



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 19, 2019

THE NEWS & OBSERVER

Canes' Calvin de Haan: 'I was pretty much blind for 48 hours'

By Chip Alexander

Raleigh

Calvin de Haan couldn't rest easy until he heard it from a doctor in Denver, until he was told, "You did not lose your eye."

As an NHL defenseman, de Haan has had his share of injuries, mild and major. A bad shoulder last season kept him out much of the year. The Carolina Hurricanes defenseman has taken shots off legs and feet, being banged into the boards, even injured in a postgame workout.

But never an eye injury. Not until this season.

"I've had a couple of stitches here or there but it was never the money-maker," de Haan said Monday.

Against the Toronto Maple Leafs in December, de Haan took a stick under his visor from the Leafs' William Nylander, leaving a gash on the left eyebrow that required six stitches. A close call.

But in the March 11 road game against the Colorado Avalanche, the Avs' Alex Kerfoot took a swipe with his stick and hit de Haan in the right eye on the follow-through.

De Haan immediately lost sight in the eye. At first, he wasn't sure if his eye was in its socket.

"I was pretty much blind for 48 hours," he said.

De Haan was treated off the ice at the arena but then taken to a Denver hospital, where he was evaluated by a specialist.

"It was down at the hospital and he said, 'You should be all right,'" de Haan said. "That was the most optimistic thing he pretty much said the whole time. He said, 'You've just got to lay low for a few days and let everything heal and go from there.'"

While the eyesight returned, there was hyphema, or pooling of blood inside the eye, de Haan said. A blurriness has persisted, which de Haan likened to being punched in the nose and having your eyes water.

De Haan was able to rejoin the team practice Monday at PNC Arena, wearing a full-face shield, but it's still uncertain when he'll be able to play. His right eye was dilated after practice from the eye drops he has been using.

"They're trying to keep the eye from moving, to let it heal," he said. "That's why I'm using industrial-strength dilating drops.

It's still a little blurry and probably not safe to be going full speed in a hockey game right now.

"It's just bad luck more than anything. I've never been hit from my nose up. It is what it is."

Eye injuries are scary things for any athlete. Former Canes coach Paul Maurice and former assistant general manager Jason Karmanos both had their hockey playing careers ended by eye injuries.

"I've always been surprised there aren't more eye injuries with the rate of speed of the puck and the battles with the sticks," Maurice said.

Canes coach Rod Brind'Amour can put himself in de Haan's place. Once, during a Canes game years ago against the San Jose Sharks, he took a stick in the eye.

"It was a real bad one, real scary," Brind'Amour said. "I thought I lost my eye, so I can relate to what he went through. ... I didn't know at the time how serious it was until after, when I got rushed to the hospital. Then you start worrying. Obviously the vision part, that's permanent.

"It puts a lot of things in perspective, that's for sure. I'm just glad he's going to be fine."

De Haan is eager to get back in the lineup with a team that he joined last July as a free agent, a team making a push for its first Stanley Cup playoff berth since 2009. De Haan was in playoff games with the New York Islanders in 2015 and 2016. He wants to get back with this Canes team, this year.

"There's a real possibility that we can get some home ice," he said. "You never know, right? One team slides and we keep climbing and anything can happen. It would be kind of a shock to the league, I think, but we've got a good team here. I've said it from day one that everyone has bought in and everyone believes in each other."



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 19, 2019

THE ATHLETIC

Charming, precise, quirky and brilliant: Inside a Carolina Hurricanes broadcast with Fox Sports Carolinas

By Sara Civian

"Picked off by Wallmark, all we need is Hallmark," longtime Carolina Hurricanes play-by-play announcer John Forslund described a play in the second period of a 4-2 win over the Sabres. "And now Martinook will hand it off."

"They do have a channel," color commentator Tripp Tracy responded.

"And they're one less actress. Down to center ice now, Haydn Fleury will draw it all the way back," Forslund didn't miss a beat.

"For a good reason," Tracy matched.

"Trevor van Riemsdyk out to center. Play by the rules, please," Forslund chuckled. "Now Bogosian out to center."

The whole thing was a tongue-in-cheek reference to the recent high-profile college admissions cheating scandal (and Lori Loughlin's termination at Hallmark in its aftermath). It was such a smooth execution that you might've missed it, as it didn't at all distract from the game at hand. That's a near-nightly accomplishment for this duo.

In a trailer truck stationed a few feet away from PNC Arena, a handful of people didn't miss the exchange. They never do.

"What?!" Fox Sports Carolinas associate director Adam Holzman laughed away from his headset. "What are they talking about?"

Quick-witted banter between Forslund, Tracy and TV host Mike Maniscalco has become as much a staple of the Hurricanes hockey experience as Sebastian Aho breakaways this season. We all know any given broadcast could bring another self-deprecating tale of Tracy's love life, some chef attire or a cake in a face, but it's always charming just the same.

That's because it's organic. The broadcast feels a little like a Canes world inside joke, or maybe a reward for putting up with the past decade of Hurricanes hockey. The men and women behind the magic try not to interfere.

"I've learned who they really are," Holzman said. "The way they prepare for the games, the way they carry themselves, the level of professionalism that they bring to the table as one of the longest current duos in the league. John truly is the governor, everyone from every other team's broadcast comes to see him. ... Tripp knows every player in the league and they all love him as a genuine friend."

In some ways, the truck outside PNC Arena is just like your living room. The cornier jokes on the broadcast warrant a friendly eye roll from Holzman or a playful "ugh" from head producer Jim Mallia throughout the broadcast.

In other ways, that truck and the perfectionists who inhabit it run a painstakingly precise operation just so you can get your fill of John, Tripp and Mike.

Pregame show

Though broadcast crews at this level in their careers have generally seen it all, they still have to deal with the unpredictability of live television every night. In the name of controlling what you can control, Fox Sports Carolinas makes it a point to nail the pregame show — the only quasi-scripted portion of game broadcasts.

It's its own entity, with Holzman producing before Mallia takes over for in-game production duties, but they also consider it a chance for everyone to get on the same page and tell the same story.

Mallia typically sends out pregame scripts a day or two before so crew members can gather graphics, tidbits, etc., that they might want handy for the 30-minute show. Sometimes these graphics don't ever see the light of day — they're just for on-air talent to reference on the mini screens in front of them.

The scripts outline the segments you see before every game: storylines Maniscalco and Shane Willis discuss, interviews with notable people in attendance, analysis from Forslund and Tracy.

Puck drop for a 7 p.m. game is supposed to happen at exactly 7:08 p.m., but if you've watched at least five NHL games you know this isn't always the case. Holzman has to keep track of time to the second at the helm of the pregame show, adding or subtracting commercials and segments on the fly when things go awry.

They were cutting it close on Saturday, so Holzman let Maniscalco and Willis decide which of three talking points they'd like to scratch.

Just like that, a key to the game that sounded like "getting their legs under them early" entered the graveyard of pregame segments. I think we'll all live.

If a guest on the pregame show says something Holzman thinks Forslund or Tracy would find interesting, he gives them the option of weighing in on it in lieu of a pre-planned segment. Forslund was dead-set on addressing Tracy's lucky tie Saturday, so he shut that one down fast.

Graphics

There are hundreds of thousands of graphics on deck for each broadcast. Seriously. The man behind the tidbits that pop up on your screen is Dean Meglio, and he uses a technique reminiscent of the Dewey Decimal System in libraries to maintain his sanity.

Each game he'll give himself a cheat sheet with the most relevant graphics on a large sticky note at his desk, but there's always a chance Mallia will need something totally random. Meglio has to come through in a matter of seconds.

So he gives every single graphic in the database a number based on the code he has memorized. For example, the



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 19, 2019

code for Brett Pesce's TOI graphic is 225. Pesce wears No. 22, Meglio's ice time category is "five."

The product speaks for itself in that significant mistakes are rare, but you won't find a broadcast in the league that hasn't messed up a graphic. When problems do arise there's a collective "move on now, discuss postgame" attitude. What else can you do?

In-game

There's always a plan, but the game of hockey has a way of ruining your plans.

Mallia slides into his seat next to Holzman and the transition from pregame to in-game begins.

"John and Tripp," Mallia beckons through his headset. "Let's go. Let's get after it."

The broadcasters and the crew like to stay out of each other's way in-game, but they do use these headsets throughout to address anything that might come up. For example, Forslund loves the sounds of the game (ping of the crossbar, skates on the ice) and he requested more of them in his ear Saturday. Tracy checked in throughout the broadcast, appreciating a Hurricanes goal here, warning of a Buffalo pushback attempt there.

Other than the standard countdowns and cues, the crew sometimes offers words of encouragement to the talent during lulls or after particularly outstanding moments. Mistakes are hard to come by in a broadcast universally regarded as one of the best in the NHL, but there's a general sense of camaraderie when they happen because everyone's been there in some stretch of the phrase and everyone has the same goal.

Ever wonder how intermission interviews work?

Holzman and Maniscalco communicate about it via text.

Obviously, they pick a goal-scorer if they can, but they pick someone else making a positive contribution if the Canes didn't score, if the scorer was the pregame interview, if the scorer has been on the broadcast a lot recently or if the scorer isn't comfortable speaking in English. Once they decide on a player, Holzman texts the designated Canes PR contact of the night. He'll get a thumbs up if the player isn't hurt, etc., and the stage manager relays the news to Maniscalco.

During the game there are cheers for goals, oohs and ahhs for saves and controlled chaos during fights.

"FIGHT, FIGHT," director Paul Hemming simply yelled when Micheal Ferland dropped the gloves Saturday.

Hemming is probably who you picture when you think about the TV truck. He's the one looking at every camera angle and adjusting what you see on the broadcast accordingly.

A veteran of the business, he's one of those people everyone in the industry knows and respects, but a fan wouldn't recognize him walking down the street. That means he's doing it right.

The aforementioned headsets link Hemming to camera operators that he, well, directs. He'll request an up-close shot of head coach Rod Brind'Amour when he's chewing his gum intensely, or a cut to Maniscalco at ice level when Maniscalco is about to weigh in on something (or get mauled by a mascot).

Hemming describes the TV truck as organized chaos with a smile.

He'd thought he'd seen it all in his three decades in the industry, but even his days at Hockey Night in Canada didn't prepare him for the Storm Surge.

The Storm Surge is uncharted territory in most aspects, including on the broadcast side of things. Fox Sports Carolinas sees it as an opportunity to have fun and get creative, a welcome wrench thrown in an otherwise familiar game plan.

"The Storm Surge has brought a level of uniqueness, something that's unknown," Holzman said. "Generally as a producer and assistant director Jimmy (Mallia) and I go through the day with a pretty solid plan that flows. From the moment the game ends 'til we see what they're doing, we're in an exciting time of sitting back and being a fan. Fun to see their personalities in it. ... Like I see Dougie Hamilton and Warren Foegele love baseball. Jordan Martinook probably has some fight training background."

You may never see Mallia, Holzman, Hemming or Meglio on your TV, but they're essential to the sometimes quirky, often brilliant broadcast that you love. And every game day they're in the truck cheering on the goals — even if nobody hears them.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 19, 2019



Preview: Penguins vs. Hurricanes

Metropolitan Division showdown is critical in playoff race

by Michael Smith

The Carolina Hurricanes and Pittsburgh Penguins are set to square off in a critical Metropolitan Division showdown.

The Hurricanes, who trail the Penguins by just three points in the standings with two games in hand, are in the midst of a five-game homestand and are coming off a 4-2 win over the Buffalo Sabres on Saturday.

The Playoffs Are Now

The Stanley Cup Playoffs won't begin until the second week of April, but the Hurricanes have been in a playoff mindset since the start of 2019.

"It feels like we've been doing that for 30 or 40 games now," head coach Rod Brind'Amour said after practice on Monday. "It is playoffs for us. We know that. We've been in it for a long time."

The Hurricanes are 24-8-2 since Dec. 31, a resurgence that has led them into a wild card spot currently in the Eastern Conference.

Tuesday's game, the first of two match-ups between the Hurricanes and Penguins down the stretch of the season, is a pivotal four-point swing game.

It's as big as the big games have been as of late for the Hurricanes.

"It's not just another game. There's a lot at stake," Brind'Amour said. "It's two points, but I think the game is going to take on a little more emotion because of it. I'm sure the crowd will be into it. I think it will be a big game and as close to a playoff game as you're going to get."

Down the Stretch

Beginning with Tuesday's match, the Hurricanes will play 11 games over a 19-day span to end the regular season.

It's a mad dash to the finish line, as the Canes jockey for playoff positioning.

Managing the team's workload is going to be key.

"It's not ideal, but it is what it is," Brind'Amour said. "How do you manage it? Day by day. We understand the workloads, so we'll probably back off on practices now. You won't see us going too long. Today was longer because we had a day off. Morning skates, who knows? Game time is what it's all about."

The Last Meeting

Backed by a 23-save performance by Curtis McElhinney, the Hurricanes blanked the Penguins, 4-0, in Pittsburgh on Feb. 5. The shutout was McElhinney's first of the season, as he returned to the crease to make his first start in three weeks. In his 300th career NHL game, Jordan Martinook tallied his 12th goal of the season, a new career high.

The Opposition

The Penguins saw a 1-0 lead disappear with just 19 seconds left in regulation against Philadelphia on Sunday, and then the Flyers took the extra point with just 3.4 seconds left in overtime. Prior to that heartbreaker, the Pens had won three of their last four and six of their last eight games to slide into third place in the Metropolitan Division. Pittsburgh will be without Evgeni Malkin, who is week-to-week with an upper-body injury.

AT THE RINK

In conjunction with Hockey is for Everyone, the Hurricanes are hosting Girls' Hockey Night, which will highlight the team's yearlong partnerships with girls' and women's hockey in North Carolina.

Returning this month is the 50/50 Raffle, which will raise funds for children's health and educational needs throughout North Carolina and give fans the chance to walk away with a cash prize. Ticket prices and all the raffle details can be found here.

WORTH A CLICK

News

Recap: Hurricanes Defeat Sabres

Podcast

CanesCast, Ep. 81: Resiliency

Videos

In the Room: Rod Brind'Amour, March 18

In the Room: Lucas Wallmark, March 18

In the Room: Greg McKeeg, March 18

Highlights: CAR 4, BUF 2

Brind'Amour's Postgame Speech: March 16 vs. BUF

Curling Storm Surge: March 16 vs. BUF

Postgame Quotes: March 16 vs. BUF



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 19, 2019

Gameday Links

Buy Tickets

Hockey is for Everyone: Girls' Hockey Night

50/50 Raffle

Auction Items

First Goal Contest presented by Kayem

WATCH, LISTEN & STREAM

Watch: FOX Sports Carolinas, FOX Sports GO

Listen: 99.9 The Fan, Hurricanes app, Hurricanes.com/Listen



Hurricanes in position to end NHL's longest active playoff drought

By Stephen Lorenzo

The last time the Carolina Hurricanes were in the playoffs, the Black Eyed Peas were on top of the charts and The Hangover was just about to hit theaters. This year, the "bunch of jerks" from Raleigh have a legitimate chance to end the NHL's longest active playoff drought.

Postseason hockey was last seen in Carolina in May of 2009, when the Canes were swept by the Pittsburgh Penguins in the Eastern Conference Final. Not one member of that playoff roster remains on the team, except for captain Rod Brind'Amour, who is now behind the bench. Justin Williams, the Canes' current captain, was traded to Los Angeles in March of 2009 before the playoffs began.

Fast forward 10 years to this March, where with 11 games to play, the Canes are in the first wild card spot in the East. They're also just three points behind the Penguins for third in the Metropolitan Division, with two games in hand. That positioning has to do with a recent surge in which Carolina has gone 11-3-1 in their past 15 games, have converted on 21.9 percent of their power plays during that stretch and also killed off 34 of 37 penalties.

Outside of Williams, who has three Stanley Cups and a Conn Smythe Trophy on his resume, Carolina is led by a slew of underrated up-and-comers. Sebastian Aho is in the middle of a career season and is on track to become just the second player in Carolina history (not including the Hartford Whalers) to record 90 points. Eric Staal did so with 100 points in 2005-06. The team's leaders in time on ice this season are Jaccob Slavin, Justin Faulk and Brett Pesce. Goaltenders Petr Mrazek and Curtis McElhinney have combined for just 176 wins over the past 11 seasons. And yet, the Hurricanes have the seventh best defense and sixth best penalty kill in the NHL.

Beyond their collective lack of experience, a glance at the roster would probably place goaltending as Carolina's biggest concern entering the final few weeks of the season, though their netminders have been sensational of late. McElhinney is 11-3-1 dating back to New Year's Eve with a 2.66 goals against average, a .910 save percentage and two shutouts. While he struggled in his latest start against Columbus, Mrazek has been terrific over the past month, going 6-1-0 over his last seven starts with a 1.71 goals against average, a .943 save percentage and two shutouts of his own. Still, performing that well in the playoffs is something new entirely. McElhinney has never made a postseason start. Mrazek took the Detroit Red Wings to Game 7 of the opening round against the Tampa Bay Lightning in 2015, but has never won a playoff series. His latest postseason appearance came last year with the Philadelphia Flyers, when he allowed two goals on 14 shots in relief during a game that the Penguins won 7-0.

If they can hang on to a playoff spot and snap their nine-season drought, the Canes will most certainly be underdogs in the first round, no matter their opponent. But there is no reason not to enjoy what Carolina has already accomplished this season in their push toward the playoffs.

When he signed with the Hurricanes before the 2017-18 season, Williams made it clear he wanted the team's culture to change.

"You have to go through trying years and failure before you get to your goal," Williams said. "We're done losing. It's time to climb the ladder and get relevant."

It took a year longer than Williams might have liked, but between making a playoff push and enjoying their viral post-game celebrations, the Hurricanes are relevant once more.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 19, 2019

YAHOO! SPORTS

Crosby and the Penguins visit the Hurricanes

The Associated Press

Pittsburgh Penguins (39-24-10, third in the Metropolitan Division) vs. Carolina Hurricanes (39-25-7, fourth in the Metropolitan Division)

Raleigh, North Carolina; Tuesday, 7 p.m. EDT

BOTTOM LINE: Sidney Crosby leads Pittsburgh into a matchup against Carolina. He ranks fourth in the NHL with 92 points, scoring 33 goals and recording 59 assists.

The Hurricanes are 9-10-2 against opponents in the Metropolitan Division. Carolina leads the Eastern Conference shooting 34.8 shots per game while averaging 3.0 goals.

The Penguins have gone 18-11-7 away from home. Pittsburgh ranks fourth in the Eastern Conference averaging 5.7 assists per game, led by Crosby with 0.8. In their last meeting on Feb. 5, Carolina won 4-0.

TOP PERFORMERS: Sebastian Aho leads the Hurricanes with 30 goals and has totaled 78 points. Teuvo Teravainen has totaled one goal and 11 assists over the last 10 games for Carolina.

LAST 10 GAMES: Penguins: 6-2-2, averaging 3.1 goals, 4.9 assists, 3.5 penalties and 7.3 penalty minutes while giving up 2.2 goals per game with a .933 save percentage.

Hurricanes: 7-2-1, averaging 3.4 goals, 5.8 assists, three penalties and 8.2 penalty minutes while giving up 2.5 goals per game with a .916 save percentage.

Hurricanes Injuries: Calvin de Haan: out indefinitely (upper body).

Penguins Injuries: Zachary Aston-Reese: out (lower body), Bryan Rust: out (lower body), Chad Ruhwedel: out (upper body), Kris Letang: out (upper body).

The Hockey News

Wild-Card Roundup: Canadiens in tough after awful week, Coyotes continue remarkable run

Montreal had an opportunity to take some all-important points from some struggling competition this past week, but the Canadiens instead suffered two tough defeats that has put their playoff lives in peril.

By Jared Clinton

Talk about an opportunity squandered. As the Montreal Canadiens entered last week, they did so with a post-season position fingertips away, tied with the Columbus Blue Jackets for the final spot in the Eastern Conference and only sitting outside the playoff picture by way of the tiebreaker.

The look ahead was favorable for Montreal, too, and there was reason to believe that when our weekly wild-card roundup came this week, we'd be swapping out the Blue Jackets for the Canadiens. On the slate were the down-in-the-dumps Detroit Red Wings, a New York Islanders group that has shown signs of slowing and the hot-and-cold Chicago Blackhawks, who've been one of the worst defensive groups in the NHL. It had all the makings of a potential six-point week, which would have gone a long way in ensuring the Canadiens surprising season ended with an unexpected playoff berth.

But that's not quite what happened. Early last week, the Canadiens managed to take two points from Detroit, but in the contests that followed, Montreal skated away empty-

handed. The Islanders managed to eke out a 2-1 victory, and the Canadiens' failed to click Saturday against the Blackhawks, sending 48 pucks at Corey Crawford only for Chicago's keeper to turn everything aside and help send Montreal to a 2-0 defeat. Those two defeats could come back to haunt the Canadiens, too.

You see, as Montreal enters this week, they do so with two playoff teams and a hungry Philadelphia Flyers squad on the horizon. And after a one-game break against non-playoff competition early next week, the Canadiens will embark on arguably the toughest run towards the end of the campaign of any team in the NHL. From March 28 through to season's end on April 6, the Canadiens draw the Blue Jackets, Winnipeg Jets, Tampa Bay Lightning, Washington Capitals and Toronto Maple Leafs. That's three divisional leaders, one top-five team and a Columbus club that is all-in on punching their ticket to the dance. Good luck with that.

If one was to look on the bright side, however, maybe it's not all bad for Montreal. An honest assessment of the Canadiens chances is somewhat bleak, particularly if they were to rise no higher than the second wild-card spot and draw the Lightning in Round One. In all likelihood, it would be a one-and-done scenario for Montreal, and the reality is that the Canadiens stand to benefit more from a higher draft pick – and an outside shot at a draft lottery win – than they do a brief foray into the post-season.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 19, 2019

In saying that, though, there's no denying that the sting of disappointment that results from missing the playoffs will hurt. And when Montreal asks what went wrong, they may very well point to the past week as the moment the hammer began its descent towards the head of that final nail in their post-season coffin.

Here's a look at the rest of the wild-card picture, with strength of remaining schedule determined by winning percentage of opposing teams:

EASTERN CONFERENCE

IN:

Pittsburgh Penguins
39-24-10 — 88 pts.

Barring an unbelievable collapse, a strong start to the past week – as well as some favorable results elsewhere – has likely pushed the Penguins into safety. Defeating the Washington Capitals and Buffalo Sabres earned Pittsburgh four important points in the wild-card race as they now sit seven points clear of the outside-looking-in Canadiens. One concern for the Penguins, however, has arisen, as Evgeni Malkin is sidelined week-to-week with an upper-body injury. If all goes well, Pittsburgh can allow Malkin to rest up for the post-season.

Remaining Schedule: 9 games
Opponents' Avg. Point Percentage: .526

Carolina Hurricanes
39-25-7 — 85 pts.

Two wins and one loss over the past week has kept Carolina in top spot in the wild-card race, but there was a concerning moment when the Hurricanes dropped the most important contest of the bunch, blanked by the Blue Jackets on Friday thanks in large part to the play of netminder Sergei Bobrovsky. Carolina got right back on track, though, by doubling up the Sabres on Saturday. The Hurricanes are inching ever closer to locking down a playoff spot after so many years spent on the outside looking in. There are no gimmes on the road in, however, as Carolina has the second-toughest remaining schedule of any team in this roundup.

Remaining Schedule: 11 games
Opponents' Avg. Point Percentage: .593

Columbus Blue Jackets
40-28-4 — 84 pts.

Two crucial wins and five of a possible eight points over the past week have put Columbus in good standing with a potentially frantic finish to the campaign on the horizon. Downing the Bruins was big, and taking three of four points from a tough Boston team was proof positive that the Blue Jackets are a tough team, and shutting out the Hurricanes helped Columbus gain ground and put separation between them and Montreal. The Blue Jackets may be able to benefit from an easier homestretch than either the Canadiens or Hurricanes will be afforded.

Remaining Schedule: 10 games
Opponents' Avg. Point Percentage: .545

OUT:

Montreal Canadiens
37-28-7 — 81 pts.

See above. Disastrous. The Canadiens had every opportunity to keep pace in the wild-card race, but the only points Montreal picked up were from the basement-dwelling Red Wings. The Canadiens could have feasted on a struggling Islanders team or dominated an up-and-down Blackhawks club, but instead, Montreal's week ended with two consecutive losses. As noted, the past week represents a missed opportunity that could come back to bite the Canadiens.

Remaining Schedule: 10 games
Opponents' Avg. Point Percentage: .607

Philadelphia Flyers
33-27-8 — 74 pts.

The outlook was never all that great for the Flyers. They were too far out with too few games remaining. Realistically, Philadelphia could be shuffled into the "playoff goner" category, but the Flyers stopped their post-season life from flatlining when they clawed back to defeat the Penguins in overtime Sunday. A run against the Canadiens, Blackhawks and Islanders this week could see Philadelphia claw right back into the race, so there's no writing them off just yet. It's close, though.

Remaining Schedule: 10 games
Opponents' Avg. Point Percentage: .579

WESTERN CONFERENCE

IN:

St. Louis Blues
37-27-8 — 82 pts.

Losers of four of their past five and seven of their past 11 contests, the Blues temporarily slid out of a divisional spot and back into a wild-card position. And just when it appeared St. Louis was about to get this thing back on track with a 5-1 defeat of Pittsburgh, the Blues dropped a shootout to the struggling Sabres. With earning home-ice advantage not entirely out of the question, St. Louis needs to pick it up. They can catch the Nashville Predators with a run of play that looks similar to February's 11-win performance.

Remaining Schedule: 10 games
Opponents' Avg. Point Percentage: .526

Dallas Stars
37-29-6 — 80 pts.

Finally, we gave Ben Bishop some love...and then he pulled himself from his next start as a preventative measure. That's long been the biggest issue plaguing Bishop, his inability to stay healthy, and the dreaded lower-body injury has reared its ugly head again. The good news is that Anton Khudobin has been good this season, as well, which doesn't leave the Stars hamstrung in goal. This week, which sees the conclusion of a five-game homestand, will be big in terms of accumulating points. After this, Dallas hits the road for four in a row.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 19, 2019

Remaining Schedule: 10 games
Opponents' Avg. Point Percentage: .549

Arizona Coyotes
36-30-6 — 78 pts.

Just when it looked like the bubble was about to burst following a 7-1 loss to the Blackhawks, the Coyotes went ahead and took five of six points from the Blues, Anaheim Ducks and Edmonton Oilers. There's nothing easy about the upcoming four-game road swing this week, though, beginning with a Monday date with the Lightning. Arizona is going to have to continue to fend off the Minnesota Wild and Colorado Avalanche, though, and the one bonus is a slightly weaker schedule than either team. Darcy Kuemper's past month has been exceptional, too, posting a .942 save percentage in his past 14 games.

Remaining Schedule: 10 games
Opponents' Avg. Point Percentage: .556

OUT:

Minnesota Wild
34-30-9 — 77 pts.

