



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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THE ATHLETIC

Is this the end? 15 NHL players who might have played their last game

By James Mirtle

Every corner of the sports world has been affected by the impact of COVID-19.

In the week since the NHL season was shut down due to the threat of the novel coronavirus, we've heard stories about arena workers losing their jobs, restaurants near stadiums struggling without business, minor-league players without paychecks and those in junior sent home. College players are being denied the chance to play for championships in their senior years; children are missing out on large portions of their minor hockey seasons and playoffs.

In some locations, the ice is even being taken out of arenas – proof of how low the optimism is that hockey will be back.

The impact on professional athletes is far down the list when it comes to folks you should feel sorry for in this situation. But it's still a reality that, because of the season being halted 85 percent of the way through, many established players could have played their last NHL games.

Some likely Hall of Famers are in that group, too.

Now, we already know that several high-profile older NHL players like Joe Thornton, Patrick Marleau, Ilya Kovalchuk and Jason Spezza intend to play next season in the NHL. I expect they can all get contracts – in many cases with the teams they're with. So I've left them off this list.

I also expect Bruins captain Zdeno Chara will be back, too, as he's still playing 21 minutes a night for the best team in the NHL at age 42 and is a fitness freak. He could well be the next Jaromir Jagr – minus the whole travelling mercenary thing.

In some of these cases, this unscheduled hiatus may even help prolong player's careers, as they'll get extra downtime to recover and get ready for next season. Beyond those big names, however, other veterans are likely going to be negatively affected by this shutdown.

What follows is my list of 15 players who very well may have retired without knowing it last week when hockey went away. This piece was compiled based on talking to several players and teams, in addition to many of our NHL reporters based in these markets. Also taken into account: a player's age, where their team is in the standings (non-playoff teams are much less likely to play games even if the season does resume) and their contract status, among other factors.

1. Ryan Miller, Anaheim

Honestly, it feels like half the time I talk to Miller there isn't hockey going on. It's either a conversation about a lockout or, in this case, a pandemic.

I messaged Miller a couple of days ago to explain I was working on this story and asked where he sat when it came to playing next season, assuming the Ducks don't get into another game the rest of the way.

He remains on the fence about what comes next, as this has all come on so suddenly.

"Too soon – can't even process what is happening," Miller said. "I think I need to get clear of the real-world issues that surround us ... and then sit with my wife and have a real discussion about where we are at with things."

Miller has had another solid season in Anaheim, appearing in 23 of their 71 games and posting a .907 save percentage behind a D that has had a lot of injuries and allowed a lot of chances. But he turns 40 this summer, and for family reasons – his wife is actress Noreen DeWulf – he wants to live in or near California, where most of the teams are not contenders. His opportunities to win that elusive first Stanley Cup appear fleeting.

If this is the end, Miller has had a marvelous career. Only three goalies – Marc-Andre Fleury, Henrik Lundqvist and Roberto Luongo – have won more games than he has since he entered the league back in 2002-03. He won the Vezina in 2009-10, the same year he put in a star turn for Team USA at the Olympics in winning a silver medal in Vancouver.

He very well could wind up in the Hall of Fame, given his credentials and those of his contemporaries. Not bad for a fifth-round pick out of East Lansing, Michigan.

"This is all pretty sad to see," Miller said of the pandemic's impact on society at large. "Hopefully we get a handle on it. We are doing our part. Feel like we are socially as distant as we can get."

2. Henrik Lundqvist, NY Rangers

At first, it felt like Lundqvist didn't fit on this list.

He's a legend with the Rangers, the only team he has ever played for. And he has another year left on his contract.

But you talk to people around the franchise a little and it's clear that the three-goalie situation this season has not been a lot of fun. It certainly sounds like the Rangers may buy Lundqvist's final year out, opening the door for him to either sign elsewhere as a UFA or hang up his pads.

Lundqvist just turned 38 earlier this month, so it's not out of the question this is it.

Like Miller, he's had an amazing career. A career .918 save percentage. A Vezina in 2011-12. Olympic gold (2006) and silver (2014). Sixth all-time in wins. The best Swedish netminder ever.

He's going to the Hall for sure. But does he have a final act as a veteran backup with a contender somewhere else? Could he somehow find a way to play for a Cup, one last time?

We'll see. I certainly hope so.

3. Justin Williams, Carolina

Williams wasn't certain about even coming back for this season, as he waited until midseason to jump back in.



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Now, it is up in the air whether he'll get to finish out his final lap.

