



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 21, 2018

THE NEWS & OBSERVER

Five takeaways from the Hurricanes' 7-3 loss to the Oilers

By Chip Alexander

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March 20, 2018 11:06 PM

Updated 8 hours 25 minutes ago

Raleigh

It didn't have a big crowd. There wasn't a lot of energy in the building.

But to get hammered 7-3? The Carolina Hurricanes had a hard time Tuesday trying to explain such a lackluster effort and beating at PNC Arena, when they were booed at game's end.

"We weren't playing good from the start right through to the end," Canes center Jordan Staal said.

That pretty much covers the full 60 minutes. There were a few glimmers of a pushback — goals from Sebastian Aho and Teuvo Teravainen after the Oilers spurted ahead, each pulling the Canes within a goal. But Edmonton's speed and aggressive forechecking was too much for a team whose defense was in disarray too much of the game.

"We never really got a spark, never really got engaged," Canes coach Bill Peters said. "It's disappointing. It's disappointing when our compete is the way it was tonight."

Staal said the Canes need to "come to work every game," adding, "We can't lay eggs like that every game."

— Don't put all the blame on Scott Darling. That was Peters' opinion about the goaltending Tuesday.

Darling, the winner Sunday against the New York Islanders, was in net for all seven goals as the Oilers worked their way into good scoring positions and made the most of their shots, scoring six times on the first 19 shots.

Peters said the coaching staff discussed replacing Darling with Cam Ward after the Oilers' sixth goal but decided against it.

"We were pretty flat," he said. "I didn't think that was going to do much for us. It didn't make any sense to put Cam in, in that environment."

— The Canes' Aho and forward Jesse Puljujarvi of the Oilers are good friends and the two joined Teravainen for a meal

Monday night in Raleigh. Good Finnish food, Puljujarvi said. Good company.

All three then scored in the game. Aho and Puljujarvi each had a goal and an assist, and Teravainen scored.

Aho centered a powerhouse Finnish line in the 2016 World Junior Championship, with Puljujarvi on one wing and Patrik Laine of the Winnipeg Jets on the other. The Finns won the gold medal in Finland and were treated like rock stars after it.

Puljujarvi said he and Aho played five years together as juniors. "He has good speed and sees all over the ice, a very smart player," Puljujarvi said. "I really liked playing with him."

— A year ago, Valentin Zykov was recalled from the Charlotte Checkers in March and scored in his first NHL game. The Russian forward then was injured in the second. That was that.

"That was unexpected," he said Tuesday. "That's about all I can say."

Zykov is back, saying he's more comfortable and confident. He has 32 goals for the Checker to lead the AHL, 16 on the power play, and had 15:05 of ice time in his first game for the Canes this season, playing on the fourth line with Victor Rask and Phil Di Giuseppe. Zykov had one shot in the game and was used on a power-play unit.

Many Canes fans have been asking why it took so long to get Zykov up to the big club, given the Canes' scoring problems. No complaints from Zykov, however.

"I'm just playing hockey," he said. "The rest is not up to me."

— After a listless 3-1 loss to the San Jose Sharks on Feb. 4, Peters wrote on a whiteboard "Who are we? 29 games to find out" at the next practice. He then tapped it with his stick for emphasis as he left the ice.

Twenty games later, after going 7-10-3, the answer is in: a team that will again miss the playoffs, that has not established a team identity.

"If we don't compete, if we're not the hardest-working team, we don't give ourselves a chance," Peters said.



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Oilers speed past Hurricanes for 7-3 victory

By Chip Alexander

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March 20, 2018 09:23 PM

Updated 9 hours 4 minutes ago

Raleigh

Sebastian Aho scored his 26th goal of the season and had an assist.

Teuvo Teravainen scored his 22nd.

But for the Carolina Hurricanes, that covers most of the highlights Tuesday as the Edmonton Oilers skated and hustled to a 7-3 victory at PNC Arena that was as decisive for the winners as it was embarrassing for the home team.

The Canes last won at home on March 2, when they topped the New Jersey Devils. That seems eons ago as the Canes' losses have piled up and they have badly faded out of playoff contention.

The Canes' defensive breakdowns came so frequently Tuesday that they were hard to keep up with as the Oilers — getting a goal and three assists from Leon Draisaitl — led 3-2 after the first period and 6-3 after the second.

Brock McGinn also scored for the Canes (31-31-11), getting his 13th in the first period. But McGinn first took a big hit from defenseman Matt Benning and was credited with the goal when his backhand pass was knocked past goalie Cam Talbot by Oilers defenseman Yohann Auvitu.

Benning later put another hard hit on McGinn in the Edmonton zone. Benning then sped down the ice and scored, and Auvitu also had a goal for the Oilers.

Aho, playing with center Jordan Staal and Teravainen, converted a power-play pass from Justin Faulk into his goal, ripping a shot from the top of the left circle in the first. Teravainen scored off an Aho pass four minutes into the second to pull the Canes within 4-3, but the Oilers answered.

Auvitu scored off the rush and Draisaitl with a sharp-angle shot as goalie Scott Darling was touched for six goals on Edmonton's first 19 shots.

The Canes did a decent job in containing the Oilers' Connor McDavid, the dynamic center who had 34 goals and 89 points entering the game. McDavid did not have a shot until the third period although earning two assists.

With defenseman Noah Hanifin out with a concussion, the Canes had Faulk paired with Klas Dahlbeck and it was a rough night on the back end — both had minus-4 games.

The game was the first of the season for Canes forward Valentin Zykov, who was recalled from the Charlotte Checkers. Zykov leads the AHL in goals but had a mostly quiet game, as did the rest of his teammates.

It has been a forgettable, disappointing season for the Oilers (32-36-5), who reached the playoffs last season for the first time since 2006 and their Stanley Cup final loss to Carolina.

For the Canes, what many believed to be a promising season has quickly deteriorated into disappointment.

NORTH
STATE
JOURNAL

Hurricanes 'lay egg' in 7-3 home loss to Oilers

Edmonton scores three times in the first and second to pull away from Carolina

[March 20, 2018 Cory Lavalette Article, NHL, Sports](#)

RALEIGH — The Carolina Hurricanes limited Edmonton Oilers superstar Connor McDavid to one secondary assist and one shot on net. Unfortunately, they forgot about Leon Draisaitl.

Draisaitl, back playing center after spending the majority of the season on McDavid's wing, scored once and added three assists in the Oilers' 7-3 win over Carolina in front of 10,554 at PNC Arena.

"It's disappointing when our compete is the way it was tonight," Hurricanes coach Bill Peters said after the loss.

"That's how our team is constructed. If we don't compete and if we're not the hardest-working team, we don't give ourselves a chance."

Edmonton scored three goals in both the first and second periods, exploiting a confounded Carolina defense and an overwhelmed Scott Darling to take control of a matchup between teams whose seasons will end on following games on April 7.

"That goes to show that we have to come to work," Hurricanes co-captain Jordan Staal said. "We play in the NHL. We have this privilege to be here, and we can't lay eggs like that every game or every other game. We can't just not work. It looks like that when we don't, and it's no fun to play. It's not fun to let each other down like that."



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The first period featured a lot of goals — with plenty of help from both defenses.

First, Brock McGinn — after getting upended on an open-ice hit by Oilers defenseman Matt Benning — retrieved a puck in front of Oilers goaltender Cam Talbot and backhanded the puck that hit defenseman Yohann Auvitu's stick and went in to make it 1-0 at 4:30 of the first.

The Oilers responded with three straight goals.

Edmonton tied it when Hurricanes defenseman Haydn Fleury lost track of Oilers winger Drake Caggiula and he deposited a Leon Draisaitl pass past Darling (23 saves) to tie it just 23 seconds after Carolina opened the scoring.

Two minutes later, Benning was denied off a rush, but tracked the fluttering puck behind the goal line and batted it out of midair and off Darling's back and in to give Edmonton the lead.

Ryan Strome then got his 13th goal of the year by reaching for a loose puck behind Darling and swiping it in the next before the first period even reached the halfway point.

Carolina chipped away at the lead with a goal on their first power play.

After several good chances by the first power play unit, Sebastian Aho finally got one past Talbot (28 saves) for his 26th goal of the season and a one-goal deficit.

"After one it was a one-goal game, but like I said, we just have to play through their momentum wisely," Aho said. "Just try to box them out and let them shoot outside and try to be hard at the net and both blue lines."

The Oilers got another good bounce early in the second to extend their lead.

A clearing attempt by Hurricanes defenseman Justin Faulk hit a referee's skate and went right to Pontus Aberg, and his wrist shot beat Darling to make it 4-2 just 92 seconds into the second period.

Teuvo Teravainen pulled Carolina within one again at 4:12, but two more Oilers goals — by Johann Auvitu and Draisaitl — vaulted Edmonton to a 6-3 lead after two periods.

"Obviously (Darling was) coming off a pretty good game in New York on Sunday and (we wanted to) give him a chance to go back-to-back with victories," Peters said. "They scored their sixth one late in the second. We talked about possibly making a change there, but we were pretty flat. I didn't think that was going to do much for us."

The third featured little, with the only goal coming from Jesse Puljujarvi, his 12th, at 13:06 to finalize the score.

"It's the work ethic and it's the effort," Staal said. "It just wasn't there."

Notes: Noah Hanifin missed his second game with a concussion. ... Faulk and Klas Dahlbeck were on the ice for four consecutive goals and were split up in the third period. ... Valentin Zykov, playing his first NHL game of the season, was minus-1 with two shots on goal in 15:05 of ice time and played on the second power play unit. ... Joakim Nordstrom was a healthy scratch. ... Fleury was plus-1, the only Hurricanes player with a positive plus/minus. ... Darling is now 12-18-7 on the season and a 3.19 goals-against average, and his .885 save percentage is worst among NHL goalies with at least 20 appearances.



Draisaitl has goal, 3 assists as Oilers whip Hurricanes 7-3

Posted 10:45 p.m. yesterday
Updated 7:19 a.m. today

RALEIGH, N.C. — Leon Draisaitl and the Edmonton Oilers just kept throwing the puck on net over and over. It was a sound strategy, considering just about every shot they took seemed to be going in.

Draisaitl had a goal and three assists and the Oilers beat the Carolina Hurricanes 7-3 on Tuesday night.

Final 1 2 3 Tot

[Edmonton](#) 3 3 1 7

[Carolina](#) 2 1 0 3

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

Three Stars

- 1: [Leon Draisaitl](#), Edm (1G, 3A)
- 2: [Pontus Aberg](#), Edm (1G, 2A)
- 3: [Sebastian Aho](#), Car (1G, 1A)

STATS

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Drake Caggiula, Matt Benning and Ryan Strome scored in a span of 4:24 in the first period after Carolina jumped to a 1-0 lead, and Edmonton led the rest of the way. Pontus Aberg, Yohann Auvitu and Jesse Puljujarvi also scored as the Oilers got six goals on their first 22 shots. Cam Talbot made 30 saves for Edmonton.



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"We started well and that gave us confidence," Draisaitl said. "We kept going after them. Kept shooting the puck, kept getting the puck back. That was our game plan."

Brock McGinn, Sebastian Aho and Teuvo Teravainen scored for the Hurricanes, who have lost six of eight. Scott Darling allowed three goals on his first nine shots and six on 22 but was left in the game. He finished with 23 saves.

As the final buzzer sounded, the Hurricanes were booed off the ice by the sparse group of fans still in the stands.

"We have to come to work," Carolina forward Jordan Staal said. "We play in the NHL. We have this privilege to be here. We can't lay eggs like that. We can't just not work. It looks like that when we don't and it's no fun to play. It's no fun to let each other down like that."

The scoring began early in a wild, five-goal first period, including a few unusual tallies.

McGinn opened the scoring with a no-look, through-the-legs backhand pass that was accidentally pushed in by Auvitu.

Caggiula tied it 23 seconds after McGinn scored, and Benning gave the Oilers the lead with an extraordinary goal two minutes later. After his initial shot went off Darling's leg pad and up onto the glass behind the net, Benning waited for the puck to come down, swung his stick like a baseball bat, and hit the puck off Darling's back and into the net.

"I just kind of tried to wait until the puck came down so I didn't get high sticking and then just tried to throw it at him," Benning said. "It's just kind of reactionary."

Strome finished the burst with another atypical goal. Darling stopped Strome's stuff attempt, but the puck wiggled free, and defenseman Justin Faulk pushed it into his own net.

Aho kept the Hurricanes within one with a power-play goal late in the first, but the Oilers scored three times again in the second period to turn it into a rout.

Just 1:32 into the period, Faulk inexplicably backhanded a no-look pass from the corner to the front of his own net. Draisaitl took the free puck and sent a pass to Aberg, who buried it along the inside post for his first goal as an Oiler since being acquired at the trade deadline.