After puzzling back-to-back results against the Lightning and Panthers – beating Tampa Bay, falling well short against Florida – the Wild had a difficult week that saw them fall one point behind the Coyotes and give up a game in hand. The

remaining schedule isn't about to do Minnesota any favors. No team in the Western Conference wild-card race has a harder run down the stretch. Not a single game is against a top-lottery odds team. In fact, every remaining Wild contest sees them square off against either a team featured in this roundup or a squad already looking ahead to the post-season.

Remaining Schedule: 9 games
Opponents' Avg. Point Percentage: .591

Colorado Avalanche
31-29-12 — 74 pts.

Far too often in the back half of the season the Avalanche have dropped points that they should have picked up. Case in point, this past week's loss to the foundering Anaheim Ducks, which saw Colorado allow two goals in the final minute to lose the game in regulation. Four points back with 10 games remaining, the margin for error is razor thin for the Avalanche. Colorado needs to take much-needed points from the home-and-home set with Blackhawks this week, and wins over wild-card clubs Minnesota and Dallas would go a long way. This is quite possibly the biggest week of the season for the Avalanche, and any mistakes could cost them a return trip to the post-season.

Remaining Schedule: 10 games
Opponents' Avg. Point Percentage: .558



SBNATION CANES COUNTRY

Carolina Hurricanes vs. Pittsburgh Penguins: Game Preview and Storm Advisory

The Canes take on the Penguins in a game that will go a long way toward determining potential playoff seeding.

By Andrew Ahr

Carolina Hurricanes (39-25-7) vs. Pittsburgh Penguins (39-24-10)

Tuesday, March 19, 2019 - 7:00 PM ET
PNC Arena - Raleigh, NC

TV: Fox Sports Carolinas
Radio: 99.9 The Fan

SBN Opponent: Pensburgh

The Hurricanes take on the Penguins, who occupy the third spot in the Metropolitan Division, tonight in Raleigh. A Hurricanes win in regulation could narrow the gap between the two teams to just one point.

Vital Statistics

Category	Hurricanes	Penguins
Record	39-24-7	39-24-10
Points	85	88
Division Rank	4 Metro	3 Metro
Conference Rank	7 EC	6 EC
Last 10 Games	7-2-1	6-2-2
Streak	Won 1	OT 1
Goals/Game	2.97	3.40



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 19, 2019

Category	Hurricanes	Penguins
Goals Against/Game	2.73	2.99
Shots/Game	34.8	32.8
Shots Against/Game	28.4	33.4
Faceoff %	48.8%	50.2%
Power Play % (Rank)	17.2% (21)	25.2% (21)
Penalty Kill % (Rank)	82.2% (6)	80.4% (18)
ES Corsi For %	54.85%	49.41%
ES PDO	99.2	101.5
PIM/Game	7:41	8:27

Goaltender #1

Category	Petr Mrazek	Matt Murray
Record	18-13-3	24-12-4
Save %	.908	.916
GAA	2.52	2.75

Goaltender #2

Category	Curtis McElhinney	Casey DeSmith
Record	18-8-2	15-11-5
Save %	.916	.916
GAA	2.50	2.75

Game Notes

Tonight's matchup is perhaps the biggest game of the season thus far. A win in the crucial four point game would pull the Canes to a point behind the Penguins with two games in hand.

The game tonight is the third of four between the two teams this season. The two teams have split the two games this season, and will meet a final time on March 31st.

The Penguins will play tonight without star center Evgeni Malkin. He was injured this weekend and will be out week-to-week with an upper body injury.

Calvin de Haan, who took a stick in the eye last week in Colorado in what could have been a very serious injury, skated with the team for the first time yesterday. He is unlikely to play tonight, but he's very fortunate to be back on the ice so soon at all based on this:

After a win on Sunday against Buffalo, the Canes are 24-8-2 in their last 34 games — the second most wins and points in the NHL in that frame. Seven out of their remaining 11 games are in PNC Arena.

Storm Advisory

Alison Murdock went from Lightning Fantasy Camp player to the only female full time Zamboni driver in the NHL. Here's how she did it. [ESPN]

Yesterday was team photo day at PNC Arena.

And a couple members of the leadership group paid homage to their coach during the event.

Torts was interested in hearing John Forslund's opinion on the Storm Surge a few weeks ago.

And here's his spot on the David Glenn Show (airs at the beginning of the hour). [DG Show]

Hurricanes' prospect Aleksa Saarela was given a two-game suspension by the AHL yesterday. [Checkers]

Carolina's top defensive prospect Adam Fox was awarded All-ECAC Hockey First Team honors after an incredible season at Harvard. [GoCrimson]

Stalking the Standings

Most of the direct competition is in action tonight. The most important game is of course the one on Edwards Mill Road, but it'd be nice to get some help from former Hurricanes coach Bill Peters and his dominant Flames tonight in Alberta.

Metro 1: New York Islanders: 72 GP, 91 points, 104 pt pace, 38 ROW

Metro 2: Washington Capitals: 72 GP, 91 points, 104 pt pace, 38 ROW

Metro 3: Pittsburgh Penguins: 73 GP, 88 points, 99 pt pace, 38 ROW

WC 1: Carolina Hurricanes: 71 GP, 85 points, 98 pt pace, 38 ROW

WC 2: Columbus Blue Jackets: 72 GP, 84 points, 96 pt pace, 39 ROW

9th: Montreal Canadiens: 72 GP, 81 points, 92 pt pace, 35 ROW

10th: Philadelphia Flyers: 72 GP, 78 points, 89 pt pace, 33 ROW

Tonight's Rooting Guide

No overtime in Flyers vs. Canadiens, and a Flyers win.

Bruins over Islanders



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 19, 2019

Flames over Blue Jackets

Devils over Capitals

Jordan Staal's 500-point milestone highlights excellent career, adversity he has overcome

500 points later, Jordan Staal has evolved into the player and person he is today.

By Brett Finger

The Carolina Hurricanes are on the verge of doing something that they haven't done in ten years, and naturally, that was the biggest talking point after their 4-2 win over the Buffalo Sabres at PNC Arena on Saturday night.

Lost in some of the playoff commotion was a milestone moment for a player who has been one of the very few constants for this organization over the last seven years, and a human being whose time with the organization has been anything but smooth sailing.

"Not exactly my style," Jordan Staal said with a smirk about his 500th point, a slick spin-o-rama backhand goal from the slot in the third period against the Sabres. "I wasn't playing all that great during the game anyways, so I kinda just went for it this time. Maybe I should do that more often."

Staal's game isn't one of finesse, or even one that revolves around the points he produces. When the Hurricanes acquired the then 23-year-old via trade on day one of 2012 NHL Draft weekend, though, there was an assumption that, with a bigger role out from under the shadow of Sidney Crosby and Evgeni Malkin in Pittsburgh, his offense would flourish and reach that next level. That never really happened, though.

"I'm sure if you ask any NHL hockey player, they want more points and more goals," Staal said on Monday. "There's always that drive to be better, offensively, but at the same time, I know what kind of player I am and what I can do to help teams win."

Now at age 30, Staal's game is fully developed and clearly defined. His strengths resemble that of a Selke Trophy candidate, not an Art Ross Trophy candidate.

The on-ice journey to this point in his career hasn't always been easy. This self-realization is the product of breaking into the NHL and experiencing immediate success in the form of multiple 20-goal seasons and a Stanley Cup ring before his 21st birthday and then taking a leap of faith that didn't pan out the way anyone expected when he joined his older brother Eric Staal and the Canes and signed a 10-year contract extension in 2012.

The 2013 lockout-shortened season was supposed to be the start of something special for the Canes, who had missed the playoffs for three consecutive seasons. The additions of Staal and then star forward Alexander Semin were supposed to push the Canes over the hump, and it looked like that would be the case through the first half of that 48-game sprint of a season.

Then, thanks to injuries and a severe lack of depth, the bottom fell out in catastrophic fashion. Just like that, the Canes' near-sighted win now strategy (which ultimately led to Jim Rutherford leaving the organization in 2014) failed, and the rebuild began.

From 2013 to the end of the 2017-18 season, the Hurricanes played 458 games, went 192-198-68, saw two GM/head coach regimes flame out, never eclipsed 36 wins in a season, reached the playoff zero times, and eventually got sold to Tom Dundon.

Jordan Staal played in 412 of those games and went through all the few-and-far-between peaks and seemingly unending valleys.

On the ice, Staal was one of the few players that you could rely on. You knew exactly what he was going to do every single night, even when Staal, himself, didn't know exactly what was going to happen off of the ice.

The brother Staal era in Carolina didn't have the storybook ending that many had envisioned. Instead of Jordan coming to Raleigh and being a consistent winner with his older brother, they toiled in the bottom-third of the league. On February 28, 2016, Eric was traded to the New York Rangers just a few hours before the Hurricanes played host to the St. Louis Blues at PNC Arena, a game that Jordan played in.

"It's obviously unfortunate," Jordan told the media about his brother's trade after the Canes' 5-2 loss to the Blues. "It wasn't the way we envisioned it with myself coming here. We wanted to win. We gave it all we got to try to get this team to where we wanted to go."

Two years later, on February 23, 2018, Staal was a late scratch ahead of a home game against his former team, the Pittsburgh Penguins. Two days later, the team announced that Jordan and his wife, Heather, had lost their daughter, Hannah, to a terminal birth defect. It was something that he had weighing on his mind and heart for longer than anyone had known. He came to work every day, regardless, and gave everything he had for his team during an unthinkable trying period for himself and his family.

Leadership isn't an easy character trait to describe, especially in the world of professional sports. Every leader leads in their own way. For Jordan, it's always been about how he conducts himself. How he carries himself. He's shown each and every day what it means to be a pro.

"I can't say much more about him," head coach Rod Brind'Amour said on Monday. "As a person and as a player, too, he's as good as they come. His numbers maybe haven't always been there, but man, as a coach, you just love being able to put him on the ice in every situation. He got what he deserved the other night."

500 points is nothing to sneeze at. It's another milestone for a great player and an even better person. There's still a lot of hockey yet to be played for Staal, though. He'll quickly put his latest achievement in the rearview mirror and focus on the next task at hand.

"You dive into the team and try to win games, but to hit a milestone, personally, it's always nice," Staal said. "It helps to take a look back and take a breath and see what you've



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 19, 2019

accomplished, but then you gotta get back into the day-to-day and move forward and focus on what you gotta do next.”

What’s next for the Hurricanes? A Tuesday-night game against Jordan’s former club, the Pittsburgh Penguins. It’s going to feel like a playoff game, given how close the two teams are to one another in the Eastern Conference standings.

It took a lot longer than everyone had hoped, but the Carolina Hurricanes are in favorable positioning in a playoff race in mid-March. After years of hardship, both on and off the ice, Jordan Staal is finally on the verge of seeing this thing through.

He has earned every bit of success that he has experienced to this point, and the same will be true about the success he has moving forward. He arrived in Raleigh as a young, newly married man joining his brother’s team. Now, he’s 30 years old, he has a family, and he has overcome countless obstacles to get to where he is now as a leader of this team. He has grown up as a Hurricane.

“Our fans, they know him,” Brind’Amour said on Saturday. “They appreciate the effort and the kind of player he is. They see him every night. It’s the rest of the hockey world that doesn’t quite understand, I don’t think, or appreciate him, but we do.”

Behind Enemy Lines: Previewing the Penguins, Lightning, Wild, and Canadiens

The Canes are entering crunch time with an enormous four-game week that could make their playoff position secure - or make it even more wobbly.

By Andy House

Pittsburgh Penguins

Tuesday, 7:00 p.m. at PNC Arena

The Pittsburgh Penguins have begun to make their playoff push, having tallied points in nine of their past eleven games, despite a rash of injuries that are beginning to set in that has chipped away at the top end players on the roster. Towards the end of February, Kris Letang went down with an upper body injury, and just last night Evgeni Malkin was helped off with an upper body injury that is said to have him “week-to-week” going forward. As two of the main cogs in the Penguins machine, will their loss be felt immediately for the Pens?

Perhaps the best sign of late has been the steady play of Matt Murray back in net. In his last 18 games (since January 30th), Murray has posted a 10-5-3 record with a .925 save percentage. This consistent effort has provided the stability needed for the high-octane Pens offense to take charge. While Pittsburgh is squarely in the middle of the pack in goals against (16th), that is solid enough when compared to their top-five offense. The Pens offense is led once again by Sidney Crosby, who has thrown up yet another incredible season with 92 points in 70 games to date. His next closest teammate in points is Phil Kessel with 73 points. With Crosby, Kessel, the injured Malkin, and young Jake Guentzel (68 points), the Pens have a top-heavy offense that is without two of its five main contributors with Malkin and Letang shelved.

As the Canes seek to leap past the Pens down the stretch in the Metro, potentially having the ability to key on certain players and lines could have a positive effect, however “keying on” and “stopping” players such as Crosby, Kessel, and Guentzel is easier said than done. In order for the Canes to have a serious chance to overtake the Penguins, they will need a win on Tuesday. If not, opportunity to secure a playoff spot will still present itself, but the road could get more difficult.

What to Watch For

How will Rod Brind’Amour use his last change advantage to attempt to slow Crosby & company? Will the assignment fall most often to Jordan Staal and his linemates? How about the defensive pairing they run up against most?

Not necessarily an on-ice observation, but I am interested to see the turnout and the allegiance of the fans in the arena on Tuesday. The Canes are in the thick of a playoff race, and are nipping on the Pens heels. Will PNC be packed? Will the heavy majority actually be rooting for the Canes? It will be interesting to see.

Tampa Bay Lightning

Thursday, 7:00 p.m. at PNC Arena

Quite simply, the Tampa Bay Lightning are putting together one of the most impressive NHL seasons in the modern era. Sitting comfortably at 55-13-4, the Lightning have already wrapped up a playoff spot, and will very shortly secure the Atlantic Division, Eastern Conference Regular Season, as well as the President’s Trophy for the best record in the NHL. Despite their position well ahead of the entire league, the Lightning continue to put the hammer down, having won four straight and 16 of their last 18. Needless to say, any hope of beating the heavy favorite in the Eastern Conference rests on playing a complete, well-rounded game over all 200 feet of ice.

On a team as good and as deep as the Lightning, the collective talent certainly is the most decisive factor in the success, but in Tampa the unquestioned leader for the Hart Trophy as NHL MVP is their offensive leader, Nikita Kucherov. Kucherov has amassed 117 points in 72 games, outpacing his closest teammate by 30 points. Throw in an eye-popping 11 players with greater than 30 points already, and what you have is a team that not only has a dynamic top-line and powerplay, but also depth in scoring and skill. Add to that a likely Vezina Trophy finalist in Andrei Vasilevskiy (.929 save percentage, 2.28 goals against), and you get the makings of a team that still has an outside shot of catching the Montreal Canadiens record of 132 points in an NHL season from 1976-77.

The playoffs will certainly be the test that this team is ultimately judged on, but perhaps the thing that makes them so dangerous is not one particular facet of their team (offense, defense, goal-tending), but rather their other-



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 19, 2019

worldly ability to transition from one to another. No team in the NHL flips the ice faster from defense to offense than the Lightning. While they are certainly skilled and dangerous when controlling possession in the offensive zone, they are truly most dangerous when breaking out after a turnover in their defensive end or especially in the neutral zone.

For the Canes to compete, they must be sharp in their decision-making. Typically a team that pinches in the offensive zone aggressively, the Canes blueliners must be sure they can keep the puck in when pinching, or a boatload of odd-man chances may be headed towards their own net all evening. If both teams bring their A-game, Thursday could potentially be one of the more exciting games of the year as two aggressive and talented teams come together as the juices of the playoff push continue to flow. A win over the Bolts would certainly feel like a bit of a steal, just given how historically great they have been on the season. We will see if they are up to the challenge.

What to Watch For

Again, the transition from defense to offense from Tampa is typically breathtaking. Check that out.

The Tampa power play is a clear top unit in the league at 28.5% on the year. Staying out of the box is supremely important for Carolina to have any chance at winning the special teams battle or the game.

Minnesota Wild

Saturday, 7:00 p.m. at PNC Arena

The Hurricanes will enter the weekend with a pivotal back-to-back to close out their current five-game homestand against two opponents on the outside of the playoff picture looking in. First, they will entertain the Minnesota Wild who enter this week just one point behind the Arizona Coyotes for the last wild card spot in the jumbled Western Conference playoff picture.

The Wild come to town for the first meeting between Minnesota and Carolina since the Victor Rask for Nino Niederreiter swap that has proved so momentous for the Canes. Since joining the Wild, Rask has tallied two points (one goal, one assist) in 14 games played. Niederreiter, on the other hand, has given the Canes a massive lift with 22 points (11 goals, 11 assists) in his 25 games in Raleigh. No doubt this topic will be discussed by many as these teams come together again, but it is hard to stress how important Niederreiter has been to the Canes' drive for their first playoff spot in a decade.

The Wild have stumbled of late, going 1-3-1 in their past five games to fall out of playoff position, but despite a tough schedule down the stretch, the Wild will have a their chance head-to-head against the Coyotes in Arizona on March 31st to make a big impact on the race. Interestingly, the Wild will enter Raleigh on the back end of a back-to-back as they take on the Capitals in Washington on Friday night. Carolina will be on the first of their own back-to-back, so they must look to take advantage of a slightly older team that may be a bit more effected by the heavy legs than most.

In terms of their structure, it will be interesting to see if Bruce Boudreau is willing to use Devan Dubnyk on back-to-back

nights as his team scraps for every point it can get. Dubnyk has been the clear number one netminder, posting a .911 save percentage in 59 starts (60 games played) to date, the most in the entire league. Meanwhile, Alex Stalock has been less than stellar in his 14 starts, accruing an .893 save percentage and a 6-6-3 record overall. Offensively, the Wild are led by a balanced attack that is spearheaded by a trio of 34-year-old stalwarts in Zach Parise (57 points) and Eric Staal (49 points) up front, and Ryan Suter (45 points) on the blueline.

While the Wild are certainly clawing for every point they can get, this is a game that Carolina needs to take advantage of in what is sure to be a challenging week at home. Winning a game where so many factors are in your advantage is the most simple way to tighten your hold on a playoff spot.

What to Watch For

While Rask is uncertain to play, the response to him by the fans if he does suit up will be interesting to see/hear.

As mentioned, who starts in net for the Wild will be noteworthy. Check out who plays in D.C. on Friday to get an idea of what Boudreau's decision-making may have to be leading into Saturday.

Montreal Canadiens

Sunday, 7:00 p.m. at PNC Arena

Perhaps the most critical game of the week and this current homestand rests at the end. The Montreal Canadiens, the closest team on the outside looking in as the week begins (four points behind Carolina, Carolina with one game in hand) comes to PNC Arena in what very likely will be a must-win situation. The Canes, well-chronicled to be searching for their first foray into the postseason since 2009, can do themselves a gigantic favor simply by taking advantage of the opportunity to claim two points at the Canadiens' expense on home ice.

The Canadiens have been leaking oil of late, having dropped five of their last seven games while falling out of playoff position. The Habs feature a similar four-game week to the Canes, playing on all of the same nights, highlighted by a matchup against the Islanders on Thursday and the crucial game against Carolina on Sunday. The heaviest burden would appear to rest on the shoulders of goalie Carey Price, as Price has been tasked with carrying the load in net for the Habs, perhaps all the way to the finish line. Antti Niemi has started just once in March (a particularly poor showing in San Jose on March 7th), and has played just 17 games all season. With Saturday-Sunday set up as the final back-to-back for the Habs, expectations are that Price will draw into the lineup for both games as Montreal clings to life in the Eastern Conference playoff chase.

Offensively, the Habs have slowed a bit, falling to 17th overall on the year. Still led by Max Domi (62 points), Tomas Tatar (50 points), and Jonathan Drouin (50 points), Montreal has scored only 12 goals in their previous seven games, which as contributed to their most recent poor stretch. Despite being owners of the worst power play in the league for the season (11.9%), the Habs do have one of the league's most dangerous weapons on that unit as Shea Weber brings his heavy shot into play. Understanding his



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 19, 2019

ability and the danger he can cause will be important if Carolina is to keep the Habs man-advantage silent.

While each game as the season barrels to a close is precious, the importance of Sunday's tilt is undeniable. A clean regulation win, coupled with a reasonable week leading to it, should put the Canes in prime position with seven games remaining after the week concludes. These are the games that Canes fans have wanted to have played over the last decade, and for one week a playoff preview resides squarely in Raleigh, North Carolina.

What to Watch For

Again, expect to see Carey Price in for the Habs as they cannot afford the same rotating luxury that the Hurricanes possess.

Victor Mete has come on in recent weeks to begin showcasing his speed and athleticism from the blueline. The 20-year-old left shot defenseman has yet to tally an NHL goal in 110 games over the past two years, but has begun to create offensive chances for the Canadiens over the past few weeks, even while their offense as a whole has been sluggish. Keep an eye on him.



AHL Hands Aleksii Saarela Two-Game Suspension

Written by Nicholas Niedzielski

The AHL today announced that Aleksii Saarela has been suspended for two games.

The suspension – the first of Saarela's AHL career – comes

as a result of a high-sticking incident in Saturday's win over Rochester.

The forward, who leads Charlotte in goals this season, will miss Tuesday and Wednesday's games against the Syracuse Crunch.

TODAY'S LINKS

<https://www.newsobserver.com/sports/article228093469.html>
<https://theathletic.com/873047/2019/03/18/charming-precise-quirky-and-brilliant-inside-a-carolina-hurricanes-broadcast-with-fox-sports-carolinas/>
<https://www.nhl.com/hurricanes/news/gameday-preview-pittsburgh-penguins-carolina-hurricanes/c-305907330>
<https://nhl.nbcsports.com/2019/03/18/hurricanes-in-position-to-end-nhls-longest-active-playoff-drought/>
<https://sports.yahoo.com/m/72491dc6-8db3-3349-8a63-638df142331f/crosby-and-the-penguins-visit.html>
<https://thehockeynews.com/news/article/nhl-wild-card-roundup-canadiens-in-tough-after-awful-week-coyotes-continue-remarkable-run>
<https://www.canescountry.com/2019/3/19/18272160/carolina-hurricanes-vs-pittsburgh-penguins-game-preview-statistics-notes-links>
<https://www.canescountry.com/2019/3/18/18270987/jordan-staal-500-point-milestone-highlights-career-adversity-he-has-overcome-carolina-hurricanes>
<https://www.canescountry.com/2019/3/18/18270828/behind-enemy-lines-preview-pittsburgh-penguins-tampa-bay-lightning-minnesota-wild-montreal-canadiens>
<http://gocheckers.com/articles/features/ahl-hands-aleksi-saarela-two-game-suspension>



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 19, 2019

SportScan

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

1136673 Carolina Hurricanes

Canes' Calvin de Haan: 'I was pretty much blind for 48 hours'

BY CHIP ALEXANDER

MARCH 18, 2019 04:53 PM

Calvin de Haan couldn't rest easy until he heard it from a doctor in Denver, until he was told, "You did not lose your eye."

As an NHL defenseman, de Haan has had his share of injuries, mild and major. A bad shoulder last season kept him out much of the year. The Carolina Hurricanes defenseman has taken shots off legs and feet, being banged into the boards, even injured in a postgame workout.

But never an eye injury. Not until this season.

"I've had a couple of stitches here or there but it was never the money-maker," de Haan said Monday.

Against the Toronto Maple Leafs in December, de Haan took a stick under his visor from the Leafs' William Nylander, leaving a gash on the left eyebrow that required six stitches. A close call.

But in the March 11 road game against the Colorado Avalanche, the Avs' Alex Kerfoot took a swipe with his stick and hit de Haan in the right eye on the follow-through.

De Haan immediately lost sight in the eye. At first, he wasn't sure if his eye was in its socket.

"I was pretty much blind for 48 hours," he said.

De Haan was treated off the ice at the arena but then taken to a Denver hospital, where he was evaluated by a specialist.

"It was down at the hospital and he said, 'You should be all right,'" de Haan said. "That was the most optimistic thing he pretty much said the whole time. He said, 'You've just got to lay low for a few days and let everything heal and go from there.'"

While the eyesight returned, there was hyphema, or pooling of blood inside the eye, de Haan said. A blurriness has persisted, which de Haan likened to being punched in the nose and having your eyes water.

De Haan was able to rejoin the team practice Monday at PNC Arena, wearing a full-face shield, but it's still uncertain when he'll be able to play. His right eye was dilated after practice from the eye drops he has been using.

"They're trying to keep the eye from moving, to let it heal," he said. "That's why I'm using industrial-strength dilating drops. It's still a little blurry and probably not safe to be going full speed in a hockey game right now.

"It's just bad luck more than anything. I've never been hit from my nose up. It is what it is."

Eye injuries are scary things for any athlete. Former Canes coach Paul Maurice and former assistant general manager Jason Karmanos both had their hockey playing careers ended by eye injuries.

"I've always been surprised there aren't more eye injuries with the rate of speed of the puck and the battles with the sticks," Maurice said.

Canes coach Rod Brind'Amour can put himself in de Haan's place. Once, during a Canes game years ago against the San Jose Sharks, he took a stick in the eye.

"It was a real bad one, real scary," Brind'Amour said. "I thought I lost my eye, so I can relate to what he went through. ... I didn't know at the time how serious it was until after, when I got rushed to the hospital. Then you start worrying. Obviously the vision part, that's permanent.

"It puts a lot of things in perspective, that's for sure. I'm just glad he's going to be fine."

De Haan is eager to get back in the lineup with a team that he joined last July as a free agent, a team making a push for its first Stanley Cup playoff berth since 2009. De Haan was in playoff games with the New York Islanders in 2015 and 2016. He wants to get back with this Canes team, this year.

"There's a real possibility that we can get some home ice," he said. "You never know, right? One team slides and we keep climbing and anything can happen. It would be kind of a shock to the league, I think, but we've got a good team here. I've said it from day one that everyone has bought in and everyone believes in each other."

News Observer LOADED: 03.19.2019

1136674 Carolina Hurricanes

Who's left on the Canes' schedule?

BY CHIP ALEXANDER

MARCH 18, 2019 09:00 AM

A word of caution for Carolina Hurricanes fans including Gov. Roy Cooper, who tweeted he is "making room in the budget" for playoff tickets:

While probability charts are showing the Canes' playoff chances hovering above 90 percent, what's left of the schedule shows just one team -- the New Jersey Devils -- that has a record below "NHL .500." And the Devils have never been an easy out for the Canes.

With the regular-season finish line in sight, the Canes have 11 games remaining and will play three of the last four on the road. As Jordan Staal said Saturday after the 4-2 win over the Buffalo Sabres, "The only thing that matters is getting the two points." Keep winning



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 19, 2019

games and collecting the points and there will be a reward -- a place in the Stanley Cup playoffs.

The Canes (39-25-7) have their grip on an Eastern Conference wild-card playoff spot. It's all in their hands. Here's a look at the opponents in those last 11 games:

Pittsburgh Penguins

The Canes have two games left against a team they're chasing in the Metropolitan Division, on Tuesday at PNC Arena and then March 31 at Pittsburgh. The Pens' Evgeni Malkin is injured but Sidney Crosby is the consummate leader.