Unlike Miller and Lundqvist, Williams' team is likely to play in the postseason, assuming there is one with 16 (or more) teams. So we may yet watch him in games at a later date.

If the playoffs are wiped out, however, he certainly sounds like someone at peace with the idea of moving on. He's 39 in the fall. He's won three Cups. And he's down to playing less of a role than he ever has, with only 13 minutes a game.

Maybe there are no more Game 7s for Mr. Game 7.

4. Mikko Koivu, Minnesota

Yeah, this is probably goodbye.

I mean, maybe the Wild get into some play-in games or something in a playoff setup designed to give teams on the bubble a chance. But Koivu turned 37 last week and his contract is up at the end of the year.

There's no question he has slowed down, and any return to play would have to be at a greatly reduced salary and role.

Still, this would be a tough way to end things for the classy captain. The league would be Koivu-less for the first time since 1994-95 when (much older) brother Saku entered the league and quickly became a star in Montreal.

And the NHL will be poorer for it.

"Ahh, yeah. It would be tough," Wild GM Bill Guerin told Mike Russo earlier this week when asked about Koivu's career potentially being over. "Nobody ... you know what, that's all I should say. That would be tough."

5. Jay Bouwmeester, St. Louis

It was probably the end anyway, but I'm not leaving him off this list.

Everyone is simply thankful Bouwmeester is alive after what happened on the bench in Anaheim earlier this season. I'm no medical expert, so I can't comment on the logistics of him returning to play one day. It sounds unlikely but hopefully, that's a comeback story he can write.

If not ... what a career. He was only 18 at his first NHL training camp in Florida, right out of the draft, and became a big-minute defenceman by his second season.

Since he entered the league, only Marleau, Thornton and Chara have played more games than Bouwmeester – and only Chara has logged more minutes, period. A big reason for that is Bouwmeester has been ridiculously durable, rarely suffering a significant injury in his 17 years in the league.

Still only 36, he's played more games at that age than all but 10 defencemen in NHL history.

Very quiet and humble, Bouwmeester took some silly criticism early in his career. Part of that was the fact he was a high pick and the top defenceman on some bad clubs in Florida and Calgary, which meant he didn't get a sniff of the postseason until he was nearly 30 years old. So it was nice to see him finally get the Cup last year in St. Louis and prove some doubters wrong.

If this is the end, he'll always have that. And five gold medals from various levels of international play for Canada, including the Olympics in 2014.

6. Brent Seabrook, Chicago

I'll say this much: He doesn't think this is the end.

He may be on the verge of turning 35. He may have a bloated contract that's going to be difficult to perform up to. And he may now be a bionic man after taking most of this season to have surgeries on half of his body parts.

But Seabrook is a gamer, and he'll do whatever he can to try and battle back.

The tough thing is that contract makes it harder for the Blackhawks to build a competitive team, if the best Seabrook can be is a depth defenceman. The buyout terms are simply brutal, too, so that won't be an option.

So is he headed for LTIR? Or a trade, with some salary retained?

I don't know how it happens but hopefully, he at least gets a shot with his rebuilt body. He was a massive part of Chicago's three Cup wins in six years and the rebirth of one of the NHL's marquee franchises. And he helped Canada win Olympic gold in his hometown in 2010 as part of a dream season.

But Father Time comes for us all.

7. David Backes, Anaheim

No, I'm not using a photo of him as a Duck or a Bruin. He'll always be the captain of some really good St. Louis Blues teams in my mind.

One personal story that sticks with me about Backes was during the last lockout. He was part of a video arguing the NHLPA's case when the season was on the verge of shutdown. It was really well done and eloquent on the players' part.

I sent him a message saying I thought as much and, within seconds, my phone was ringing. Backes was ready to talk. Did I want to do a story about the PA's position and trying to save the season?

That was kind of how he played, too. All in. Like Seabrook, he was a battler. Up for anything. You can see it in the 1,144 penalty minutes Backes piled up. And in his willingness to fill any role – even as an enforcer – as he gets to the end of his career here.

Backes turns 36 in May. He's been punted around a bit of late, and the Ducks aren't going to make the playoffs. He does have one year left on his deal, at big money, but what if Anaheim decides it's better to buy that out rather than keep him on the roster as a veteran mentor?

Then, yeah, this might be the end. But my guess is he battles onto the bottom of a roster somewhere for another year or two. That's his nature.

8. Craig Anderson, Ottawa

Anderson is another guy who's had an inspiring road to here.



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He was in the minors until he was 26 years old. Then a backup until he was 28. He didn't even start 100 NHL games in his first eight years in pro hockey.