"We weren't playing good from the start right through the end," Hurricanes forward Jordan Staal said. "It wasn't a good effort from anybody."

Auvitu got in on the scoring midway through the second when he finished a 3-on-2 rush with a wrist shot past Darling's glove, and Draisaitl joined the party with a one-timer from the right faceoff circle, his 23rd this season. Puljujarvi provided the finishing touch when he gathered his own rebound and pushed a backhander through Darling's legs.

Carolina is still technically alive in the Eastern Conference playoff race, but its hopes are dwindling. The Hurricanes are nine points back with nine games to play.

NOTES

Draisaitl surpassed 200 career points. ... Aberg also had two assists for his first career three-point game. ... Aho and Teravainen extended their point streaks to six games. ... Oilers F Connor McDavid played in his 200th NHL game. ... Hurricanes D Noah Hanifin missed his second straight game with a concussion. ... Oilers D Andrej Sekera and F Zack Kassian both missed the game with undisclosed injuries.

UP NEXT

Oilers: At the Ottawa Senators on Thursday.

Hurricanes: Host the Arizona Coyotes on Thursday.



Recap: Canes Can't Contain Oilers

McGinn, Aho & Teravainen score in 7-3 loss

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

March 20th, 2018

A high-scoring affair did not favor the Carolina Hurricanes, as they were bested 7-3 by the Edmonton Oilers on Tuesday night at PNC Arena.

[Brock McGinn](#), [Sebastian Aho](#) and [Teuvo Teravainen](#) scored for the Hurricanes, who fall to 31-31-11 on the season.

Here are five takeaways from tonight's game.

One

Simply put, this is certainly not how the Hurricanes wanted to follow up Sunday's win in Brooklyn. Playing against opponents well out of the playoff race in either conference, the Hurricanes had a chance to establish some momentum down the stretch of the season, even if their fate is similar. Tonight, though, they couldn't keep up with a potent Oilers offense, and any chance in snuffing the opponents' production was countered.

"We weren't playing good from the start right through the end. It wasn't a good effort from anybody, including myself," [Jordan Staal](#) said. "It's the work ethic and the effort. It just wasn't there."



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"We've got to do a better job getting them ready to go," head coach Bill Peters said. "I don't think there's a guy in there who's proud of his game tonight."

Two

This one was scattered - and strange - from the start. Before the game was even 10 minutes old, the Oilers had a 3-1 lead.

The Canes got on the board first on a fluke play, as McGinn attempted a through-the-legs backhand pass in the slot that was fielded and put into his own net by Oilers defenseman Yohann Auvitu.

The Oilers then scored three straight goals, each one perhaps stranger than the one prior. Drake Caggiula was left open in the slot and [Scott Darling](#) had drifted out of the crease, and just like that it was 1-1. Two minutes later, Darling extended his left pad to make a great stop on Matt Benning, who then made an even better play to bat the rebound out of midair, off Darling's back and into the net. And not even three minutes later, Darling made another sharp left skate stop on Ryan Strome and scissored to cover the puck, only to see it squirt out and into the net.

"It got away early," Peters said. "We never really got a spark or engaged."

Three

The Canes would then twice bring it within a goal, with Aho scoring on the power play to make it a 3-2 game late in the first period and Teravainen's goal in the second making it 4-3. From there, though, the Hurricanes were never able to climb back into the contest.

"After one it was a one-goal game," Aho said. "We just have to play through it."

"When it gets loose it's because we're not playing our game. If we're not skating and working, our game is not going to work and we look a step behind. ... When we're skating and going, we're on top of guys and don't give them much or time to make plays," Staal said. "Tonight was pretty much the exact opposite."

"I think it's on the team," Peters said. "It's on all of us - the coaches, the players, us as a group. We weren't good enough tonight."

Four

Aho and Teravainen remain a constant source of hope for the Hurricanes, even in this current stretch. The two are currently tied for the team lead in points (59); Aho has 26 goals and 33 assists in 69 games, while Teravainen has 22 goals and 37 assists in 73 games. That's career highs across the board for the Hurricanes' dynamic Finnish duo, numbers that are only going to continue growing in the final nine games of the season.

Five

The Hurricanes have had a number of these types of games this season - too many, really - in which the team lacks the compete necessary and the final score reflects just that.

"That goes to show that we have to come to work. We play in the NHL. We have this privilege to be here," Staal said. "We can't lay eggs like that every other game. We can't just not work. It looks like that when we don't. It's no fun to play. It's no fun to let each other down like that. I'm one of them. I wasn't good enough tonight. It's too bad. I'm going to be ready for the next game."

"It's hard. It's disappointing. It's disappointing when our compete is the way it was tonight," Peters said. "That's how our team is constructed: when we don't compete and if we're not the hardest working team, we don't give ourselves a chance. I think our guys understand that. They're realistic with that. So when we don't bring it, it's a little disappointing for sure. That's an understatement."

So, Thursday against Arizona, it's evident what needs to happen for this team to get back in the win column.

"Just work ethic. Come to work," Staal said. "It doesn't matter if you're making mistakes; it's a game of mistakes. But if you're out there working, trying your best and doing what you can to help each other, that's all we're looking for."

Up Next

The Hurricanes play host to the Arizona Coyotes on Thursday.



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SB NATION
CANES COUNTRY

Recap and Ranker: Oilers top Canes in a 7-3 snoozer

A game that featured ten goals was anything but riveting edge-of-your-seat action.

By [Brian LeBlanc@bdleblanc](mailto:Brian_LeBlanc@bdlblanc) Updated Mar 20, 2018, 10:23pm EDT

In an alternate universe somewhere, Tuesday's matchup between the [Carolina Hurricanes](#) and [Edmonton Oilers](#) was one that saw a team comfortably in the Eastern Conference playoff race going at it against a team that is on the short list of [Stanley Cup](#) hopefuls with a chance to win the whole thing. With the firepower of [Connor McDavid](#) and company facing a Hurricanes defense that has proven its mettle time and again when up against the top scorers in the league, the Canes and Oilers would have been a callback to the high-level hockey of the 2006 [Stanley Cup Final](#).

Back here on planet Earth, the Canes and Oilers played a sloppy goal-fest that set the game of hockey back to the 1980s, an 7-3 Oilers win that left no one on either team happy in a game that will be the Wikipedia example of "meaningless game" for generations to come.

If you wanted, you could say that the Canes lived up to their billing in one regard: [McDavid](#) had one assist but was held to one shot and played to a minus-one in a game the Oilers won by four goals. The problem is that the Oilers are more than just McDavid, and Leon Draisaitl was happy to pitch in to fill the vacuum, scoring one goal and setting up three others to set a season high with four points.

Scott Darling, albeit doing himself no favors on the final three goals, was largely the victim of circumstances beyond his control for the first four. Drake Caggiula's equalizer, 23 seconds after [Brock McGinn](#) opened the scoring, came when [Haydn Fleury](#) got caught puck-watching in front of the net; Matt Benning's goal two minutes later was a puck batted out of midair behind the net and banked off Darling's back into the cage. Then, three minutes later, Ryan Strome scored somehow after Darling had made a save and sent the puck into his own net while attempting to slide his legs together for a whistle.

After Sebastian Aho scored to pull the Canes back to within one on a power-play goal Cam Talbot had no business allowing, [Pontus Aberg](#) made it a two-goal lead again 1:32 into the second period after Justin Faulk's clearing attempt caromed off a referee and right into the slot.

The Canes did see point streaks by Aho and Teuvo Teravainen extend to six games, and Aho's 26th goal extended his career high in that department, but this was a game the Hurricanes would seemingly have been fine with ending ten minutes in. Aho, Teravainen and Trevor van Riemsdyk were the only Hurricanes players to finish even on

the night, with the Faulk-Klas Dahlbeck pairing going minus-4 apiece.

The crowd of just over 10,000 was lifeless all night, understandably with the Hurricanes looking much the same on the ice. In fairness, the Oilers didn't exactly cover themselves in glory either, with seven goals not really doing justice to how out of sync both teams looked all night.

The Canes continue their week of games against non-playoff opponents Thursday when the [Arizona Coyotes](#) come to town, their tragic number down to 9 pending the result of the [Devils/Sharks](#) game in San Jose later Tuesday and looking every part of a team that simply can't wait for the calendar to show April 8.

They Said It

Bill Peters:

Disappointing. It got away early, but saying that we did make it 3-2 with lots of time, then 4-3 with lots of time, but we never had a spark, never got engaged. Not sure why that is.

They're very receptive. I don't think there's a guy in there who's proud of his game tonight, and collectively, when you get in that situation and it looks like it did tonight. The only thing that was probably good was our power play in the first, we won four faceoffs, got the puck back a bunch, ended up with a bunch of shots and a goal. I thought our power play was good. That was the shining moment of the night.

I think it's on the team, all of us, the coaches, players, all of us as a group. We weren't good enough tonight. We gave Darling the chance to go tonight and try to win back to back games coming off a pretty good game in New York on Sunday. They scored their sixth one late in the second, we talked about possibly making a change there, but we were pretty flat. I didn't think that would do much for us.

It's hard. It's disappointing when our compete was the way it was tonight. When we don't compete, and if we aren't the hardest working team, we don't give ourselves a chance. When we don't bring it, it's a little disappointing, and that's an understatement.

We talked earlier today about the two previous home games, we played real hard and well, and played better in those losses than we did in the win. You have to have some perseverance and you have to stick to it.

Aho was good again tonight, he had the puck lots. They're competitive. They're still at that young age, Turbo is 24, where there's room for growth. We talked about a five game plan and [Aho] going in the middle for the next four. Turbo left the game at the five minute mark with a little tweak, so I



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don't know if he's available, but Seabass will be in the middle for the next four. [What did he tweak?] His body.

Jordan Staal:

Obviously where we are in the standings there's something to be said [about giving up] but that goes to show that we have to come to work. We play in the NHL, we have a privilege to be here, and we can't lay eggs like that every game. We can't just not work. It looks like that when we don't. It's no fun to play, it's no fun to let each other down like that, and I'm one of them, I wasn't good enough tonight. It's too bad and I'm going to be ready for the next game.

When we aren't skating and working, our game isn't going to work. We looked a step behind in what looked like a loose game. When we're skating, we're on top of guys and don't give them time to make plays. We're creating turnovers and playing in their end when we're playing well. Tonight was pretty much the exact opposite. It's the work ethic and the effort and it just wasn't there.

Game Notes

Hard to say much about that game. It felt very much like a preseason game. There was little sustained pressure on either side, and the goals that were scored were more the

result of players being in the right (or wrong) place at the right time than they were about set plays being executed.

Seven goals on 30 shots for Scott Darling is what it is, but that's probably a little bit unfair to him since four of them were oddball bounces that left him no chance.

Peters was asked about if he's ever gone through adversity like this in his coaching career, specifically being on the verge of missing the playoffs for four straight years. His answer was "no, that doesn't bother me," but I feel like I should point out here that his reaction was much more rooted in the fact that he doesn't dwell on what's happened previously in his career and not so much as an Alfred E. Neuman-style "what, me worry?" approach. It seems evident that Peters knows that the issues with his team go beyond whether or not they qualify for the postseason, so don't read too much into the quote - I don't think there's anything to get carried away about with it.

Aberg's three-point night was the first of his career, and - this shocked me - it was only Draisaitl's second four-point game of his career, and first since December of 2015 (!!).

The Canes are back on the ice for practice tomorrow and will skate Thursday morning prior to their matchup with the Coyotes.

TriangleSportsNetwork

Hurricanes can't contain slick Oilers in 7-3 loss

Leon Draisaitl leads Edmonton with four-point night

[March 20, 2018 Peter Koutroumpis Carolina Hockey Network, Carolina Hurricanes, Triangle Sports Network, Triangle Sports Roundup](#)

By Peter Koutroumpis

editor@trianglesportsnet.com

RALEIGH, N.C. – The 10,554 in attendance at PNC Arena witnessed a gusher of scoring on Tuesday.

Unfortunately for the host Carolina Hurricanes, the majority of pucks that crossed the goal line were deposited into their net and resulted in a 7-3 loss to the Edmonton Oilers.

Leon Draisaitl led the Oilers with a goal and three assists as seven different skaters netted single markers, including Drake Caggiula, Matt Benning, Ryan Strome, Pontus Aberg, Yohann Auivitu, and Jessie Puljujarvi.

Edmonton goaltender Cam Talbot earned the win with a 28-save effort, while captain Connor McDavid posted an assist which pushed his point total on the season to 90, and [into second place in the NHL scoring race](#) behind Tampa Bay's Nikita Kucherov.

Brock McGinn, Sebastian Aho, and Teuvo Teravainen scored for the Hurricanes, not enough to help starting goaltender Scott Darling who finished with 23 saves in the losing effort.