The game this season: The teams split the first two games, the Pens winning 2-0 in Raleigh (Dec. 22) as Matt Murray had 39 saves, and the Canes winning 4-0 in Pittsburgh (Feb. 5) as Curtis McElhinney turned in a 23-save shutout.

Tampa Bay Lightning

The Canes face the Lightning on Thursday at PNC Arena. The Lightning are the NHL's best team. Enough said.

The games: The Lightning have won both games, both in Tampa. Tampa Bay took a 4-2 victory on Oct. 16 and a 3-1 win on Jan. 10, scoring all three goals in the third and ending a five-game winning streak by the Canes.

Minnesota Wild

The Wild, coming to PNC Arena on Saturday, are fighting for a playoff spot in the Western Conference and Wild general manager Paul Fenton has been hammered over the decision to trade Nino Niederreiter to Carolina for Victor Rask in January. Niederreiter can now have his say, on the ice.

The game: The Canes capped a 4-0-1 start to the season with a 5-4 win at Minnesota on Oct. 13, Sebastian Aho getting the overtime winner.

Washington Capitals

While Tampa Bay has the best record in the league, the Caps have 91 points and like Tampa Bay is 8-2-0 in their past 10 games. The Canes face the Caps twice in three days -- at Washington on March 26 and at PNC Arena on March 28.

The results: The Canes and Caps have not played since Dec. 27, the Caps winning 3-1 at home. The Caps also won Dec. 14 at PNC Arena, 6-5, in one of the Canes' rare shootout games this season. Aho had a shorthanded goal and power-play score in the second game but was not used in the shootout.

Montreal Canadiens

The game Sunday could be a pivotal one. The Canadiens, after a 2-0 loss Saturday to the Chicago Blackhawks, sat below the playoff outline, three points behind Columbus and four behind the Canes.

The results: The Canes won 2-1 at the Bell Centre on Nov. 27 as McElhinney had a career-high 48 saves -- 21 in the third period -- and Rask and Trevor van Riemsdyk scored. The Habs then won 6-4 on Dec. 13 in Montreal.

Carolina Hurricanes' Petr Mrazek, left, blocks a shot by Philadelphia Flyers' Wayne Simmonds during the second period of an NHL hockey game Thursday, Jan. 3, 2019, in Philadelphia.

Philadelphia Flyers

There are two games with the Flyers, including the regular-season finale in Philadelphia on April 6. The Canes don't want it to come down to that one, with a win-or-else scenario in Philly.

The results: The Canes, after a mostly miserable December, began righting their season with consecutive wins over the Flyers on Dec. 31 at PNC Arena and then 5-3 at the Wells Fargo Center on Jan. 3

as Teuvo Teravainen had two goals and an assist. Carolina was 15-17-5 before the New Year's Eve game, 24-8-2 after it.

Toronto Maple Leafs

This is always an unpredictable game and should be again, especially in Toronto. The Maple Leafs' top-end talent is scary good and John Tavares has feasted on the Canes during his career.

The results: The Canes played both games at PNC Arena, winning 5-2 on Nov. 21 with 11 players on the scoresheet and McElhinney making 30 saves against the team that waived him. The Canes then lost 4-1 on Dec. 11 as Justin Williams' power-play score was the Canes' only goal.

New Jersey Devils

The April 4 game will be the last regular-season game at home for the Canes, who are hoping it won't be their last home game.

The results: The Canes have lost two of three to the Devils. The Canes won the first 2-1 (Nov. 18) at PNC Arena -- Williams and Micheal Ferland with the goals -- and then were shut out 2-0 (Dec. 29) by Mackenzie Blackwood. The Devils won again 3-2 at the Prudential Center on Feb. 10 as Marcus Johansson scored twice for New Jersey.

News Observer LOADED: 03.19.2019

1136675 Carolina Hurricanes

Charming, precise, quirky and brilliant: Inside a Carolina Hurricanes broadcast with Fox Sports Carolinas

By Sara Civian Mar 18, 2019

"Picked off by Wallmark, all we need is Hallmark," longtime Carolina Hurricanes play-by-play announcer John Forslund described a play in the second period of a 4-2 win over the Sabres. "And now Martinook will hand it off."

"They do have a channel," color commentator Tripp Tracy responded.

"And they're one less actress. Down to center ice now, Haydn Fleury will draw it all the way back," Forslund didn't miss a beat.

"For a good reason," Tracy matched.

"Trevor van Riemsdyk out to center. Play by the rules, please," Forslund chuckled. "Now Bogosian out to center."

The whole thing was a tongue-in-cheek reference to the recent high-profile college admissions cheating scandal (and Lori Loughlin's termination at Hallmark in its aftermath). It was such a smooth execution that you might've missed it, as it didn't at all distract from the game at hand. That's a near-nightly accomplishment for this duo.

In a trailer truck stationed a few feet away from PNC Arena, a handful of people didn't miss the exchange. They never do.

"What?!" Fox Sports Carolinas associate director Adam Holzman laughed away from his headset. "What are they talking about?"

Quick-witted banter between Forslund, Tracy and TV host Mike Maniscalco has become as much a staple of the Hurricanes hockey experience as Sebastian Aho breakaways this season. We all know any given broadcast could bring another self-deprecating tale of Tracy's love life, some chef attire or a cake in a face, but it's always charming just the same.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 19, 2019

That's because it's organic. The broadcast feels a little like a Canes world inside joke, or maybe a reward for putting up with the past decade of Hurricanes hockey. The men and women behind the magic try not to interfere.

"I've learned who they really are," Holzman said. "The way they prepare for the games, the way they carry themselves, the level of professionalism that they bring to the table as one of the longest current duos in the league. John truly is the governor, everyone from every other team's broadcast comes to see him. ... Tripp knows every player in the league and they all love him as a genuine friend."

In some ways, the truck outside PNC Arena is just like your living room. The cornier jokes on the broadcast warrant a friendly eye roll from Holzman or a playful "ugh" from head producer Jim Mallia throughout the broadcast.

In other ways, that truck and the perfectionists who inhabit it run a painstakingly precise operation just so you can get your fill of John, Tripp and Mike.

Pregame show

Though broadcast crews at this level in their careers have generally seen it all, they still have to deal with the unpredictability of live television every night. In the name of controlling what you can control, Fox Sports Carolinas makes it a point to nail the pregame show — the only quasi-scripted portion of game broadcasts.

It's its own entity, with Holzman producing before Mallia takes over for in-game production duties, but they also consider it a chance for everyone to get on the same page and tell the same story.

Mallia typically sends out pregame scripts a day or two before so crew members can gather graphics, tidbits, etc., that they might want handy for the 30-minute show. Sometimes these graphics don't ever see the light of day — they're just for on-air talent to reference on the mini screens in front of them.

The scripts outline the segments you see before every game: storylines Maniscalco and Shane Willis discuss, interviews with notable people in attendance, analysis from Forslund and Tracy.

Puck drop for a 7 p.m. game is supposed to happen at exactly 7:08 p.m., but if you've watched at least five NHL games you know this isn't always the case. Holzman has to keep track of time to the second at the helm of the pregame show, adding or subtracting commercials and segments on the fly when things go awry.

They were cutting it close on Saturday, so Holzman let Maniscalco and Willis decide which of three talking points they'd like to scratch.

Just like that, a key to the game that sounded like "getting their legs under them early" entered the graveyard of pregame segments. I think we'll all live.

If a guest on the pregame show says something Holzman thinks Forslund or Tracy would find interesting, he gives them the option of weighing in on it in lieu of a pre-planned segment. Forslund was dead-set on addressing Tracy's lucky tie Saturday, so he shut that one down fast.

Graphics

There are hundreds of thousands of graphics on deck for each broadcast. Seriously. The man behind the tidbits that pop up on your screen is Dean Meglio, and he uses a technique reminiscent of the Dewey Decimal System in libraries to maintain his sanity.

Each game he'll give himself a cheat sheet with the most relevant graphics on a large sticky note at his desk, but there's always a chance Mallia will need something totally random. Meglio has to come through in a matter of seconds.

So he gives every single graphic in the database a number based on the code he has memorized. For example, the code for Brett Pesce's

TOI graphic is 225. Pesce wears No. 22, Meglio's ice time category is "five."

The product speaks for itself in that significant mistakes are rare, but you won't find a broadcast in the league that hasn't messed up a graphic. When problems do arise there's a collective "move on now, discuss postgame" attitude. What else can you do?

In-game

There's always a plan, but the game of hockey has a way of ruining your plans.

Mallia slides into his seat next to Holzman and the transition from pregame to in-game begins.

"John and Tripp," Mallia beckons through his headset. "Let's go. Let's get after it."

The broadcasters and the crew like to stay out of each other's way in-game, but they do use these headsets throughout to address anything that might come up. For example, Forslund loves the sounds of the game (ping of the crossbar, skates on the ice) and he requested more of them in his ear Saturday. Tracy checked in throughout the broadcast, appreciating a Hurricanes goal here, warning of a Buffalo pushback attempt there.

Other than the standard countdowns and cues, the crew sometimes offers words of encouragement to the talent during lulls or after particularly outstanding moments. Mistakes are hard to come by in a broadcast universally regarded as one of the best in the NHL, but there's a general sense of camaraderie when they happen because everyone's been there in some stretch of the phrase and everyone has the same goal.

Ever wonder how intermission interviews work?

Holzman and Maniscalco communicate about it via text.

Obviously, they pick a goal-scorer if they can, but they pick someone else making a positive contribution if the Canes didn't score, if the scorer was the pregame interview, if the scorer has been on the broadcast a lot recently or if the scorer isn't comfortable speaking in English. Once they decide on a player, Holzman texts the designated Canes PR contact of the night. He'll get a thumbs up if the player isn't hurt, etc., and the stage manager relays the news to Maniscalco.

During the game there are cheers for goals, oohs and ahhs for saves and controlled chaos during fights.

"FIGHT, FIGHT," director Paul Hemming simply yelled when Micheal Ferland dropped the gloves Saturday.

Hemming is probably who you picture when you think about the TV truck. He's the one looking at every camera angle and adjusting what you see on the broadcast accordingly.

A veteran of the business, he's one of those people everyone in the industry knows and respects, but a fan wouldn't recognize him walking down the street. That means he's doing it right.

The aforementioned headsets link Hemming to camera operators that he, well, directs. He'll request an up-close shot of head coach Rod Brind'Amour when he's chewing his gum intensely, or a cut to Maniscalco at ice level when Maniscalco is about to weigh in on something (or get mauled by a mascot).

Hemming describes the TV truck as organized chaos with a smile.

He'd thought he'd seen it all in his three decades in the industry, but even his days at Hockey Night in Canada didn't prepare him for the Storm Surge.

The Storm Surge is uncharted territory in most aspects, including on the broadcast side of things. Fox Sports Carolinas sees it as an



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 19, 2019

opportunity to have fun and get creative, a welcome wrench thrown in an otherwise familiar game plan.

"The Storm Surge has brought a level of uniqueness, something that's unknown," Holzman said. "Generally as a producer and assistant director Jimmy (Mallia) and I go through the day with a pretty solid plan that flows. From the moment the game ends 'til we see what they're doing, we're in an exciting time of sitting back and being a fan. Fun to see their personalities in it. ... Like I see Dougie Hamilton and Warren Foegele love baseball. Jordan Martinook probably has some fight training background."

You may never see Mallia, Holzman, Hemming or Meglio on your TV, but they're essential to the sometimes quirky, often brilliant broadcast that you love. And every game day they're in the truck cheering on the goals — even if nobody hears them.

The Athletic LOADED: 03.19.2019

1136740 NHL

Spokane native Tyler Johnson and his record-paced Lightning know they haven't won a thing yet

March 18, 2019 at 6:00 am

By Geoff Baker

Nobody ever has to caution Tampa Bay Lightning forward Tyler Johnson about taking things for granted.

After all, the Spokane native — all 5-foot-8 of him — wasn't merely overlooked in the NHL draft, but got through 10 rounds of the Western Hockey League's Bantam Draft as a 15-year old before finally being picked.

So, even though the onetime Spokane Chiefs junior star now earns millions not only playing in the NHL, but for one of its best regular season teams of all-time, there's no need to remind Johnson he hasn't yet won anything.

"First and foremost, it's been a lot of fun," Johnson, 28, told me last Friday, discussing a Lightning season the likes of which haven't been seen in nearly a quarter century. "But as far as people mentioning the records and stuff, I don't think anybody on the team is even aware of the records as they come up."

The previous night, Johnson deflected home a go-ahead third period goal in Detroit in an eventual 5-4 win over the Red Wings after the Lightning had once trailed 3-0. It guaranteed Tampa Bay a second straight season of at least 54 wins, only the fourth team in history to do that.

And it kept them paced for bigger history, like matching the league record of 62 victories by the Red Wings from 1995-96. Heck, after beating the defending Stanley Cup champion Washington Capitals 6-3 on Saturday, with Johnson scoring again and adding an assist, the Lightning still have a shot at — though it would require a Herculean run — the NHL record of 132 points set by the 1976-77 Montreal Canadiens.

Tampa Bay sits 55-13-4 and at 114 points with 10 games to play. They'll beat Detroit's wins record by going 8-2 and tie Montreal's points mark with a 9-1 stretch. Their current season-long pace indeed does have them finishing with a record 63 wins, though they're slightly off the points mark at a 130 clip.

Still, this is regular season we're talking about.

Nobody, especially in Tampa Bay's dressing room, is foolish enough to argue the Lightning should be considered the greatest team of all-

time if they break those records. For one, they'll play two games more than that Montreal squad — which went 60-8-12 — and already have the benefit of 12 extra points gleaned off overtimes and shootouts that didn't exist for the 1970s Canadiens or 1990s Red Wings.

More importantly, there's the big reason nobody compares those Canadiens and Red Wings teams when it comes to all-time greatness — despite both being coached two decades apart by the legendary Scotty Bowman. You see, Montreal went on to win the Stanley Cup that year with a 12-2 playoff record and finals sweep.

Detroit? They got bounced in the conference final, much like baseball's record-setting 116-win Mariners losing the 2001 American League Championship Series.

So, the Lightning get that they haven't accomplished anything yet.

"The last three out of four years, we've either made the conference final or the Stanley Cup final and we realize the regular season doesn't mean a thing," said Johnson, who played on the 2014-15 finalist squad that lost the Cup to the Chicago Blackhawks in six games. "I think pretty much everyone on the team keeps reminding ourselves of that."

In fact, no Presidents' Trophy winner for the league's top regular season record has claimed the Cup since the 2012-13 Blackhawks. Only three have captured a title this millennium.

Last year, the Lightning finished No. 2 overall with 113 points, but neither they nor regular season champion Nashville won the Cup. Instead, the Lightning bowed out to Washington in the seventh game of the Eastern Conference final on home ice.

If the Lightning ever needed a reminder the playoffs are a different animal, they have the captain of those mid-1990s Red Wings in their own front office in senior advisor Steve Yzerman.

It was a personal phone call from then-Lightning general manager Yzerman during his final season with Spokane in 2010-11 that convinced Johnson to sign with Tampa Bay as a free agent. Though Johnson had won a Memorial Cup his first year with the Chiefs in 2007-08 and a World Junior Hockey Championship for the U.S. in 2010, he'd gone undrafted due to size concerns and was contemplating studying to become an anesthetist.

Having played NHL video games as a Spokane teenager, where he often controlled the likeness of 5-foot-8 Lightning legend Martin St. Louis, Johnson never gave up hope. He kept working and made the Calder Cup final with Tampa Bay's American Hockey League affiliate in 2012-13 — the season in which he also was rewarded with a once-inconceivable NHL debut.

Even now, Johnson sometimes can't believe that he's in the NHL, on the second season of a seven-year, \$35 million contract. Nor that he's paired on a line with NHL points-leader Nikita Kucherov and has surpassed the 25-goal plateau for the second time.

"I don't think you ever really get used to it," Johnson said. "The minute you get comfortable with it, it all starts to go downhill. For me, it's more about having fun while you're doing it and creating memories with the people you're with in hockey. My whole career, it's been that way."

A career summed up by this advice for would-be hockey players from Washington: "I think the biggest thing is not to be discouraged, no matter what. It just takes one or two guys to give you a chance. I just tried to make the best of it."

And that's exactly what he'll do once this regular season is done and he can get on with the task of bringing the Stanley Cup to Spokane for a celebratory stopover this summer. There are big hopes for the Lightning beyond their record, based on how thoroughly Kucherov, Steve Stamkos, Victor Hedman, Andrei Vasilevskiy — and yes, Johnson, too — have dominated their peers.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 19, 2019

Their +93 goal differential is nearly double the +50 of the next-closest Calgary Flames. Even though the 1976-77 Canadiens had a record +216 goal differential and the 1995-96 Red Wings were +144, both those tallies were also only about double their closest competitors, which shows the Lightning do compare favorably.

Just how favorably has yet to be determined.

"We know what we have to do," Johnson said. "And if we do it, then the rest of this will matter."

Seattle Times LOADED: 03.19.2019

1136753 Pittsburgh Penguins

Survival tips for Penguins while Evgeni Malkin is sidelined by injury

JONATHAN BOMBULIE | Monday, March 18, 2019 1:34 p.m

On March 11, 2016, Evgeni Malkin suffered an upper-body injury after a collision with Columbus Blue Jackets defenseman Dalton Prout.

The Pittsburgh Penguins had gone 5-5-0 in their previous 10 games and were seventh in the Eastern Conference, only three points ahead of the ninth-place Philadelphia Flyers. Missing the playoffs was a real possibility.

Without Malkin, the Penguins went on an improbable 13-2-0 run to close out the regular season. When he returned in the second game of the playoffs, the Penguins marched to the franchise's fourth Stanley Cup championship.

On Saturday afternoon, Malkin suffered another upper-body injury on a cross-check by St. Louis Blues defenseman Robert Bortuzzo. With coach Mike Sullivan describing his status as week-to-week, it's entirely possible Malkin will be out for the final three weeks of the regular season.

It's probably not reasonable to expect lightning to strike twice.

A more realistic goal for the Penguins is to keep their heads above water over the final nine games, secure a playoff berth and hope Malkin can provide a playoff boost when he returns.

Here's a look at a few ways the Penguins can pull that off:

1. Turn to Teddy

Sullivan's first move when Malkin went down was to shift rookie Teddy Blueger to the center spot on the second line, but he has other options. Most notably, he could relieve Jared McCann of his first-line winger duties and use him in the middle of the second line.

It might be worth sticking with Blueger for a while, however. Ultimately, the 24-year-old Latvian profiles as a bottom-six center. This season, though, he has four goals in 19 games with limited ice time.

Among NHL players who have logged at least 100 minutes, Blueger ranks 13th in goals per 60 minutes at even strength (1.37), just behind Jake Guentzel (1.50) and Alex Ovechkin (1.45) but ahead of Nikita Kucherov (1.24) and Patrick Kane (1.14).

His relatively hot hand could come in handy the next few weeks.

2. Lean on Line 3

Malkin's injury in 2016 led to the formation of the HBK Line, which was a major factor in the championship run that followed. While the current third-line combination of Dominik Simon, Nick Bjugstad and Patric Hornqvist is nowhere near as dynamic, it's recently been a possession monster.

Over the last five games, the Penguins have outshot opponents 30-18 and outscored them 3-0 at even strength with the line on the ice.

They could handle some extra minutes with Malkin out.

3. Get Phil going

A drought-ending goal March 7 hasn't magically turned Phil Kessel back into a dominant offensive force — he was fighting the puck most of the night in a 2-1 overtime loss to Philadelphia on Sunday — but he does have nine points in his last nine games.

No matter what configuration the second line takes on, Kessel will have to be a driving force for it to be successful.

4. Keep shooting

In their first game without Malkin, the Penguins racked up 42 shots on goal against Philadelphia. In the game he was hurt, they took 41 shots on the Blues.

Their weekend was made miserable thanks in large part to the performance of a pair of rookie sensations in net, Jordan Binnington and Carter Hart, who gave up only one goal apiece. Keep up the shot barrage and shooting percentage will likely even out in the long run.

5. Run out the clock

For the Penguins to miss the playoffs, ninth-place Montreal, which has lost four of its last five games, would have to make up a seven-point deficit in a 10-game span. That's a heck of a hill to climb.

Going .500 the rest of the way would almost certainly be enough to get the Penguins into the tournament. Given the circumstances, that's the only goal they should focus on.

Tribune Review LOADED: 03.19.2019

1136754 Pittsburgh Penguins

Failure to protect leads a growing late-season problem for Penguins

JONATHAN BOMBULIE | Monday, March 18, 2019 5:30 a.m

Statistically speaking, the Pittsburgh Penguins are one of the best teams in the league at protecting third-period leads.

They're 32-0-3 when leading after two periods this season, one of only four teams in the NHL that haven't lost in regulation under those circumstances.

Recent results, though, tell a vastly different tale.

On Sunday night, the Penguins blew a 1-0 lead when James van Riemsdyk scored with 18.8 seconds left and lost 2-1 in overtime.

The last time the Keystone State rivals met, it was a similar story. At Lincoln Financial Field on Feb. 23, the Penguins blew a 3-2 lead when Jakub Voracek scored with 19.7 seconds to go and lost 4-3 in overtime.

It's the first time in NHL history that one team has used a tying goal in the final 30 seconds of regulation to beat the same opponent twice in the same season.

Throw in a 4-3 overtime loss in Buffalo on March 2 that saw Brandon Montour score the tying goal in the final three minutes of regulation, and it starts to look like a disturbing trend. The Penguins have blown a late lead and lost in overtime in three of their past 12 games.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 19, 2019

"We've got to find a way to close that out," center Matt Cullen said. "We're right there. Just find a way to close it out. Obviously if we're going to be where we want to be at the end of the season, we've got to get better at finishing games."

It's hard to find a solution to the problem because the tying goals came in such vastly different situations. It's hard to connect the dots between the three.

Montour's goal was on a shot from the point that deflected off an ankle in front. It came before the Sabres pulled their goalie.

Voracek's goal came on a bad-angle shot from the left-wing corner of the offensive zone that went through the legs of defenseman Jack Johnson and eluded Matt Murray in a driving rain.

Van Riemsdyk scored on what was essentially a four-on-two after Sidney Crosby stepped up on the Flyers forward but failed to steal a pass in the neutral zone.

"I thought we did a pretty decent job, honestly, until that four-on-two," Murray said. "When we're in zone, we were doing a really good job. We have our scheme and we stuck to it and we did a good job. They just threw pucks on net and we battled for rebounds and did a good job clearing them out. Just that one play and it gets by us."

There's no easy answer. For the Penguins to fix the problem, they'll need to use a combination of better in-zone structure, better execution with the puck and better decision making in general.

"We gotta stay on our toes," Murray said. "That's what it's all about in the grand scheme of things."

Tribune Review LOADED: 03.19.2019

1136755 Pittsburgh Penguins

Evgeni Malkin injury puts Penguins back into shuffle mode

MATT VENSEL

MAR 18, 2019 10:26 AM

With the Penguins playing some of their best hockey of the season before this weekend, Mike Sullivan kept his lineup intact for three straight games, which may be some kind of personal record.

That seemingly changed with one crosscheck. Now more shuffling could be on the way.

Star center Evgeni Malkin is "week-to-week" with an upper-body injury suffered on Saturday's 5-1 loss to the St. Louis Blues at PPG Paints Arena. While Sullivan did not say how Malkin got injured, the best guess is that it happened when former Penguins teammate Robert Bortuzzo blindsided him.

During the first period Saturday, Malkin looped in front of the Blues net and was watching the puck, which was more than 10 feet away from him. Bortuzzo crosschecked Malkin in the torso, causing him to crumble onto the ice. Malkin eventually got up and skated off without assistance.

Malkin hopped right back out onto the ice after that and finished out the rest of the game. He did not show any obvious signs of a significant injury. But after Malkin did not play in Sunday's 2-1 overtime loss to Philadelphia, Sullivan revealed he would likely be out at least a few games.

"Obviously, he's a tough guy to replace," the Penguins coach said. "He's an elite player."

These Penguins got a glimpse at life without Malkin in early February. It was not ideal.

He missed five games at that time with an upper-body injury. Malkin was then suspended one game for swinging his stick at Flyers winger Michael Raffl on Feb. 11, his first game back in the lineup.

With Nick Bjugstad or Matt Cullen filling in as the second-line center, the Penguins won just two of six games without Malkin and a long scoring drought began for Phil Kessel, his regular winger.

Teddy Blueger, the 24-year-old rookie who had been skating on Malkin's left wing before Malkin was hurt, got the first crack in the middle of that second line against the Flyers. His wingers were Kessel and Bryan Rust, who returned to the lineup after missing nine games with a lower-body injury.

Blueger played his best game in a while against the Flyers, which was not shocking given who he was playing with and that he was back at his natural position after several games on the wing. Blueger still looks tentative when the Penguins have the puck, but he has been as advertised defensively.

He did score the team's lone goal and his fourth of the season, putting home a rebound off a Kessel shot. And when he was on the ice at five-on-five, the Penguins created nine scoring chances and allowed just four the other way. But Sullivan was noncommittal about Blueger there going forward.

"We'll probably take it game by game and see how it goes," Sullivan said after that loss.

It is possible that Sullivan sticks with that trio Tuesday when the Penguins visit the Carolina Hurricanes, who are battling for a playoff spot. And if that's the case, maybe the best way to look at it is that the Penguins have the Sidney Crosby line and then two interchangeable lines behind that.

What had been regarded as the third line – Bjugstad between Dominik Simon and Patric Hornqvist – had a strong first period against the Flyers. So Sullivan started the second period with them. Perhaps he keeps both lines intact and gives a little more ice time to whichever line is playing best.

Or maybe, as he is wont to do, Sullivan will unveil a drastically different lineup Tuesday.

With due respect to Cullen, who is having a solid season for a fourth-line center regardless of his age, he shouldn't play second-line minutes at this point in his enviable career. That leaves Bjugstad, Blueger or – if Sullivan is feeling frisky – Jared McCann to skate with Kessel, whose importance is magnified.

Bjugstad showed flashes skating with Kessel in his first two games with the Penguins following his arrival from the Florida Panthers via trade. He assisted on a Kessel goal in his first game in Pittsburgh on Feb. 1, and the two of them created a bunch of chances the following night in Toronto.

After one night of playing Cullen with Kessel to get a look at Bjugstad on the wing, Sullivan briefly put Bjugstad with Kessel before Malkin returned to the lineup for good in the middle of February.

Bjugstad has settled in as the third-line center over the past three weeks. Over the weekend, his line, with Simon and Hornqvist, was arguably the team's best line, though that's not saying much. One would certainly not think this line is untouchable as Sullivan mulls his options in Malkin's absence.

And then there is McCann, who had been a third-liner – first at center then left wing – before catching fire while playing with Crosby and Jake Guentzel for much of the last three weeks. That line simmered down over the weekend. But prior to that, they were scoring nearly 70 percent of the team's goals.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 19, 2019

Would Sullivan consider putting McCann between Kessel and Rust? That's a lot of speed.

While he has a lot to consider in regards to the makeup of the forward lines before the Penguins take the ice in Raleigh, the power-play personnel should be predictable. Guentzel has been a sixth man of sorts for the top unit and is expected to sub in for the big Russian.