But his numbers were sparkling, especially in the AHL and in Florida. And when it came time to be a starter, first in Colorado 10 years ago, Anderson continued to perform.

In the 10 seasons between 2007-08 and 2016-17, he had a .919 save percentage, putting him in the top 10 among No. 1 netminders. He started 431 games in that span, the league's 12th heaviest workload and took the underdog Senators on an unlikely playoff run as recently as 2017.

Anderson's late start as a starter meant that he was never a viable option to be a long-term No. 1 goalie. He's 39 in May, and his numbers have been subpar for three years running now.

COVID-19 could very well be the end of his career. At least he made nearly \$40 million along the way, the vast majority of which came after he turned 30 years old. There's a good story of perseverance in there, to be sure.

9. Dan Hamhuis, Nashville

That's the perfect picture for Dan Hamhuis. The pride of Smithers, B.C.

I first watched Hamhuis closely way back in junior, when he was a star with the Prince George Cougars and I was doing some junior scouting work for McKeen's Hockey in Kamloops. There was no doubt back then he was going to be an NHLer. And likely a very good one.

The Preds took him 12th overall, and he blossomed into a defensive mainstay for both Nashville and Vancouver over the next 13 years. Heck, his first three years with the Canucks he received a bunch of Norris votes, as his profile was raised in a bigger (and Canadian) market.

Now in his second stint in Nashville, Hamhuis is closing in on 1,200 games. But he's into strictly third-pair duty at this point, at age 37, and will be year to year contractually the rest of the way.

But he remains a solid, smart, defensive player with limited offence, so hopefully, this isn't the end.

10. Ron Hainsey, Ottawa

I'm glad I had a chance to cover Hainsey. The guy is one of a kind. A true character. And the kids with the Leafs loved playing with the sarcastic veteran who seemed to wear the same rumpled suit to the rink every day.

Like Anderson, he was another guy that had to battle to find his role. Hainsey was actually picked 13th overall by Montreal — and that was a helluva pick, even if it didn't look like it for years. The list of players from that draft class who played more NHL games than Hainsey has only two names on it: Justin Williams and Scott Hartnell.

But he was in the minors for years in that Habs organization before getting a chance with a crappy expansion outfit in Columbus. That was around the same time that analytics like Corsi began to gain popularity, and Hainsey quickly became a favorite among the numberly inclined.

He's bounced around a ton as of late, in part due to his own desires. I imagine he probably could have stayed in Pittsburgh or Toronto, had he been willing to accept a bargain of a contract. No, it was off to Ottawa, where he's on the verge of turning 39 next week and still somehow playing 21 minutes a night and making \$3.5 million.

I didn't bother reaching out to him to ask if he intends on coming back next season because, well, there's no way he would return that call. He's Ron Hainsey.

But my guess is he tries to keep going as long as he can. Perhaps with team No. 9.

11. Andrew Ladd, NY Islanders

Tough to watch him go out this way.

One of the worst of the ill-advised bad contracts signed on July 1, 2016, Ladd's still getting big money for three more years, with a \$5.5 million cap hit even as he approaches 35 years old.

He spent most of this season in the minors, however, before a late recall, and it's hard to see a path where he becomes an NHL regular again. With the way his contract is structured, it'll also be tough to buy him out, as there really aren't much savings involved in doing so — and they'd still have to pay him \$11 million.

In his prime, Ladd was a force. He landed that big contract thanks to some power forward seasons with Atlanta and Winnipeg, where he was the captain for five years. A fourth-overall pick, Ladd didn't quite hit the heights some scouts thought he would back in junior, but he was a good player.

Like a lot of guys who play that role, however, it gets hard to maintain it into your mid-30s. He's had back problems and a knee surgery lately, which has hurt his mobility. A lot of this points to Lou Lamoriello finding a home for him on LTIR, but we'll see how it plays out.

12. Jimmy Howard, Detroit

Howard turns 36 next week, and he's had a tough year with an awful Detroit team. His numbers before this season weren't terrible, however, so maybe he catches on as a backup elsewhere. But there's at least a chance he's played his last NHL game.

That kind of thing can be unpredictable with older goalies.

How will we remember Jimmy Howard? Well, a lifelong Red Wing, at least to date. A second-round pick in 2003, he just missed Detroit's glory years, not catching on as a regular until 2009-10, two years after their last Cup win.

But they were still a solid team and he was a decent contributor, putting up three seasons with big save percentages in his first four seasons as a No. 1. He finished second in Calder voting as a rookie and then sixth in Vezina voting in his fourth year in the league.

