is) different. I think at the end of the day it's probably about making sure we all understand what the criteria are. You know, not just referees but coaches and general managers and the league itself. If we can get on the same page, it's going to make a big



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difference. Right now I don't think we're all clear and I'm not sure we're all on the same page with that.

"So I think they've got an opportunity at the GMs meetings to maybe rectify that."

Some of the issue might come down to optics. There are those who work in NHL front offices who believe more calls are being made correctly because of video review, but that's been overshadowed by the focus on the controversial ones.

As everyone gets in one room here, there is a clear need to get on the same page.

The GMs will also discuss some potential changes to how offsides are interpreted on video review.

They talked last year about allowing players with a skate in the air to be considered onside and will revisit that topic again. Momentum is growing. They're also going to debate the merits of instituting a more liberal interpretation of possession when a player is entering the offensive zone – a potential change that would see fewer goals overturned.

Dimitri Filipovic provides entertaining and thoughtful dialogue about the game of hockey with an analytical edge. Not as nerdy as it sounds.

Other topics for discussion include:

Playoff format

The league will soon be expanding again and there are general managers who would like to see the size of the playoff tournament grow as well.

While not formally part of the agenda, the post-season format is likely to be broached this week. The NHL has qualified 16 teams for the playoffs annually since it was a 21-team league and, with Seattle set to become the 32nd franchise within the next few years, there's been a growing amount of talk about creating wild-card or play-in games to get more teams involved each spring.

It's an idea Gary Bettman has repeatedly poured cold water on publicly, but there are those who believe that the commissioner is mindful of creating a weaker bargaining position when it comes to future negotiations with the NHLPA by not coming out in support of extra playoff games.

Ryan Dixon and Rory Boylen go deep on pucks with a mix of facts and fun, leaning on a varied group of hockey voices to give their take on the country's most beloved game.

The 2017-18 season began with three notable initiatives: A tougher standard on slashing penalties, renewed focus on violations in the faceoff circle, and a mandate to ensure players properly covered their eyes with visors.

There were a ton of penalties early. It's slowed since.

A progress update will be provided to GMs on each count.

One interesting development on the visor front is that a handful of players with the option not to use them at all have since been granted dispensation to wear them in a manner not allowed by their younger colleagues. That list includes Detroit's Niklas Kronwall, Arizona's Niklas Hjalmarsson and Toronto's Leo Komarov.

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Power-play changes?

There is a belief in some corners that power plays aren't created equal. That there might be a better way to have the punishment fit the crime.

The GMs will kick around the possibility of introducing one-minute PPs for overtime, and on non-aggression penalties like puck over the glass and faceoff violations in regulation.

The agenda also includes a proposal to have all faceoffs during a power play start in the offensive zone. This could potentially include those coming off a goal scored during a 5-on-3 advantage or the occasions when a period starts in the middle of a man advantage.

Long-term injured reserve

There is due to be a discussion on how LTIR was handled in the cases of Marian Hossa, Joffrey Lupul and Nikita Soshnikov this season.

This could be an interesting one. Hossa and Lupul were each brought in for independent medicals by the NHL in October after questions were raised about the team-run physicals they failed at the start of training camp.

In the case of Soshnikov, some questioned why the Toronto Maple Leafs were allowed to keep him on LTIR last month after he had a strong showing in the American Hockey League during a conditioning loan. Eventually, the Leafs traded the Russian winger to St. Louis rather than making a roster move to activate him.

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NHL Alumni Association

The NHL Alumni Association has quietly been mobilizing since Glenn Healy took over as executive director last year and on Wednesday morning he'll become the first leader of that organization ever to make a presentation to the GMs.

It's a sign of progress for the players who helped build the league. The alumni are going to have a more prominent role in future NHL events/initiatives, and already share a new sense of cooperation with the league.

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Sportsnet.ca / Goalie interference among topics on agenda at GM meetings

Emily Sadler

March 17, 2018, 11:27 PM

There is plenty to talk about when the NHL's general managers gather in Boca Raton for the annual GM meetings next week.

At the top of that list is, of course, is everyone's favourite topic.

"No surprise here that the biggest two topics will be about goaltender interference and offside reviews—the two coach's challenges that have generated a lot of headlines throughout this season," Sportsnet's Chris Johnston said during Saturday's Headlines segment on Hockey Night in Canada.