But their tactics when up a man will surely differ without Malkin's booming lefty shot.

Malkin's upper-body injury is the latest setback in what has been one of the most frustrating seasons of his decorated NHL career. There have been injuries, invisibility and the stress he put on himself chasing the 1,000th regular-season point, which he finally notched in last Tuesday's win over Washington.

On the season, Malkin is a minus-24, which is by far the worst rating of his career. He has been assessed 89 penalty minutes, his second-highest total. His 11.5 shooting percentage is his lowest since the lockout-shortened 2012-13 season. And yet he still has 21 goals and 50 assists in 66 games.

That production won't be easy to replace. But Sullivan and the Penguins will still try.

Post Gazette LOADED: 03.19.2019

1136756 Pittsburgh Penguins

Who are the most hated figures in Pittsburgh sports history?

By The Athletic Staff Mar 18, 2019 95

"My only love sprung from my only hate!" – "Romeo and Juliet"

With all due respect to Bill Shakespeare – the playwright, not the first draft pick in Steelers history – hate isn't all that complicated.

It's pretty simple, especially if you threw multiple interceptions to Cowboys cornerbacks in the middle of the Arizona desert.

Or launched "Operation Shutdown" after hitting .173.

Or signed with the Red Wings weeks after losing to them in the Stanley Cup Final.

And in the event you butt heads with the quarterback who helped make you the NFL's premier wide receiver and take to every conceivable form of social media to orchestrate a trade for an underwhelming return – with the bonus of a hideously dyed yellow mustache – hate is a pretty straightforward proposition.

In the aftermath of Antonio Brown's departure from Pittsburgh last week, The Athletic Pittsburgh launched an ambitious endeavor of determining the most hated athletes (and in one case, a coach) in Pittsburgh history.

This process was vigorously unscientific. Rob Biertempfel, Mark Kaboly, Jesse Marshall, Rob Rossi, Josh Yohe and Seth Rorabaugh ranked our selections 1 through 10 and weighted each vote with points (A first-place vote equaled 10 points while a 10th-place vote equaled one point).

The results yielded a who's who of abhorrent Pittsburgh sporting icons involving the Penguins, Pirates, Steelers and Pitt football. This process also showed hate could be spread around as it produced ties for sixth and eighth place on this list.

Hopefully, this project doesn't inspire disgust or revolt. It was done in the pursuit of silly harmless fun. One might say it was an "exceptionalism." (Or "expertalism." We're still debating which is the correct spelling for this incorrect word.)

So there's no need to feel like you're dying alive when reading it. Hopefully, it will be a high octane experience for you. — Seth Rorabaugh

1.) Antonio Brown — Steelers, 2010-19 (60 points)

In the beginning: Coming from humble beginnings, Brown worked his way from a sixth-round pick to the best wide receiver in the NFL, thus endearing himself to the fans. Brown's six-year span (2013-2018) is unprecedented in league history. It didn't hurt that his ever-present smile and his willingness to interact through social media allowed the fan base to communicate with him in a way never seen before in the city.

It went bad when: When Brown stormed out of practice the last week of the 2018 season and went AWOL for the must-win Week 17 game against the Bengals. That was just the beginning of a more than two-month bash tour of the team that paid him \$75 million over his nine years with the club. His passive aggressive social media approach turned into an aggressive-aggressive approach that got to the point where the Steelers had no choice but to grant him his wish of being traded. Brown systematically destroyed his trade value and ended up getting traded to the Raiders for a third-round and a fifth-round pick.

Current status: Yeah, it's only been a couple of days, and the vitriol is still at fever pitch. It won't die down anytime soon. Surely if Jaromir Jagr and Barry Bonds can eventually win back the town, then Brown can as well. Now, it may take 20 years, but ultimately he'll be appreciated more for what he did than how he left.

The take: It wasn't so much that Brown wanted out, but it was more of how he went about it. He took down everybody on his way out of the door including an owner who treated him more than fair, a coach who bent over backwards for him and a quarterback who forced him the ball almost to a detriment. Framing it as a cultural disconnect and a toxic environment was mostly a ruse. Brown's primary interest was getting more money two years after becoming the highest paid receiver in the league. And in Pittsburgh, if it's about wanting more money, they are going to hold a grudge for a long time. — Mark Kaboly

2.) Barry Bonds, Pirates — 1986-92 (45 points)

In the beginning: The story goes that former Pirates general manager Syd Thrift set aside five minutes before every game to chat with Bonds, stroke his ego and pacify him. However, that extra coddling is not the reason Bonds won a pair of National League MVP awards, three Gold Gloves and three Silver Sluggers during his seven seasons with the Pirates. Bonds was arguably the franchise's most gifted player since Hall of Famer Honus Wagner.

It went bad when: During spring training in 1991, Bonds lollygagged through a workout. When manager Jim Leyland told him to pick up his pace, Bonds sulked. Leyland exploded: "Don't fuck with me no more. I've had enough of this fucking shit. ... I've kissed your ass for three years. If you don't want to be here, then get your fucking ass off the field." The salty language didn't turn off Pirates fans, who overwhelmingly sided with Leyland.

Later that year, Bonds insinuated that Pirates management was racist because it was more eager to re-sign Andy Van Slyke than Bobby Bonilla. By the end of the 1992 season, Bonds had alienated himself from many of his teammates and the fans at Three Rivers Stadium. He became a free agent and signed a six-year, \$43.75 million contract with the San Francisco Giants.

Current status: On speaking terms, but just barely. The Pirates invited Bonds to the 2014 home opener at PNC Park, and there was



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 19, 2019

a mix of loud boos and polite applause when he presented Andrew McCutchen with the 2013 NL MVP award. In September 2015, Bonds was given a lifetime legacy award from the Josh Gibson Foundation. In his blog on BarryBonds.com, Bonds (or his publicist) wrote, "I don't get the opportunity to travel to Pittsburgh much, but love any chance I get to travel back there. ... Looking forward to my return to a great city!"

The take: Bond's relationship with Pittsburgh had soured long before the first report of his alleged steroids use surfaced. He was immensely talented, for sure, but also was moody, aloof and self-centered. When many folks around baseball began to view Bonds as a scoundrel, fans in Pittsburgh were quick to gloat, "Told yinz so." — Rob Biertempfel

3.) Jaromir Jagr, Penguins — 1990-2000 (40 points)

In the beginning: Jagr was the fifth overall pick of the 1990 NHL Entry Draft and became an immediate sensation in Pittsburgh, winning the Stanley Cup in each of his first two seasons. A big-game player with a penchant for third-period and overtime heroics, Jagr became a superstar, replacing the then-retired Mario Lemieux as the world's best hockey player in 1997. He won the Art Ross Trophy as the league's leading scorer five times and a Hart Trophy during his time with the Penguins, scoring 439 goals before hitting age 30.

It went bad when: In the summer of 2001, the Penguins were dealing with serious financial issues. Mario Lemieux had successfully taken control of the Penguins' ownership, but until a new arena deal produced additional revenue — this was still six years away from happening — the Penguins had to be careful with money. This was the pre-salary cap era, and the Penguins couldn't spend with the Rangers of the world. Jagr's contract required him to receive \$20.5 million over the following two seasons and, though Lemieux's return to the ice was increasing revenue in the form of nightly sellouts, paying Jagr would have been difficult. Then, there was the reality that Jagr, legendary for his moodiness, had indicated on numerous occasions during the 2000-01 season that he was ready to move on from Pittsburgh. Even Lemieux acknowledged that "it was probably time for a change" for Jagr during that season. In the worst trade in franchise history, Craig Patrick, an otherwise brilliant general manager, received only prospects Kris Beech, Michal Sivek and Ross Lupaschuk, none of whom ever made a dent in the NHL, for one of the 10 greatest players in hockey history. Jagr would be booed lustily in Pittsburgh for many years to come. This escalated in 2011. That summer, Jagr flirted with the idea of returning to Pittsburgh, and the Penguins offered him a one-year deal worth \$2 million. He turned them down, signing with, of all teams, the Flyers on a one-year deal worth \$3.3 million. Jagr and the Flyers then stunned the mighty Penguins in the first round of the playoffs.

Current status: Jagr finished his NHL career last season and is back in the Czech Republic. He hasn't officially announced his retirement, but it appears his remarkable NHL career is finally over. He is now 47. In his final appearance in Pittsburgh — what's noteworthy is that no one knew with certainty that it was his last game here — Jagr was given a lengthy, powerful standing ovation. He touched his heart and waved to the crowd.

The take: In my view, Jagr is unfairly vilified in Pittsburgh. Yes, he made unflattering comments in his final season and, yes, even in his 40s, there was often a petulant and immature side to him. He was always the prince who didn't want to grow up, and Mario was still the king. Fair enough. But Jagr always gave everything he had when he played for the Penguins. The bigger the game, the bigger he played. He was the ultimate winner. The Penguins never missed the playoffs on his watch. Not one time. Also, I have spoken with him enough over the years to see that he has a real affection for Pittsburgh. His number will soon be retired in Pittsburgh, as it should be. He is an icon and was at his very best in Pittsburgh. A quirky character? Of course. But his former teammates all love him. Pittsburgh should, too. — Josh Yohe

4.) Dave Parker, Pirates — 1973-83 (32 points)

In the beginning: After the tragic death of franchise icon Roberto Clemente, Parker emerged by the mid-1970s as another right fielder with few equals in baseball. In fact, he was included in a book titled "The 100 Greatest Baseball Players of All Time" in 1981. By then, Parker had won a couple of National League batting titles, the league's MVP and a World Series. Known fondly as "The Cobra" on a Pirates squad that did not lack for colorful characters, Parker signed for a then-unprecedented \$1 million average salary in 1979. Though Willie Stargell was the unquestioned leader of the "We Are Family" Pirates that won the World Series in 1979, Parker (who borrowed Stargell's habit of warming up in the on-deck circle by swinging a sledgehammer) was inarguably their cornerstone player.

It went bad when: If the 1970s were the heyday of Pirates baseball, the early 1980s were a mostly embarrassing period — and Parker's descent mirrored that of the franchise. His Hall-of-Fame-caliber performance dipped as injuries mounted. Once the image of athletic supremacy, Parker gained noticeable weight. However, it was the weight of baseball's infamous Pittsburgh Drug Trials, for which Parker was a central figure, that soured Pirates fans on Parker. He signed with the Cincinnati Reds as a free agent after the 1983 season and spent the next four summers as Public Enemy No. 1 in Pittsburgh, where Parker had mashed 166 home runs and recorded 1,479 hits over 11 seasons.

Current status: Parker is now viewed in Pittsburgh as he was originally — with great fondness. His long-ago mending-of-fences with the Pirates and their fans have made him an inspirational figure since he went public with his diagnosis of Parkinson's disease in 2013. With 2019 serving as the 40th anniversary of the Pirates' last title team, Parker's unlikely return to good graces in Pittsburgh will continue.

The take: Each passing season without a championship will only enhance the popularity of Parker in Pittsburgh. — Rob Rossi

5.) Marian Hossa, Penguins — 2008 (27 points)

After falling short with the Penguins and Red Wings, right winger Marian Hossa won three Stanley Cup titles with the Blackhawks. (Sergei Belski/USA TODAY)

In the beginning: A first-round draft pick by the Ottawa Senators in 1997, Hossa quickly became a star with the Senators and then the Atlanta Thrashers. At Lemieux's urging, Ray Shero shook up the hockey world by acquiring Hossa, a few months away from unrestricted free agency, to aid the 2007-08 Penguins. Hossa was brilliant in the postseason, producing 26 points in 20 games and leading the young Penguins within two victories of the Stanley Cup.

It went bad when: In the summer of 2008, Hossa was 28, arguably the world's finest two-way hockey player and an unrestricted free agent in possession of enormous power. The Penguins offered him a seven-year deal worth \$50 million and his agent, Ritch Winter, led the Penguins to believe that Hossa would be signing the contract. However, Hossa pulled a stunning swerve, instead signing a one-year, \$7.4 million contract with the Detroit Red Wings. It was the Red Wings, of course, who had just defeated the Penguins in the Stanley Cup Final. The 2008 Red Wings were a true powerhouse, arguably the greatest NHL team of this century. Hossa leaving the Penguins for the Red Wings made another Stanley Cup in Detroit almost feel like a formality. While he was betting on himself by signing a one-year deal, he was also essentially betting on the Red Wings and betting against the Penguins. None of the Penguins were publicly critical of Hossa. He had been a good, albeit introverted, teammate. The Penguins had the last laugh, though, as they beat the Red Wings in the classic 2009 Stanley Cup Final, winning Game 7 at Joe Louis Arena in dramatic fashion. Hossa was held without a goal in the final. Immediately after featuring the Penguins mobbing goalie Marc-Andre Fleury, NBC's cameras captured Hossa on the Red Wings bench, his face buried in his hands.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 19, 2019

Current status: A skin disorder forced Hossa to retire from professional hockey one year ago. Things worked out just fine for him, though. Hossa signed with the Chicago Blackhawks after his season in Detroit and was a member of three Stanley Cup teams. He scored 525 goals in his career and is a no-doubt Hall of Famer.

The take: Hossa's status as a traitor in Pittsburgh is probably somewhat fair. He's not a bad guy and played magnificently in his time with the Penguins. Those 26 points in 20 playoff games speak for themselves. Still, there are few things harder to handle in life than being turned down for someone presumed to be better. Hossa looked at the Penguins and determined he could win more easily elsewhere. He was booed relentlessly for the rest of his days when he played in Pittsburgh, and understandably so. Hockey players love playing here and rarely burn Pittsburgh. Hossa did. — Josh Yohe

6.) Bobby Bonilla, Pirates — 1986-91 (21 points)

In the beginning: Undrafted out of high school, Bonilla signed with the Pirates after a scout spotted him at a baseball camp in Europe. The Pirates lost him in the Rule 5 draft, then reacquired Bonilla in 1986. The next season, he was their opening day left fielder. From 1988 through 1992, he hit .284/.359/.495 with 98 home runs.

It went bad when: After the Pirates lost to the Atlanta Braves in the 1991 National League Championship Series, Bonilla became a free agent. The Pirates made a final offer of four years and \$18.5 million, which reportedly was \$4 million less than what they'd offered him during the season. After Bonilla signed a five-year, \$29 million deal with his hometown New York Mets, Bonilla publicly ripped the Pirates: "(Pirates general manager Larry) Doughty said there are 15 players better than me. Name 'em. I mean, name 15 players that are better than me. And Leyland, saying I wouldn't have taken \$22.5 million if it had been offered to me during the season. How's he know? The fact is, they never really tried to sign me. ... They never negotiated. It was always, 'Here is what we offer. Take it or leave it.' That's all."

Current status: With no major awards or World Series trophies to act as reminders of his tenure, Bonilla is mostly forgotten in Pittsburgh. He now works for the Major League Baseball Players Association.

The take: Bonilla was an affable, outgoing guy when he first arrived in Pittsburgh. As usual, money ruins everything. Pirates fans have a right to feel jilted, but Mets fans have more cause to despise Bonilla. The Mets must give him a deferred payment of \$1.19 million every year on July 1 — an unofficial holiday in baseball known as "Bobby Bonilla Day" — until 2036. — Rob Biertempfel

6.) Todd Graham, Pitt football — 2011 (21 points)

After guiding Pitt to a 6-6 record in 2011, head coach Todd Graham abruptly departed after one season for Arizona State. He spent six seasons with the Sun Devils before being fired in 2017. (Russ Isabella/USA Today)

In the beginning: A cynical fan of Pitt's football program would argue that Graham didn't stick around Pittsburgh long enough to have a beginning and an end to his tenure. Come to think of it... Pitt turned to Graham amid particularly tumultuous several weeks that began with Dave Wannstedt's resignation on Dec. 7, 2010, and ultimately ended with Graham's hiring on Jan. 8, 2011. In between, Pitt had hired and fired Mike Haywood, who was replaced after 16 days on the job following his arrest on domestic violence charges in Indiana. Graham pledged to win the trust of rattled fans and alumni and described the Pitt job as a "dream come true." He brashly instituted changes to the previous offensive and defensive philosophies and boldly proclaimed an era of "high octane" football had arrived for the Panthers.

It went bad when: Well, after the "high octane" talk — not to mention the word of Graham's dismissiveness of everything from Pitt's tradition to the decor in its practice facility — his 6-6 record for the 2011 season guaranteed heat would be on Graham in his second

year. But at least everybody figured Graham would have a second year. Instead, he resigned on Dec. 14, 2011 — less than a full year after taking over at Pitt — to fill a vacancy at Arizona State. Graham infuriated bosses by bailing without apology, and word spread that he had never really taken to Western Pennsylvania; neighbors told reporters they had never met Graham or his family and his former Pitt players openly shared tales of a coach they found dismissive and disinterested.

Current status: Graham remains persona non grata when it comes to Pitt's football program and person in Pittsburgh who is held in disgust even by people with no interest in the Panthers. He is also unemployed since the end of his tenure at Arizona State — a fact those cynical Pitt fans would argue is karma.

The take: At least Graham made life easier on future Pitt coaches. Nobody will ever garner as much agreed-upon animosity in Pittsburgh as did the coach who former players said would brag about how much money he made in meetings. That not one person associated with Graham's tenure at Pitt has publicly offered a supportive word about him is telling. — Rob Rossi

8.) Le'Veon Bell, Steelers — 2013-18 (14 points)

In the beginning: Bell was an instant success on the field after being a second-round pick in 2013. A multi-threat player able to run and catch with equal effectiveness, he had 1,300 total yards of offense in four of his five years that included 2,215 his second year in the league. Even though Bell was suspended twice for violating the substance abuse policy, his talent on the field made many overlook his transgressions away from the field.

It went bad when: You can point to a bunch of different instances of when it went wrong, but none are more prominent than when Todd Gurley signed a \$60 million extension with the Rams with \$45 million guaranteed a couple of days before the Steelers reported to camp. Bell ultimately decided to forego his \$14.5 million franchise tag and sit out the entire season after turning down multiple offers to become the league's highest-paid running back. And we know money disputes are the best way to get in the dog house with fans. The constant will-Le'Veon-show-up-this-week news cycle didn't help either

Current status: Brown's antics have cooled the hatred toward Bell, but he will always go down as one of the most villainous Steelers players of all time just because of the way he approached his exit strategy in choosing money over everything else.

The take: Bell wasn't a bad guy during his time with the Steelers. He was guilty of being an impressionable young kid who listened to some bad advice, and that's from his drug suspensions to sitting out all of 2018. Still, his antics over the past year will be something that this town won't soon forget. He reportedly turned down a \$70 million deal that included \$45 million worth of guarantees and then left the franchise tag money on the table after that. That is a problematic aspect of all this to digest and won't soon be forgotten by this town. — Mark Kaboly

8.) Neil O'Donnell, Steelers — 1990-95 (14 points)

In the beginning: O'Donnell was a third-round pick of the Steelers in 1990 and became the team's starter by the following season. The Steelers had been looking for a replacement for Terry Bradshaw for years and went through guys like Cliff Stoudt, Mark Malone, David Woodley, Mike Tomczak and Kordell Stewart. O'Donnell started five years and helped the Steelers to Super Bowl XXX.

It went bad when: You can say that the two awful interceptions to Larry Brown in the Super Bowl started the downfall of public support. Then, just like the majority of the most hated athletes in Pittsburgh, a pursuit of money finished it off. Fresh off the Super Bowl loss and a team MVP award, O'Donnell turned down \$3.15 million a year from the Steelers to sign with the Jets for \$5 million a year.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 19, 2019

Current status: Enough time has passed for any grudge held against O'Donnell to have faded. Heck, many current Steelers fans likely never heard of him before. He is currently a regional sales manager for FieldTurf in Tennessee.

The take: The hatred of O'Donnell was a little unwarranted. He had a bad game in the biggest game and then decided to go home and play for the Jets for significantly more money. But the reality of the situation, O'Donnell was 39-22 in five years as the starter and threw 68 touchdowns. He was able to propel the Steelers' offense out of the doldrums of the 1980s and into more of a contemporary one fresh with a five wide receiver look — something unheard for the Steelers. The fact that he helped lose the Steelers' first Super Bowl appearance in 15 years seemed to be much more critical as him being the main reason why they got there in the first place. — Mark Kaboly

8.) Derek Bell, Pirates — 2001 (14 points)

In one season with the Pirates, outfielder Derek Bell hit .173. (Jonathan Daniel /Allsport)

In the beginning: Although Bell was coming off a pair of sub-par seasons, the Pirates signed the free-agent outfielder to a two-year, \$9.5 million deal in December 2000 on the day before he turned 32 years old. Injuries limited him to just 46 games in 2001, and he slashed .173/.287/.288.

It went bad when: Near the end of 2002 spring training, Bell seemed surprised when asked if he thought he could win the starting job in right field. "If it ain't settled with me out there, then they can trade me," Bell told the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette. "I ain't going out there to hurt myself in spring training battling for a job. If it is (a competition), then I'm going into Operation Shutdown." Bell was released before the end of camp and never again played in the majors, although the Pirates still had to pay his \$4.5 million salary.

Current status: Bell remains the butt of bitter jokes and uncomplimentary comments in homes and taverns across the tri-state area.

The take: Before Bell walked out of the clubhouse for the final time, Pirates media relations director Jim Trdinich asked if Bell wanted to speak with reporters. Bell declined, saying, "Just tell them I got in my yacht and rode out into the sunset." This catastrophe was an omen of more bad things to come for Dave Littlefield, who was in his first year as general manager when Bell triggered Operation Shutdown. — Rob Biertempfel

Voting

For the sake of transparency, here are the voting totals from our staff:

Others receiving votes: Cliff Stoudt (12), Kordell Stewart (9), James Harrison (9), Mike Merriweather (4), Bubby Brister (4), Matt Cooke (2), Limas Sweed (1), Mark Malone (1).

The Athletic LOADED: 03.19.2019

1136757 Pittsburgh Penguins

LeBrun Notebook: Jordan Binnington's sensational rookie season aided by both old-school and modern approaches

By Pierre LeBrun Mar 18, 2019

There are few more compelling stories in the NHL this season than Jordan Binnington's rise from the AHL to the season-saving goaltender of the St. Louis Blues.

His story has part-traditional roots, the third-round pick from the 2011 NHL draft who marinated in the minors the necessary time before being ready for this career-making call-up.

"It was a good thing for me," Binnington told me on Friday over the phone from Pittsburgh, the 25-year-old earnestly acknowledging his minor-league tutelage as a needed experience.

But Binnington's sensational NHL debut season also has a modern feel. With today's game marked by specialized coaching, Binnington made sure to give a tip of the hat to one of the people who helped him turn a corner over the past few offseasons at the BioSteel summer camp in his native Toronto.

"No doubt he deserves a shout-out, the guy works so hard, it's crazy," Binnington said when asked about this person.

We are speaking of Andy Chiodo, whom Binnington first met three years ago at the Biosteel camp run by Matt Nichol, at the time Chiodo was still a goalie himself, a former Pittsburgh Penguins farmhand who ended his career overseas with stops in Russia, Austria and Finland.

"He was the hardest-working guy I had ever seen, he was just so prepared on and off the ice, in the gym and stuff," Binnington said of his first time seeing Chiodo. "It just seemed like he had his lifestyle under control. He was content. There was peace of mind there ...

"It was nice of him to let me jump in on training sessions and build the relationship from there."

Chiodo retired as a player after the 2016-17 season and jumped right into coaching at the Biosteel camp where he began to work with Binnington, Malcolm Subban and a few other netminders.

"He started small, but he was really great, it was refreshing to have someone who was so committed, who genuinely believed in me so much and willing to do what he can to get me where I want to be," Binnington said. "He basically, in a way, almost believed in me more than I did at the time. That, in turn, instilled confidence in myself and showed me how to believe in myself. So it wasn't just on the ice, but I think he really brought the best out of me. It's been great."

Needless to say, when Binnington got his chance this season with his NHL call-up, Chiodo was damn proud of him. Although when reached on Sunday, Chiodo tried his best to downplay any role he had in helping Binnington.

"First and foremost with 'Binner,' he's a great person," Chiodo said. "He's a great teammate and he cares about the people around him. He was already good when we met. He was talented, he moved incredibly well, he's a competitive kid. We addressed a couple of details on the ice. And the majority of our work was just developing him as a person, professionally, pushing the standard, raising his bar, bringing structure, especially in the offseason."

Chiodo credited Nichol and his staff at the Biosteel camp where 40-plus NHLers work out every summer and also the Blues' development staff.

The point is that in today's game, there are several contributing layers to a player's progress.

"These things are always moving parts," Chiodo said. "This guy doesn't take a big step without him at the forefront, Jordan has put in the work. He has committed himself. Then you have support around you that can complement that and help guide you in the right direction."

However, it was a little awkward this past Saturday when Binnington made 40 saves in a 5-1 win over the Penguins, the organization



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 19, 2019

which last summer hired Chiodo as their goaltending development coach (he works with the AHL netminders in Wilkes-Barre).

"He's fantastic, he's so detailed, great dedication," Penguins assistant GM Bill Guerin, who runs the AHL team, said.

"Andy's developed a really good relationship with all three of our guys here," Guerin added. "Andy's is just a terrific guy. The biggest thing is that they trust him and they trust what he's saying to them. He's a real honest guy and they know they're getting the truth from him."

Added Binnington when describing Chiodo's approach: "He really cares."

Where this all leads for the 35-year-old Chiodo remains to be seen but he's beyond appreciative of the chance the Penguins organization has given him.

"It's been really cool, this is a great organization to work for," Chiodo said. "It's a great group, a winning culture, the staff, everyone here works together in a really cohesive way."

Former NHLer Mike Cammalleri saw Chiodo's work first-hand at the Biosteel camp and sees a rising star in the coaching world.

"Andy has the qualities that you see in successful people: work ethic, passion, discipline, etc," Cammalleri said via text message. "Where he is different, better, exceptional as a coach is his ability to relate and communicate. He is a great listener, he approaches coaching with humility and understanding. As a result, he avoids carrying his own prejudice or baggage to a situation. I've seen just how effective the results of this are for his athletes. It allows him to be contemporary and innovative in his strategy."

Cammalleri went on to opine that while Chiodo is a goalie coach at the moment, he sees a skill set which will show a path to being a head coach one day should that interest him.

It's a crazy, competitive world, both for goalie coaches and coaches on the whole. But let's file the name Andy Chiodo away. He's on the radar.

Trotz magic

Speaking of coaching, how else can you explain the meteoric rise of the New York Islanders from 31st overall in goals against per game last season to first overall in the same department less than a year later?

I asked Barry Trotz late last week what steps he and his staff could possibly have taken to achieve such a feat.

The Isles head coach humbly chuckled and then walked me through it.

"The one thing that you can correct is defensive hockey," Trotz said last Thursday over the phone. "Defensive hockey is about pride and commitment and work ethic. It's not skill-based, it really isn't. I'll say character-based. I asked our group, 'We finished last in goals against with the highest goals against in the last 10 years. That's 301 teams or whatever. That's not very good.' I just said to them, 'I know this is an area that we can absolutely correct. I know that the group of people we have here have a lot of pride and we're going to put some structure and pride in this area and if we do, then we'll improve this immensely.' Now, did I think we were going to be first? Not a chance ...