Then Nick Lidstrom left, the Wings began to decline and Howard struggled to regain that form. He settled in as a mostly average starter on a team that never had another meaningful postseason run.



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My guess is Detroit deems it time to move on, after a 17-year marriage. It's possible Howard plays on. But it's also possible there isn't a fit, given his age and the season he is coming off of.

13. Trevor Daley, Detroit

Thus continues a run on Red Wings.

We know they won't play another game, even if there's some sort of play-in format to make the playoffs, so we can write off that as a source of more games for Detroit. And they have a lot of these veterans on the downswing on the roster.

Probably not a very fun season to end a career on, that's for sure.

Daley is one of the players on this list whose game has really fallen off in recent years. In his heyday, he was a great skater and a wonderful utility D-man, someone who logged about 22 minutes a night for years with some pretty good Dallas teams. He then won a couple of Cups on an unheralded Penguins blue line in 2016 and 2017.

A second-rounder way back in 2002, Daley has now played more games than everyone in his draft class except Bouwmeester, Duncan Keith and Rick Nash, the latter of whom he was on the verge of passing before the NHL shut down. That's a testament to his durability but also his ability to fill any role, from top pair to depth D, even as he aged.

But Daley's going to be 37 and he's down to under 16 minutes a game on a bad team. I'm not sure if he'll get another contract or not, not with the NHL's continued push to get younger and younger. He had a good run, though. And he deserves a tip of the cap on the way out.

14. Roman Polak, Dallas

At 33, Polak's one of the younger players on this list, but he's also a bit unusual in the modern NHL. He's massive and mean and not the greatest with the puck on his stick.

I didn't really know if he'd get another NHL opportunity after Toronto passed on him a couple of years ago, but he's found a role as a depth D with Dallas the past two years. He's had some brutal injuries the past several years – including

fracturing his sternum in the Stars' opener this year – so that's beginning to be a factor for the big man.

Polak may catch on somewhere as a sixth or seventh D next season for a contract around the league minimum. Or maybe he opts to go overseas and make bigger money there to close out his career.

He's had a darn good career for a sixth-round pick, though, playing more games than all but three other defencemen from that 2004 draft: Mike Green, Alex Edler and Alex Goligoski. He's a fascinating guy, too, someone who should have a future in the game in some capacity when he's done. It'd be fun to see him do some media.

15. Jonathan Ericsson, Detroit

Last on the list is the big man from the Red Wings.

Another guy who has spent his entire career in Detroit, Ericsson sort of flew under the radar leaguewide. At his very best, he was a modest second-pair type, but that was what landed him the ill-advised six-year, \$4.25 million a season contract in 2014 that he's just finishing up this season.

The more the NHL moved towards smaller, younger, faster defencemen who could skate, however, the further it moved away from players like Ericsson. Which is a problem when you're locked into top-four money until age 36.

Of late, he hasn't even been able to play up to the level of a fringe NHL defenceman, which is how he wound up in the minors this season.

Fans have been talking about buying Ericsson out for more than three years now, so I don't imagine many will miss him.

If this is the end, Ericsson will sit seventh all-time in games played as a Red Wings defenceman, which is pretty remarkable for an Original Six franchise. He also sits seventh in career games among defencemen picked in the ninth round, too, so there's always that.

Honorable mentions: Mike Smith (Edmonton), Andy Greene (NY Islanders), Deryk Engelland (Vegas), Justin Abdelkader (Detroit), Trevor Lewis (Los Angeles)

Who did I miss?



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SPORTSNET™

31 Thoughts: NHL teams prepping for anything amid COVID-19 suspension

By Elliotte Friedman

- Inside the ECHL season cancellation
- Why expanded NHL playoffs make sense
- What's in the Calgary Flames cookbook

Twelve hours after helping a teammate move out of his hockey-season home, James Henry is available to talk. The Winnipeg-born forward, who played five WHL seasons with the Vancouver Giants and Moose Jaw Warriors, is an ECHL veteran.

It quickly becomes obvious that, as captain of the Adirondack Thunder and the team's PHPA rep (the minor leagues' version of the NHLPA), Henry feels an obligation to speak out.

"I think we expected a little more support and backing," he says. "We didn't get as much effort as we should have."

Last Saturday night, the ECHL announced it was cancelling the rest of the 2019–20 season, including the playoffs. A couple of sources indicated the conference call was "heated," with some teams arguing it was wrong to cut loose players without pay.

"I wouldn't call it heated," Commissioner Ryan Crelin said on the 31 Thoughts podcast. "There were varying viewpoints, and it was emotional.... But there were a couple of factors that everyone agreed on. We wanted to find something to hold on to, a way to keep the season going... but I wouldn't say that it was heated."