The rules surrounding goalie interference have been foggy at best, with several players and coaches venting their frustrations about the unpredictability of it over the course of the season. As Johnston explains,



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it's hard to say where the controversial subject will sit following the meetings, but the issue of offside review could get a little clearer.

"There's a feeling that we could see a change with [offside] reviews, specifically that's to do with a proposal to have a more liberal interpretation of possession as players cross the blue line and to have their skates in the air," Johnston said. "It's something the GMs talked about last year and it didn't go through. The feeling, as we head to Boca Raton for the meetings on Monday, it could change this year."

As far as goaltender interference goes, Sportsnet's Nick Kypreos cautions hockey fans that it's not a matter of simply letting someone else have the final say.

"Still a lot of talk that people think that perhaps it would move [the decision] out of the officials' hands, in terms of goaltender interference, and move it to the NHL office. They can't do that," said Kypreos. "Much like the league changing working conditions for the players, it would have to go through the players' association and they would have to sign off on that. That's a similar situation with the officials. They would have to sign off on it before it ever got to the point where now the NHL office would be making those types of decisions."

As for other items on the agenda for the three-day meeting, Johnston outlined a few key talking points of interest:

"The possibility, a proposal that every faceoff on a power play is in the offensive zone; that we move to one-minute penalties in overtime and on plays like a puck over the glass [delay of game]; and maybe another one that's sneaky on the agenda: how the long-term injury provision was handled with Marian Hossa, Joffrey Lupul and Nikita Soshnikov. The GMs will have a discussion about that."

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Sportsnet.ca / Takeaways: Laine's tear continues for Jets in win over Stars

Mark Spector

March 19, 2018, 12:02 AM

The Winnipeg Jets are the Western Conference version of the Toronto Maple Leafs this March — solidly entrenched in their playoff position, and simply honing their game while waiting for a first-round opponent to declare itself.

For the Jets, it is second place in the Central Division where their regular season will end. And as they welcomed Mark Scheifele, Adam Lowry and Tobias Enstrom back into their lineup Sunday, Winnipeg showed a post-season resolve in beating the Dallas Stars 4-2, tying a franchise record with win No. 43 in the process.

Remember all those regular season games where no one hits anybody? Where the players all skate around carefully, like a bunch of union brothers trying not to mess up anyone's hair?

Yeah, this wasn't one of those.

There were blow-up hits all over the ice Sunday, and it was the star players who were throwing them. Scheifele lit up John Klingberg as he came out from behind the Dallas net, while Jacob Trouba, who left the game for good after he stepped up on Stars captain Jamie Benn, took the worse of the wreck.

This was one team fighting for its playoff life against another that wanted to leave Dallas with the distinct perception that — playoffs or not — there's a reason the Stars are 12 points back in the standings. The Jets won all four meetings between the teams this season, and are the better team — have no doubt about that.

Here are some takeaways from a fantastic night of Hometown Hockey, and a Jets club that you might take a close look at for your playoff pool.

1. Laine Rolling

After a generation where the East got Sidney Crosby and Alex Ovechkin, Connor McDavid and Patrik Laine will be more than just a reasonable facsimile out West for the next dozen years or more.

On Sunday, Laine notched goals No. 42 and 43 to tie Ovechkin for the league lead, while extending his point streak to 15 games. That's the longest scoring streak ever posted by a teenager in the NHL, with 18 goals and 26 points in that span.

This kid, in this barn, is going to be a blast come April.

2. All In For Paul

Not so quietly, the deal to bring Paul Stastny to Winnipeg may just have won the trade deadline for Jets general manager Kevin Cheveldayoff. The conservative, draft-and-develop GM always said that he'd be ready to make the big deals when his team was ready to win, and it's hard to criticize now.

Stastny's assist on Sunday was his tenth point in nine games as a Jet since coming from St. Louis for a conditional first-round pick in 2018, a conditional fourth-round pick in 2020, and prospect Erik Foley.

Tampa landed Ryan McDonagh and J.T. Miller at the deadline, though the Bolts haven't seen the residuals in the win-loss column as much as they would have liked thus far. The Boston Bruins have been on fire since acquiring Rick Nash, and he has six points in 11 games for a team that's knocking on Tampa's door in the Atlantic.

But watching Stastny operate between Laine and Nikolaj Ehlers Sunday, the 32-year-old appears to be the perfect centre for a pair of prodigal young talents on the wing. It's as good a second line as anyone has, anywhere.

3. Trouba Trouble

Trouba returned on Thursday after being on I.R. since Jan. 25. That's the good news.