"But they took a lot of pride in it. I give a lot of credit to the group, you can't go from where we were to where we are in that area without the character in the group."

Of course, it probably didn't hurt that Trotz was walking into that Islanders' dressing room last September fresh off a Stanley Cup championship. That'll get a players' attention in a hurry.

But the buy-in is so evident. The Isles' are a pain to play against. They suffocate the other team in their own zone. There's so little free ice. It reminds me of the way Nashville played years ago when the pesky Predators had a small budget and played a style under Trotz that saw his team gain success by being the sum of their parts.

Trotz' work this season may very well net him the Jack Adams Award this season. It's really between him and Jon Cooper in my mind. We chatted briefly about the coach of the year race and while Trotz was quick to mention the terrific work of guys like Rick Tocchet in Arizona, Rod Brind'Amour in Carolina and Claude Julien in Montreal, among a few others, he did not hesitate for one second when picking his Jack Adams favourite.

"Jon Cooper," Trotz said.

And he went on to explain that if the Lightning keep going at this pace, you can't discount how difficult it is to keep a team this focused in March with such a crazy lead in the standings.

Trotz should know. He had that in Washington a few times and saw how hard it was to keep that rhythm going in March with the players just waiting for the playoffs to start.

The Athletic LOADED: 03.19.2019

1136758 Pittsburgh Penguins

What happened on that double-review of a no-goal call between the Penguins and Flyers?

By Rob Rossi Mar 18, 2019

Matt Cullen, he of more than 42 years on Earth and over 1,500 games in the NHL, could stake as good a claim as any hockey player to having "seen everything."

There's always something else, though.

Witness a bizarre couple of minutes in the Penguins' 2-1 overtime loss to the Flyers on Sunday night.

"I haven't seen that, I don't think, ever," Cullen said of a sequence during which all of the following happened at PPG Paints Arena:

Claude Giroux of the Flyers bested Penguins goalie Matt Murray 1:06 into the second period to presumably give Philadelphia a 1-0 lead.

Referee Dan O'Rourke waived off the score, citing goaltender interference by Flyers winger Jakub Voracek.

Flyers coach Scott Gordon challenged the call and requested a review by NHL officials in Toronto.

After that review, O'Rourke said Giroux's goal would stand because Voracek was deemed to have made incidental contact when crossing in front of Murray while being defended by Penguins defenseman Jack Johnson.

Penguins coach Mike Sullivan called O'Rourke over to Pittsburgh's bench and challenged the authenticity of Voracek having been onside when the Flyers entered the offensive zone. Another request for review by NHL officials was made, this one by Sullivan.

After that review, O'Rourke said that Voracek had been offside when the Flyers entered the offensive zone, thus nullifying the goal.

So, to recap: no goal and two successful challenges of plays involving Voracek.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 19, 2019

"Mixed feelings," Giroux said. "They said no goal and I saw the replay. It was a goal. Then they put it on the big screen, offside. Then, obviously, it wasn't a goal. It was a lot of up and down there."

As astute-beyond-his-years Flyers goalie Carter Hart noted, the whole saga was "kind of crazy."

"As soon as they showed the replay on the scoreboard, I was like, 'All right, that's not a goal,'" Hart said. "It was kind of crazy how it could kind of flip-flop back and forth like that. Took a little bit of a delay for the game. You see some guys trying to warm back up again and get into the game. You don't see that too often, that's for sure."

Cullen's assessment from the Penguins' perspective: "You saw a lot of funny looks on guys' faces when coming back to the bench — a lot of, 'I don't know what's going on here.'"

What went on was a bit of history.

A longtime official scorer for NHL games in Pittsburgh said that never before at PPG Paints Arena had two successful coaches' challenges of separate plays involving the same player followed a no-goal call made on the ice by a referee. This is the Penguins' ninth season in this building.

Had Sullivan, often successful on challenges during his Penguins tenure, seen anything similar to the second-period scene Sunday night?

"No," Sullivan said. "But we knew it was offside. So, regardless of what happened, we knew we were going to challenge it."

As for Gordon's challenge — well, it shouldn't have been necessary in the opinion of Flyers defenseman Shayne Gostisbehere.

"It was pretty obvious that their guy hit (Murray's) stick," Gostisbehere said of Johnson, whose stick blade's contact with Murray was likely the action misinterpreted for Voracek's bumping of the Penguins' goalie atop the crease.

"They knew what they were doing. They knew it was offside before we challenged. I was talking to some of their guys, and they baited us into that. But you have to take a chance when you know it's a goal."

The Penguins are taking a chance with their postseason fate — if not qualification for the Stanley Cup playoffs, certainly with their seeding — by making a habit of failing to close out games. They have blown multiple 2-0 leads on the season and recently have squandered three points with a couple of overtime losses to the Flyers and one against the Buffalo Sabres despite being ahead late in regulation.

The losses to the Flyers have been especially galling given the nature of the Pittsburgh-Philadelphia rivalry that dates to the NHL's 1967 expansion. Also, the Penguins have surrendered waning-second goals in regulation — including to winger James van Riemsdyk Sunday night — in losing two of three games to the Flyers since February.

Still, the Penguins are on an 11-5-4 run dating to a 4-0 home loss to the Carolina Hurricanes Feb. 5. They begin a four-game road trip at Carolina on Tuesday night.

Center Evgeni Malkin will not play against the Hurricanes. He is week-to-week with an upper-body injury, Sullivan said. Malkin was cross-checked in the ribs by Blues defenseman Robert Bortuzzo in the Penguins' 5-1 home loss to St. Louis Saturday afternoon.

With Malkin out, rookie Teddy Blueger centered the Penguins' second line. He scored Pittsburgh's lone goal against the Flyers. That line also included returning winger Bryan Rust, who had missed nine consecutive games with a lower-body injury.

As for the Flyers, their second-half surge might prove too little/too late for postseason qualification. Still, they did finish with a 3-1-0 record against the Penguins on the season.

But this season's final installment of the Battle of Pennsylvania will be remembered by those amongst a St. Patrick's Day sellout crowd in Pittsburgh — a crowd that included noticeable pockets of Flyers fans — for Giroux's goal that wasn't.

After it was.

After it wasn't.

And with a couple of challenges involving the same player in between.

"It really was weird," Cullen said.

The Athletic LOADED: 03.19.2019

1136771 Tampa Bay Lightning

Steven Stamkos sets Lightning record for career goals

The captain scored his 384th career goal as Tampa Bay clinched its first Presidents' Trophy.

By Diana C. Nearhos

TAMPA— Steven Stamkos wouldn't

call himself an emotional guy, but he got emotional Monday night.

It wasn't necessarily that he broke the Lightning franchise goal record that made Stamkos emotional. It was the emotion shared with the fans in the crowd.

He scored goal No. 384 to pass Vinny Lecavalier. Not only did his new Lightning franchise goal record earn a standing ovation, but that applause continued even once play resumed.

That was when it hit Stamkos.

"You're just not prepared for moments like this," Stamkos said after the 2-1 win over Arizona. "There are only two goals that have made me feel like this. That was the 60th in Winnipeg and this one here tonight. To do it at home, if I could have drawn it up, that's the way I would have liked it to happen."

The other piece Stamkos wanted was to break the record in a win. The captain did better than that.

Because there's always more in this historic season, he broke the record as the Lightning clinched the first Presidents' Trophy (for the most points in the league) in franchise history.

No. 384 for @RealStamkos91. He's officially the franchise leader in goals for the @TBLightning. pic.twitter.com/glpXK20cJh

— NHL (@NHL) March 18, 2019

Victor Hedman has been with Stamkos 10 of Stamkos' 11 seasons. He tried to think how many goals that means he's seen. Out of 384, maybe 360 he ball-parked.

"The guys that are No. 2 and 3 on that list are in the rafters so you know that's where he's heading," Hedman said referring to Lecavalier and Martin St. Louis respectively.

Both Lecavalier and St. Louis knew this day was coming. Lecavalier saw it from the first one-timer he ever saw Stamkos take in practice. He knew his record was going to fall then.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 19, 2019

"Steven is the best goal-scorer in Lightning history and now he has the record to prove it," Lecavalier said in a statement provided by the team. "How he's gotten to 384 - all the adversity, scoring from all over the ice - and still managing to set the record in a relatively small number of games is remarkable and further establishes Stamkos as one of the top goal-scorers in the history of the game. It's an honor to call him a friend and a teammate."

#TBLightning's Steven Stamkos scored his 384th goal to pass Vincent Lecavalier for the franchise goal record Monday night against the Coyotes. Here's some of his tribute to Bolts Nation: pic.twitter.com/GCfpPF5CKL

— Mari Faiello (@faiello_mari) March 19, 2019

St. Louis is proud to have been a part of some of Stamkos' early goals. He said he enjoys watching "him do his thing" and knows there are many more goals to come.

Someone else from Stamkos' past was in the building, too.

[Up Next: at Capitals, 7:30 p.m., Capital One Arena | TV/Radio: NBCSN; AM-970]

Arizona coach Rick Tocchet knows exactly what Stamkos means to the franchise; he coaches Stamkos in his first year with the Lightning. The opposing coach doesn't usually recognize a goal, but Tocchet gave Stamkos a thumbs up as he skated by.

"Did I know he'd break the record? Yeah, if you had asked me back then, I would have said yes," Tocchet said before the game. "With his shot and hands? When he had those injuries, you're concerned. But his level of play is still the same. Great kid. His teammates love him. He's still great in the community. He's just a complete guy."

Stamkos appreciated that nod from Tocchet and that he was there to share in the moment, even if it was from the other bench.

Like Lecavalier, coach Jon Cooper and general manager Julien BriseBois referenced how quickly Stamkos reached this mark. He's scored an average of 0.52 goals a game over 11 years. It took Lecavalier 14 years to reach 383.

"Steven Stamkos was a guy that by his 29th birthday, would he think he would be the leading scorer of the franchise?" Cooper said. "That's an unbelievable accomplishment for him to say that, well, until another Steven Stamkos comes along. Those are the few and far between."

BriseBois recognized Stamkos as the established face of the franchise since he joined the Lightning at age 18.

"The speed at which he was able to take over the franchise's career goals record is fitting and speaks to how incredible a goal scorer he is," he said. "He just turned 29! He might only be halfway through what is already an illustrious career. The fact that he has scored 30+ goals again this year (and counting) while playing what I think is his best all around hockey is an important reason why our team was able to win the Presidents' Trophy this season."

Then there's Stamkos' dad. Stamkos credited his parents with making sacrifices to get him to this point. He calls his dad after most games still (and said he'd be the first call when he got to his phone on Monday).

"Breaking the record of one of the franchise's greatest players demonstrates Steven's dedication to the Tampa Bay organization and its continued success," Chris said. "He has had the privilege of playing with some great players in Vinny, Marty, Heddy and Kuch along with many others who have helped him achieve this special accomplishment."

Stamkos ran into Lecavalier at dinner Sunday night. He said maybe that was an omen.

Either way, it couldn't have worked out better for Stamkos to set a franchise record on a night he helped the organization for another first in this historic season.

Tampa Bay Times LOADED: 03.19.2019

1136772 Tampa Bay Lightning

Lightning, hockey fans react to Steven Stamkos' new record

Twitter celebrated Stamkos' 384 career-goals achievement during the Monday night contest against the Coyotes.

By Mari Faiello

TAMPA — It took six minutes and 54 seconds for Steven Stamkos to make history Monday night as the veteran forward notched his 384th career goal, surpassing Vincent Lecavalier's previous franchise record of 383.

Many fans, former teammates and admirers took to Twitter shortly after the Stamkos' tipped shot to help him celebrate the new career milestone.

ESPN Senior NHL Writer Greg Wyshynski admired Stamkos from afar:

Stamkos: 384 goals in 737 games with the Lightning
Lecavalier: 383 goals in 1,037 games with the Lightning
Stamkos is OK.

— Greg Wyshynski (@wyshynski) March 19, 2019

Former teammate and the previous record-holder himself, Vincent Lecavalier, also congratulated Stamkos from afar:

From one captain to another. ⚡️#Stammertime | #GoBolts
pic.twitter.com/MjZEmPehJT

— x - Tampa Bay Lightning (@TBLightning) March 19, 2019

Former teammate and Hockey Hall of Famer Martin St. Louis congratulated Stamkos with a throwback picture:

Congrats @RealStamkos91 for becoming the all time leader in goals for @TBLightning. Was a lot fun to be part of some of your earlier ones! #notsurprised pic.twitter.com/bfjWNvjY7m

— Martin St.Louis (@mstlouis_26) March 19, 2019

One fan missed the ultimate goal to answer Mother Nature's call:

I go to the rest room and miss Stamkos ' goal #FML

— Mikey (@nolegsmike) March 19, 2019

Another fan channeled a MasterCard commercial celebrating the "priceless" moment:

Parking: free
Tickets: free
Watching @RealStamkos91 become all time @TBLightning goal scorer: Priceless#gobolts #history #STAMMERTIME pic.twitter.com/CfVtZ3KxgR

— Tammy (@tammylynn2483) March 19, 2019

Brittany Austin, Lightning marketing and creative director, now gets to celebrate a new memory (in addition to the old one) with the moment:

This was in my memories today...6 years ago. Now @RealStamkos91 breaks the franchise record with 384 career goals! #StammerTime #GoBolts #LoveMyJob pic.twitter.com/jFqQrJocMk



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 19, 2019

— Brittany Austin (@BrittanyAust10) March 19, 2019

Tampa Bay Times LOADED: 03.19.2019

1136773 Tampa Bay Lightning

Valspar player exchanges putter with J.T. Miller

J.J. Spaun will play in the Valspar Golf Championship tournament this weekend.

By Mari Faiello

TAMPA — J.T. Miller has a new putter to add to his golf bag.

He and PGA golfer J.J. Spaun met before Monday's game against the Coyotes and exchanged gifts. Typically, they'd exchange jerseys, but as a golfer, Spaun didn't have one of those on hand.

"Dude that's unreal," Miller said with a smile as Spaun pointed out the putter's balance and stability.

Miller was happy to offer up a Lightning jersey with Spaun's lucky number (32) in return for the Travis Mathew steel-tipped, split-carbon-and-graphite putter.

Spaun started his professional career back in 2012 and has been on the PGA tour for the past five years. He's played in 13 events so far this year, bringing in just over \$859,000.

Miller is both a fan and a golfer himself. He saw Spaun compete at the Arnold Palmer Invitational in Bay Hill just a couple of weeks ago. Spaun finished tied for 63rd at five over par on the tournament.

[Photos: Lightning takes on Coyotes]

Spaun is excited to share the jersey with his fiancé, Melody Means, whose favorite number is also 32. She has the number in her email. Red 32 is his go-to at the roulette table.

The PGA golfer looks forward to seeing her wear it in four months, when they get married, since she's a Lightning fan herself.

Spaun will also be the #BoltsSocial captain for Monday night's game against the Arizona Coyotes.

#Bolts fans, please welcome tonight's @budlight #BoltsSocial captain, professional golfer @JJSpaun! 🍷 ⚡ #ARIVsTBL pic.twitter.com/G7ByNmW7TP

— x - Tampa Bay Lightning (@TBLighting) March 19, 2019

Tampa Bay Times LOADED: 03.19.2019

1136774 Tampa Bay Lightning

Lightning pregame: Defenseman Cameron Gaunce recalled

Tampa Bay has no update on Dan Girardi or Anton Strålman's injuries

By Mari Faiello and Mike Sherman

TAMPA — The Lightning recalled another defenseman, which can't be a good sign for Dan Girardi or Anton Strålman's injuries. Cameron Gaunce's arrival isn't necessarily a bad sign, though.

Coach Jon Cooper said both players' lower-body injuries are still day-to-day.

"They're not available to play yet," Cooper said after Monday's morning skate. "Hopefully it doesn't last too much longer but it's one of those situations where all the wounds are healed and they're ready to go back. We don't want to rush guys back at this point, so right now they're both out for a bit."

Strålman has not played since March 5, missing five games. He had returned for morning skate in Toronto and practice in Detroit, on March 8, returning to a d-pairing with Victor Hedman but he has not skated with the team since.

Girardi has not played since March 7, missing four games, and has not skated with the team. He was not on the last road trip either, which had him missing two games with two days between in Toronto and Detroit.

Jan Rutta has filled in as the "sixth defenseman" in Girardi's and Strålman's place. He was called up from Syracuse for the Detroit game on March 8 and has played in four games since.

Since his Lightning debut he has taken up a d-pairing with veteran defenseman Braydon Coburn, shifting Mikhail Sergachev to the top pairing with Victor Hedman.

Rutta has fit in with the defensemen group quite well since March 9 when the Lightning took on Detroit and Rutta saw his first ice time with the program.

"(He's) just a steady defender," assistant coach Todd Richards said on Sunday. "(He) moves the puck well enough, his head is up, he sees plays."

With Girardi and Strålman out of the lineup, it looks like Rutta will be seeing more ice time in the future as the Lightning finishes out the regular season.

Gaunce last played in the NHL in 2017, a 12-game stint with a Pittsburgh Penguins team that went on to win the Stanley Cup. He isn't likely to play in the current situation but he's likely to be the seventh defenseman in case of another injury.

The 28-year-old Gaunce has 10 goals, 42 points and 61 penalty minutes in 56 games with the AHL Crunch this season.

Drafted 50th overall in 2008 by Colorado, Gaunce has played 32 NHL games combined with the Avalanche, Dallas Stars and Penguins. He was recalled once earlier this season, spending Oct. 27 to Nov. 9 with the Lightning, but did not play.

Lightning beat writer Diana C. Nearhos contributed to this report.

Tampa Bay Times LOADED: 03.19.2019

1136775 Tampa Bay Lightning

How Rick Tocchet played a key role in Steven Stamkos' rise to Lightning record books

By Joe Smith Mar 18, 2019

TAMPA, Fla. — Before the lengthy standing ovation flooded Steven Stamkos with emotion, and a minute-long tribute video brought back



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 19, 2019

a decade of memories, the Lightning captain shared a subtle but special moment with someone who helped him make history.

Stamkos had just set a Lightning franchise record for goals with No. 384, his first-period deflection of Ryan McDonagh's shot helping him surpass former teammate and mentor Vinny Lecavalier. Stamkos' goal song, MC Hammer's, "Hammer Time," boomed from the speakers as Stamkos fist-bumped all his teammates along the bench.

That's when Stamkos pointed to the Coyotes bench at coach Rick Tocchet, who responded with a smile and thumbs up.

"Good job, buddy."

It was Tocchet who played a pivotal role in Stamkos' rise, helping the then 18-year-old rookie prodigy become a pro, build up his strength and adjust to the league. There was some tough love, with Tocchet, then the interim coach, making Stamkos a healthy scratch, take notes in the press box and go through class-room-like video sessions with assistant Wes Walz.

But Stamkos credits Tocchet with "kickstarting my confidence," and path to the franchise record book.

"He was really one of the first guys that really believed in me," Stamkos said. "He gave me a shot and worked with me, saw the potential, gave me an opportunity and I can't thank him enough for that coming into this league. I owe a lot to him because he taught me a lot."

Stamkos' career had gotten off to a rough start, with the No. 1 overall pick getting played sparingly by coach Barry Melrose, who said he was "not ready for the NHL." After Melrose was fired 17 games in, Tocchet took over and began rebuilding Stamkos' game and confidence.

"I felt there was no sense of playing him every game," Tocchet said. "I felt that playing him a couple games here and there and getting in the gym, with Gary Roberts a good mentor, they worked out together. It's funny, after he sat a game and got in the gym, he'd have a great game. He got bigger and stronger and the rest is history. He's just a super kid."

Stamkos, who had two goals in his first 20 games as a rookie, finished with 23, including 10 in his final 18 games. He'd score 51 the next season. The two-time Rocket Richard Trophy winner beat Lecavalier's record in 300 fewer games while overcoming such serious injuries as a broken leg, blood clot and torn lateral meniscus.

"He's a hell of a kid," Tocchet said. "When I was here and he was an 18-year-old, you just knew he'd be a leader and captain," Tocchet said. "For me, all the injuries he had to sustain in his career, those are some tough injuries and to sustain that level that he did. There have been some pretty good people that played for Tampa Bay. So to beat it, it's a great record."

Lecavalier, who lives in Tampa and attends many games, reached out to Stamkos on Thursday after he tied the record in a win over Detroit. Lecavalier offered his congratulations, telling Stamkos he "knew this day was coming."

Then Stamkos ran into Lecavalier in downtown Tampa on Sunday night at his "special" dinner spot, which he felt was a good omen.

"Steven is the best goal scorer in Lightning history, and now he has the record to prove it," Lecavalier said. "How he's gotten to 384 — all the adversity, scoring from all over the ice — and still managing to set the record in a relatively small number of games is remarkable and further establishes Stamkos as one of the top goal scorers in the history of the game. It's an honor to call him a friend and a teammate."

Stamkos doesn't consider himself an emotional guy but said he was touched by both the fans ovation, which lasted from his goal into the next TV timeout, leading him to take a lap and wave. He said the

moment meant more coming at home, in a win that clinched the franchise's first Presidents' Trophy. His wife, Sandra, was in attendance.

NO. 384 FOR @REALSTAMKOS91.

HE'S OFFICIALLY THE FRANCHISE LEADER IN GOALS FOR THE @TBLIGHTNING. PIC.TWITTER.COM/GIPXK20CJH

— NHL (@NHL) MARCH 18, 2019

The video tribute included highlights of many of Stamkos' memorable goals, from his first (a deflection of a Lecavalier shot) as a rookie to his record 60th on the final day of the 2011-12 season in Winnipeg. The momentum-swinging goal in Boston in last year's playoffs.

"It's a rush of great memories and emotions seeing some great plays that former teammates made," Stamkos said. "Then seeing the transition through my career, the long hair, the short hair, the no facial hair. It brings back so many great memories. I just want to continue to have more great ones with this organization."

STEVEN STAMKOS TRIBUTE VIDEO FOR SETTING #TBLIGHTNING FRANCHISE GOAL RECORD PIC.TWITTER.COM/FMYRIG3EEP

— JOE SMITH (@JOESMITHTB) MARCH 18, 2019

"The speed at which he was able to take over the franchise's career goals record is fitting and speaks to how incredible a goal scorer he is," GM Julien BriseBois said. "He just turned 29! He might only be halfway through what is already an illustrious career. The fact that he has scored 30+ goals again this year (and counting) while playing what I think is his best all-around hockey is an important reason why our team was able to win the Presidents' Trophy this season."

Stamkos said his parents, who live back in his Toronto-area hometown, would be his first call after this milestone moment. He often calls or texts his dad after games, and this would be no different. He figured his phone would be blowing up with texts and calls from friends and former teammates. That included the other two Lightning legends in the top three of the goal-scoring list, Lecavalier and Hall of Famer Marty St. Louis, both of whom have their jerseys retired.

"The guys that are No. 2 and 3 on that list are in the rafters," defenseman Victor Hedman said. "So that's where (Stamkos) is heading."

Stamkos has been the longtime face of the franchise, the steady hand and conscience. Coach Jon Cooper called him an ambassador for the team and the city, seemingly handling the responsibilities seamlessly. There's a reason the sellout crowd made their ovation for the milestone last.

"He has brought fans out of their seats many times," Cooper said. "But tonight they stood a little longer."

Tocchet, whose Coyotes are battling for a playoff spot in the Western Conference, said he wished Stamkos would have set the record in Tampa Bay's next game. When told Stamkos credited him for his development, Tocchet quipped, "I just opened the (bench) gate."

Stamkos knows better than that. Those nights in the press box as healthy scratch his rookie year "weren't fun memories." But they helped get him where he is today:

The franchise's all-time leading scorer.

"I didn't really know how I was going to react, but there were definitely some emotions there and I'm just so thankful for all the love and support from family and friends, teammates, coaches on the other side. (Tocchet) helped me so much coming into the league as a younger player. That was pretty special."



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 19, 2019

The Athletic LOADED: 03.19.2019

1136712 Minnesota Wild

MacKinnon and the Avalanche visit the Wild

By The Associated Press MARCH 19, 2019 — 2:25AM

Colorado Avalanche (31-29-12, sixth in the Central Division) vs. Minnesota Wild (34-30-9, fifth in the Central Division)

St. Paul, Minnesota; Tuesday, 8 p.m. EDT

BOTTOM LINE: Nathan MacKinnon leads Colorado into a matchup with Minnesota. He currently ranks sixth in the league with 91 points, scoring 37 goals and totaling 54 assists.

The Wild are 11-7-4 against Central Division teams. Minnesota has given up 43 power-play goals, killing 80.2 percent of opponent chances.

TOP PERFORMERS: Ryan Suter leads the Wild with 38 assists and has recorded 45 points this season. Ryan Donato has totaled 9 points over the last 10 games for Minnesota.

LAST 10 GAMES: Avalanche: 4-5-1, averaging 2.2 goals, 3.6 assists, 3.1 penalties and 7.3 penalty minutes while giving up 2.4 goals per game with a .919 save percentage.

Wild: 4-3-3, averaging 2.6 goals, 4.1 assists, 2.5 penalties and 5.3 penalty minutes while giving up 2.7 goals per game with a .909 save percentage.

Wild Injuries: Joel Eriksson Ek: out (lower body).

Avalanche Injuries: Gabriel Landeskog: out (upper body), Matt Nieto: out (lower body).

Star Tribune LOADED: 03.19.2019

1136713 Minnesota Wild

Wild enters crucial game against Colorado in desperation mode

By Sarah McLellan Star Tribune MARCH 18, 2019 — 11:32PM

Since slipping from a playoff spot last week, the Wild has had to worry about hurdling just one team — the Coyotes — to regain the second wild card seed in the Western Conference.

The Wild can keep the focus squarely on Arizona, if it keeps Colorado at bay. That opportunity arrives Tuesday, when the Wild wraps up its season-long five-game homestand at Xcel Energy Center against an Avalanche squad it leads it by just three points with nine games to go.

"We have to play with desperation knowing that every point matters, every shift matters," defenseman Ryan Suter said. "You can't afford to be flat for anything."

At 1-2-1, this stint in St. Paul has been more harmful than helpful.

Arizona leapfrogged the Wild after Minnesota opened the homestand with a 3-0 loss to San Jose on March 11. The Coyotes added some breathing room when the Wild sleepwalked through a 4-1 loss to the Dallas Stars on Thursday.

That setback seemed to serve as a wake-up call, and the Wild received more urgency and effort during last weekend's back-to-back to mixed results: It won 5-2 over the Rangers on Saturday before its rally against the Islanders fell short 3-2 in overtime Sunday.

"Coming off that Dallas game, I think the mood in here is a lot different," winger Zach Parise said. "I know we didn't get that extra point [Sunday], but we have to like the way we played. It's unfortunate we didn't get it. But we did a lot of good things."

Because Arizona has jumped the Wild, this matchup with the Avalanche is Minnesota's last against a team currently below it in the standings.

The Wild returns to the road later this week, where it's had most of its success this season. But prevailing at home against Colorado, to keep the Avalanche safely in its rearview mirror, also would help it catch the Coyotes.