"It was an excruciating decision, (but) 100 per cent the right decision."

The ECHL has a weekly salary cap of \$13,300 per team (20 players). The floor is \$10,100. There are playoff bonuses — after the first round. Multiple sources indicated the biggest issue was the future of the league itself. Crelin and PHPA Executive Director Larry Landon were concerned about franchises surviving the economic impact of COVID-19.

"We were worried about three or four teams," Landon said Tuesday. "This was the best thing to do to protect players and the CBA. We will do our best to save jobs. These are difficult times, with difficult decisions on all fronts. No one wants to be in this position. If you look at the entire picture, the vast majority of ECHL teams are in no position to pay players with no revenues."

"That's certainly a top priority — to maintain our league and our member teams," Crelin added. "Economic activity is seizing up right now.... Even our teams at the top of attendance are going to be significantly impacted. At this point I believe we made the prudent decision to give us the best opportunity to maintain our league and set up our league for future growth for years to come. We're working together to try and help all of our members."

The best piece of news is that players' health insurance will be covered until June 30. Moving expenses are covered, too. If Henry had a request, it would be to honour one other CBA provision: If a player is waived and doesn't get a new job in two weeks, he receives two weeks' pay as severance.

"You go from fully expecting to be compensated to nothing," he said. "It's an opportunity to help people who need it. Some guys are renting out their regular place during the season, so they have to find somewhere else to go. They've lost their April rent (at their ECHL home). Opportunities to earn money are going to be hard right now because people aren't hiring."

"We discussed it, but under our CBA, when you invoke end of season, there is no severance," Crelin said. "We understand this is a troubling time for everyone. For our teams, for our players, for all stakeholders in the ECHL community. The PHPA recognizes that and we recognize that as well. So we'll be working as partners in hockey to try and assist everyone."

The ECHL and PHPA have a "career enhancement" plan. It allows players to take courses or learn a trade, and can help with job placement. Landon said he's found work for three players, but Henry recognizes there won't be enough opportunity due to shutdowns.

Both Crelin and Landon said other avenues to help are being discussed.

"We have a player-hardship fund — that will be looked at," Crelin said. "How can we build up that fund, and then react on a case-by-case basis, or perhaps a blanket scenario — make sure we are supporting everyone in our community on both sides of the aisle?"

"Given the uncertainty, nothing is off the table," Landon added. "We know they need help. We're working to create funds for economic need."

One idea: There is one team (rumoured to be defending Kelly Cup champion Newfoundland) that apparently offered to pay its players through the remainder of the regular season. The Growlers are unique in that the parent Maple Leafs have several players on NHL/AHL contracts there, so the big club is responsible for those. With this added flexibility, there's room to help out those on ECHL deals.

It was not allowed.

"Under our end-of-season [rules], any payment to an ECHL-contracted player would be a salary-cap violation," Crelin said. "The PHPA represents all their members and we represent all our teams. We act as a league and move forward as a league.... Collective bargaining takes months and months. We had hours and hours. We stayed within the terms of that agreement."

He added, "We recognize these are extraordinary times."

Yes, they are. That's why any team that wishes to step in should be allowed to — on a one-time, agreed-upon scenario.



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For one thing, it embodies the spirit of what needs to happen for everyone to survive this. For another, if a team takes more responsibility upon itself, that's fewer players that the league and PHPA have to worry about. The emergency fund can help those others.

One agent said it best: "This just sucks. It's not anyone's fault — it just sucks."

"Some sleepless nights, no question," Crelin finished. "But you've got to make what you believe is the right decision.... There were moments where you believe it is the wrong decision. But as we reflect on it here, I'm confident it was the right decision."

31 THOUGHTS

1. We all need a good smile right now, and, on Tuesday night, it came from the Canadiens' and Kings' twitter feeds. The two teams were supposed to play last night. Instead, their social media teams did video-game simulations:

In a textbook example of unconscious bias, Montreal won 6-2 on its feed, the Kings won 5-4 on theirs. Los Angeles had Trevor Lewis scoring the winner in the last few seconds, and the celebration surrounded Shea Weber:

A true simulation would have seen Weber pile drive everyone in anger.

2. The OHL, QMJHL and WHL notably cancelled the remainder of their regular seasons, but not the playoffs. According to Sportsnet CHL analyst Sam Cosentino, the No. 1 thing that allows them to do on time is their drafts — which would be online. As for playoffs, what does Sam think?