"It got away early," Carolina head coach Bill Peters said.

Though noting the Hurricanes trailed by a goal at points, 3-2 in the first and 4-3 early in the second, the coach simply stated his team "never really got a spark, never really got engaged."

Following a successful start on Sunday in a 4-3 win over the New York Islanders, Darling had a chance to post back-to-back victories.

However, it was another five-plus goal-against outing which the netminder and his teammates felt the sting of once more this season.

Peters didn't see the blame falling on one individual though.

"It's on the team, it's on all of us – its on the coaches, its on the players, its on us as the group," he said.

"I don't think there's a guy in there that's proud of his game tonight, I wouldn't think."



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Canes 'not good enough' in lackluster loss to Oilers

Andrew Schnittker, Sports Editor

10 hrs ago

As the Carolina Hurricanes continue to play out the string in another lost season, the team was embarrassed by the Edmonton Oilers on its home ice Tuesday, falling 7-3 at PNC Arena.

Forwards Brock McGinn, Sebastian Aho and Teuvo Teravainen scored for the Canes (31-31-11) against Edmonton (32-36-5). Aho, who had a goal and an assist, and Teravainen extended their point streaks to six games. In a game that featured five goals in the first period alone, neither team played well defensively. The Canes in particular left goalie Scott Darling, who was beaten 7 times on 30 shots, out to dry throughout the game in a very poor effort from Carolina.

"It's on the team," head coach Bill Peters said. "It's on all of us. It's on the coaches; it's on the players. It's on us as a group. We weren't good enough tonight."

The Canes struck less than five minutes into this one, as McGinn put a backhand on net that Oilers defenseman Yohann Auvitu inadvertently poked home to make it 1-0.

The good fortune did not last long, however, as the Oilers struck for three goals in a span of 4:47 from forwards Drake Caggiula and Ryan Strome and defenseman Matt Benning off a defensive breakdown and a pair of fluky bounces to take a 3-1 lead.

"When it gets loose, it's because we're not playing our game," forward Jordan Staal said. "If we're not skating and working, our game's not going to work and we look a step behind. We look like it's going to be a loose game."

Carolina cut the lead to one on a power play with about five minutes left in the period; Aho zipped a shot over Talbot's glove from the top of the faceoff circle to make it 3-2.

The Oilers made it 4-2 on another bad bounce for Carolina less than two minutes into the second period; defenseman Justin Faulk's clearing pass from the corner went off an

official's skate and into the slot, where Oilers forward Leon Draisaitl fed forward Pontus Aberg for a tap in.

The game continued to be a high-scoring affair from there, as less than three minutes after Aberg's goal, Teravainen took a slick backhand feed from Aho and fired it top shelf to make it 4-3.

Edmonton restored a two-goal lead with about eight minutes left in the second as defenseman Yohann Auvitu finished off an odd-man rush to make it 5-3.

Draisaitl made it 6-3 Oilers with a little over four minutes to go in the second on a blast from the right circle. Edmonton forward Jesse Puljujarvi added insult to injury late in the third period, picking up his own rebound after Darling stopped his breakaway chance to make it 7-3.

"It's disappointing," Peters said. "It's disappointing when our compete is the way it was tonight. That's how our team is constructed. If we don't compete, and if we're not the hardest working team, we don't give ourselves a chance. I think our guys understand that; they're realistic with that. When we don't bring it, it's a little bit disappointing, for sure. That's an understatement."

The loss drops the Canes' already slim playoff chances to virtually nonexistent, with Carolina currently trailing the New Jersey Devils for the Eastern Conference's final wild card spot by nine points with nine games to play. Despite its miniscule playoff odds, the team knows it will have to put forth a better effort in its remaining games.

Carolina returns to action Thursday against the Arizona Coyotes at PNC Arena.

"Obviously where we are in the standings, there's something to be said," Staal said. "But that goes to show that we have to come to work. We play in the NHL. We have this privilege to be here, and we can't lay eggs like that every game, every other game. We can't just not work. It looks like that when we don't. It's no fun to play. It's no fun to let each other down like that. I'm one of them; I wasn't good enough tonight. It's too bad, and I'm going to be ready for the next game."



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 21, 2018



Shaya's 10 Thoughts: March 20, 2018

Written by Jason Shaya

Published: March 20, 2018

During the season, Checkers broadcaster Jason Shaya checks in each week with his 10 Thoughts - a series of observations about the team and the hockey world in general.

- 1) There are 10 games left in the season. Six of those 10 are on the road. Six of the games are against opponents that are in the playoffs or within reach. With Charlotte visiting Laval this week, a team that won't be in the playoffs, they can't afford to stumble when it matters. This past Sunday was a wasted opportunity.
- 2) Considering the way his rookie season has gone, I have to believe Warren Foegele gets a look from the Hurricanes before season's end. His scoring pace has been steady all year and he's the only player amongst scoring leaders that doesn't have a power-play goal. He does it all at even strength or shorthanded. How many top goal scorers in the AHL could score at the same rate as Foegele if they weren't on the power-play? I'd say hardly any.
- 3) Records that have been broken this season in Charlotte: Goals by a rookie (Foegele), wins (and goals scored) by a goaltender (Alex Nedeljkovic). When the season concludes it's more than likely Wallmark will average more points per game (1.15) than any player in team history, breaking Zach Boychuk's record (1.08). Nedeljkovic has five shutouts this season and the single season record is six by Justin Peters in 2012-13. Valentin Zykov is scoring at .522 goals per game, which is within reach of Boychuk's .525. The plus/minus records will be absolutely shattered by Roland McKeown and Phillip Samuelsson and more than likely Foegele as well. All three should top Haydn Fleury's +16 from last season. There are more, but you get the point. The year has gone very well for Mike Vellucci and his team. But, the goal is to make the playoffs and put together a run. Nothing else matters.
- 4) Since being reassigned by Carolina to Charlotte, it is clear to me that the Checkers would be in dire circumstances if it wasn't for Lucas Wallmark. In my estimation, he has done everything to warrant a permanent spot in the NHL next season. For the time being, it is Wallmark who propels this team offensively.
- 5) If the NHL doesn't find a way to get a better handle on goaltender interference and the subsequent review for coach's challenge, we are heading into a postseason that may see an entire playoff series come down to a controversial goal and perhaps even in the Stanley Cup Final. This would be a disaster. Clarity of the rules is the highest importance in sports.
- 6) On Monday, I'll be heading up to Raleigh to call the Hurricanes vs. Senators game on Fox Sports Carolinas. What a privilege it's been to be a part of Carolina's TV broadcast this season. I'll have more on the whole experience after this season concludes.
- 7) While I'm looking forward to seeing Checkers legend Chris Terry this week as we visit Laval, I can't imagine the team is looking forward to seeing him take one-timers on the power play. Though Laval won't make the postseason, the Checkers got a lesson in defeat against the lowest-ranked team in the North Division this past weekend when they lost 4-1 against Binghamton. Charlotte can't afford to take any games off with Bridgeport still closing in. The broadcast on Friday night will begin at 7:15 for the 7:30 puck drop and we'll have it all live on ESPN 730 and the Checkers app.
- 8) Here is an idea. If a team ices the puck, then the normal repercussion ensues: an inability to make a line change followed by a defensive-zone draw. My suggestion is that if you do it again after the faceoff, it's a two-minute penalty for delay of game. This game needs to be sped up, not slowed down.
- 9) Greg McKegg is the best trade deadline addition to the Checkers that I can recall. Head coach Mike Vellucci had high praise for McKegg even before he played a single game for Charlotte. McKegg has a very good reputation both on and off the ice and both his professionalism and his skill are on full display with Charlotte as he averages a point per game since putting on a Checkers sweater.
- 10) Lehigh Valley is one of the hottest teams in the AHL. You can thank former Checkers goaltender John Muse for that. He's 10-1-1 with a save percentage of .931 and a goals against average of 2.13. The kid knows how to win hockey games.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 21, 2018



Oilers score seven against Hurricanes

Draisaitl has goal, three assists for Edmonton

by Kurt Dusterberg / NHL.com Correspondent

March 20th, 2018

RALEIGH, N.C. -- [Leon Draisaitl](#) had a goal and three assists, and the Edmonton Oilers defeated the Carolina Hurricanes 7-3 at PNC Arena on Tuesday.

[Pontus Aberg](#) had a goal and two assists for the Oilers, who won for the second time in five games (2-2-1). [Cam Talbot](#) made 28 saves.

"It was a fun night, when you score as we did and do some of the things we did correctly," Edmonton coach Todd McLellan said. "It's nice to get a win on the road."

The Oilers (32-36-5) are 17 points behind the Anaheim Ducks for the second wild card into the Stanley Cup Playoffs from the Western Conference.

[Sebastian Aho](#) extended his point streak to six games with a goal and an assist for the Hurricanes (31-31-11), who trail the New Jersey Devils by nine points for the second wild card into the playoffs from the Eastern Conference. [Scott Darling](#) allowed seven goals on 30 shots.

"I don't think there's a guy in there that's proud of his game tonight," Carolina coach Bill Peters said. "It's on all of us. It's on the coaches, it's on the players. It's on us as a group. We weren't good enough tonight."

[Brock McGinn](#) gave the Hurricanes a 1-0 lead at 4:30 of the first period when his backhand pass deflected off [Matt Benning](#)'s skate and [Yohann Auvitu](#)'s stick.

[Drake Caggiula](#) tied the game 1-1 when he scored from in close off a Draisaitl pass at 4:53. The assist was Draisaitl's 200th NHL point.

Benning put the Oilers up 2-1 at 6:53. Darling made the save on the initial shot by Benning, who batted the rebound off the glass out of midair off Darling's back from behind the net.

"I just tried to wait until the puck came down so I didn't get high sticking," Benning said. "I was actually trying to hit it at his pads, but it hit his back."

[Ryan Strome](#) made it 3-1 at 9:17 with an unassisted goal.

"Our answer to the goal-against was exceptional," Draisaitl said. "I think we scored the shift after. All four lines were

ready to go right off the bat, and that helped us win the game."

Aho scored on the power play to cut the Oilers lead to 3-2 at 14:54.

Draisaitl found Aberg for a tap-in for a 4-2 lead at 1:32 of the second period.

[Teuvo Teravainen](#) scored at 4:12 to get the Hurricanes to within 4-3, but Auvitu made it 5-3 at 11:54. The defenseman scored off a pass from Draisaitl on an odd-man rush.

"I haven't scored, I haven't played, so obviously it's a little personal pride," said Auvitu, a healthy scratch the past nine games and goalless in his previous 13. "I will take it."

Draisaitl gave the Oilers a 6-3 lead at 15:37 when he scored on a one-timer from along the boards off a pass from Jesse Puljujarvi, who made it 7-3 at 13:06 of the third.

Goal of the game

Draisaitl's goal at 15:37 of the second period.

Save of the game

Talbot stopping [Jordan Staal](#) at 3:38 of the second period.

Highlight of the game

Benning's goal at 6:53 of the first period.

They said it

"As a top-six guy, you always get measured by what you produce, at the end of the day. It's about contributing and producing. I think I can speak for a lot of guys that are supposed to contribute. You have to stay positive. Some nights the bounces don't go your way, the next night they will go your way." -- Oilers center [Leon Draisaitl](#), who had one assist the previous four games before his four-point night

"It's disappointing when our compete is the way it was tonight. If we don't compete and if we're not the hardest-working team, we don't give ourselves a chance. When we don't bring it, it's a little bit disappointing, for sure. That's an understatement." -- Hurricanes coach Bill Peters

Need to know

The Oilers scored at least seven goals for the fourth time this season. ... Draisaitl has 17 multipoint games this season. ... The Hurricanes have allowed 29 goals in their past five losses.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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What's next

Oilers: At the Ottawa Senators on Thursday (7:30 p.m. ET; TSN5, RDS, SNW, NHL.TV)

Hurricanes: Host the Arizona Coyotes on Thursday (7 p.m. ET; FS-CR, FS-A, NHL.TV)

TODAY'S LINKS

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SportScan

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

1104683 Carolina Hurricanes

Five takeaways from the Hurricanes' 7-3 loss to the Oilers

BY CHIP ALEXANDER

calexander@newsobserver.com

March 20, 2018 11:06 PM

RALEIGH

It didn't have a big crowd. There wasn't a lot of energy in the building.

But to get hammered 7-3? The Carolina Hurricanes had a hard time Tuesday trying to explain such a lackluster effort and beating at PNC Arena, when they were booed at game's end.

"We weren't playing good from the start right through to the end," Canes center Jordan Staal said.

That pretty much covers the full 60 minutes. There were a few glimmers of a pushback — goals from Sebastian Aho and Teuvo Teravainen after the Oilers spurred ahead, each pulling the Canes within a goal. But Edmonton's speed and aggressive forechecking was too much for a team whose defense was in disarray too much of the game.