"We have a good team when we work hard," Suter said. "This team gets rewarded when we do work hard because we don't have that pure goal scorer. It's about work ethic, and when we show up and work hard, good things usually happen."

Star Tribune LOADED: 03.19.2019

1136714 Minnesota Wild

Career of Wild defenseman Jared Spurgeon has proved doubters wrong

By Sarah McLellan Star Tribune MARCH 18, 2019 — 11:34PM

The snow is melting, a cascade of water dripping near the arena's sun-pelted windows, as Barry Spurgeon roams the inside, looking for a photo of his son.

This warmer-than-usual February afternoon is his first time back at Callingwood Recreation Centre in maybe 15 years, but he remembers the snapshot hanging on the wall. It showed a team with a young Jared Spurgeon in 2000 that won the city championship, a squad — perhaps auspiciously — named the Wild.

After exploring a hallway without any luck, Barry stops his search. He glances out at a public skating session that just started on Rink B, and then his memories begin to thaw.

He used to coach Jared, from the time he started competing at age 5 until he was 11.

All these years later, having overcome the doubts of so many in the hockey world, Spurgeon has blossomed from a sixth-round draft pick into a crucial player for the Wild.

Minnesota Wild defenseman Jared Spurgeon celebrates after he tied the game at 2-2 in the third period against the New York Islanders on Sunday, March 17, 2019 at Xcel Energy Center in St. Paul, Minn. (Jeff Wheeler/Minneapolis Star Tribune/TNS) ORG XMIT: 1284952

He has been an integral part of six consecutive playoff teams and now this one, which desperately hopes for one last late-season gasp.

Along the way, Spurgeon's value has been magnified.

He has had a career year while the Wild has battled injuries and inconsistency, and his impact could continue to balloon because of the style he adopted right here in his hometown.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 19, 2019

"He just needed an opportunity to be able to show it," Barry said.

A step ahead

Laced into skates when he was just 3, Spurgeon joined his first organized team two years later.

He was constantly around the game, watching it on TV and going to the arena when his older brother Tyler played. Instead of hanging out with the other kids in the lobby, Spurgeon would sit by himself in the seats and analyze what was happening.

By the time he was 7, Spurgeon was winding up for fake shots, turning into spin-o-ramas and looking to his left when he passed right — as the rest of his teammates chased the puck in a pack.

"Jared was about three levels past everybody," said Bruce Ennis, who also coached Spurgeon during his minor-hockey days. "He was playing probably like a 17-year-old when he was 7 years old."

Ennis switched Spurgeon from forward to defense in peewee because of his fluid skating and hockey IQ, and Spurgeon liked shutting down the opposition. And he had a knack for it, setting his sights on the professional ranks.

When a school project asked him what he wanted to do for a living someday, an 8-year-old Spurgeon responded, "Play in the NHL."

His teacher explained that he needed to answer with a real job.

On a mission

An undersized skater who's now listed at 5-9 and 167 pounds, he was routinely told he would never advance — by scouts, coaches and hockey organizations, some of which cut him.

The feedback made him angry but also motivated. He wanted to prove the naysayers wrong, so he kept developing.

Spurgeon studied NHL defensemen who were smaller, noticing how Brian Rafalski and Dan Boyle operated in the corners against beefier opponents and transitioned the puck the other way.

Jared Spurgeon and Tyler Ennis when they were kids, provided by Ennis' father.

When it was his turn to attend Oilers games with his grandfather's season tickets, he'd observe what worked for the pros — even a forward like Doug Weight — and copy the moves. He would listen to games on the radio, visualizing the action, then check the TV highlights to see if what he imagined was real.

The scenes in his mind were pretty close.

At 15, Spurgeon joined the Spokane Chiefs in the Western Hockey League. That is when he learned how to use his stick instead of his body to pry opponents off the puck.

"The way he defends, he defends intelligently," said Bill Peters, who coached Spurgeon in Spokane and is now the bench boss of the Calgary Flames. "You gotta go through him to get to the net."

This progress, however, still was tested.

Spurgeon hadn't been contacted by any scouts after the Chiefs hoisted the Memorial Cup as the Canadian Hockey League champions in 2008.

He had no expectations for the draft that summer and thought going to college could be a backup plan. But with the 156th pick, the New York Islanders selected him.

After two more seasons in Spokane, Spurgeon learned the Islanders weren't going to sign him. He moped for a week, wondering if he could really twist a dream into a reality.

Spurgeon (right)

But he wasn't alone in this pursuit.

Barry and Spurgeon's mom, Debi, encouraged him, boosting his morale when the negativity swelled. He also had friend and former teammate Tyler Ennis to lean on; Ennis was also overlooked because of his size.

Eventually, Spurgeon decided he was ready to use the rejection as fuel.

New direction

Spurgeon's agent, Eustace King, assembled a video of his junior highlights and sent it to NHL teams. Then-Wild General Manager Chuck Fletcher invited Spurgeon for a tryout, and he impressed enough to earn a contract. He was in the minors for just 21 games before he made his Wild debut and by the 2011-12 season, he was with the team full-time.

"To play this long is pretty special to me and my family," Spurgeon said.

Even now, as a 29-year-old in his ninth NHL season of an underrated career, Spurgeon monitors his peers for tips to improve — such as how Drew Doughty and Erik Karlsson elude forecheckers and jump into the rush to create chances for their teammates.

And this attention to detail shows.

wild vs. colorado 7 p.m. Tuesday (FSN)

Already, Spurgeon has set career highs in goals (14) and points (41). On Sunday, against those same Islanders who passed him up, he crafted a highlight package that included a stick save on the goal line, a ferocious end-to-end backcheck to disrupt a breakaway and a clutch power-play goal.

His 14 goals are tied for the fourth most in the NHL among defensemen.

"He's a gem in this league that nobody knows about," coach Bruce Boudreau said.

A righthanded shot, Spurgeon chalks up the statistical spikes to luck but also a concerted effort to unleash more pucks on net. That's another trend he detected among the NHL's most offensive defensemen, and the 156 shots he is on pace for would be a career high.

"I don't know if it's the best he's been," Boudreau said, "but it's made it look like that only because we've needed him more."

Spurgeon felt the need to step up after Matt Dumba suffered a torn pectoral muscle, and most of Spurgeon's contributions have come since that mid-December injury.

Take these measures: The Wild generates approximately 59 percent of its high-danger chances when Spurgeon is on the ice, which is fifth among NHL defensemen, and gives up only eight of those chances per 60 minutes played by Spurgeon at 5-on-5 (also fifth best for league defensemen).

As the Wild's top unit, he and partner Ryan Suter also allow roughly eight high-danger chances per 60 minutes played at 5-on-5, compared to 12 when Suter was with Dumba. And Spurgeon's defensive play is estimated to have secured the Wild nearly three additional wins — which ranks fifth in the NHL among defensemen.

"As long as ... you're committed to the game, working hard and thinking the game," Spurgeon said, "it doesn't matter how big you are or strong you are."

No spotlight needed

Barry Spurgeon backtracks to the main lobby at Callingwood, still on the lookout for the picture.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 19, 2019

There's a display case and a flier on the wall but not the team photo. He figures it was taken down when the rink was repainted, one less reminder of what Spurgeon's accomplished.

But it doesn't matter. Spurgeon actually prefers when the spotlight misses him. He's an underdog who honed a technique that, combined with his perseverance, turned him into one of the most dependable at his profession. That tailored approach is what helps keep him in the NHL at his size, but it's a skill set Spurgeon believes he'd have even if he was taller.

"How could he ever think he was great?" said Bruce Ennis, Tyler's father. "Everyone told him he was never going to make it."

So after pausing in front of the sun-splattered windows, where the drops of water are still sinking, Barry decides to leave and walks out of the arena one more time. His son's improbable journey to the NHL may be rooted here, but right now it continues out there.

Star Tribune LOADED: 03.19.2019

1136715 Minnesota Wild

Wild-Colorado game preview

MARCH 19, 2019 — 12:02AM

SARAH MCLELLAN

7 p.m., vs. Colorado Avalanche, Xcel Energy Center, FSN-Plus, 100.3-FM

Colorado brings a hot goaltender

Preview: The Wild concludes its five-game homestand after signing free-agent Gophers goalie Mat Robson to a two-year, entry-level contract Monday that starts immediately. Robson will report to the Wild, but he isn't playoff-eligible and won't be able to play in the American Hockey League until next season. Robson also doesn't count as the Wild's fourth and final non-emergency recall.

Players to WATCH: Avalanche G Philipp Grubauer has three shutouts in his past five starts. C Nathan MacKinnon has nine points in his past six games. Wild F Ryan Donato is producing at a point-per-game pace since his team debut Feb. 21

Numbers: Colorado is 4-5-1 in its past 10 games. The Wild power play has scored in three straight games. Its 16 power-play goals by defensemen are tops in the NHL.

Injuries: Wild Fs Joel Eriksson Ek (lower body) and Mikko Koivu (torn ACL and meniscus) and D Matt Dumba (torn pectoral) are out. Avalanche Fs Gabriel Landeskog (upper body), Matt Nieto (lower body) and Vladislav Kamenev (shoulder) and D Conor Timmins (concussion) are also out.

Star Tribune LOADED: 03.19.2019

1136716 Minnesota Wild

Jared Spurgeon: By the numbers

MARCH 18, 2019 — 11:30PM

STAFF

The Wild's Jared Spurgeon:

- Is the franchise leader in goals scored by a defenseman and ranks tied for first in game-winning goals (13) and power-play goals (26) with Brent Burns.

- Has established career highs in points and goals this season. He is the fifth defenseman in team history to reach 40-plus points in a season.

- Has 22 points (10 goals, 12 assists) in the last 35 games and ranks tied for first among NHL defensemen in goals since Jan. 3.

CAREER GOALS SCORED BY WILD DEFENSEMEN

Jared Spurgeon 70

Matt Dumba 56

Brent Burns 55

Ryan Suter 44

Filip Kuba 33

GOALS SCORED BY WILD DEFENSEMEN IN A SEASON

Brent Burns 17 (2010-11)

Brent Burns 15 (2007-08)

Jared Spurgeon 14 (2018-19)

Matt Dumba 14 (2017-18)

Marc-Andre Bergeron 14 (2008-09)

Star Tribune LOADED: 03.19.2019

1136717 Minnesota Wild

Shortest NHL defensemen

MARCH 18, 2019 — 11:29PM

STAFF

Shortest NHL defensemen

Joe Hicketts, Detroit 5-8

Victor Mete, Montreal 5-9

Matt Grzelcyk, Boston 5-9

Torey Krug, Boston 5-9

Jared Spurgeon, Wild 5-9

Brad Hunt, Wild 5-9

Erik Brannstrom, Ottawa 5-10

Samuel Girard, Colorado 5-10

Will Butcher, New Jersey 5-10

Troy Stecher, Vancouver 5-10

Tyson Barrie, Colorado 5-10

Sami Vatanen, New Jersey 5-10

Ryan Ellis, Nashville 5-10



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 19, 2019

Chris Wideman, Florida 5-10

Alex Biega, Vancouver 5-10

Kris Russell, Edmonton 5-10

Star Tribune LOADED: 03.19.2019

1136718 Minnesota Wild

Mat Robson leaves Gophers for Wild

By Megan Ryan Star Tribune MARCH 18, 2019 — 11:49PM

The Gophers are suddenly without a starting goaltender.

Junior Mat Robson signed with the Wild on Monday and will join the team Tuesday, forgoing his last college season.

The Gophers just ended their season Saturday in the Big Ten semifinals in "unfair" fashion, as Robson said. The controversial overtime penalty that led to the Gophers' demise was a bitter end to the Canadian's collegiate career. And it forced a choice he had pushed to the background all season into focus.

"I didn't even want to think about making this decision until pretty much this morning," Robson said Monday. "I wanted to enjoy the time I had with my teammates, kind of soak it all in, let the emotions kind of take over. Just do what you need to do to get your mind right."

At the same time, Robson said he always knew if he earned an opportunity to play at the highest level, he'd "take it and run with it." But the decision was still "very hard."

"You never want to feel like you're turning your back or leaving people behind or cutting time short anywhere," he said.

Robson played 31 games this season and 14 last year, after he became eligible halfway through the season. He set a career save-percentage record for the Gophers at .924 in that time. He originally had given up his NCAA eligibility to play for a major junior team in his native Canada. But a series of injuries, including one his draft year, led to struggles for playing time and made him reconsider.

He ended up at Clarkson with a year-and-a-half suspension, eventually making it to the Gophers in 2017-18. Gophers coach Bob Motzko has been effusive in his praise of Robson all season, often crediting the goaltender's performance with the team's good results. Motzko was not available for comment, but he will address the media Tuesday.

With the Wild, the free-agent signee inked a two-year, entry-level contract. He will report to the team immediately, but he isn't eligible to play in the playoffs or the AHL until next season. So the next couple of weeks will be a way for him to acclimate to the NHL lifestyle while learning from pro coaches and players in preparation for next season.

Motzko will have the next seven months to ponder his goaltender situation, as fellow netminders Eric Schierhorn and Brock Kautz are graduating seniors.

The Gophers do have potentially three goaltenders in the pipeline for next season: Jared Moe, Jack LaFontaine and Justen Close. Moe, 6-3, 205 pounds, is from New Prague and has played the past two seasons with junior team Waterloo Black Hawks. LaFontaine, 6-2, 205 pounds, played for Michigan from 2016-18 before returning to his native Canada — he's from the same Toronto suburb as Robson — to play junior hockey this season. Close, 5-10, 161 pounds, is

another Canadian who has spent the past three seasons with the junior team Kindersley Klippers.

The future of the Gophers in goal has Robson pretty intrigued, at least.

"A very good buddy of mine coming in, LaFontaine, next year, so he's going to be great," Robson said. "And I've heard all good things about the other two goalies. It's going to be fun to see them battle for the net. It'll be good for all three of them now, that friendly competition. And it will be really nice to be able to be around [to watch it]."

Robson, also a Big Ten goaltender of the year finalist, might not be the only early departure. Junior center Rem Pitlick, a Nashville Predators pick, ended the season as one of the top scorers in the nation with 41 points.

Star Tribune LOADED: 03.19.2019

1136719 Minnesota Wild

Mat Robson leaves Gophers for Wild

By Megan Ryan Star Tribune MARCH 18, 2019 — 11:49PM

The Gophers are suddenly without a starting goaltender.

Junior Mat Robson signed with the Wild on Monday and will join the team Tuesday, forgoing his last college season.

The Gophers just ended their season Saturday in the Big Ten semifinals in "unfair" fashion, as Robson said. The controversial overtime penalty that led to the Gophers' demise was a bitter end to the Canadian's collegiate career. And it forced a choice he had pushed to the background all season into focus.

"I didn't even want to think about making this decision until pretty much this morning," Robson said Monday. "I wanted to enjoy the time I had with my teammates, kind of soak it all in, let the emotions kind of take over. Just do what you need to do to get your mind right."

At the same time, Robson said he always knew if he earned an opportunity to play at the highest level, he'd "take it and run with it." But the decision was still "very hard."

"You never want to feel like you're turning your back or leaving people behind or cutting time short anywhere," he said.

Robson played 31 games this season and 14 last year, after he became eligible halfway through the season. He set a career save-percentage record for the Gophers at .924 in that time. He originally had given up his NCAA eligibility to play for a major junior team in his native Canada. But a series of injuries, including one his draft year, led to struggles for playing time and made him reconsider.

He ended up at Clarkson with a year-and-a-half suspension, eventually making it to the Gophers in 2017-18. Gophers coach Bob Motzko has been effusive in his praise of Robson all season, often crediting the goaltender's performance with the team's good results. Motzko was not available for comment, but he will address the media Tuesday.

With the Wild, the free-agent signee inked a two-year, entry-level contract. He will report to the team immediately, but he isn't eligible to play in the playoffs or the AHL until next season. So the next couple of weeks will be a way for him to acclimate to the NHL lifestyle while learning from pro coaches and players in preparation for next season.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 19, 2019

Motzko will have the next seven months to ponder his goaltender situation, as fellow netminders Eric Schierhorn and Brock Kautz are graduating seniors.

The Gophers do have potentially three goaltenders in the pipeline for next season: Jared Moe, Jack LaFontaine and Justen Close. Moe, 6-3, 205 pounds, is from New Prague and has played the past two seasons with junior team Waterloo Black Hawks. LaFontaine, 6-2, 205 pounds, played for Michigan from 2016-18 before returning to his native Canada — he's from the same Toronto suburb as Robson — to play junior hockey this season. Close, 5-10, 161 pounds, is another Canadian who has spent the past three seasons with the junior team Kindersley Klippers.

The future of the Gophers in goal has Robson pretty intrigued, at least.

"A very good buddy of mine coming in, LaFontaine, next year, so he's going to be great," Robson said. "And I've heard all good things about the other two goalies. It's going to be fun to see them battle for the net. It'll be good for all three of them now, that friendly competition. And it will be really nice to be able to be around [to watch it]."

Robson, also a Big Ten goaltender of the year finalist, might not be the only early departure. Junior center Rem Pitlick, a Nashville Predators pick, ended the season as one of the top scorers in the nation with 41 points.

Pioneer Press LOADED: 03.19.2019

1136720 Minnesota Wild

Wild face brutal schedule in race for final Western Conference playoff spot

By Dane Mizutani | March 16, 2019 at 8:39 PM

Minnesota DHS inspector general put on leave; investigators say child care fraud 'pervasive'

Let's just say if the Wild make the playoffs at the end of what figures to be a sprint to the finish line, they will have earned their spot. They entered the weekend three points behind the Arizona Coyotes and two points ahead of the Colorado Avalanche in the race for the final Western Conference playoff spot.

In other words, the Wild had some work to do over with 11 games left in the season, including Saturday's contest against the New York Rangers.

"Obviously these are important games coming," veteran center Eric Staal said. "We have to look forward to the challenge. It'll be a good test of us."

It only figures to get more difficult for the Wild over the next couple of weeks, with nine of the remaining 10 games coming against teams currently in playoff position.

Luckily, the Wild have been in this position before and have found a way to sneak in.

"We have been through it, so we know how to approach it mentally," goalie Devan Dubnyk said. "You don't get it done by thinking too much about it or staring at the standings or worrying about one play being something that ruins everything. You just go out there and work and be sharp and trust that we have a group in here that's going to get it done. We just have to understand that we're in control of what goes on here."

That's the main point coach Bruce Boudreau is trying to hammer home to his team amid the brutal schedule the rest of the way. He used a recent loss to the Dallas Stars as an example for how not to play down the stretch.

"We know how we have to be much better," Boudreau said. "It's never easy. That's the parity of this league. We just have to win our games. If we win our games, everything else will take care of itself."

DECISIONS, DECISIONS

It's still unclear whether Boudreau will go with Dubnyk or backup Alex Stalock between the pipes in Sunday's game against the New York Islanders.

"I think everything is day by day," Boudreau said. "Let's see how this game goes, and then we'll make a decision."

ERIKSSON EK ON THE MEND

Joel Eriksson Ek is still recovering from a lower-body injury that was expected to keep him out for at least a week. As of now, it doesn't sound like Eriksson Ek is close to returning.

"He hasn't skated," Boudreau said. "He's not ready to do that yet."

Pioneer Press LOADED: 03.19.2019

1136721 Minnesota Wild

Wild defenseman Jared Spurgeon doesn't like to brag ... so his teammates brag for him

By Dane Mizutani | PUBLISHED: March 18, 2019 at 12:18 pm | UPDATED: March 18, 2019 at 12:20 PM

It's uncanny how Wild defenseman Jared Spurgeon always seems to find a way to stand out. Though the 5-foot-9, 170-pound Spurgeon is one of the smallest players on the team, he's one of the biggest in terms of impact.

You could make a legitimate case that Spurgeon has been the team's MVP this season, netting a career-high 14 goals and dishing out 27 assists, while serving as a stabilizing force on the blue line.

"He's a great player," said coach Bruce Boudreau, who long has been the leader of the Jared Spurgeon fan club. "He's a gem in this league that nobody knows about."

That was on full display at various points throughout Sunday's 3-2 overtime loss to the New York Islanders. Spurgeon played the role of goaltender when he saved a surefire goal with backup Alex Stalock out of position. He backchecked his butt off to breakup another surefire goal with Islanders speedster Mathew Barzal alone on a breakaway. Oh, and he scored the tying goal to force overtime and help the Wild secure one point Sunday, which helps in the gridlocked Western Conference standings.

Not surprisingly, Spurgeon had no interest in talking about any of that after the game.

"I just got lucky," he said when asked about his split-second decision to back up Stalock and save a goal. "I was sort of standing there. It just ended up hitting me."

Spurgeon has his goalie's back. pic.twitter.com/92rTFILtu5

— NHL GIFs (@NHLGIFs) March 17, 2019



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 19, 2019

"Fresh ice, I guess," Spurgeon added when asked to explain how he caught Barzal. "If anyone has a breakaway, I just put my head down and try to catch them."

Spurgeon starts this play from behind the goal line 
pic.twitter.com/KGFNinQYFx

— CJ Fogler (@cjzero) March 18, 2019

You've probably got a better chance of getting Spurgeon to discuss game theory than talk about his stellar play on any given night.

Yet, after his most recent Herculean effort, he was the talk of the Wild locker room.

While the Wild left the rink disappointed that they didn't come away with two points they probably deserved, almost everyone took a step back to credit Spurgeon for his effort.

"It looked like Barzal had three zones (on him) on that breakaway, and Spurge caught him," veteran forward Zach Parise said. "I don't think we can say enough about the guy. I mean, every game, he's so good for us. He scored some big goals for us the last couple of games. That guy does it all."

And if Spurgeon continues to do that, he's going to put himself in line for a big pay day next offseason. He signed a four-year, \$20.75 million contract extension on Dec. 21, 2015 — perhaps one of the best bargains in the league right now — and figures to be making a heck of a lot more the next time he puts pen to paper.

Not that Spurgeon is thinking about any of that right now. Not with the playoff push in the home stretch.

"I think the effort was good," Spurgeon said, shifting the focus away from himself. "We need to continue that. We have to keep that effort up. We need points."

Pioneer Press LOADED: 03.19.2019

1136816 Websites

The Athletic / DGB weekend power rankings: The Lightning are the NHL's best team and they probably won't win the Cup

By Sean McIndoe Mar 18, 2019

We're just three weeks away from the start of the playoffs. It's the very best time of year, with a ton of action, intensity through the roof and the crushing suspense of finding out who'll be left standing as the season's best team.

Except that this year, there's no suspense, because we already know the answer. The Tampa Bay Lightning are the best team of the 2018-19 season. There's really no question about it. Even if they lose every game they play for the rest of the year, they're still the season's best and it's not even close.

Now we just need to wait and see if they actually win the Stanley Cup. However, they probably won't.

That feels like a weird thing to say. As hockey fans, we're trained to believe that the Cup winner is the best team. Of course they are. They were the last team standing and they won a big trophy for it. Regular season success is nice, but as the league itself has told us, it's all about the Cup. We can't know who's the best until we've seen who survives four rounds and emerges as champion.

Nonsense. This year, we already know. It's the Lightning.

To be clear, I'm not trying to make a case that the Presidents' Trophy is somehow the real prize of an NHL season. Most years,

there's so little difference between the top few teams that the difference between finishing first overall and third or fourth doesn't really tell us anything about which team was actually best.

But not this season. The Lightning aren't just clearly the best team in the league, they might be the best team of the last quarter-century. They've been dominant at pretty much every facet of the game. They're loaded with stars, with many of them having career years. They're well-coached, have the league's best powerplay and penalty kill, are strong in goal and don't feature any obvious holes anywhere on the roster. If you could wish the perfect cap-era team into existence, it would look a lot like this year's Lightning.

But they still probably won't win. And we might as well start getting our heads around that now.

Dom Luszczyszyn currently has the Lightning at about a 25 percent chance to win the Cup, even though he also thinks they may be the single best team of the cap era. That seems like a contradiction, but it's not. In the NHL's era of hyper-parity, 25 percent is pretty close to the best you can do.

To understand why, let's do some math. Imagine a team that was a 70 percent favorite in a playoff series. That's pretty good. It's rare for any team to be a 70 percent favorite in a single game, even against the last place team or a tired one that's starting its backup goalie. There's more variance in a single game than a seven-game series, but still, 70 percent would be a heavy favorite. Now imagine our team is so strong that they're a 70 percent favorite against each and every team they could possibly play in the playoffs.

That's sounds good. And it is. But there's a problem: If you're a 70 percent favorite in every series, it's more likely than not that you won't even make it to the third round. Our 70 percent team has only a 49 percent chance of winning two straight rounds. And their odds of winning four in a row are only 24 percent.

The Lightning are probably a better than 70 percent favorite over whichever wildcard team they play. But they're less than that against, say, the Bruins or whoever comes out of the West. Mix in a few injuries or a poorly timed slump and you can see how this might end.

Here's what will probably happen: The Lightning will go into the playoffs being referred to as overwhelming favorites even though, compared to the rest of the league collectively, they'll be big underdogs. And at some point, they'll likely lose. Maybe some key players will get hurt. Maybe they'll draw an especially tough matchup. Chances are, they'll just run into a red-hot goalie who'll steal the series even though Tampa plays better.

And when that happens, the narratives will kick in. Fans and media and maybe even the Lightning themselves will honor the age-old hockey tradition of refusing to accept that sometimes the best team doesn't win and instead will start looking for reasons why Tampa wasn't as good as we thought. Odds are we'll settle on something around their character and leadership and heart. They didn't want it bad enough. They were good, sure, at least during the season. But the problem is, we'll tell ourselves, they weren't the best after all.

And we'll be wrong. The Lightning are the best team in the league, even if they get swept in the first round. They may not be Stanley Cup champions and we all agreed long ago that that's what matters most. If and when they get eliminated, they'll be devastated and their season will feel like a failure. That's natural and it's how it should be. The Cup is what counts.

Just don't fall for the narratives. Instead, accept the reality of today's NHL: The Lightning are the best, but the best team usually doesn't win.

On to this week's power rankings. Hey, I bet you can't guess who's going to be ranked No. 1 ...

Road to the Cup



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 19, 2019

The five teams that look like they're headed towards a summer of keg stands and fountain pool parties.

One downside of focusing on the top five and bottom five every week is that it doesn't leave us with much room to talk about the wildcard races in the middle. That might be good news for Canadiens fans, who watched their team stumble through a rough week punctuated by Saturday's loss to Corey Crawford. Montreal sits three points back of the Blue Jackets and four back of the Hurricanes with just ten games left and the Habs don't look like they'll hold the ROW tie-breaker on either. They're still in it, but their odds look a lot worse than they did when we were breaking them down just one week ago.

In the West, it's the Wild and the Avalanche chasing the Coyotes and Stars and maybe the Blues. The Avs got a big win yesterday, but didn't gain all that much ground because the loser point fairy decided to show up and work its magic on pretty much everyone else. Sorry, Colorado, just because you win and all the teams you're chasing lose doesn't mean you should gain two points on anyone and that makes sense because (mumble, mumble) closer playoff races (mumble, mumble) and hey look over there it's the power rankings.