"Contingency plans are being discussed frequently," he said. "But with the Memorial Cup scheduled for Kelowna, government regulations will determine that."

How late do you think the CHL can wait?

"I think it has to happen before the NHL draft."

3. In its media release last week announcing the season's pause, you could tell the NHL was well aware it would be impossible to escape at least one positive test to a player. That happened Tuesday night with an Ottawa Senator. The official position is that testing is necessary if a player is symptomatic and/or determined to need a swab. This is always a thorny issue. New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio was upset when Brooklyn Nets players were tested:

A great deal of "flattening the curve" is about self-isolation, social distancing and limiting contact. That's what the NHL and NHLPA are asking players to do.

4. Obviously, there are a few questions about the Sens player's identity being undisclosed. It was his choice. In the NBA, both Kevin Durant and Rudy Gobert agreed to put their names out there, but it is a personal decision.

5. Ottawa visited Los Angeles in the most recent game of this NHL season. That was March 11, days after the Brooklyn Nets were at the same arena to face the Lakers. (The Senators reportedly used the same dressing room as the NBA visitors.) They also played earlier in both San Jose and Anaheim. The game against the Sharks was played after public health officials in Santa Clara County advised the public to avoid

large gatherings in the area. (A mandatory decree came two days later.) The team also had a day off in the Los Angeles area on May 8. Some of the players went to the basketball game that night. So those will be the steps everyone tries to retrace.

6. Nine months ago, 25-year-old winger Spencer Foo decided to try a new hockey adventure, leaving AHL Stockton for Kunlun Red Star of the KHL.

"I loved it," Foo said Tuesday, back home in Canada after his team missed the playoffs. "It didn't end the way we wanted it to end, but I had a blast."

Red Star had a legit excuse, as it spent the last month of the season on the road as COVID-19 expanded.

"At the start, it was hard to find information into what was happening because news is in [Mandarin], and you can't find translations. By the time we left Beijing the final time, there was nobody on the subways, nobody on the street. That was crazy because you are used to seeing people everywhere."

Because he could not go back to collect belongings, Foo came home with what he carried on his final road trip. The rest of his stuff is still over there. One of the reasons he went was the possibility of representing China at the 2022 Winter Olympics.

"That is still the plan. A few of us (who played there) are still hoping that is an option."

You're going back for next season?

"Yes. It was an awesome experience."

7. How much Mandarin did he learn?

"We gave it a valiant effort," he laughs. "It's a tough language, props to anyone who can learn it."

What can you say?

"I can do 'Thank you,' ask for water and direct a taxi driver. Another try next year. But it makes you think of European players who come to Canada and the U.S. for sure."

Kunlun's schedule is not easy, simply because of location. They'd go on a 10- to 14-day road trip and then back to Beijing, where players would stay in a hotel or an AirBNB. It meant checking in and out over and over again, sometimes with a roommate. Foo joked captain Brandon Yip, who played 174 NHL games with Colorado, Nashville and Phoenix, always had a single room, "Because he'd be complaining if not. The travel does create a decent amount of adversity, but we had a good group that embraced being over there and seeing the world. When you're going hotel to hotel, you end up being very close. It's fun that way."

8. What was the most difficult thing about playing there?

"It's hard to explain, but you think it is going to be a really offensive league, because there are so many super-skilled players. But it is much more defensive. You get some NHL-sized rinks, some Olympic and some in Finland that are in the middle of the other two. Switching rink-to-rink gives you a different feel depending on where you're playing. We played on an Olympic-sized rink in Beijing, where it slowed down — not quite as many chances. It was hard to find offence."



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Foo finished with 25 points in 58 games.

“Once I figured it out, I felt a lot more confident.”

Does head coach Curt Fraser still have that killer glare?

“He’s an awesome guy, great for us,” Foo laughed. “We didn’t see it too much, but you know it is there.”

9. What is the wildest hockey-related thing you saw?

“Oh, the fan stuff in the intermissions. There were a couple games I sat out with an injury. There was one where they came on the ice in running shoes after a fresh scrape — two teenage girls doing a tug-of-war, no helmet, falling all over the place. It was hilarious.”

Finally, I asked what he thought of hockey’s chances for success in China.

“There are a ways to go, but the good thing to see is there were kids and families at our games. The biggest thing is getting the youth there into the sport.”

10. In case you are not a basketball fan, ESPN’s Adrian Wojnarowski reported the NBA’s Board of Governors had a conference call with former U.S. Surgeon General Vivek Murthy on Tuesday. According to Wojnarowski: Murthy explained the “grim potential impact of coronavirus pandemic in U.S., but left owners with hope of re-starting season/playoffs before July.”