The bad news? He wobbled to the bench and never returned after his collision with Benn on the opening shift of the third period. There's no doubt Trouba simply could not pass concussion protocol, and on a team that is just beginning to get healthy again, the question mark goes right back up beside one of their premier defencemen in Trouba.

4. Check Mate on Bishop

Speaking of players who just recently returned from the injury list...

The Stars' No. 1 goalie Ben Bishop recently missed five games with a left knee injury, and in his second game back Sunday, he had to leave midway through with what possibly might be a recurrence of the same malady. The Stars later announced that he won't be re-evaluated for two weeks, which means this is likely a regular season-ending injury.

Bishop limped off after making a wicked glove stop on Bryan Little, and was relieved by Kari Lehtonen. In another good news-bad news scenario, Lehtonen was fabulous in relief.

But the bad news? Lehtonen can always give you two good periods. It's the next three where he tends to fade, and the Stars just fell out of the final wild card spot, with just nine games remaining.

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Sportsnet.ca / Flames season encapsulated in disappointing loss to Golden Knights

Iain MacIntyre

March 18, 2018, 6:58 PM

LAS VEGAS – After getting crushed by a check, T.J. Brodie was too hurt to play the third period here Sunday, which at least might explain how badly he played in the second. But the defenceman's injury doesn't come close to explaining the Calgary Flames.

It doesn't explain their 4-0 loss to the Vegas Golden Knights when the Flames dominated the first period, then disintegrated over a 10-minute stretch in the second after Brodie was steam-rolled by Ryan Reaves. And it certainly can't explain a season in which the Flames, who were supposed to have one of the best defences in the National Hockey League, could bleed goals down the stretch and go 3-6-1 in their last 10 games to retreat from the race.

Everything disappointing about the Flames was evident here. They couldn't score on the many chances they generated in the first period, couldn't defend in the second, were outplayed on special teams and their brittleness under duress made it easy for the Knights to beat them.

At least their suffering will be over soon because the Flames, who lost 7-4 at home Friday against the San Jose Sharks, have just nine games remaining and a four-point deficit (going to six pending the Dallas Stars' late game Sunday in Winnipeg) in the Western Conference wild-card race.

"We're fighting for our lives and it's obviously frustrating to go out like that," Calgary goalie Mike Smith said. "But it's not over until you're officially eliminated.

"It's hard to pinpoint one thing. I think it's the mental part of the game where if you get scored on, the next shift coming out you need to get the momentum back. That's just part of being a good pro."

After Calgary surrendered a fluky power-play goal to Colin Miller at 5:33 of the second period to fall behind 1-0 in a game in which the Flames outshot the Knights 20-6 in the opening 20 minutes, Brodie had an unforced giveaway that Vegas turned into a 2-on-1 and 2-0 lead at 6:26.

Then the Knights scored again at 13:01 when Flame Micheal Ferland meekly lost a puck battle along the boards and Calgary couldn't defend a two-against-five. Then they scored again on another 2-on-1 at 14:10 when Flames defenceman Mark Giordano gambled and was caught.

By "they," we mean William Karlsson, because the Vegas winger scored a natural hat trick to boost his season total to 39 goals – 24 more than he scored the last two years combined. The 25-year-old plucked in the expansion draft from the Columbus Blue Jackets is the most amazing aspect of the Knights' remarkable inaugural season.

During the Knights' four-goal outburst, the Flames were unrecognizable as the team that dominated the first period.

"I just think, you're going to get scored on (and) it's how you react to mistakes and goals against and changes of momentum in games," Smith said. "Tonight, I thought we didn't handle it very well. We started forcing things. We thought we could get it all back in one shift. That's not the way it works in this league.

"We're still in the hockey game. It's 1-0 or 2-0 there and we decide we're going to run all over the place to get back in the game."

Giordano added: "I don't know. I thought it was pretty obvious we were the better team in the first. We controlled the play, we played in their zone. We let the momentum swing. We've got to do a way better job of when they do get one – even if they get two – to stop the momentum.

"We took too many chances when we were down. But you can't blame guys for trying too hard. It's not a lack of effort; it's none of that. It's our reads and our decision-making and knowing that there's still a lot of time left. That's what hurt us tonight."

A lot of things have hurt them this season.

Their power play is 24th in the NHL. After sending first and second-round 2018 draft picks to the New York Islanders for defenceman Travis Hamonic, who was supposed to give the Flames a marquee top-four, Calgary's 16th-ranked goals-against average of 2.90 is actually worse than a year ago. Brodie, especially, has been a mess.