5. Washington Capitals (42-23-7, +20 true goals differential*) – Two goals to 50 for Alexander Ovechkin, who has yet another Rocket Richard Trophy all but wrapped up. And as Sportsnet reminds us, Wayne Gretzky's unbreakable record remains within his sights.

4. Boston Bruins (43-20-9, +32) – Three straight regulation losses during the week put an end to their points streak and allowed the struggling Leafs to stay in range. More importantly for our purposes, it took some of the pressure off of trying to figure out how to get them higher in the rankings.

3. San Jose Sharks (43-21-8, +39) – The schedule served up a neat tag-team match of sorts on Saturday night, with the Sharks and Flames facing the Predators and Jets, respectively, in a showdown between the top two teams in the Pacific and Central. And it was the Central earning the sweep. So, uh, shouldn't that division be represented in this list somewhere? Maybe, but we're not going to overreact to one night, especially with the Jets and Predators both still sitting under 90 points and facing a tough road to home ice in the conference final.

2. Calgary Flames (44-21-7, +54) – The offense opened up again this week, at least until they ran into the Jets. That's enough to nudge them back ahead of the Sharks in what feels like it could be a back-and-forth dance that lasts the rest of the season.

Also, they're officially in the playoffs and feeling very chill about it:

FIRST WESTERN CONFERENCE TEAM TO CLINCH A PLAYOFF SPOT! YEAH BABY! PIC.TWITTER.COM/9OSG0ND3ZH

— X – CALGARY FLAMES (@NHLFLAMES) MARCH 18, 2019

1. Tampa Bay Lightning (55-13-4, +88) – They stomped the Leafs and outlasted the Capitals in the same week and now need seven wins in their last ten games to tie the all-time record of 62 in a season. Can they do it? It will be tough, as the schedule serves up two more against the Caps and two against the Bruins and you'd imagine the Lightning rest a few guys at some point. But they've still got a shot.

*Goals differential without counting shootout decisions like the NHL does for some reason.

Not ranked: Toronto St. Pats – They weren't very good this weekend. Which is bad news, since it's the only weekend they get before they turn back into the Maple Leafs, who are also not very good lately. Does anyone know what the Arenas are up to these days?

The Leafs' recent struggles have been well-documented because everything about this team is well-documented. But that doesn't mean they've been overstated. This team just isn't very good right now, especially in their own end. In four games this week, they gave up 23 goals and were lucky to escape with two points thanks to a late comeback against a tired Flyers team. Some of that is a depleted blueline missing Jake Gardiner and Travis Dermott and there's still a chance that one or both guys could be back around playoff time. But a lot of it was just flat-out bad goaltending.

The question is how much that should worry a team that, if we're being honest, really doesn't have all that much to play for down the stretch before they face Boston in the first round. Every goaltender has highs and lows, and if Frederik Andersen and Garret Sparks just picked the same week to go cold, well, that happens. A goalie being off in mid-March doesn't mean he'll still be off in mid-April when it counts. If you were an especially optimistic Maple Leaf fan – I'm told they exist, although I've never met one – then maybe you could hand-wave that part away.

But while goaltending matters, it's far from the whole problem in Toronto. This team just stinks right now. Losing to the Lightning is one thing, although you'd like to think the Leafs could at least look like they belonged. The games against the Hawks and Flyers were harder to defend, and going into Ottawa for a de facto home game and getting blown out by the last place Senators is just embarrassing. After each one of those games, frustrated Leaf player promised to be better next time. And then they weren't.

Cold streaks sometimes happen to teams just like they happen to goalies, but as Scott Wheeler broke down yesterday, there's more going on here. The Leafs have been a very good team for most of the season, but the standings have sometimes exaggerated their true level of play. James Mirtle flagged that way back in November and we've been seeing it play out in the second half. This isn't a team that had one bad week; this is a team that's won just 17 of its last 34 games dating back to the end of December. This isn't some sort of blip. This is who they are right now.

The question is whether they can fix it. The good news is that they still have ten games before the showdown with the Bruins. While it would be nice to catch Boston for home-ice advantage, it's looking unlikely, and the Canadiens' recent struggles mean there's virtually no chance Toronto misses the playoffs even if they crash and burn the rest of the way. That gives Mike Babcock and company three weeks to figure things out without necessarily having to worry about every point along the way.

Is that enough? Given that many of this team's problems date back to earlier in the season and even previous years, it doesn't seem like it. Maybe this miserable week is enough of a low point to raise the urgency level. We'll see.

Either way, the Leafs will be a fascinating team to watch over the next few weeks. They're still good enough to beat the Bruins, and if they do then we'll all look back at posts like this and roll our eyes at the overreactions. But if they don't, and they make their third straight first-round exit, things are going to get very interesting in Toronto. The Babcock era has been given an extended honeymoon, largely well-earned, from a fan base that isn't used to optimism. If it turns out that all that progress of the last few years means they've topped out as just the third-best team in their own division, the offseason is going to get ugly.

The bottom five

The five teams that look like they're headed towards hoping the ping-pong balls deliver Jack Hughes.

Since 80 percent of the teams in this section are already looking ahead to the lottery, we should point out that we now know when it will be: Tuesday, April 9, the day before the playoffs start. That's a departure from the previous tradition of holding it during the first



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 19, 2019

Saturday of the postseason and gives the lottery its own night in the spotlight. Get your lucky charms ready.

5. Anaheim Ducks (30-35-9, -55) – The Ducks have actually been sort of OK since Bob Murray took over from Randy Carlyle. This post dives into why that's happened.

4. New Jersey Devils (27-37-9, -43) – They were shutout for the third time in eight games yesterday, which sounds bad until you remember that they're icing a roster that looks like you simmed ahead too far and now half the players are made up by the computer and it's kind of a miracle they ever score at all.

3. Detroit Red Wings (25-37-10, -50) – They beat the Islanders and actually made the Lightning sweat in a pair of games. On Tuesday they kick off a tough five-game road trip by facing the Rangers and have a shot at their first two-game win streak in over a month.

2. Los Angeles Kings (25-38-8, -58) – Don't look now, but a six-point gap between the Kings and Senators on Thursday morning shrunk to two points by the end of Saturday night, so this "race" isn't over yet.

(I've never understood why people say "don't look now." You can totally look, I won't mind.)

1. Ottawa Senators (25-41-6, -49) – Saturday's win over the Leafs was a highlight in a season that hasn't had many and a nice reward for a team that's been doing some good things since Marc Crawford took over. This was funny, though:

"WE DID A GOOD JOB OF TAKING THE CROWD OUT OF IT RIGHT FROM THE START," ZACK SMITH SAID. #SENS

— CHRIS STEVENSON (@CJ_STEVENSON) MARCH 17, 2019

Not ranked: New York Rangers – Help me out here, Rangers fans. How do you feel about this season?

We haven't talked about the team all that much; they were in the bottom five in each of the season's first four weeks, then disappeared other than a brief re-entry at the five-spot in January. Other than that, they've been bad, but not as bad as the real bottom-feeders. They're sitting 26th overall, which certainly isn't good. But they're closer to catching the Canadiens for 15th than the Senators for 31st.

"Bad but not terrible" should be better than the alternative, but in today's NHL it often isn't. If you're going to rebuild, and the Rangers clearly are, then you want to give yourself a good chance at winning the lottery and drafting a franchise player. The Rangers aren't in bad shape there, but even three or four fewer wins would have made a big difference. Heck, just scraping away a few of their league-leading 13 loser points would have done it. Their fans have to be wishing that they weren't quite this good.

Except ... I mean, that's an awful way to go through a season, right? You're supposed to want your team to do well. The Rangers are trying to rebuild with a Hall-of-Fame goalie, so finishing dead last was probably never in the cards. They won enough to look respectable, had a decent deadline and continued to make progress.

That should be enough and maybe it is. You good, Ranger fans? Or has this season felt like a missed opportunity?

The Athletic LOADED: 03.19.2019

1136817 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Takeaways: Canucks playing spoiler in West playoff race

Iain MacIntyre | March 19, 2019

This will be the fourth straight joyless spring for the Vancouver Canucks, but the National Hockey League team is tossing some of its misery on others trying to make the Stanley Cup playoffs.

Too far out of the race themselves for any realistic chance of getting into the post-season, the Canucks on Monday completed an impressive 26 hours when their 3-2 overtime win against the Chicago Blackhawks capped a two-game road sweep for Vancouver.

The Canucks beat the Dallas Stars 3-2 in a shootout the previous night. The Stars are trying to hang on to a wildcard playoff spot in the Western Conference, and the Blackhawks, who had won five straight games before Monday, are one of the teams chasing them.

But both dropped valuable points to the Canucks, who could win their final nine games and probably still miss the tournament.

Canucks defenceman Alexander Edler, who fumbled the puck into his own net while trying to block a shot on Erik Gustafsson's tying goal for the Blackhawks late in the third period, worked a give-and-go with Bo Horvat that his teammate finished just 16 seconds into OT.

Suddenly 3-0-1 in their last four games, the Canucks return home to play the Ottawa Senators on Wednesday. They can't play spoilers against Ottawa because the Senators are the worst team in the NHL. But the Canucks can make them feel badly — and themselves feel even better.

DEMKO TIME

Canucks backup Thatcher Demko was excellent in just his fourth start since his mid-season promotion from the American Hockey League, which preceded a knee injury that kept the 23-year-old goalie out most of February.

Demko didn't look good on Chicago's power-play goal that opened scoring in the first period — after recovering his stick, Demko was slow to react to Jonathan Toews' redirect from the high slot — but the goaltender was outstanding in the third when the Blackhawks' surged.

He made four saves during a late Chicago power play, and made enough good saves on the night that it won't look like charity when Vancouver coach Travis Green gives him his next start.

Jacob Markstrom, who has been brilliant lately and superb the last three months, rested Monday after a 44-save performance in Dallas. Green told reporters before Monday's game that Demko, long-considered the Canucks' future starter until Markstrom elevated his game this season under goalie guru Ian Clark, is going to get playing time down the stretch but it's not going to be "all about Thatcher Demko."

It shouldn't be. But it should be a little bit about Demko and he helped himself with Monday's 27-save performance.

Sportsnet NOW gives you access to over 500 NHL games this season, blackout-free, including Hockey Night in Canada, Rogers Hometown Hockey, Scotiabank Wednesday Night Hockey, the entire 2019 Stanley Cup Playoffs and more.

CANUCKS IN NO GOLDIE RUSH

For the second straight game, the Canucks won while talented but enigmatic winger Nikolay Goldobin was a healthy scratch. This is the sixth time this season that Green has sent the Russian, one of his most skilled players, to the press box.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 19, 2019

It would be more fun bashing Green, which is kind of a thing in Vancouver, if the team was losing and the guys the coach played ahead of Goldobin fell on their faces.

But Tim Schaller, who had been scratched in 20 of the previous 22 games, scored his first two goals of the season in Dallas. And Markus Granlund scored in Chicago. All 'Team Demeaned' needed was for Loui Eriksson to score, too. But Blackhawks goalie Corey Crawford made one of his best saves against Eriksson, who was scratched by Green last week against the New York Rangers, not quite halfway through his six-year, \$36-million-US contract with the Canucks.

But Goldobin's many advocates outside the hockey team have a point: Schaller, Granlund and Eriksson may not even be on the Canucks next year and don't appear to have futures in Vancouver while Goldobin is a gifted 23-year-old who plays a position where the Canucks need to get much better.

This is what Green told reporters in Dallas: "Goldie has got to bring something to the table. I think he has two goals and two assists in 23 games. Those aren't numbers that are really going to keep a guy in the league. We know that he's not going to be a guy that's heavy and hard and physical, and I know that I'm alright with that. But at the end of the day, you take the month of November away and he hasn't done a whole lot. So somebody else gets an opportunity and that's the way this league is."

And here is what Goldobin said after scoring the winning goal against Anaheim the night the Feb. 25 trade deadline passed: "I'm just glad I'm staying here. Really happy. I like this organization and I know coaches believe in me a lot."

He is testing their faith.

SWEET PETE

Canucks rookie Elias Pettersson's second-period assist on Granlund's rebound goal gave him 61 points in 62 games and the record as the highest-scoring rookie in franchise history. Pavel Bure had 60 points in 65 games in 1991-92, a decade after Czech legend Ivan Hlinka joined the Canucks at age 31 and produced 60 points in 72 games as an NHL "rookie."

Pettersson's deft dish to Brock Boeser on Granlund's goal was nice, but what was even better was the way the centre allowed the Canucks to break out of their zone by dragging the puck through his skates to fool Blackhawks forechecker Chris Kunitz.

Night in and night out, whether he scores or not, Pettersson is worth watching.

BROCK IS BACK

Two weeks after inquiries were being organized into the disappearance of Boeser's offence, the second-year forward is on a seven-game points streak (2-6-8 pts). He is skating better and appears to be re-energized.

It's worth remembering that although not a rookie, this is Boeser's first trip through the NHL's March madness after an injury last March 5 ended his freshman season at 60 games. The two seasons before that, mostly in college hockey, Boeser played 42 games and 41 games. Monday was his 60th game this season. He's still learning.

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 03.19.2019

1136818 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Derek Ryan embracing chance to centre Flames' top line

Eric Francis | March 18, 2019, 6:14 PM

CALGARY – All eyes were on James Neal Monday as the veteran winger made a surprising return to practice for the first time in a month.

However, once the puck drops Tuesday against Columbus the focus will likely shift from the Calgary Flames' priciest free agent signing last summer to its most effective one: Derek Ryan.

Unless Sean Monahan is able to rebound from the illness that kept him out of practice Monday and off the charter on the weekend, Ryan will once again be elevated to centre the Flames' top line.

It's a role the 32-year-old Alberta Golden Bears grad has spent the last two games fulfilling for a team he usually plays fourth-line minutes for.

Quite a jump for most NHLers, but when you consider the winding path Ryan took to get here it's hardly surprising the nomadic centre was Bill Peters' choice to play between Johnny Gaudreau and Elias Lindholm.

After all, when you're an undersized, undrafted U Sports grad who found ways to thrive in three pro leagues before making his NHL debut at age 29, you clearly have experience embracing and excelling in endless roles.

"That's the trademark of my whole career," said Ryan of being Calgary's chameleon.

"I've been able to adapt to play in the Austrian league, which is a super offensive, run-and-gun, three-on-twos, two-on-ones league, to the Swedish League which is 1-0, 2-1 games all the time and super tough defensively as guys don't give up much. I had a lot of success there and was able to adapt.

"Then from Sweden to the AHL: huge change, ice surface change and the game is way different. I was able to adapt. Then the adapting from the AHL to the NHL too – it's being able to adapt in every situation and finding ways to be successful."

Peters is as familiar with Ryan's evolution as anyone. He coached the five-foot-eight, 185-pound American while both were with the WHL's Spokane Chiefs and was the one who summoned him to try his hand at the NHL in Carolina, where they spent three years together.

After being courted by several teams this summer, Ryan signed a three-year, \$9.375 deal to show off his versatility in Calgary where he's become a fan favourite since Christmas.

"It was adjusting to a different city and organization; adjusting to Janks (Mark Jankowski) and I bouncing back and fourth between the third and fourth line the first 30 games and that wasn't exactly easy on either of us," said Ryan of the growing pains he endured earlier this season.

"Once I settled into, 'okay, this is where Bill wants me to play and this is how I'm supposed to play. How can I adapt in my role to better myself and better the team?' And once I figured that out I had more confidence and started to play better I guess."

And now Peters wants him to play a new role with significantly new demands.

"I think I've had a lot of success playing the way I have played, but at the same time I can't exactly play the same way as I would on the fourth line," he said of his top line duties.

"I'm going to have more opportunities, more minutes, more time with the puck. It's just making different decisions with the puck. I can make more offensive plays and take a little more risk."



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 19, 2019

"It's also different playing with those two guys. They're going to hang onto pucks more and put pucks in different areas so it's reading off them differently. It's more of an offensive game but I try not to change who I am as a two-way forward."

An analytics darling whose defensive prowess sees him start the bulk of his shifts in his own zone, Ryan has been a top-10 faceoff man in the NHL the last few years.

He's also one of the Flames' chief penalty killers on a unit that leads the loop in shorthanded goals.

Remarkable stuff considering he won scoring titles in Austria and Sweden to go with his league MVP awards at all three levels before he hit the NHL.

"It's hard to compare playing a top-six role in leagues like those to a top-six role in the NHL, but I think I have enough offensive skill and instincts that I just know what to do in those situations when I am playing with high end skill guys," said Ryan, who has nine goals, 29 points and a 57 per cent faceoff success rate on his first playoff-bound NHL squad.

"Just make plays and hold onto pucks and put them into positions to score. Obviously, I've played that way most of my career."

So, while many were surprised to see Ryan elevated to the top trio after Monahan left the game on Friday, he wasn't.

"Not really – I just feel I had been playing well to that point and Bill maybe felt I earned it," he said.

"I filled in for (Mikael Backlund) when he was injured. That's kind of the trademark of who I am as a player, especially in the NHL. Just being able to find ways to fit in wherever the team needs me and find ways to contribute and be successful."

Monahan skated with Sam Bennett (undisclosed injury) and the team's skills coach long before the Flames practiced Monday, and Peters said afterward they'd both be re-evaluated following Tuesday's game-day skate.

Both are crucial pieces on a team that can't change its approach just because it officially clinched its first playoff spot in two years due to Minnesota's loss Sunday.

After all, the goal of fending off San Jose for the division title will likely be all-consuming for the squad until Game 82 is finished.

"It's nice to play playoff-style, big games down the stretch for sure, but we all know being first-place would be really nice," said Ryan.

"It's interesting for sure."

As is the career path he continues to pave.

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 03.19.2019

1136819 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Leafs' Frederik Gauthier to miss two games with foot injury

Sportsnet Staff | @Sportsnet March 18, 2019

Toronto Maple Leafs centre Frederik Gauthier is slated to miss the next two games with a foot injury, the team announced Monday.

Leafs forward Frederik Gauthier (foot) will not travel with the team for the next two games in Nashville and Buffalo and will be re-evaluated on Thursday. #LeafsForever

— Leafs PR (@LeafsPR) March 18, 2019

Gauthier, 23, will remain in Toronto as the club embarks on a road trip starting Tuesday with back-to-back games in Nashville and Buffalo, respectively.

The club says the 2013 first-round pick (21st overall) will be re-evaluated Thursday.

Gauthier has three goals and nine assists in 62 games for the Leafs this season.

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 03.19.2019

1136820 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Garret Sparks' post-game comments strike nerve with Leafs fans

Luke Fox | March 18, 2019

The Toronto Maple Leafs don't want their mid-March mini crisis to be about emotion, about feeling.

They want to get the narrative under control just as they want to get their D-zone coverage under control.

Last week's defensive debacle should be about attention to detail, tidying mistakes and investing a hard day's work. Not a referendum on this team's heart.

So, after getting blown out by a depleted Ottawa Senators squad on Hockey Night in Canada Saturday in prime time, their fourth consecutive soft effort before a partisan crowd, one could see how a spurt of raw Garret Sparks honesty could rankle those with more seniority.

"We need more emotion from everybody. We need people to get angry. We need people to step up and get mad and take it personally," said the backup goalie, after appearing in all three of the week's losses and giving up nine of the Leafs' 23 goals allowed during the span.

Some context.

Due to Frederik Andersen's sudden bout with mortality, last week was the most Sparks had contributed all season.

The goalie had just spent 60 minutes under siege after commissioning a custom St. Pats mask and pad set for Saturday's affair. He had made 38 saves in the 6-2 humbling, including a couple beauties. He claimed ownership for the Sens' third and fourth goals, both fired off the stick of Magnus Paajarvi, but there were four other pucks that got past him.

"Maybe I should start overthinking these starts and just play some hockey," said Sparks, who is expected to get a rather quick chance at redemption Wednesday in Buffalo.

"It's been challenging. Me and Fred both have been trying to make saves for this team — that's all we ever try to do. We know we're missing some guys [Jake Gardiner, Travis Dermott, Kasper Kapanen], but we also have some pretty good players in the lineup in their place, so we're not going to use that as an excuse."

The backup goalie's comments struck a nerve for a fan base beginning to panic and a franchise that insists it's not.

"A little adversity never hurt anyone" would be the organization's message of choice to the public.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 19, 2019

Had, say, Auston Matthews or John Tavares or Morgan Rielly demanded more passion, the echo might ring a little differently.

Any reporter who tweeted Sparks' headline comments got ratio'd to Trumpian levels. A significant portion of Leafs Nation would rather the first-year full-timer stop the pucks than the presses.

Other critics point to heart or GM Kyle Dubas's speed-over-sandpaper roster construction.

The isolated clips of a smiling William Nylander fraternizing with the enemy don't help the perception that the Leafs might be letting complacency creep in.

Not unlike Zach Hyman after the letdown on Long Island, the source of a public outcry for more attitude was an unlikely one.

But Sparks is in the room. He has a better finger on the pulse than those of us who wait for the doors to open and the expletives to clear. And he has more at risk by deviating from the script.

Truth is, outside of coach Mike Babcock, we're not certain whose hand is on the rudder of this unsteadied ship.

Boston's veteran leadership core of Zdeno Chara, Patrice Bergeron and Brad Marchand, meanwhile, is regarded league-wide as one of the best.

We asked Mitch Marner whom the club looks to, who pipes up in those miserable intermissions when the Leafs are down multiple goals to a lesser light, when they look like a group that's already conceded home ice to the Bruins, up four standings points with 10 games to go.

"All of us. All of us talk in that locker room. We all know what we need to do," Marner said Saturday night. "It's not just one guy speaking up, but we've got to start doing it."

It wasn't so long ago these same Leafs were fun and loose. They comported themselves with a swagger that now feels elusive.

On the same night Toronto laid an egg in Ottawa, the hockey world watched Marchand flexing a Conor McGregor strut after scoring a critical overtime winner, then tweet out his own celebration.

They saw former Leafs backup Curtis McElhinney quietly win his 18th(!) game for Carolina, raise his save percentage to .916, and the Hurricanes gleefully play a few silly sheets of curling.

Yes, Jake Gardiner is injured. Yes, Frederik Andersen is human. But this is no time to pucker.

Pressure busts pipes. Pressure forms diamonds.

What's it gonna be?

Smack in the middle of hell week, the faded dynasty that is the cap-crunched Blackhawks came through Toronto, simultaneously a symbol and a warning of what the Leafs could become.

Jonathan Toews — whom Babcock called "the conscience" of Chicago's three championships — spoke about the importance of finding your best hockey in the days leading up to the post-season, how there's no switch that can be flicked overnight.

The Hawks, Toews lamented, stumbled into the dance in 2017 and were swiftly swept by the Predators.

It's not about seeding. It's about feeling.

Sportsnet NOW gives you access to over 500 NHL games this season, blackout-free, including Hockey Night in Canada, Rogers Hometown Hockey, Scotiabank Wednesday Night Hockey, the entire 2019 Stanley Cup Playoffs and more.

During a quieter moment, before hell week but not much, Tavares — our best guess for these Leafs' conscience — said something to a

couple of reporters that felt like he was driving to the heart of the matter.

"We want to go on a deep run, so you see what other teams are doing and understand what the landscape is," Tavares said.

"To get to where we want to get to, you're gonna have to get outside your comfort zone. And you're going to have to get to certain levels you may not have known you could get to.

"I don't think you realize how difficult it is. That's part of the journey. That's part of building a team and being part of a team."

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 03.19.2019

1136821 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Weekend Takeaways: Crawford finding form for course-correcting Blackhawks

Ryan Dixon | March 18, 2019

The Bell Centre was always a good bet to be the place for Corey Crawford's official 'I'm back' moment.

The Montreal native has long tortured his hometown Canadiens and he took things to a new level on Saturday night, turning aside a career-high 48 shots during a critical 2-0 Chicago Blackhawks win.

The Hawks — six points back of the final Western Conference wild card — are in tough to make the playoffs this season, meaning the team of the decade is on the verge of consecutive quiet springs. But, increasingly, there are reasons to believe Chicago is course-correcting and Crawford's recent play might be the most welcome among them.

Concussions have plagued the 34-year-old the past two years to the point that it seemed justified to worry about his career being in jeopardy. His most recent sideline stint saw Crawford on the shelf from mid-December until the second-last day of February. He's played seven games since returning and has gone 5-0-0 in his past five starts (including the game in Toronto last week he had to leave after 40 minutes due to illness) with a .955 save percentage.

The head-standing he did against the Habs earned him his fifth consecutive victory in Montreal, where he has never lost a regulation-time contest in seven outings (5-0-2).

The win was also the fifth straight 'W' for the Hawks, as they cling to slim playoff hopes. Should this push ultimately end in disappointment, there will be no shortage of good things for Chicago to carry forward. The emergence of Dylan Strome and the growing brilliance of sophomore Alex DeBrincat have completely altered the outlook of the top-six forward crew.

Brendan Perlini — the 22-year-old who came over from Arizona earlier this season with Strome — scored against the Habs for the eighth time in his past seven games. Defenceman Erik Gustafsson, who turned 27 on Thursday, has 29 points in the 30 games Chicago has played in 2019. Strome, DeBrincat and old favourites Patrick Kane and Jonathan Toews are all producing at better than a point-per-game clip in that period of time.

Kane is third overall in league scoring, while he and DeBrincat are both among the top seven goal scorers in the NHL.

Questions remain, specifically on a blue line that — despite Gustafsson's development — could use some sprucing up. To that end, the Hawks drafted D-man Adam Boqvist eighth overall last



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 19, 2019

June and could well add another top-10 talent to the mix this summer.

Of course, Chicago would happily make peace with a weaker draft position if it meant more brilliance from Crawford.

Other Weekend Takeaways

- What a roller-coaster three days for the Flyers, who remain on the outer fringes of the Eastern Conference playoff race. After blowing a 5-2 lead in Toronto on Friday, Philly tied its game in Pittsburgh with 18 seconds left in the third on Sunday and won it three ticks before overtime was set to expire. The man who notched the equalizer, James van Reimsdyk, has 10 goals in his past 11 outings. The Flyers — six points back of a wild-card spot — host ninth-place Montreal on Tuesday.

- Calgary also split its games this weekend — pumping the Rangers on Friday, then losing a heavyweight tilt in Winnipeg on Saturday — but got good news when Minnesota lost in overtime to the Islanders on Sunday.

- It's one game, but Jets fans had to feel emboldened watching Connor Hellebuyck stop 27 of 28 in the 2-1 victory over Calgary. If he can find last year's form down the stretch, Winnipeg's chances for the Cup will surge — especially in a Western Conference where questions about goaltending abound.

- Tampa's 6-3 pounding of Washington on Saturday gave the Bolts a franchise-best 55 wins with 10 games still on the docket (eclipsing the 54 they posted last year). As Tampa aims to capture the championship that's eluded it, the ridiculous question the word nerd in me must ask is, what will rule this year: The parity that's become so much of a league calling card you'd think Karl Marx ran the NHL, or the fact the Lightning are so good it's like they're almost a parody of an unstoppable squad that will march to a Cup victory?