11. It is a tough time to be an optimist. We had heard about the impact the coronavirus would have, but now, those of us in North America are seeing it play out in real time. Everyone is stressed about the financial implications. When it comes to the NHL, there’s nothing anyone can do but see how it plays out over the next six weeks. We can speculate all we want (and come up with fun/crazy playoff scenarios) but we won’t know until close to the end of April at the earliest.

“All we can do is chill until then,” one agent said.

That’s not going to be easy, but I’m going to try and make it my (mental) approach. On his Pull Up podcast, Portland Trail Blazers guard CJ McCollum talked with teammate Carmelo Anthony about meditation — how it helps them deal with life’s insanities. There are just so many factors here we cannot control.

If I could recommend one thing that I’ve picked up later in life: 10 minutes of meditation per day, which I try to do with my son. I never thought I’d be into anything like that, but it slows down life and clears your mind. Very valuable.

12. Many of you, great hockey fans that you are, have asked good questions like, “What happens with the conditional first-rounder in the Jason Zucker trade?” or “What happens with the conditional pick based on James Neal/Milan Lucic production?” or “How do rookie bonuses hit or not yet hit affect my favourite team’s cap next year?” These are all good questions. At this time, there are no good answers. It depends on when the NHL resumes and what things look like.

Obviously, there will be changes to the NHL’s calendar. There’s nothing confirmed, but teams are preparing for the possibility of life without a combine, a draft from their own war rooms, and no visitation period for free agency. Who knows

how everything plays out, but organizations know they need to be prepared for anything.

13. One of the most interesting questions that one exec asked: What happens in situations where teams were considering front-office and/or coaching changes? Does this give them a reprieve? Can you do a proper search/interview process under these circumstances?

14. One of the theories behind the AHL not cancelling its season yet is the NHL clubs may want a “taxi squad” of extra players available to them for any playoffs that might happen.

15. We’ll get back to business later, but I wanted to inject some fun throughout the blog. If you are looking for some new recipes, allow me to present (via @derek_orr12 on Twitter) Flaming Foods: A Cookbook of Enjoyable Recipes by your Calgary Flames Families:

Derek said Doug Risebrough was a family friend, and gave them the book. Please enjoy selections from Al MacInnis, Bob and Martha Johnson, and Harley and Becky Hotchkiss:

I know some of these may not be 21st-century healthy, but who cares?

16. Via text, I asked Al MacInnis if he really made the Cape Breton Clam Chowder or the Turtle Cake.

“Absolutely,” he answered. “You grow up quick when moving away from home. We didn’t have a team chef to make three meals a day.”

17. Okay, so when it comes to the possibilities for playing again, here are a couple of things that are important to the NHL: 1) awarding a Stanley Cup this year, and 2) ensuring a full 82-game season next year. As we sit here on March 18, we have no idea if these things are going to be possible, but those are the targets.

18. Existential question, if it came down to it: If you’re Chicago or Montreal, would you rather be in the playoffs or the draft lottery?

19. This is why I think an expanded playoffs with a unique format will be targeted, if it’s at all possible. One of Commissioner Gary Bettman’s biggest successes has been negotiating TV deals. We all know the U.S. one is up soon. When sports comes back, people are going to be starving for action. Go big or don’t bother. So if there’s a way to include eyeball-catchers like the Blackhawks and Canadiens, it’s going to happen.

20. I’m a big believer in play-in games, and, as Chris Johnston reported, we could very well see some. But, instead of two games, total goals, there’s a better way. After all, if the first game ends 5–1, the second is borderline wasteful.

So here’s the better way: Game 1 is only 60 minutes no matter what. If Game 1 ends in a tie, then Game 2 is winner-take-all. And if someone wins Game 1, then the other team must win Game 2 in regulation to force sudden-death overtime. That gives us a better chance for an incredibly meaningful Game 2. Love it.

21. Jeff Marek’s crazy playoff idea from the 31 Thoughts podcast: Go home until September. Play the Stanley Cup playoffs then, which crowns a new champion in



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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December. Then start the season again in January, with another champion in June. The NHL's desire for an 82-gamer next year ruins that, as does the question: What do you do with the teams who don't qualify, assuming not everyone is invited? But I have to say I didn't hate it as much as I hate most of Marek's ideas.

22. I don't know if the NHL has discussed it, but an NBA friend says the idea of playing the playoffs at one or two locations that are declared "safe" first has been thrown around. More of a brainstorm than actual policy, though.