"We never really got a spark, never really got engaged," Canes coach Bill Peters said. "It's disappointing. It's disappointing when our compete is the way it was tonight."

Staal said the Canes need to "come to work every game," adding, "We can't lay eggs like that every game."

— Don't put all the blame on Scott Darling. That was Peters' opinion about the goaltending Tuesday.

Darling, the winner Sunday against the New York Islanders, was in net for all seven goals as the Oilers worked their way into good scoring positions and made the most of their shots, scoring six times on the first 19 shots.

Peters said the coaching staff discussed replacing Darling with Cam Ward after the Oilers' sixth goal but decided against it.

"We were pretty flat," he said. "I didn't think that was going to do much for us. It didn't make any sense to put Cam in, in that environment."

— The Canes' Aho and forward Jesse Puljujarvi of the Oilers are good friends and the two joined Teravainen for a meal Monday night in Raleigh. Good Finnish food, Puljujarvi said. Good company.

All three then scored in the game. Aho and Puljujarvi each had a goal and an assist, and Teravainen scored.

Aho centered a powerhouse Finnish line in the 2016 World Junior Championship, with Puljujarvi on one wing and Patrik Laine of the Winnipeg Jets on the other. The Finns won the gold medal in Finland and were treated like rock stars after it.

Puljujarvi said he and Aho played five years together as juniors. "He has good speed and sees all over the ice, a very smart player," Puljujarvi said. "I really liked playing with him."

— A year ago, Valentin Zykov was recalled from the Charlotte Checkers in March and scored in his first NHL game. The Russian forward then was injured in the second. That was that.

"That was unexpected," he said Tuesday. "That's about all I can say."

Zykov is back, saying he's more comfortable and confident. He has 32 goals for the Checker to lead the AHL, 16 on the power play, and had 15:05 of ice time in his first game for the Canes this season, playing on the fourth line with Victor Rask and Phil Di Giuseppe. Zykov had one shot in the game and was used on a power-play unit.

Many Canes fans have been asking why it took so long to get Zykov up to the big club, given the Canes' scoring problems. No complaints from Zykov, however.

"I'm just playing hockey," he said. "The rest is not up to me."

— After a listless 3-1 loss to the San Jose Sharks on Feb. 4, Peters wrote on a whiteboard "Who are we? 29 games to find out" at the next practice. He then tapped it with his stick for emphasis as he left the ice.

Twenty games later, after going 7-10-3, the answer is in: a team that will again miss the playoffs, that has not established a team identity.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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"If we don't compete, if we're not the hardest-working team, we don't give ourselves a chance," Peters said.

News Observer LOADED: 03.21.2018

1104684 Carolina Hurricanes

Oilers speed past Hurricanes for 7-3 victory

BY CHIP ALEXANDER

calexander@newsobserver.com

March 20, 2018 09:23 PM

RALEIGH

Sebastian Aho scored his 26th goal of the season and had an assist.

Teuvo Teravainen scored his 22nd.

But for the Carolina Hurricanes, that covers most of the highlights Tuesday as the Edmonton Oilers skated and hustled to a 7-3 victory at PNC Arena that was as decisive for the winners as it was embarrassing for the home team.

The Canes last won at home on March 2, when they topped the New Jersey Devils. That seems eons ago as the Canes' losses have piled up and they have badly faded out of playoff contention.

The Canes' defensive breakdowns came so frequently Tuesday that they were hard to keep up with as the Oilers — getting a goal and three assists from Leon Draisaitl — led 3-2 after the first period and 6-3 after the second.

Brock McGinn also scored for the Canes (31-31-11), getting his 13th in the first period. But McGinn first took a big hit from defenseman Matt Benning and was credited with the goal when his backhand pass was knocked past goalie Cam Talbot by Oilers defenseman Yohann Auvitu.

Benning later put another hard hit on McGinn in the Edmonton zone. Benning then sped down the ice and scored, and Auvitu also had a goal for the Oilers.

Aho, playing with center Jordan Staal and Teravainen, converted a power-play pass from Justin Faulk into his goal, ripping a shot from the top of the left circle in the first. Teravainen scored off an Aho pass four minutes into the second to pull the Canes within 4-3, but the Oilers answered.

Auvitu scored off the rush and Draisaitl with a sharp-angle shot as goalie Scott Darling was touched for six goals on Edmonton's first 19 shots.

The Canes did a decent job in containing the Oilers' Connor McDavid, the dynamic center who had 34 goals and 89 points entering the game. McDavid did not have a shot until the third period although earning two assists.

With defenseman Noah Hanifin out with a concussion, the Canes had Faulk paired with Klas Dahlbeck and it was a rough night on the back end — both had minus-4 games.

The game was the first of the season for Canes forward Valentin Zykov, who was recalled from the Charlotte Checkers. Zykov leads the AHL in goals but had a mostly quiet game, as did the rest of his teammates.

The Canes' Derek Ryan (7) and Jeff Skinner (53) battle the Oilers' Jesse Puljujarvi (98) and Ryan Strome (18) for the puck during the second

period of an NHL game played between the Carolina Hurricanes and the Edmonton Oilers at PNC Arena in Raleigh on Tuesday, March 20, 2018.

News Observer LOADED: 03.21.2018

1104654 Arizona Coyotes

Arizona Coyotes recall Dylan Strome, Trevor Murphy ahead of Wednesday game in Buffalo

Richard Morin, azcentral sports Published 2:41 p.m. MT March 20, 2018 | Updated 3:13 p.m. MT March 20, 2018

Ahead of their upcoming six-game road trip, the Arizona Coyotes have recalled center Dylan Strome and defenseman Trevor Murphy from their AHL affiliate in Tucson.

The Coyotes also announced that defenseman Jason Demers, who suffered an upper-body injury on Monday against the Calgary Flames, will miss the remaining 10 games of the season.

Strome, the third overall pick in the 2015 NHL Draft, has tallied two points in 18 career games with the Coyotes — including one goal in 11 games with the big club this season. The 21-year-old center has tallied 50 points in 47 games with the Roadrunners.

Murphy, who was acquired from the Nashville Predators organization at the trade deadline, has registered 30 points in 56 games between Tucson and the Predators' AHL affiliate in Milwaukee.

Coyotes head coach Rick Tocchet is also expected to rejoin the team on Wednesday in Buffalo after missing Monday's game due to attending his mother's funeral in Toronto.

Arizona Republic LOADED: 03.21.2018

1104655 Arizona Coyotes

Battle for the bottom: Coyotes, Sabres vying with others for best lottery odds

BY CRAIG MORGAN

MARCH 20, 2018 AT 12:36 PM

GLENDAL, Ariz. — The Coyotes departed Tuesday on a six-game road trip.

With just 10 games left in its season, Arizona is in 30th place in the NHL standings, giving it the best odds of landing the No. 1 pick in the 2018 NHL Draft and presumably using that to select Swedish defenseman Rasmus Dahlin.

The Coyotes aren't alone in their hopes of landing the No. 1 overall pick, however. The team they face on Tuesday at KeyBank Center, the Buffalo Sabres, is the one team below them in the standings and a few other teams are doing noteworthy work in their efforts to slide to the bottom of the NHL.

There is no guarantee that finishing last will land the No. 1 pick.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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Last year's lottery was a travesty of the draft process. New Jersey jumped from the fourth worst record to the No. 1 pick, Philadelphia jumped from the 12th worst record to the No. 2 pick and Dallas jumped from the seventh worst record to the No. 3 pick.

That's right, the teams with the three worst records in the league last season — Colorado, Vancouver and Arizona — picked fourth, fifth and seventh (the Coyotes traded this pick), while the expansion Vegas Golden Knights, who spent a reported \$500 million just to join the league, got the sixth pick.

The NHL seems content not to fix its problematic lottery so even if the Coyotes finish with the worst record in the NHL, they'll only have an 18 percent chance of landing the top pick.

There appear to be just six teams with a legitimate chance of finishing with the league's worst record. Here's a look at those six teams, their remaining schedules and tanking rating, which measures effort (or more appropriately, lack thereof).

We've also included the NHL Draft Lottery odds for all teams currently out of the playoff picture, courtesy of the awesome site, tankathon.com.

Arizona Sports LOADED: 03.21.2018

1104771 Ottawa Senators

Karlsson family tragedy in the air at Canadian Tire Centre

Ken Warren

Published on: March 20, 2018 | Last Updated: March 20, 2018 11:51 PM EDT

The mood was sombre at Canadian Tire Centre on Tuesday night, quieter than usual.

Erik Karlsson was not on the ice against the Florida Panthers, but the Ottawa Senators captain was in everybody's thoughts. Karlsson and his wife, Melinda, who were married last summer, lost the son they were expecting in June.

Karlsson didn't take part in the club's pre-game skate Tuesday morning. In the afternoon, the Senators released a statement with the devastating news.

"The collective thoughts and prayers of the Ottawa Senators organization, the city of Ottawa and entire hockey community rest with Erik and Melinda Karlsson following the loss of their son," the statement read. "We ask that you respect the family's wishes for privacy during the grieving process."

Following the 7-2 defeat, Senators players offered whatever support they could towards Karlsson.

"I can't even imagine what Erik and Melina are going through right now," said defenceman Mark Borowiecki. "It puts some perspective on life and the way things are going here. It's important for them to take time together to grieve. We've got so much love coming out of this dressing room for them. We truly are a family in here and it hurts."

Zack Smith echoed those comments.

"Our hearts go out to them and we hope they're doing okay," said Smith, whose wife is pregnant. "It hits a little deeper. You realize what it would be like, the feeling, the attachment you get to something like that. It's devastating. I just feel terrible for them right now."

Senators coach Guy Boucher says the tragedy is tough to deal with.

"Everybody's heartbroken, it's awful," he said. "As a group in there, it has been a tough year, but I think this is a real personal, devastating blow. I feel for them and Erik is going to take the time he needs and when he does come back we'll do what we can to support him the best we can. It's definitely a sad day."

As per usual, Karlsson sweaters littered the crowd and at least one fan brought a sign offering condolences: "Thoughts and prayers to the Karlssons."

The NHL community also felt for Karlsson, weighing in on the news.

"Today is a day to remember that there are way more important things in life and hockey is just a game," former NHL star and Orléans native Marc Savard said in a Twitter message. "Our condolences to Erik Karlsson and his wife, Melinda on the their tragic loss!! The Savard Family."

Karlsson's season has been marked by adversity.

He has experienced difficulty in fully recovering from off-season foot surgery. There was endless speculation about whether he might have been dealt away before the trade deadline in February. His long-term future with the Senators remains in doubt, and with only one year remaining before he becomes an unrestricted free agent, there's a possibility he could be traded in the summer.

Through all that, though, the couple had given the world a sneak peak at the excitement they were feeling about the pending birth.

In November, Melinda posted pictures of the two wearing "Mom" and "Dad" baseball caps, announcing the pregnancy.

In December, they posted scenes from their unique gender reveal party. With guests in their garage, Karlsson took a slapshot, hitting a specially-created puck that exploded in blue. Karlsson jumped up and down with the news that the couple was having a boy.

"We would have been excited no matter what (the gender)," Karlsson told reporters at the time. "But I think the way we did it was pretty cool. Neither one of us knew. The only person who knew was the person who made the puck."

The Karlsson news comes only a few weeks after Carolina Hurricanes captain Jordan Staal and his wife, Heather, announced that their daughter, Hannah, died of a terminal birth defect.

Ottawa Citizen LOADED: 03.21.2018

1104772 Ottawa Senators

Karlsson-less Senators no match for Panthers

Ken Warren

Published on: March 20, 2018 | Last Updated: March 20, 2018 11:36 PM EDT

Even in the high-stakes world of the National Hockey League, sometimes it really is just a game.

Tragedy trumped the puck for the Ottawa Senators on Tuesday, as the devastating and hollow feeling from the afternoon carried over into a long and difficult night.

Hours after learning the tragic news that captain Erik Karlsson and his wife, Melinda, had lost their baby, the Senators were no match for a Florida Panthers team continuing their determined push for a playoff spot.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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The Panthers jumped on the makeshift Senators lineup early, chasing starting goaltender Craig Anderson in the second period and rolled to a 7-2 victory at Canadian Tire Centre.

Colton Sceviour, Keith Yandle, Evgenii Dadonov, Jared McCann, Frank Vatrano, Nick Bjugstad and Jamie McGinn scored for the Panthers, who, at least temporarily, moved to within one point of a wildcard spot in the Eastern Conference. McCann's first goal, on a breakaway, chased Anderson in favour of backup Mike Condon.