Top centre Sean Monahan is playing at half speed with an undisclosed lower-body injury, and super sophomore Matthew Tkachuk is now out with a suspected concussion. Smith missed 13 games with a lower-body injury and the Flames won only five times. But since he returned four games ago, Smith's save percentage is 86.7. And Ferland, who helped drive the offence in the first half of the season, has one goal in 18 games and, alarmingly, little physical presence some nights. He registered zero hits against Vegas. Former fourth-overall draft pick Sam Bennett has 11 goals this season.

"There's tons of hope," Giordano insisted. "There's nine games left and that puts us at 98 points if we win them all."

But they've got only 10 wins the last two months.

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Sportsnet.ca / Evander Kane discusses Winnipeg, money photo, hockey's culture

Steven Loung

March 18, 2018, 1:16 PM

As the old adage goes: "You only get one chance to make a first impression."

For Evander Kane, that expression rings especially true.

Flashback to December 2012 when the Winnipeg Jets had just come back and Kane, then only 21 years old and originally drafted by the Atlanta Thrashers, posted this infamous photo to Twitter:

The timing of the photo probably wasn't the best as he had recently signed a big six-year, \$31.5-million contract extension with the Jets, followed by the NHL going through with a lockout. The picture led to much negative backlash from fans as he appeared to be flaunting his wealth – a definite no-no amongst the unwritten rules of hockey.

But what about basketball and football?

Speaking to Scott Oake during Hockey Night in Canada's "After Hours" segment following the San Jose Sharks' – Kane's new team – 5-3 win over the Vancouver Canucks Saturday night, the now-26-year-old Vancouver native addressed that photo again and, specifically, the culture around hockey and the NHL when compared to the NBA and NFL.



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"Obviously that picture had a lot of mixed reviews," Kane said. "I understand the timing of it, but I was a young kid with some free time, having some fun and, like [Oake mentions], in the NBA, NFL that wouldn't get a second look.

"It's happened before. You have Wes Welker at the Kentucky Derby throwing money after he won the race. I think in the NHL it's a little bit of an older mindset and I think you have to try to stay within that, but I think it's important to show that personality and show people – players, specifically – who are willing to show that personality because that's what's going to help grow the game and sell the game."

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The topic of discussion came up when Oake made reference to a San Jose Mercury News story from Paul Gackle that explores inherent racism within hockey's culture and why a player like Kane – a black man – is a much better fit in a more racially diverse area like California's Bay Area.

"I was in Atlanta for my first two years and those were very smooth years," Kane told Gackle. "Then, we got sold to Winnipeg and things changed. I didn't change, so it's interesting how things happen."

"If you don't acknowledge [the racial element] to some degree, you're living in the shadows. It's an older mentality and something that [hockey] hasn't caught up to. There's nothing wrong with lights, camera, action and embracing the entertainment side of sports. Unfortunately, we don't have enough guys who want to do that or think it's important to do that. If you look at the four major sports, that's why hockey ranks fourth."

Kane spent four years in Winnipeg before he was traded to the Buffalo Sabres in February 2015. His time with the Jets didn't end the most amicably as it was rumoured he clashed with the coaching staff and teammates for alleged behavioural issues.

The Sabres flipped Kane to the Sharks at the trade deadline this past February. In the midst of one of his best seasons as a pro, Kane has 50 points and 25 goals split between Buffalo and San Jose.

He's off to a flying start with the Sharks, recording 10 points and five goals in nine games played with this new team, including a four-goal night Friday against the Calgary Flames.

Took me 9 years in the @NHL but was worth the wait. Happy I was able to get my first trick with this group of guys! @SanJoseSharks Huge win! pic.twitter.com/sqW6UtwAvL

— Evander Kane (@evanderkane_9) March 17, 2018

Set to become an unrestricted free agent in July, given his productivity with the Sharks so far and the chemistry he's appeared to build with the club in a such a short time, it's looking like Kane may have found a home at long last.

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Sportsnet.ca / 4 things we learned in the NHL: B's proving they can bottle Lightning

Sonny Sachdeva

March 18, 2018, 9:20 AM

There were shutouts around every corner, some clashes between top contenders, and plenty a highlight-reel play to keep the NHL faithful satisfied.

That said, here are a few things we learned around the league on Saturday night.