23. Some previously taped podcasts will be coming. One is with Nashville head coach John Hynes, who has not been afraid to bench his best players.

"There's a reason why I'm in Nashville now," Hynes said. "Part of it was the team was not where it needed to be record-wise. So when we came in, we really talked about — as a new coach — our standard of play, our standard of competitiveness, the work ethic that it takes to be successful every night has to be higher. We had talked about what the standard was going to be, and we talked about having guys earning their ice time. If you're a 20-minute player and that's your ice time, we'd expect you to play at a high level for 20 minutes. When I first came in, I thought our team was very inconsistent, and part of our inconsistency was we didn't have the right kind of work ethic and competitive level night in and night out. In a situation where we have to win games, [the most competitive players] are going to get the most ice time. To their credit, I think those guys understood what was going on. Their games have gotten better — they accepted and wanted to know why and what they needed to do to have to get it."

I decided to do some fishing and ask Hynes if there was a particular conversation that struck him as honest. He mentioned Viktor Arvidsson.

"He self-admitted, 'I'm not having a great year,'" the coach said. "My job as a coach is to help this guy come through. He's one of our better players, he's had massive success in the league.... I say, 'If you were the coach, the way you're playing right now, would you play you 18 minutes a night?' And he says, 'Probably not.' Okay, well, these are the areas that need to get better. This is how we need to work to get these areas better for me to be able to give you that ice.... To his credit, he [put in the work]... and he's progressively gotten better."

24. Courtesy @Liam_Morrison95: The unofficial 31 Thoughts: The Podcast drinking game. Don't do this and drive.

25. Some NCAA free-agent stuff: On his Instagram, Scott Perunovich made it clear his successful time at Minnesota-Duluth is over:

The 45th-overall selection in the 2018 NHL draft, he could become an unrestricted free agent if not signed June 1 by the St. Louis Blues, who picked him. (The June 1 date could change, too, since everything is up in the air.) All indications

are that the Blues are the frontrunners, but he knows there would be plenty of opportunity if he chose to examine it.

26. Perunovich's college teammate, Nick Wolff, signed in Boston on Wednesday. The AAV is \$792,500.

27. Others getting closer to a decision: Mitchell Chaffee (UMass); Connor Mackey (Minnesota State-Mankato); Brinson Pasichnuk (Arizona State); Colton Poolman (North Dakota). Teams can't sign them to contracts for this season, which would usually be a recruiting strategy — "We'll let you burn the year." Curious to see if any of them wait until we get some kind of resolution, to see if "burning the year" will still be possible.

28. Clarkson's Josh Dunne has notified teams he will stay in school.

29. The U.S. National Development Team had to cancel a recent camp for the 2004 birthdays.

"That's a talented group," one source said.

It may force decision makers to select the team from the group invited to the camp. It's imprecise, but unusual measures for unusual times.

30. Last Saturday, the NFL and NFLPA agreed to a new CBA through 2030. It was a very close vote, contentious and controversial. Superstars like Aaron Donald, Aaron Rodgers, JJ Watt and Russell Wilson publicly voiced their reasons for voting "no," but their side was defeated. One of the theories out there is that, as bulletproof as the NFL is, there were concerns about what the COVID-19 outbreak could do to finances. While the highly paid superstars were going to be financially safe, other players weren't as sure.

At a time when the NHL and NHLPA are negotiating their own extension, you wonder how this will affect those talks. Unlike with the NFL, this pandemic hit at a critical point of the NHL season. On last week's conference call with the clubs, estimates were that \$1 billion in revenues could be affected — approximately 20 per cent of the 2018–19 total.

31. The biggest player concern will be escrow — as it always is. If no playoffs are played, players are concerned it could get to 30–35 per cent, which would be the highest ever. It's possible there would be conversations about spreading that out over multiple seasons, but that's a big bite from the paycheques.

The biggest concern from teams will be cap, and you can expect the NHL and NHLPA to work together on keeping it as close to this year's \$81.5 million as possible — as opposed to lowering it.

The biggest concern for owners will be damage to other business, never mind hockey. And, while player salaries are tied into a percentage of the cap, other expenses aren't. So, we'll see if there is incentive to work together. Cap, escrow, Olympics, World Cup, everything. The world is different today.

TODAY'S LINKS

<https://theathletic.com/1681674/2020/03/19/is-this-the-end-15-nhl-players-who-might-have-played-their-last-game/>
<https://www.sportsnet.ca/hockey/nhl/31-thoughts-nhl-teams-prepping-anything-amid-covid-19-suspension/>