Defenceman Patrick Sieloff, recalled from Belleville of the American Hockey League earlier in the day to take Karlsson's spot in the lineup, provided one of the few Senators highlights, scoring on a bizarre goal in the first period. Sieloff now has two goals in two career NHL games, the other coming on April 9, 2016, while playing with the Calgary Flames. In the process, he became the first player in NHL history to score in his first game with two different teams.

If focus was an issue for the Senators, it was understandable. The Karlsson news earlier in the day was emotionally draining.

Strictly from a skill level, it was also a challenge for the Senators to play without Karlsson, Mark Stone and Ryan Dzingel. Stone is still recovering from a leg injury while Dzingel is being careful not to rush back too soon after taking a Mike Hoffman shot off the helmet last Saturday in Columbus.

In addition to the recall of Sieloff, Jim O'Brien and Filip Chlapik were also brought up from Belleville to face the Panthers.

While the Senators entered the game on the brink of being officially eliminated from playoff contention – a Senators loss coupled with a New Jersey Devils victory late Tuesday against the San Jose Sharks would do the trick – the Panthers remain very much alive in the hunt for the post-season.

Monday's 2-0 defeat of the Montreal Canadiens, coupled with Tuesday's romp past the Senators, gives the Panthers an 18-5-1 record since the all-star break.

The win also moved the Panthers to within one point of New Jersey for the final wild-card spot in the East, pending the outcome of the Devils late game against the Sharks.

After Tuesday's games, the Panthers have 11 games remaining, while the Devils have only nine left to play.

The Panthers also had a measure of revenge on their minds. On March 12, the Senators ended the Panthers 8-0-1 stretch with a 5-3 victory in Ft. Lauderdale, providing a hiccup in their pursuit of the playoffs.

It was a far different story Tuesday.

Sceviour got the night started on the right skate for the Panthers, scoring only 2:36 in.

Sieloff briefly gave the Senators life, signaling his re-appearance in the NHL by tying the game 1-1. His shot from the blue line deflected off the glass behind the net and off Reimer's back. Nothing but net.

Yandle, however, restored the Panthers lead on a 2-on-1 break three minutes later and Florida never looked back from there.

Dadanov was left all alone in the slot before one-timing a blast behind Anderson. After McCann made it 4-1, scoring on a breakaway after Gaborik was too casual with a bouncing puck, Anderson's night was over. He stopped 13 of 17 shots.

Gaborik made it 4-2 on a bad angle shot against Panthers goaltender James Reimer (Max McCormick set the play up with some hard board work), but Vatrano and Bjugstad padded the lead to 6-2 against Condon before the second period was out. McGinn scored in the third.

The Senators return to action Thursday at Canadian Tire Centre against Connor McDavid and the Edmonton Oilers, who, like the Senators, have endured an agonizing season, failing to live up to lofty expectations. The

three-game homestand concludes Saturday against the Carolina Hurricanes.

Karlsson will be given as much time as he needs to deal with the tragedy.

Ottawa Citizen LOADED: 03.21.2018

1104773 Ottawa Senators

Erik and Melinda Karlsson will have lots of support from Senators

Bruce Garrioch

Published on: March 20, 2018 | Last Updated: March 20, 2018 11:31 PM EDT

There are nights when a hockey game feels meaningless.

As the Ottawa Senators faced the Panthers on Tuesday, this game felt that way.

The devastating news arrived in a statement from the Senators on Tuesday afternoon that captain Erik Karlsson and his wife Melinda lost their son.

You knew there was something wrong when coach Guy Boucher didn't offer any update on why Karlsson wasn't going to suit up against the Panthers following the club's morning skate.

After getting married last August, Erik and Melinda were overjoyed at becoming parents. They were excited that their son was on the way and they bought a new home in the area to prepare for his arrival.

This is a terrible tragedy for the Karlssons. Not only do they have family and close friends to lean on at this awful time, when Karlsson does return to the Senators, he'll have the support of his teammates every step of the way.

Karlsson has been there for his teammates when they've needed his support. They'll be there for him again whenever he returns. That's what teams do, they rally around each other in difficult times, and you know the Senators will do everything they can to help Erik and Melinda Karlsson.

Our thoughts and prayers go out to the Karlsson family.

Ryan Dzingel considers himself fortunate.

"I think the big man upstairs saved me on that one but I feel good. I got lucky," said Dzingel on Tuesday morning.

Hit in the back of the helmet by a hard slap shot from teammate Mike Hoffman during Saturday's 2-1 loss to the Columbus Blue Jackets on the road, Dzingel sat out Tuesday's visit by the Panthers. But if all goes well, he'll play Thursday against the Edmonton Oilers.

Dzingel was fortunate he didn't suffer a concussion as a result of the shot that ripped the No. 18 off the back of his helmet. Nobody needed to tell the 26-year-old how fortunate he was that the damage wasn't a lot worse.

"I think that's the second time I've taken a slap shot in the head in the last two years," said Dzingel, who skated in a non-contact jersey. "It was pretty close. Luckily, I turned. If I didn't turn it could have been worse but who knows? Even if I turned and it was a little bit lower.

"It's a game of inches and someone is watching over me so it's good. It caught me in the bottom of the helmet so it's a bit bruised but most of it



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 21, 2018

hit the helmet. I watched the replay in slow-motion and it was pretty scary for my family and friends, but I feel great.”

Dzingel said he saw the incident right after it took place and sent his family and friends texts back quickly to let them know he was okay.

“It was a little scary, but I think it was more scary for my family and friends who didn’t know what was going on,” he said. “I got a lot of texts, which I appreciate, but I feel great and I’m good to go Thursday.

“I’m 100% fine.”

He was held out of the lineup for precautionary reasons, but doesn’t see any reason he won’t be back fairly quickly. You’d have to think Dzingel has a chance to extend his season with Team USA at the world championships in May in Denmark, so this shouldn’t hold him back.

“The (doctors) are just keeping it cautious and making sure I do all the protocols, but I feel good and I should be ready to go,” Dzingel said. “I definitely felt tender, but there was no headache and no concussion.

“It rung my bell a little bit, but I felt really good after. There’s a big bruise back there.”

THIS 'N' THAT

The expectation is goaltender Filip Gustavsson, acquired in the deal that sent Derick Brassard to the Pittsburgh Penguins, will arrive in North America in the near future to suit up for the AHL’s Belleville Senators for the rest of the season. The Senators have been working with his club team, Lulea, and the Swedish Ice Hockey Federation to negotiate the 19-year-old’s release. That’s expected to happen soon. Gustavsson isn’t under contract to play for Lulea next season and the expectation is he’ll compete for a job in Belleville. Goalie coach Pierre Groulx spent last week overseas getting to know Gustavsson and left impressed. Lulea was eliminated from the AHL playoffs on the weekend and that stood in the way Tuesday was getting all the paper work in place ... The Panthers went into Tuesday’s game against the Senators trailing the New Jersey Devils by three points for the final wild-card spot in the East, with two games in hand. Coach Bob Boughner said there’s little use in scoreboard watching. “We don’t talk about it much in the dressing room,” said Boughner. “We talk more about trying to control our own destiny and doing it ourselves. Who knows what the number is going to be? We just know we have to win 85-to-90% of our games on the way in.” The Panthers have a tough schedule. However, they can close the gap ... It was a surprise to see Craig Anderson get pulled after allowing four goals on 17 shots and replaced by Mike Condon.

THE LAST WORDS

With the University of North Dakota eliminated from the NCAA playoffs, the Senators have made it a priority to sign defenceman Christian Wolanin. The 23-year-old Wolanin, selected No. 107 overall in the fourth-round of the 2015 NHL draft, is the son of former NHL blue-liner Craig Wolanin, who won a Stanley Cup with Colorado in 1996. The Senators are working hard with Wolanin’s advisors to see if they can get a deal in place because the word is he’d like to leave school ... Always great to see Hall of Fame blue-liner Denis Potvin in the press box. He’s working as an analyst on the Florida broadcasts now and anybody who has worked the Senators beat will tell you they treasured the time spent with Potvin when he worked on the Ottawa games ... Patrick Sieloff has scored in two straight NHL games. He just had a two-year break between goals. He opened the scoring at 12:48 and that was his first since April 9, 2016 ... The Panthers and Senators played the final 2:10 of the first period after an early intermission. The officials wanted to give the people in the arena time to replace a piece of broken glass in the corner.

Ottawa Citizen LOADED: 03.21.2018

1104774 Ottawa Senators

Patrick Sieloff happy to get his chance with Senators

Bruce Garrioch

Published on: March 20, 2018 | Last Updated: March 20, 2018 8:58 PM EDT

Patrick Sieloff made his Ottawa Senators debut at Canadian Tire Centre on Tuesday night.

Nearly 18 months had passed since Sieloff hit winger Clarke MacArthur in the corner during a training camp scrimmage on Sept. 25, 2016, but, while the veteran defenceman has been toiling with the Belleville Senators of the American Hockey League, it was still a surprise to see him get the call Tuesday.

While Sieloff hasn’t been forgotten by Ottawa fans, he has put the incident that caused MacArthur’s fourth concussion in 18 months behind him. Many thought Sieloff ended MacArthur’s career, although MacArthur did return to the Senators’ lineup for the end of the regular season and the playoffs in 2017.

“It’s an unfortunate circumstance, but I’m just happy to be here and happy to get the opportunity,” Sieloff said Tuesday morning. “I’ve never questioned my hard work and my work ethic. If you keep putting in the hard work, eventually it will pay off, whether it’s next week or a year from now.

“I just trusted the process and I knew that one day it would work out like it is.”

MacArthur didn’t pass the medical exam in training camp in September and isn’t expected to play again. He also had a neck injury during the Stanley Cup playoffs last spring.

On the day of the incident with Sieloff, winger Bobby Ryan dropped his gloves and fought Sieloff, 23, who was sent off the ice during the scrimmage and wasn’t recalled from the AHL affiliate last season, but did re-sign with the Senators as a restricted free agent last summer.

“Honestly, when it happened, they handled it the way they had to handle it,” Sieloff said. “It was just another bump in the road. I just wanted to keep moving on and playing my game and worked to get back up here.

“It’s been good (being in Ottawa). Honestly, the guys are all good. They’ve been awesome. They’ve been great. They all came up, said, ‘Hi,’ welcomed me and said, ‘Let’s go play hockey and have fun.’”

Tuesday’s game was only the second Sieloff has played in the NHL — he scored a goal and collected two penalty minutes for the Calgary Flames against the Minnesota Wild on April 9, 2016. And, he has now scored in two straight games after opening the scoring at 12:48 of the first vs. Florida.

“It’s never an easy thing down there. You’re always trying to work on your game and get better,” Sieloff said. “You have to do your job and do what got you here.”

Ottawa Citizen LOADED: 03.21.2018

1104775 Ottawa Senators

Ottawa Senators announce that Erik Karlsson's son has died



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 21, 2018

Staff Report

THE CANADIAN PRESS

Published on: March 20, 2018 | Last Updated: March 20, 2018 7:28 PM EDT

OTTAWA — The Ottawa Senators say the son of captain Erik Karlsson has died.

"The collective thoughts and prayers of the Ottawa Senators organization, the city of Ottawa and entire hockey community rest with Erik and Melinda Karlsson following the loss of their son," the team said in a release.

"We ask that you respect the family's wishes for privacy during the grieving process."

The couple announced in November that they were expecting their first child.

The Senators had said earlier that Karlsson would not play in Tuesday's game against the visiting Florida Panthers.

The hockey world was quick to voice its condolences and support.

"The players and staff of the NHLPA extend their condolences to Erik and Melinda Karlsson following the loss of their son," tweeted the NHL Players' Association.

"Today is a day to remember that there are way more important things in life and hockey is just a game. Our condolences to @ErikKarlsson65 and his wife Melinda on their tragic loss," former NHLer Marc Savard said via Twitter.

"The entire LA Kings' organization is thinking of Erik Karlsson and his family during this time," said the Kings.

The 27-year-old Senators captain has already suffered through a painful season that has seen Ottawa plummet in the standings. The two-time Norris Trophy winner was also the object of trade speculation for weeks ahead of the NHL trading deadline.

Karlsson, who can become an unrestricted free agent after the 2018-19 season, said in late February that he hopes to stay in Ottawa. Talks on a contract extension can't begin until July 1.

The smooth-skating Swede had a slow start to the season after surgery last summer to repair torn tendons in his left foot. The tears, which occurred during the Stanley Cup playoffs, were found in a post-season MRI.

Going into play Tuesday, the 26-34-11 Senators were 14th in the Eastern Conference. They finished sixth in the Eastern standings last season at 44-28-10.

Ottawa Citizen LOADED: 03.21.2018

1104776 Ottawa Senators

Senators captain Erik Karlsson and his wife, Melinda, lose child

Ken Warren

Published on: March 20, 2018 | Last Updated: March 20, 2018 6:56 PM EDT

Ottawa Senators captain Erik Karlsson and his wife, Melinda, have lost their son, the National Hockey League team announced Tuesday afternoon.