- Brad Marchand's celly nod to Conor McGregor got a lot of attention after the Irish fighter dropped the ceremonial puck on what was surely more like St. Patrick's Day weekend in Boston.

After scoring the game winner, @Bmarch63 gives us his best Conor McGregor impression. pic.twitter.com/yeYvWL8any

— Sportsnet (@Sportsnet) March 17, 2019

But as a media member who's been chided for walking on a logo that's placed where people walk, I, too, think this is the bigger story.

Red and White Power Rankings

1. Calgary Flames (44-21-7): Matthew Tkachuk's five-point outing (2-3-5) on Friday gave the Flames consecutive outings with a five-point scorer following Johnny Gaudreau's 3-3-6 night last Tuesday versus the Devils.

2. Winnipeg Jets (42-25-4): Patrik Laine is having such a weird year. Six goals in his past 39 games, so basically a 12-goal pace over 82 for a guy who seemed like he might win the Rocket Richard Trophy entering this season. Of course, with 29 goals right now, he could still finish the year with close to 40 tallies. Also, he has seven assists in his past nine contests after registering 12 in his previous 62. So, he's a setup guy now?

3. Toronto Maple Leafs (43-24-5): That escalated quickly. Lucky to beat Philly 7-6 on Friday and pounded by putrid Ottawa 6-2 on Saturday. Worse yet, word is Jake Gardiner's health is not improving as hoped.

4. Montreal Canadiens (37-28-7): Haven't scored more than two non-empty-net goals in a game in five outings. Jonathan Drouin has four assists and zero goals in his past 16. Haven't beaten a team that presently holds a playoff spot since Feb. 19. However this largely pleasant surprise of a season plays out, it's clear the Canadiens still lack front-line offensive talent.

5. Edmonton Oilers (32-33-7): Eight straight multi-point games for Connor McDavid. If the season was three weeks longer, he'd likely chase down Nikita Kucherov for the scoring title.

6. Vancouver Canucks (30-32-10): Wednesday marks the start of a seven-game homestand for a team that's given its fans way more than anybody should have expected this year.

7. Ottawa Senators (25-41-6): Nice 20-game run with Ottawa for Anders Nilsson (.917 save percentage), who's likely earning himself an NHL contract for next year.

In Your Ear

Last Friday on the Tape to Tape podcast, co-host Rory Boylen and I took a deep dive on the Western Conference playoff picture and spoke to NHL.com's Lou Korac about the incredible second half the St. Louis Blues have turned in. We also delved into the Jack Adams debate, where we pointed out how it's dumb that the award always goes to the guy leading a team with good goaltending to a bounce-back season right before we decided this year's winner should be Barry Trotz for leading the New York Islanders — whose goals he have been terrific — to a fantastic bounce-back campaign.

Tape to Tape

March 15: We Got The (St. Louis) Blues

March 15 2019

Audio Player

Your browser does not support the audio element.

The Week Ahead

- Elias Pettersson's next point will give him 61, passing Pavel Bure (who was limited to 65 games in 1991-92) for the rookie scoring record in Vancouver. His first chance is Monday night in Chicago. Pettersson's freshman points-per-game clip is 0.98, ahead of Bure's 0.92.

- Columbus captured three of four critical points on the weekend, including a must-have, regulation-time victory over Carolina on Friday. Now the Jackets head out for a roadie through Western Canada that starts Tuesday in Calgary.

- Alex Ovechkin is two goals shy of his eighth 50-goal season and first since 2016-17. Washington hosts Tampa Bay on Wednesday in a rematch of Saturday's Bolts victory and, of course, the 2018 Eastern Conference final.

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 03.19.2019

1136822 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Canadiens still aiming to prove doubters wrong in final push to playoffs

Eric Engels March 18, 2019, 2:27 PM

BROSSARD, Que. — You can hear the chorus growing in volume around Montreal, that with losses in 11 of their last 17 games the Canadiens have shown their true colours. That they don't have what it takes to make it to the Stanley Cup Playoffs.

The coaches are hearing it, the players are hearing it, and with 10 games remaining — with the team three points back of the Columbus Blue Jackets for the final wild-card position in the Eastern Conference — both parties have a message to impart to the doubters.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 19, 2019

"We're not dead," said Canadiens coach Claude Julien on Monday. "We practised hard today and we're going to go to Philly and give it everything we have. That's the bottom line."

A game against the surging Flyers in Philadelphia on Tuesday is the first of many tests Montreal must face to achieve its goal of participating in the post-season. They'll face the New York Islanders at the Bell Centre on Thursday, welcome the Buffalo Sabres to town on Saturday, and they'll square off against the Hurricanes in Carolina Sunday and play the Florida Panthers next Tuesday before shuffling off to Columbus and closing out the season against cream-of-the-crop teams in Winnipeg, Tampa Bay, Washington and Toronto.

It's the type of schedule that would be tough to go through for a team firing on all cylinders, never mind one that has scored just one goal in its last two games. Combined with the results of late, it's no wonder people around town are questioning whether the Canadiens have what it takes to prevail in the race.

But the players haven't lost faith.

Montreal Canadiens head coach Claude Julien, left, and assistant coach Dominique Ducharme look on from behind the bench. (Graham Hughes/CP)

"We're a team. We're not going to give up," said Canadiens assistant captain Brendan Gallagher. "We're going to keep doing what we did for 72 games to get here. We know it's not going to be easy, but we're capable of beating anyone when we show up and compete and work. I think it's about having a simple mindset [that] it really doesn't matter; we've got 10 games here, there's 20 points up for grabs, just go take as many as you can, take it game-by-game, compete and enjoy the process. If we do that as a team, it should be a fun time."

It's been a particularly tense time of late for a player like Artturi Lehkonen, who has just one goal in his last 34 games and missed the team's best two opportunities to score in a 2-0 loss to the Chicago Blackhawks on Saturday. To a lesser extent, it's been trying for Max Domi, who's goalless in seven of his last eight games; for Tomas Tatar, who hasn't scored in seven; and for Gallagher, who last scored five games ago in a 3-1 win over the Los Angeles Kings.

Canadiens winger Joel Armia had a hat trick against the New York Rangers on Mar. 1 but hasn't scored a point in seven games since. Speedy scorer Paul Byron has only scored in one of his last nine games. And 18-year-old Jesperi Kotkaniemi, who has 11 goals and 32 points, last scored against the Flyers on Feb. 21.

Then there's Jonathan Drouin, who has 50 points on the season but hasn't managed to record one in 15 of his last 16 games.

"It's matter of time," said Gallagher about his struggling teammate. "He's too good of a player, he's too talented, and when he's putting in the work, which I think as of late he has been, results are going to come."

If they don't come immediately, the Canadiens will be in tough to prove their doubters wrong.

It's something they hadn't had a problem doing prior to Feb. 25 trade deadline. The Canadiens were universally expected to be a draft lottery favourite heading into the season, but they jumped out to a 6-2-2 start in October, had a great December after an average November, and they all but cemented themselves in a playoff spot by winning 10 of 16 games prior to their loss to the New Jersey Devils on deadline day.

They rallied with a couple of wins, but losses in five of their last seven games have put the Canadiens in a precarious position. But centre Phillip Danault believes they can dig themselves out, regardless of what anyone around town has to say about it.

"I think everyone was doubting us before the season started, too, so it's not a problem for us," he said. "We've been there, and we've just got to get back to the basics. Our work ethic is strong. Don't try to do too much out there; just do your job and have fun."

Habs this year: Gave up 6 in a loss to BUF, beat VGK 5-4 next game; gave up 6 to EDM, beat CGY their next game; gave up to 7 to MIN, beat CAR 6-4 next game; lost 6-5 to TB, beat DAL 3-2 next game; 6-3 loss to FLA, beat CBJ 3-2 next game; 6-3 L to TOR, 8-1 win vs. DET 2 gms later.

— Eric Engels (@EricEngels) March 9, 2019

That's been the recipe the Canadiens have followed for most of this season. And when things have fallen off the rails they've responded well.

Julien believes they'll do it again.

"Because they've done it all year," he said. "Simple as that. They've done it all year."

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 03.19.2019

1136823 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Kapanen closes in on return as Leafs aim to snap out of funk

Luke Fox | March 18, 2019, 2:20 PM

TORONTO — Kasper Kapanen had never endured anything like it before.

It was a "subtle play" on March 9 in Edmonton, the winger says, avoiding specifics, that concussed him for the first time. He didn't think much of the knock at the time and had no issue finishing the victory, but in the hours after the buzzer had sounded symptoms crept in.

So Kapanen approached team doctors, and they held him back all of last week — the most defensively porous stretch of the Toronto Maple Leafs' season.

"It's hard to describe. You just don't feel like yourself. You feel like you're in a bit of a fog. I felt slowed down. It's not fun," Kapanen said Monday, returning for the first time since the injury. "I'm just happy to be back practising with the guys today, and we'll see about tomorrow."

"I just feel like myself now."

The reinjection of Kapanen's speed and feistiness may be viewed as Step One in the Maple Leafs' suddenly difficult task of feeling like themselves again, after a disastrous and dramatic four-game stumble that rattled their confidence and could ultimately cost them home ice in Round 1 of the playoffs. (Hey, look, Boston sniper David Pastrnak also returned to practice this morning.)

Ready for full contact, Kapanen wheeled around on the third line with Nazem Kadri and Patrick Marleau, bumping Connor Brown to a more suitable role on the fourth unit with Nic Petan and Trevor Moore.

"Back-to-play protocol is really important, especially anything to do with the head. Kap' probably could've gone in two games ago, but I think it's important we handle the situations in the right way. That's why we've got a medical team. That's why the coach doesn't decide when you're playing," said coach Mike Babcock, relieved to see a core player return.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 19, 2019

"Kappy has got great speed, he's got tremendous work ethic, [and] he's a really good penalty killer."

Centre Frederik Gauthier suffered a foot injury. Gauthier did not participate in practice, will not travel with the Leafs to Nashville (Tuesday) or Buffalo (Wednesday) and will be re-evaluated Thursday.

While Kapanen's jump back into the lineup is no doubt welcome, it's the defencemen — Jake Gardiner (back) and Travis Dermott (shoulder) — whose returns are more anticipated.

The recent rash of Toronto's defensive injuries has conspired with suddenly spotty goaltending to make the organization take another hard look at its blueline depth.

Babcock recently tossed around the idea of calling up AHL super rookie Rasmus Sandin with Toronto Marlies coach Sheldon Keefe.

The left-shooting 19-year-old is currently tearing up the minors, putting up 11 points over his past seven outings while logging heavy minutes.

Ultimately, the decision-makers would rather Sandin over-develop in the farms system, so he can make an impact when he does arrive, like Kapanen.

"Let's not get in our own way because we're feeling a little tension. Forget that. We got good players here," Babcock said. "Adversity is really important for you in life. When you don't have some, you think you should get some so you can get better. When you get it, you don't want it. We have it right now. Let's pull together."

"The other thing in life: If you own it. What I mean by that, as the head coach of this club, this is my responsibility. If I'm the goaltender, I'm D, whoever I am, if I own it, I have the chance to fix it right away."

Monday's fixing ahead of Tuesday's test in Nashville was focused on sharpening a faulty breakout and limiting turnovers, on those goal-hungry forwards helping out a defence that's been sorely exposed.

The Leafs' blueline is hoping for a Kapanen-esque health bump from Gardiner or Dermott, or even AHL stud Calle Rosen (foot), who might be closest of all them.

"You're supposed to build the best program you can, so you have as much depth so you don't miss people. If you have enough, you don't miss a beat and you just keep going," Babcock said.

"There's other teams that have done a better job when different players are out than we have in keeping on going. That just tells you what state we're at, and you just gotta keep adding better players."

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 03.19.2019

1136824 Websites

TSN.CA / Babcock: Rare rested practice a time to 'recommit' to defence

Mark Masters

TSN Toronto reporter Mark Masters checks in daily with news and notes on the Maple Leafs who practiced at the MasterCard Centre on Monday before flying to Nashville for Tuesday's game against the Predators.

Due to a jam-packed schedule, Leafs coach Mike Babcock hasn't had many chances like the one he had on Monday. Since the all-star

break, there's been only three practices following a day off and the other two happened during lengthy road trips. So, this was a valuable coaching moment coming at a crucial time.

"A good opportunity structurally," Babcock said of the fast-paced session. "We got to recommit to being better defensively. We've given up too much on the rush here the last little bit. So, we got to do a better job that way and we understand that as a group."

The Leafs are coming off a brutal week, which saw the team allow 23 goals in four games with almost all the damage at even strength. The Tampa Bay Lightning scored a shorthanded goal during a terrible line change by the Leafs while the Philadelphia Flyers struck with the goalie pulled. There was no special teams work during Toronto's main session Monday. This practice was all about getting to the heart of the matter.

"You want a solution," Babcock said. "I don't know about you, but I'm way better when I know what the answer is. If I know what the answer is then I can fix it, so we did that here today ... Talked about it, gave the solution and now we have to solve the problem. I don't think there's a guy in our room that doesn't trust himself."

"We want hold each other accountable and obviously be better for one another," said centre Auston Matthews. "And the big message today was just commitment on defence and making sure all five guys are communicating and making sure we're in good spots so we can let our speed and skill show and we're breaking out easy and getting in and playing in the offensive zone."

Despite the latest setbacks, the atmosphere on Monday wasn't noticeably different.

"The mood's fine," Matthews insisted. "I don't know, I think we have a bit of a sense of urgency. I think we had a good practice today, getting our legs moving and just moving forward. We're not sulking or getting down on one another."

"A little adversity will be good for some teams sometimes," said goalie Frederik Andersen, "and I'm sure once we work our way out of it we'll be better off."

Matthews, Leafs stay upbeat amid slump: 'Mood's fine ...we're not sulking'

After a week that saw them give up a whopping 23 goals in only four games in what was one of their worst weeks of the season, the Maple Leafs are looking to get back on track this week. At practice on Monday, Auston Matthews said the Leafs' tough week hasn't changed the club's mood or belief in their team.

The Leafs have struggled to fill the void left by the injuries to puck-moving defencemen Travis Dermott (shoulder) and Jake Gardiner (back). Both have been out since late February.

"The thing about a team is you got 23 spots on it and you got a minor league team and you're supposed to build the best program you can to have the most depth so you don't miss people," Babcock said. "Now, if you have enough you don't miss a beat and you just keep on going. There's other teams that have done a better job when their different players are out than we have in keeping on going and that just tells you what state you're at and you just have to keep adding better players."

Considering the situation, Babcock was asked if there was any consideration given to calling up defensive prospect Rasmus Sandin. The 19-year-old has been impressive during his first season in the American Hockey League with his role increasing of late due to injuries to fellow blueliners Calle Rosen and Andreas Borgman.

"He's been really good," Marlies coach Sheldon Keefe told Leafs Nation Network on Sunday. "He's taken on a lot of responsibility here and you're pushing him towards 30 minutes for three games in two-and-a-half days. It takes a toll on any player but as a young guy he's handled it extremely well. Not just him but all of our defence,



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 19, 2019

with missing so many key people everybody is kind of playing in different situations and we've responded well.

"We haven't controlled play as much as we'd like to but we didn't crack defensively a whole lot in terms of giving up real scoring opportunities and that's a credit to our whole defence, but certainly Rasmus is leading the way."

Sandin seems to be rising in confidence with 11 points during a current seven-game streak so why not give the team's first-round pick from last June a look?

"We talked about that," Babcock acknowledged. "I talked to Sheldon about it, too. What have we done really well with (Kasper) Kapanen and (Andreas) Johnsson?"

"Let them develop," a reporter answered.

"So, let's not get in our own way because we're feeling a little tension," Babcock continued. "Forget that. We got good players here so dig in a play good."

Slumping Leafs resist the urge to call-up top prospect Sandin

With defenceman Rasmus Sandin on fire right now in the AHL, and the Leafs currently struggling defensively, Mike Babcock says although there have been some discussions about calling up the top prospect, he explains why he feels it's important to remain patient with young players.

There will be no quick fix to Toronto's situation and GM Kyle Dubas seemed to reference that in a tweet on Monday afternoon:

The Leafs should be getting a boost on Tuesday in Nashville as Kapanen appears likely to return following a concussion sustained on March 9 against the Oilers in Edmonton.

"Just a little play," he said vaguely. "Nothing too bad and just something happened and after just didn't feel like myself ... it's hard to describe the feeling you get. You're just off and don't feel like yourself."

Kapanen practised Monday for the first time since missing four games. He skated on a line with Nazem Kadri and Patrick Marleau.

"There's a back-to-play protocol and I think it's real important, especially with anything with the head," Babcock said. "Kap probably could've gone two games ago, but I think it's important that we handle the situations in the right way and that's why we have a medical team and that's why the coach doesn't decide when you're going."

Leafs Ice Chips: Kapanen's return imminent; Goat out for two

The struggling Maple Leafs received good news on Monday, as Kasper) Kapanen rejoined the regular lineup for practice and looks to be ready to return from a concussion that sidelined him for the past four games. Kapanen spoke about getting back into the lineup and the precautions he took with an injury as delicate as a concussion.

After getting shelled for 14 goals on 62 shots last week, Andersen was asked what he's working on.

"Keep doing your process that we can control," he said, "and really just try to keep it simple and working on battling on every puck and helping the guys out."

When asked what he learned from reviewing the film, Andersen didn't want to dwell on the past.

"You move past it and now I focus on Nashville and try to be prepared for that."

Andersen is 8-1-0 with a .929 save percentage in his career against the Predators. He missed the first game against Nashville (a 4-0 Leafs loss on Jan. 7) due to a groin injury.

Frederik Gauthier will miss at least the next two games with a foot injury. Nic Petan skated as the fourth-line centre at practice.

Lines at Monday's practice:

Forwards

Hyman-Tavares-Marner

Johnsson-Matthews-Nylander

Marleau-Kadri-Kapanen

Moore-Petan-Brown

Ennis

Defencemen

Rielly-Hainsey

Muzzin-Zaitsev

Marincin-Ozhiganov

Holl

Goaltenders

Andersen

Sparks

TSN.CA LOADED: 03.19.2019

1136825 Websites

TSN.CA / Leafs turn page on worst week of the season

Kristen Shilton

TORONTO – Picking up the pieces from their worst week of the season, the Maple Leafs are trying to take away something other than disappointment from an awful four-game stretch.

"Adversity is really important for you in life," explained coach Mike Babcock after the Leafs' practice on Monday. "When you don't have any, you think you should get some so you can get better. When you get it, you don't want it. We have it now. Let's pull together. Let's dig in. Let's get better. [These are] important lessons for us, we just have to build off it."

Improving on what just transpired shouldn't be hard. Toronto bookended last week with four-goal losses to the NHL's best team (Tampa) and its worst (Ottawa), while going a collective 1-3-0 and allowing 23 goals against.

It's a late-season fall so staggering that backup goalie Garret Sparks felt compelled to call out his team's lack of emotion following a 6-2 loss to the Senators on Saturday.

By Monday, the theme was turning the page. It had been weeks since Toronto last had a day off and practice day at home between games, a coveted opportunity to recuperate mentally and physically in this condensed span of the schedule. The Leafs used Monday's session to dial in on their defensive play.

The team will be right back to work on Tuesday in Nashville for the first half of another back-to-back set, before heading to Buffalo on Wednesday.

"I don't think there's a guy in our room that doesn't trust himself," said Babcock. "Does it not go your way sometimes? Absolutely. But



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 19, 2019

you get up each day, you work hard and you battle your way through it. What you want is a solution. I'm way better when I know what the answer is; when I know what the answer is, I can fix it. We did that here today. We've been giving up rush chances, so we talked about it, gave the solution. Now we have to solve the problem."

Coors Side Seats: Craig Button

TSN Director of Scouting Craig Button joins Jay and Dan in the Coors Side Seats to weigh in on the Maple Leafs' current woes, the Canadiens' offensive struggles, the Flames Stanley Cup potential and more.

Toronto entered last week averaging 2.83 goals against per game, and allowing the eighth-fewest goals all season. The Leafs gave up at least five goals in their next four games, with 21 of the 23 coming at even strength. They also fell behind by at least three to every opponent.

While long-term injuries to Jake Gardiner (back) and Travis Dermott (shoulder) have no doubt caught up to the Leafs and weakened their play in the defensive zone, a poor spell of goaltending from Frederik Andersen (1-2-0, .765 save percentage) and Sparks (0-1-0, .864 save percentage) has made matters worse.

For a club that's been hyping its own depth since training camp, the last seven days have exposed cracks in the Leafs' organizational foundation.

"If you have enough [depth], you don't miss a beat and you keep on going," Babcock said. "There are other teams that have done a better job when different players are out than we have [in] keeping on going. That just tells you what state you're at, and you have to just keep adding better players."

It's a strong message for Babcock to relay, although if either of Calle Rosen (foot) or Andreas Borgman (concussion) were available to be recalled from the American Hockey League's Toronto Marlies, the Leafs' blueline might be better off.

Slumping Leafs resist the urge to call-up top prospect Sandin

With defenceman Rasmus Sandin on fire right now in the AHL, and the Leafs currently struggling defensively, Mike Babcock says although there have been some discussions about calling up the top prospect, he explains why he feels it's important to remain patient with young players.

Babcock also made it clear Monday that 19-year-old prospect Rasmus Sandin won't be rushed out of his first AHL season to try to rescue the Leafs, despite tallying 11 points in his last seven games.

"Let's not get in our own way because we're feeling a little tension," said Babcock of respecting Sandin's development. "Forget that. We have good players here. Dig in and play good."

That leaves the same Leafs who got themselves into this mess responsible for finding the way out.

"You move past it," said Andersen, who is slated to start on Tuesday after being pulled from consecutive games last week for the first time in his career. "I'm focused on Nashville now and trying to be prepared for that. I thought we had a good practice today where we were able to do some good work."

The Leafs should have top-six winger Kasper Kapanen back in the fold in Nashville after he missed the team's last four games with a concussion. But just as Toronto gets one piece back, another domino falls in Frederik Gauthier, who won't be on the trip due to a foot ailment.

Regardless, winning isn't optional for the Leafs now if they still intend to close the four-point gap on Boston for second in the Atlantic Division and have the inside track on home-ice advantage for the first round of the postseason.

In order to do that, Toronto will have to start acting like a playoff team again.

"Once we work our way out of [this adversity], we'll be better off," added Andersen. "You don't feel good [going through it], but once you get out of it, you're better off. Hopefully you learn some really valuable lessons."

TSN.CA LOADED: 03.19.2019

1136826 Websites

TSN.CA / Who is playing well heading into the final weeks of the regular season?

Travis Yost

Now that we're about 10 games removed from the NHL trade deadline, we are getting a feel for how teams are playing heading into the final weeks of the regular season.

How a team is playing this late in the year is obviously critical. Most of the Stanley Cup contenders made moves at the deadline to improve their team performance, and we already know that analyzing more recent play is valuable in understanding the likelihood of future playoff success. (I attribute a lot of this to roster changes, injuries, general changes in individual/team level performance, and so on.)

We will run through all of the numbers in this space in the annual playoff preview on a rolling 25-game basis, but consider this a checkpoint of sorts for that type of analysis. The general caveats apply: in smaller samples of games, teams have disparate strength of schedules and may be uniquely impacted by shorter-term injuries and the like. I have isolated to the 19 teams that are fighting for 16 spots.

Let's start by just isolating for even strength play first. Here, you have each team's performance by three measures – the percentage of goals in their favour (x axis), the percentage of shots in their favour (y axis), and the points they have accumulated per-game (size of the bubble).

The best ways to think about performance here in our four quadrants analysis:

- Upper right quadrant: playing exceptionally well
- Lower right quadrant: playing relatively poorly, but having some puck luck (great conversion rates on shots and/or great stop rates)
- Lower left quadrant: playing poorly
- Upper left quadrant: playing well, but low on puck luck (poor conversion rates on shots and/or poor stop rates)

A few of the Canadian teams stand out here for some obvious reasons.

Montreal, as one example, picked a bad time to see their save percentages crater. Canadiens goaltenders are stopping just 88.7 per cent of shots, which is second worst in the league since the trade deadline (Kings are at 88.4 per cent). There is still reason to be bullish with this team on a performance basis at 5-on-5 because of how dominant they are territorially, but the unfortunate reality is that they're losing ground in the wild-card race in a hurry from this stretch. (We'll talk about the Montreal power play further down.)



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 19, 2019

Toronto is also noteworthy because for all of the guffawing about how bad this team is playing right now, everything is graded on a relative basis.

Let's be clear: there should be little pride in comeback wins against the Flyers, let alone getting throttled by the 31st-place Ottawa Senators. But even their roughest stretch of hockey sees them breaking even in shots and goals at 5-on-5, and it sounds like, absent Jake Gardiner, they're going to get some injury relief here in short order. So no, Toronto isn't playing well relative to most contenders. They are playing well enough to sustain the conversation about chasing the two seed in the Atlantic Division, though even that appears fleeting.

Lastly, there's Calgary. The Flames have been terrifying all season long and have routinely skated most teams out of the rink, be it at the Scotiabank Saddledome or elsewhere. We can still use this as a weekly reminder about how critical it is for the Flames to win the Pacific.

There are only a couple of other teams who appear comparably dominant in the most critical game state, and one just so happens to be that gigantic bubble over to the right in the form of the Vegas Golden Knights. Since the trade deadline, the Knights have doubled up their opponents in goals, are more than 100 shots in the black over a span of eight games, and have just one loss on the ledger. That loss came against Calgary on a back-to-back with a backup goaltender. So, yeah. Win the Pacific, Calgary!

Now, let's run through the same performance measures but including all situations data. This will be a bit choppier due to disparities in special-teams opportunities but it does well descriptively to explain why teams are moving up and down in the standings.

All situations data is much friendlier to the likes of the Boston Bruins and Colorado Avalanche, particularly on the goal fronts. That's because the Bruins (12.0 goals per 60 minutes) and Avalanche (8.7 goals per 60 minutes) are realizing power play success with high degrees of frequency, which is really just a continuation of how the regular season has trended for both teams on this front. (Nashville sees the biggest decline, as they are -4 in goal differential away from 5-on-5 since the trade deadline.)

I mentioned Montreal's power play earlier. Their position on the graph really didn't change, but I would be remiss to point out that there is an underlying theme here about the Canadiens and their power play. Montreal's reality is that their power play, by and large, will be the reason they miss the postseason if it comes to that.

Since the deadline Montreal has one power-play goal in nearly 50 minutes of hockey, which is 30th in the NHL over that span. It's something this team has dealt with all season long, and it's rearing its ugly head at the most critical point of the regular season.

An average power play this season is scoring a little over seven goals per 60 minutes of hockey, or converting on about 20 per cent of their power-play opportunities. Montreal season-to-date: 4.2 goals per 60 minutes of hockey and converting on fewer than 12 per cent of their power play opportunities. Just maintaining an average man advantage in Montreal would have seen them gain 18 goals in the standings, which is worth approximately three wins.

How critical is three wins? On Sunday, the Canadiens were four and three points back of the two wild-card slots, respectively. I'll let you do the rest of the math.

TSN.CA LOADED: 03.19.2019