Bruins proving they're Lightning's biggest Eastern threat

The Eastern Conference isn't going to be a cake walk for anyone, but it's pretty clear who the top dog is at the moment. While last year's champs are surging and a number of other clubs are climbing the ladder, the Tampa Bay Lightning have sat on the throne since Day 1. And with the most potent offensive duo in the game in their midst, the Lightning still look pretty immovable.

But Saturday night in Tampa Bay, the Boston Bruins made clear why they're the Lightning's toughest test in the east, a puzzle that will have to be solved sooner rather than later if Steven Stamkos' club wants a crack at the Stanley Cup this summer.

The Bruins topped the Lightning 3-0 on Saturday, becoming the only team to shut out the offensively dominant Bolts this season. While Andrei Vasilevskiy was solid in the cage, Boston's win came by committee, as the club limited Tampa Bay's scorers to just 23 shots on the night. Prior to their meeting, Tampa Bay had posted 23 or fewer shots just six times through their 71 games this season.

One of those sub-23-shot nights came on Nov. 29 — the Bolts' only other game against Boston this season. The Bruins held them to 21 shots on net, and walked away with a 3-2 victory. But that's not even the most interesting part of this whole equation.

Saturday's shutout loss also marked the first time Tampa Bay was blanked since April 4 of last season. The opponent that night?

The Boston Bruins.

Make no mistake, Tampa has a Bruins problem. And if they can't get it figured out in either of their next two meetings with the B's this season, Boston is as good as the Eastern Conference favourite heading into the playoffs.

Kreider's hitting another level on rebuilding Rangers

The New York Rangers have found themselves in an odd position since declaring themselves a rebuilding club and selling off their top stars.

While the likes of Rick Nash and Ryan McDonagh now ply their trade with other clubs — the two teams mentioned above, in fact — the Rangers haven't wilted, earning points in seven of nine games following the Feb. 26 trade deadline.

And what of this? After averaging 0.56 points per game through the first 39 games of the season (posting 22 points in that span), Kreider has averaged 1.11 points per game in the nine games since the trade deadline, posting 10 points in those tilts.

The bulk of those recent points came against the rival Pittsburgh Penguins on Wednesday, when Kreider took his club on his back and threw down a four-point outing, factoring in on every Rangers goal as they won 4-3. Saturday night, he nearly did it again.

New York was bested in overtime this time around, but Kreider finished the evening with another multi-point affair, including this madness:

The Vancouver Canucks still know how to score goals

After what seemed like an eternity without a single puck in a single opposing cage, the Vancouver Canucks proved they still have plenty of offensive firepower in the lineup on Saturday night.

Nikolay Goldobin scored 10 minutes into Vancouver's tilt with the San Jose Sharks, finally ending the team's three-game goalless streak after 118 Canucks shots failed to do the job.

Goldobin ends the drought. 118 shots between goals.



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— Rick Dhaliwal (@DhaliwalSports) March 18, 2018

Vancouver firmly put the drought in the rear-view in the second period, however, when Bo Horvat and Alexander Edler added two more goals to the pile, proving the team does indeed still have some offensive juice without The Brock Boes Monster in the lineup.

Those three goals in two periods equalled the total posted by the Canucks over the previous 15 periods of hockey, however. So it's safe to say the club's draft lottery chances are still looking decent heading into the season's home stretch.

Ottawa's Jim O'Brien is an NHLer once again

It's been a long, winding road for Ottawa Senators centreman Jim O'Brien.

Drafted 29th overall by the Senators back in 2007 — just a few picks after David Perron, a handful before P.K. Subban — O'Brien went on a tumultuous journey that took him from the WHL's Seattle Thunderbirds to the AHL's Binghamton Senators, up to the NHL level, back to Binghamton, over to the KHL's Novokuznetsk Metallurg, back to the AHL to suit up for the Hershey Bears, then the Albany Devils, then the NHL-level Devils, then back to the AHL for the San Antonio Rampage, then the Belleville Senators and then, finally, the 2017-18 Ottawa Senators.

Still following?

Now back with the big club, O'Brien registered a point on Saturday night, assisting on Ottawa's lone goal during their 2-1 loss to the Columbus Blue Jackets.

While it might not have been enough to get the Senators in the win column, there's a fair chance O'Brien was happy to take it either way.

That point was the first at the NHL level for the 29-year-old O'Brien in five years. And it came almost to the day, as his last point was registered on March 16, 2013 — an assist on a Chris Phillips goal in a Senators win over the Buffalo Sabres.

Here's to sticking with it.

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