The Karlssons were married last August in Ottawa. Their first child had been expected this spring.

The pregnancy was announced in November, and the gender of the child was revealed in December.

"The collective thoughts and prayers of the Ottawa Senators organization, the city of Ottawa and entire hockey community rest with Erik and Melinda Karlsson following the loss of their son," the team's statement said. "We ask that you respect the family's wishes for privacy during the grieving process."

The Senators announced Tuesday morning that Karlsson wouldn't play against the Florida Panthers that night.

Head coach Guy Boucher said only that the star defenceman was neither sick nor injured.

Ottawa Citizen LOADED: 03.21.2018

1104777 Ottawa Senators

GAME DAY: Florida Panthers at Ottawa Senators

Bruce Garrioch

Published on: March 20, 2018 | Last Updated: March 20, 2018 2:29 PM EDT

THE BIG MATCHUP

Matt Duchene vs. Aleksander Barkov

Duchene, the Senators' top centre, has been their best player down the stretch. While he was held scoreless in Saturday's 2-1 loss to the Columbus Blue Jackets, Duchene has six points in his past four games. It bodes well for next season and he has become a player the club can rely on. Barkov has been the Panthers' best performer this season, but was minus-3 in a loss to the Edmonton Oilers on Saturday. That can't happen again.

FIVE KEYS TO THE GAME

1. Back to Anderson

It's his turn to start after the club's loss to the Columbus Blue Jackets on Saturday, and Craig Anderson has wins in four of his past five games. He made 35 stops in a victory over the Panthers last Monday in Sunrise, Fla., so he should have confidence.

2. Win at home

The Senators have a 15-14-6 record at home this season and that's not going to get you anywhere. Don't forget two of those wins weren't even at Canadian Tire Centre because one was at Lansdowne Park and the other was in Sweden.

3. Goals from Pageau

He took over the role as the No. 2 centre when Derick Brassard was dealt to the Penguins at the deadline. Jean-Gabriel Pageau has been held pointless in the club's past two games and he has to use this opportunity to bring the offence.

4. Get to 500, Bobby



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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Bobby Ryan has gone pointless in six straight games. He has been sitting at 499 career points in 720 games. He'd like to achieve this milestone before the end of the season, but really there's no pressure to make it happen.

5. Score on the power play

The Senators have actually had some success with the man advantage lately and that trend has to continue. They only had one chance on the power play in Columbus, but they have to make the most of their opportunities the rest of the way.

Ottawa Citizen LOADED: 03.21.2018

1104751 New Jersey Devils

New Jersey Devils vs. San Jose Sharks: LIVE score updates and chat (3/20/18)

By Chris Ryan

Cory Schneider, Nico Hischier, Michael Grabner, Sami Vatanen and the New Jersey Devils will continue their six-game road trip with game No. 5 against the San Jose Sharks at 10:30 p.m. Eastern on Tuesday at SAP Center in San Jose, California.

Schneider will make his first start since March 8 and will be searching for his first win since Dec. 27.

Devils' lines vs. Sharks

Here is everything you need to know about the game:

What: New Jersey Devils (37-27-8) vs. San Jose Sharks (36-24-12)

When: 10:30 p.m. EST, Tuesday, March 20, 2018

Where: SAP Center, San Jose, California

TV: MSG+

Live stream: MSG GO

Radio: The One Jersey Network

Star Ledger LOADED: 03.21.2018

1104752 New Jersey Devils

Devils' lines, pairings vs. Sharks (3/20/18) | Miles Wood out; Cory Schneider in net

By Chris Ryan

Cory Schneider will return to goal when the Devils finish up the California portion of their six-game road trip against the San Jose Sharks at 10:30 p.m. Eastern on Tuesday at SAP Center in San Jose.

Keith Kinkaid started the first four games of the Devils' trip, going 3-1-0. The Devils dropped their last game on Sunday, 4-2, against the Anaheim Ducks.

Forward Miles Wood will also be out with an upper body injury, so here's how the Devils will line up against the Sharks, plus notes heading into game No. 73.

Josh Manson, Taylor Hall

FORWARDS

Taylor Hall - Nico Hischier - Kyle Palmieri

Michael Grabner - Travis Zajac - Brian Gibbons

Patrick Maroon - Blake Coleman - Stefan Noesen

Jesper Bratt - Brian Boyle - Drew Stafford

Damon Severson, Tyler Toffoli

DEFENSEMEN

Andy Greene - Sami Vatanen

John Moore - Damon Severson

Will Butcher - Ben Lovejoy

NHL: New Jersey Devils at Boston Bruins

GOALIES

Starter: Cory Schneider (38 GP, 17-14-6, 2.81 GAA, .912 save percentage)

Backup: Keith Kinkaid

Schneider is 4-6-2 with a .909 save percentage and 3.13 GAA in his career against the Sharks.

Miles Wood

SCRATCHES

Forward: Jimmy Hayes (healthy), Miles Wood (upper body, day-to-day), Pavel Zacha (upper body, skating on own, day-to-day)

Defenseman: Mirco Mueller (healthy)

On IR: F Marcus Johansson (concussion, skating on own)

GAME NOTES

Wood out

Forward Miles Wood will miss Tuesday's game with an upper body injury suffered in Sunday's loss to the Ducks. Wood is considered day-to-day.

Wood was injured in a collision with Ducks defenseman Francois Beauchemin, where Wood's right arm bent awkwardly. Wood reacted in immediate pain before skating to the bench on down the tunnel. He did not return to the game after the second-period hit.

With Wood out, Jesper Bratt will take his spot in the lineup. Bratt was a healthy scratch on Sunday and in the Devils' 8-3 win over the Vegas Golden Knights.

The Devils will be missing Wood's 17 goals, which ranks third on the team. But Bratt is tied for fourth on the team with 35 points this season.

What's at stake on Tuesday

The Devils plus the three teams they are fighting with for a playoff spot are all in action on Tuesday.

Before the puck drops in San Jose, the Devils should know the results of the games for the Florida Panthers, Columbus Blue Jackets and Philadelphia Flyers.

The Devils trail the Blue Jackets and Flyers by three points in the Metropolitan Division. The Flyers currently hold third place in the division, while the Blue Jackets have the first wild card spot. The Devils have one game in hand on both teams. The Blue Jackets visit the Rangers on Tuesday, while the Flyers visit the Red Wings.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 21, 2018

The Panthers trail the Devils by three points for the second wild card spot. They are on the road against the Ottawa Senators and have two games in hand on the Devils.

Star Ledger LOADED: 03.21.2018

1104753 New Jersey Devils

Devils mailbag: Will team turn back to Cory Schneider eventually?

By Chris Ryan

The Devils begin their final 10 games of the regular season on Tuesday when they visit the San Jose Sharks. Before they do, here's another edition of the NJ.com Devils mailbag, where we take a look at the goalie situation between Keith Kinkaid and Cory Schneider, the Devils trying to finish off a playoff run, Marcus Johansson's health and much more.

Dillon

@omfsmtim

Replying to @ChrisRyan_NJ

The Ducks loss wasn't on Keith, but do you expect Hynes to go back to Cory on Tuesday? He needs to play eventually but Kinkaid should have some leash to avoid sitting after just one loss.

11:38 AM - Mar 19, 2018

See Dillon's other Tweets

Twitter Ads info and privacy

CR: I do think the Devils turn to Schneider on Tuesday against the San Jose Sharks, and it won't be meant on an indictment on Kinkaid's play after one loss. Coach John Hynes said prior to Sunday's game the Devils wanted to get Schneider in eventually, and after four straight starts for Kinkaid, Tuesday makes sense. On typical road trips, when Schneider was the everyday starter, Kinkaid would usually get a game during a three or four-game stretch.

Regardless of who plays Tuesday, it's hard to imagine the two goalies don't split the back-to-back coming on Friday and Saturday against the Pittsburgh Penguins and Tampa Bay Lightning. Given the travel and short turnaround, both will likely get one start, so Schneider will play a game soon.

KDEVILPHIN

@KDEVILPHIN

Replying to @ChrisRyan_NJ

Do you think Cory will be the #1 again?

11:47 AM - Mar 19, 2018

See KDEVILPHIN's other Tweets

Twitter Ads info and privacy

CR: Eventually, yes. For the time being, Kinkaid has played one of the best stretches of his career, and the Devils have been right to ride him as much as possible. While Kinkaid has earned every start he's gotten, it has allowed Schneider to keep working after coming off a five-week injury.

Even if the goalies end up splitting games evenly over the final 10 games, expect Schneider to get a more consistent workload. At the end of the day, the Devils are going to let the results dictate playing time.

Panic

@307ken

Replying to @ChrisRyan_NJ

Cory has not seemed himself dating back to late dec - the seemingly soft goal per game during this 11 game losing streak coupled with maybe lack of confidence - how is the new goal tending coach and Cory working to fix what seems him as a liability when in net ?

5:36 PM - Mar 19, 2018

See Panic's other Tweets

Twitter Ads info and privacy

CR: Like you said, it's typically been one goal that's made the difference for Schneider during his current slide, where he hasn't won in 11 starts since Dec. 27. Getting one win will certainly help get him back into a groove, especially since he missed significant time between his illness in January followed by his groin injury.

Goalie coach Rollie Melanson works one-on-one with Schneider and Kinkaid at practice and off the ice, Melanson also coached Schneider when he broke into the NHL with the Vancouver Canucks and established himself in the league. So if there's any goalie coach who understands Schneider and can help him get back to his game, it's Melanson.

CraigyD™

@CraigyD127

Replying to @ChrisRyan_NJ

Do you think Marcus Johansson will be healthy for the playoffs is the devils maintain their position in the standings?

11:41 AM - Mar 19, 2018

See CraigyD™'s other Tweets

Twitter Ads info and privacy

CR: To start, I'm going to answer one other question I got on Johansson: it does not appear he'll be ready to return for his bobblehead night on Saturday. He stayed in New Jersey to skate on his own while the Devils were on their road trip, and given how long he has been out, he would need a few full practices to get up to speed if and when he is cleared.

That said, I think he has a chance to get back for the final few games or the playoffs. He has been skating on his own for more than two weeks now, which was a big step in his recovery. If he continues on that trajectory and is cleared to play, he could make a return. Cautious optimism is the best way to put it.

Matt Reichl

@matt12r

Replying to @ChrisRyan_NJ

What are the chances the Devils make the Playoffs with 2 weeks left in the season?

11:32 AM - Mar 19, 2018

See Matt Reichl's other Tweets

Twitter Ads info and privacy

CR: Entering their six-game road trip, I would have said iffy, just based on the difficulty of their schedule. But after winning three of four to start the trip and still holding their spot, it looks much better for them. They still need to win games down the stretch to fend off the Florida Panthers, Columbus Blue Jackets and/or Philadelphia Flyers, but the schedule gets a bit easier after this week.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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Following games against the Sharks, Penguins and Lightning, they play a five-game stretch with four games against teams currently out of the playoffs. They need to win consistently to get in, but they can take care of business during that stretch to make things easier on themselves.

Justin

@JD_Isaacs

Replying to @ChrisRyan_NJ

Is there that same feeling within the locker room from earlier this season when the devils were rolling compared to now where these games have some urgency to them?

11:55 AM - Mar 19, 2018

See Justin's other Tweets

Twitter Ads info and privacy

CR: It's not different from how the team felt early in the season. Even after losses or during losing streaks, the Devils have stayed the course and remained calm. They've avoided the term desperation, and they've often talked about not getting too high or too low following wins or losses.

Devils lose to Ducks: 6 observations | Fatigue not an excuse

KDEVILPHIN

@KDEVILPHIN

Replying to @ChrisRyan_NJ

Who will be out as a Healthy Scratch once Zacha comes back and only MoJo is out?

11:48 AM - Mar 19, 2018

See KDEVILPHIN's other Tweets

Twitter Ads info and privacy

CR: We'll know a little more about Miles Wood's injury when the Devils play the Sharks on Tuesday, so depending on the severity of that, he could be an option.

If Wood's injury isn't serious, the Devils would likely slide Blake Coleman back to a wing and scratch a different wing. Jesper Bratt has been out for a couple games as a healthy scratch recently, and Drew Stafford has been in and out of the lineup all season.

Eric Hogan

@ehogan47

Replying to @ChrisRyan_NJ

What is it going to take for Bratt to secure his spot again on the roster?

2:06 PM - Mar 19, 2018

2

See Eric Hogan's other Tweets

Twitter Ads info and privacy

CR: Bratt's a big reason why the Devils turned things around so quickly this season. Despite his much cooler second half, Bratt is still tied for fourth on the team with 35 points.

Over the last couple weeks, Hynes has said there weren't any big fixes that need to be made to Bratt's game. They're letting him work out some kinks and getting other forwards some deserved playing time for now, but I would expect Bratt in the lineup more often than not over the final 10 games.

KDEVILPHIN

@KDEVILPHIN

Replying to @ChrisRyan_NJ

Will Mueller ever get back in the lineup or is he just a spare tire/pull in case of emergency player?

11:49 AM - Mar 19, 2018

See KDEVILPHIN's other Tweets

Twitter Ads info and privacy

CR: At this point, it looks like Mueller has been slotted in as the team's seventh defenseman. The three defensive pairings have been set in stone for the most part lately, and Mueller has been the odd man out. The Devils do have two back-to-backs left, plus dressing 11 forwards and seven defensemen is always an option, so Mueller could see a game or two down the stretch.

Kyle Cannillo

@knills74

Replying to @ChrisRyan_NJ

Do you expect Mikey McLeod to get a phone call?

12:08 PM - Mar 19, 2018

1

See Kyle Cannillo's other Tweets

Twitter Ads info and privacy

CR: If Michael McLeod does, I would expect it would be to go to Binghamton in the AHL once his junior season in Mississauga is over. But it's hard to imagine a scenario, barring several injuries, where the Devils throw him right into the NHL fire.

John Dawkins

@JDsays2much

Replying to @ChrisRyan_NJ

Do we see Joey Anderson in an @NJDevils Jersey before the playoffs?

1:21 PM - Mar 19, 2018

See John Dawkins's other Tweets

Twitter Ads info and privacy

CR: Just like McLeod, Anderson likely won't end up in the NHL this season. That said, Anderson could be a player the Devils look to sign when his college season is over, whether that be in the coming weeks or over the summer.

Anderson, a 2016 third-round pick, had 26 points in 32 regular-season games as a sophomore at Minnesota-Duluth, and he was the captain for Team USA at the World Junior Championships.

victor troyan

@victortroyan

Replying to @ChrisRyan_NJ

Do you see Shero getting involved in the big fish UFA market (JT or John Carlson)? Or possibly trade for Hoffman or Pacioretty?

3:59 PM - Mar 19, 2018

See victor troyan's other Tweets

Twitter Ads info and privacy

CR: Signing John Tavares would probably be a stretch, but Shero making a push for John Carlson could make sense. The Capitals defenseman will be one of the top blue liners on the market this summer if he doesn't re-sign prior to July 1, and he does have New Jersey ties.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 21, 2018

What's more likely is Shero getting involved in the trade market, like he has done the past three offseasons, where he has added players such as Taylor Hall, Marcus Johansson and Kyle Palmieri. The Devils were tied to interest in Mike Hoffman from the Senators prior to the trade deadline, so he could still be an option in a trade down the line.

Star Ledger LOADED: 03.21.2018

1104754 New Jersey Devils

Cory Schneider pulled as Devils rocked by Sharks | Rapid reaction

By Chris Ryan

Cory Schneider's first start on the Devils' six-game road trip ended early, and Keith Kinkaid had trouble stopping the bleeding, too.

Schneider was pulled after giving up four goals on 14 shots over 30:31, and Kinkaid allowed two goals on the first two shots he faced as the San Jose Sharks rolled past the Devils, 6-2, on Tuesday night at SAP Center in San Jose, California.

The loss was the second straight for the Devils, who are now 3-2-0 on their six-game road trip. They play their final game of the trip on Friday night in Pittsburgh against the Penguins.

Along with the Devils' loss, the three teams in direct competition for playoff spots in the Eastern Conference all picked up points on Tuesday. The Columbus Blue Jackets and Florida Panthers both won in regulation, while the Flyers lost in a shootout to add one point.

The Devils trail the Blue Jackets by five points and the Flyers by four points with one game in hand on each. The Panthers trail the Devils by one point for the second wild card spot with two games in hand.

Any hopes the Devils had on Tuesday evaporated quickly, with the Sharks jumping out for three first-period goals. Eric Fehr chipped a shot over the left shoulder of Schneider from a sharp angle for a 1-0 lead 5:32 into play.

The Devils struck back when Taylor Hall scored on a semi-breakaway at 11:19, with his 32nd goal of the season tying the game 1-1. But the Sharks got goals from Joe Pavelski and Jannik Hansen to take a 3-1 lead into intermission.

Barclay Goodrow chased Schneider with a 2-on-1 goal at 10:38 of the second period, putting the Sharks up 4-1.

Kinkaid entered in relief and faced two shots the rest of the first period. Both found the net. Logan Couture scored at 11:18 for a 5-1 lead, and Mikkel Boedker added a sixth goal at 18:20. He stopped all nine shots he faced in the third period.

Blake Coleman tacked on a late goal for the Devils, popping in a shot in front of the crease with 1:36 left in regulation.

Hall briefly exits

With the Devils already down big in the second period, they got a scare when Hall was shaken up by a big hit from Sharks forward Evander Kane. Hall was slow to get up and went down the tunnel, but he quickly returned to the bench and the ice. The hit to Hall's chest appeared to knock the wind out of the Devils forward.

Next up

The Devils will travel to Pittsburgh on Wednesday before practicing on Thursday. Following their game against the Penguins at 7 p.m. on Friday at PPG Paints Arena in Pittsburgh, the Devils will quickly return home for

a 7 p.m. game against the Tampa Bay Lightning on Saturday at Prudential Center in Newark.

Star Ledger LOADED: 03.21.2018

1104755 New Jersey Devils

Live updates: Sharks 3, Devils 1

Andy Vasquez, Staff Writer

SAN JOSE, Calif. -- The Devils will have a familiar face back in net tonight against the Sharks as they try to continue their success on the longest road trip of the season.

New Jersey won the first three games of this six-game swing, beating the Predators, Golden Knights and Kings. But they're coming off a poor performance in Sunday night's 4-2 loss to the Ducks.

Enter Cory Schneider, the Devils top goaltender who is making his first start of this trip. Schneider pointed out that those earlier wins were nice, but the Devils can't afford to limp their way back to New Jersey as they continue to chase their first playoff berth since 2012.

"We have to build on it," Schneider said after morning skate. "If you start the road trip well, it doesn't do any good if you finish it not so well. So we've got to make sure that we close this thing out and get some points here in the last couple of games to make it a really good road trip."

Need to now

*Schneider is making his first start since March 8. The Devils haven't won a game with Schneider in net since December 27. Schneider missed five weeks, starting the last week of January, with a groin injury. He's played in only three games since, giving up three goals in each with a save percentage of .888.

*Devils forward Miles Wood will sit out tonight after suffering an upper-body injury in the Devils' loss at Anaheim on Sunday night. The Devils list him as day-to-day.

*Jesper Bratt, 19, will be in the lineup for the second time in the last three games. Here's what Devils coach John Hynes said about Bratt after this morning's skate.

"I thought he actually played pretty well against LA, but we have to make decisions all the time of who's in and who's out, but Jesper's been a very good player for us and he's a good young player, so the areas we've talked with him about: being ablate play well in tight areas under pressure and how hard he checks when he doesn't have the puck is something that needs to be little better, and he was better in LA and we expect him to be better tonight."

Buffalo Sabres goaltender Robin Lehner (40), of Sweden,

*The Devils also switched up their lines for tonight's game. Nico Hischier is moving up to be the first-line center alongside Taylor Hall and Kyle Palmieri. Travis Zajac is back on the second line at center alongside Brian Gibbons and Michael Grabner. Bratt will be on the fourth line with center Brian Boyle and Drew Stafford.

*The Sharks beat the Devils 3-0 at Prudential Center on Oct. 20.

Lines

Devils

Taylor Hall-Nico Hischier-Kyle Palmieri

Michael Grabner-Travis Zajac-Brian Gibbons



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Patrick Maroon-Blake Coleman-Stefan Noesen

Drew Stafford-Brian Boyle-Jesper Bratt

ANdy Greene-Sami Vatanen

Joh Moore-Damon Severson

Will Butcher-Ben Lovejoy

Cory Schneider

Sharks

Evander Kane-Joe Pavelski-Melker Karlsson

Tomas Hertl-Logan Couture-Mikkel Boedker

Timo Mier-Chris Tierney-Kevin Labanc

Barclay Goodrow-EricFehr-Jannik Hansen

Marc-Edouard Vlasic-Justin Braun

Paul Martin-Brent Burns

Brenden Dillion-Dylan DeMelo

Martin Jones

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1104756 New Jersey Devils

Cory Schneider returns to net as Devils face Sharks in pivotal game

Andy Vasquez, March 20, 2018

SAN JOSE, Calif. — There will be no easing into things for Cory Schneider.

The Devils top goaltender returns to the net late Tuesday night as they face the Sharks at SAP Center. And it just may be the most important start he's ever made for New Jersey, with just 10 games remaining in the season and the Devils in a dogfight to make the playoffs for the first time since 2012.

"It's a big one," Schneider said after the Devils morning skate. "But I'm not trying to overemphasize this one versus any of the other [games with the Devils]. I'm just worried about my process and making sure that I play well and I'm doing my job and hopefully the rest will follow. So I'm not as focused on the result, I'm worried about the process of keeping as many pucks as I can out of the net."

For nearly two weeks, Schneider's process has not included actually playing in games.

Keith Kinkaid made the last four starts for the Devils as coach John Hynes elected to go with the hot goaltender. And so Schneider, who has played only three games since missing five weeks with a groin injury, hasn't played in a game since March 8, when the Devils lost to Winnipeg.

It's not an ideal situation for Schneider, who turned 32 on Sunday. But the veteran goaltender took it in stride.

"It's not about any individual, right now this time of year," Schneider said. "So whatever job you're asked to do, you have to find a way to do it the best way you can. So yeah, while I'm used to playing more often if that's not the case then it's on me to work hard and be ready and be a good teammate and all those things."

Schneider said he didn't change much about his routine, other than putting in some extra work so he could stay sharp. And when he did

work, he went 100 percent because he wanted to be ready to play at a high level when he returned.

"Obviously, [you] focus in on those things that you can do better, that you can be better at," Schneider said. "And for me again it's partly just getting up and playing with the intensity and the competitiveness that's required this time of year. That's also what I've been working on, is to compete intensely in practice and just try to carry that over to the game."

It's hard to believe, but the Devils' last win with Schneider in net came on Dec. 27. The Devils are 0-8-2 in his starts since then. And Schneider was not happy with his performance in the three games he played March 1-8 after he returned from injury. He gave up three goals in each loss with a save percentage of .888.

But after nearly two weeks to think about it, Schneider believes he's close to playing better.

"It can feel far away when you're not getting the win," Schneider said. "But you have to sit back and say it's a save here or there or just be a little bit better. That's all it is. I've been working hard and putting a lot of work in the last little bit. I'm just eager to compete and go out there and not think too much and just go out there and play."

It's a huge game for the Devils, who entering Tuesday held the second wild card spot but were only three points ahead of the streaking Panthers, who are 7-2-1 in their last 10. Now, Schneider is hoping he can help the Devils, who have won three of four to start this road trip, continue their own hot streak.

"I'm eager to play again and just compete and try to get two points here," Schneider said. "It's been awhile, but Keith played great that last stretch here and got us a few wins, so for me it's just trying to keep that going, trying to make sure that we're getting good goaltending and giving us a chance to win here."

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1104757 New Jersey Devils

Sharks 6, Devils 2: Post-game observations — John Hynes won't blame goaltending for loss

Andy Vasquez, March 21, 2018

SAN JOSE, Calif. — The Devils were optimistic that Tuesday would be the night Cory Schneider turned things around.

Schneider was tabbed to start for the first time since March 8. A strong performance could have snapped a personal 10-game winless streak for Schneider and provided him and the Devils some much-needed confidence in the heat of a tight playoff race.

Instead, only 30 minutes and 31 seconds after the game began, Schnieder was watching from the bench wondering what went wrong.

The Sharks obliterated the Devils, 6-2 at SAP Center on Tuesday. Schneider was pulled after allowing four goals on 14 shots. There are serious concerns about how much the Devils can rely on him over the final nine games as they push for their first playoff spot since 2012. (We wrote here about how Tuesday's loss affected the playoff chase. Spoiler alert: it's not good.)

But coach John Hynes, understandably, didn't want to broach the Schneider issue publicly after the loss. When asked if he was disappointed in Schneider's play, he gave no definitive answer.



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"Well, we've got to be better in front of him, too. It's not about one player tonight," Hynes said, quickly changing the subject to the Devils' need to better match the intensity of their opponent.

When asked directly to assess Schneider's performance, Hynes dodged the question.

"You know, I think he made some stops and there were a couple that went in," Hynes said. "But to me, tonight's not on the goaltender or either goaltender that was in. Our team has to be better in lots of aspects of it."

It's true that Schneider's teammates didn't put him in a good position on any of the goals he allowed. And given how quickly Keith Kinkaid surrendered two goals, maybe it wouldn't have mattered who was in net. (At one point the Sharks had six goals on 16 shots.)

But good goaltenders make big, tough saves when their team needs it. And Schneider didn't do that on Tuesday night

And it's been that way for a while. The Devils haven't won a start with Schneider in net since December 27. He's 0-9-2 in those 11 starts with 40 goals allowed and a .868 save percentage. None of that is good.

As you read above, Hynes was unwilling to reveal his true feelings on Schneider's play. So what did Schneider think of his own performance? Your guess is as good as ours. He dressed quickly and left the locker room without speaking to reporters.

Other observations

Things went from bad to downright scary for the Devils late in the second period when star Taylor Hall absorbed a big hit from Evander Kane and struggled to pick himself up from the ice. Hall then skated to the bench and walked directly back to the locker room.

Devils fans understandably feared the worst, but Hall explained after the game.

"I got the wind knocked out of me," he said. "It's not a good feeling."

He was back on the bench before the end of the second period and played without hindrance in the third period.

Hall did have the one bright spot for the Devils on this bleak night, scoring a memorable goal after a tremendous individual effort. He beat two Sharks to a loose puck near the blue line, corralled it and quickly unleashed a wrist shot that goaltender Martin Jones had exactly zero chance of stopping.

It was an exquisite play. And it was Hall's 32nd goal of the season. Unfortunately for the Devils, it was the only goal they would score until the final two minutes of the third period.

Captain and defenseman Andy Greene reacts after the Devils lost 6-2 to the Sharks on Tuesday, March 20, 2018, at SAP Center in San Jose, Calif. Andy Vasquez/NorthJersey.com

For the second straight game, the Devils had a lengthy 5-on-3 advantage and failed to score. In Anaheim on Sunday night, the Devils got nothing out of their two-man advantage. They only got one shot. Tuesday night they managed four shots, but the unit was still disjointed and struggled.

It was that way on the power play overall. The Devils finished the night 0-for-4 on power-play chances.

"It starts with myself," Hall said. "I have the puck probably a lot on the power play. So just better execution, better confidence, just finding a way to make plays and get pucks to the net and create chances. We're not doing that as much as we had been on the power play."

In their last two games, the Devils are only 1-of-8 on the power play.

"Our puck decision, our puck execution wasn't very good," Hynes said. "We've got to have better entries and then when we get the puck in the offensive zone, we've got to be higher, we've got to get to our sets and good power plays, one, two passes you've got to deliver it to the net and we didn't do that much tonight."

Up next

The Devils are off Wednesday as they are scheduled to fly to Pittsburgh. They'll practice Thursday in Pittsburgh and return to action Friday at 7 p.m. when they face the Penguins at PPG Paints Arena.

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1104758 New Jersey Devils

Cory Schneider struggles as Sharks pummel NJ Devils 6-2, putting playoff hopes in jeopardy

Andy Vasquez, March 21, 2018

SAN JOSE, Calif. — The last few days have not been kind to the New Jersey Devils.

The Sharks pummeled the Devils on Tuesday night, 6-1, chasing struggling goaltender Cory Schneider from the game with four goals in 30 minutes.

The Devils have lost two straight after starting this season-long, six-game road trip with three straight wins. And worse yet, they're now clinging to the final Wild Card spot in the East.

The Florida Panthers trailed the Devils by five points on Monday morning. But they won on Monday and Tuesday night and are now just a point behind New Jersey for the final playoff spot. The Devils have nine games to play, the Panthers have 11.

The Devils can take some of the heat off, and make this a highly-successful road trip, with a win in Pittsburgh on Friday night. But there was very little promising to take from Tuesday night's debacle at the SAP Center.

Schneider, in his first action since March 8, did not look good. His first two goals allowed were tough to stop, a shot from a tough angle and a deflection in front of the net from Joe Pavelski. The third goal probably should have been stopped on a breakaway. The fourth goal was bad; Schneider got beat five-hole on a long shot on a breakaway.

"We've got to be better in front of him, too," Devils coach John Hynes said. "It's not about one player tonight."

And he's partially right. The Devils didn't make it easy on Schneider on Tuesday night. Not at all. But Schneider hasn't looked sharp in a while, and that continued as he allowed four goals on just 14 shots.

Remarkably, the Devils haven't won a game that Schneider started since Dec. 27, when the Devils beat the Red Wings at Prudential Center. Since then, the Devils are 0-9-2 when Schneider starts — he did miss about five weeks, from late January through February, with a groin injury.

Keith Kinkaid didn't fare much better. Less than a minute after he entered the game midway through the second period, he allowed a goal. He'd allow one more before the second period ended, putting the Devils in a 6-1 hole.

"We gave up too many opportunities from the odd-man rushes, and they ended up capitalizing," captain and defenseman Andy Greene said. "But we can't sit there and give them free plays, free goals and quite a few of them were. .. this time of the year, you can't give teams free offense."

The only good thing that happened for the Devils on this night? Taylor Hall scored a gorgeous goal after single-handedly chasing down the puck early the second period. He briefly left the game and went to the locker room in the second period after taking a hard hit to the chest. But he quickly returned.



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And so at least the Devils avoided a key injury. That's about the only positive from their trip to Northern California.

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1104858 Websites

The Athletic / From worst to first, ranking how each NHL team performs at the draft

By James Gordon Mar 20, 2018 99

There are many ways to go about building a winning NHL roster, and the most successful teams use all the tools at their disposal: signing free agents, trading with other squads and drafting players.

Of the three main roster-building tools, the draft gives teams the most control over their own destiny. Whereas top free agents can say yea or nay to any particular offer (and tend to favour markets that offer the more attractive mixes of size, competitiveness and tax treatment), and trades require another willing and self-interested partner, teams typically get what they want at the draft. There are certain players available to be chosen, teams make their selections. Fin.

Of course, teams' advantages differ at the draft based on where they finished in the standings the previous season and where the lottery balls fall. But in no way is that the be-all, end-all factor in determining what is a good and bad-drafting team.

Success at the draft came up in a piece I wrote for The Athletic earlier this month about the Ottawa Senators and why they need more scouting resources and, maybe, some new voices in the front office.

Looking at the 2011-2015 drafts, I compared them with two of their rumoured trade deadline partners: the Winnipeg Jets and Tampa Bay Lightning. How could the Senators become a team bursting with enough assets to hold onto their best young assets and still be flush enough to improve their teams via trade?

While Ottawa has had a lot of success drafting NHL players — that is, guys who actually get into big league games — they haven't been able to find many elite contributors in the recent past. The Senators' best pick in that time period — Mika Zibanejad — no longer plays for them, while Winnipeg and Tampa had each drafted five or more core players in that time.

Winnipeg and Tampa are known as good drafters, though, and some readers wondered where Ottawa would fit in the league as a whole.

Curious myself, I ran through all the teams to see if I could come up with a list that made sense. I wanted to look at two things: teams' ability to complete the baseline task of drafting players who can play in the NHL, and teams' ability to draft young, potential core players.

For the first part, I looked at hockeydb.com, counted up all the picks teams made during that five-year period and divided them by the total number of NHL games played by the selections. That gave me an average number of games played per pick (Note: I gathered all these numbers last Tuesday, and they obviously change by the day).

To identify potential core players, I looked at the list of the top 100 players under 25 that my colleague Corey Pronman published prior to the start of this season, then added guys who've had breakout campaigns in 2017-2018: think William Karlsson, Mathew Barzal, Kyle Connor, Brock Boeser, etc. In all, I wound up with 105 players, and once again averaged those against the number of picks each team made to determine the rate at which teams selected top youngsters. Those players' names are highlighted in green in the Images below, while regular NHLers appear in white. The Top 105 rate listed with every team refers to what percentage of a team's picks turned up a top player.

To some extent, teams are hurt here by being too good for too long. You're much more likely to find both NHL and impact players the higher you pick in the draft. Some teams, like the Penguins, have a higher degree of difficulty because they've been so good for so long. Others, like the Kings and Rangers, exacerbated their situations by consistently trading away first- and second-round picks (with mixed results). The Kings, for example, didn't pick in the first round in three of the five years we're examining.

On the one hand, they were Stanley Cup contenders in some of those years and had more pressing concerns. On the other, they haven't been replenishing with young, cheap players to back up their core of expensive, Cup-winning veterans and are, at best, a bubble team on the way down as a result. You can't, by definition, be a good drafting team if your actions rarely allow you to draft in decent positions.

Nor does drafting in good positions automatically make you a good drafting team (as you'll see in a moment with our worst-ranked team). I'd encourage you to consider the degree of difficulty ranking when deciding if you agree with where I've placed each team.

A note on the time period. The reason I initially chose the years 2011-2015 is because 2011 was a transitional year for the three teams I first looked at: It was Tampa's first year under GM Steve Yzerman, the Jets had just returned to the league, and the Senators were shifting into what many believed would be a long rebuild process.

Additionally, the further we go into the past, the more churn there is in front offices and the further away we get from modern player evaluation. Admittedly, there's definitely a "what have you done for me lately" component to this.

I think it's useful to limit this to those years for a few other reasons:

- 1) It allows us to focus on young players who are still on their first couple RFA contracts, which is when the team has the most control over them;
- 2) Most of the players were 24 or younger to start the season, which allowed me to use Corey's ranking. I also think there's just a ton of value in being able to identify players who can contribute right away, given how the league is skewing younger and good teams need value contributors as quickly as possible;
- 3) It limits the bump that lottery teams would get from the past two seasons. Typically, the only players who make an immediate impact are guys at the very top of the draft, and I think that's a little unfair to everyone else here. Starting in 2015 allows us to deal with players who are now in their 20s and who should probably be showing some signs of being good players by this point.

I decided to give a little more weight to teams that managed to draft star players, and if two teams were close in terms of our baseline numbers, I generally gave the nod to the one that had a higher hit rate on top 105 players.

By no means is this list perfect. A lot of this — the years selected, the degree of difficulty, the designation of key players — is subjective, as are most ranking pieces like this. You'll probably disagree with some of these, and that's great! We encourage critical thinking here at The Athletic, and I hope you'll take the time to leave a comment or two if you think any of my picks are egregious.

At the end of the day though, I think this gives a fair representation of which teams have most taken advantage of the draft recently.

So, without further ado, let's get to the ranking.

30. Arizona Coyotes

Remember that thing I said about picking high not necessarily resulting in success? No team provides a better example of that than the Coyotes.

While 2015 players like the aforementioned Barzal and Boeser — both selected in the middle to late parts of the first round — have had rookie-



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of-the-year level campaigns, Arizona's third-overall pick, Dylan Strome, has played all of 18 NHL games and hasn't done anything with them.

The Coyotes finished near the bottom of the league in average games played by their picks and their hit rate on top young players was low, despite decent drafting position in 2013, 2014 and 2015. The Coyotes had more picks overall than all but one other team, yet Max Domi is the brightest star here. That isn't saying a whole lot given his struggles this season.

The good news? Things appear to be turning around since GM John Chayka took over. His first draft as GM in 2016 turned up Clayton Keller at No. 7 and Jakob Chychrun at No. 16.

29. Minnesota Wild

As with the Coyotes, the Wild have really struggled to draft NHLers — their picks from 2013-2015 had played a grand total of 222 games when I pulled the numbers, which is ... bad. In fairness, the Wild were pretty consistently good during the time in question and they did have the third-worst average pick position in the league.

Part of the reason for that was the fact they traded their 2013 first-rounder to Buffalo. They did get Jason Pominville — who scored 30 goals for them the next season — in return, so it's tough to be too critical of that.

28. Dallas Stars

The Stars aren't quite as bad as some of these other teams in terms of games played per pick, but the lousy quality of players they've gotten despite some really decent draft positioning hurts them a lot.

Imagine how great the Stars would be — what with Tyler Seguin, Jamie Benn and Alexander Radulov — had they managed to get another core piece or two with one of their many mid-first and second-round picks. Instead, they've nabbed mostly role players who don't move the needle much.

This team should be much further along than it is at this point.

27. Los Angeles Kings

Admittedly, the Kings might be getting a bit of the short shrift here. They won the Stanley Cup twice in our window, so it's not like they were getting premium picks. In fact, they had the worst average pick position among all teams. Meanwhile, Tanner Pearson, who scored 24 goals for the Kings last season, just missed the cut for our under-25 players (he celebrated his birthday just prior to the start of the season). Adrian Kempe definitely looks like a player, but he's on the bubble here.

The toughest pill to swallow is that the player who might wind up being their best draft find since 2011 now patrols the ice for someone else.

In 2015, the Kings traded Colin Miller, a first-round pick and goalie Martin Jones to the Boston Bruins for Milan Lucic. In retrospect, it was a ton to give up for a guy who wound up playing just one season for them. The Vegas Golden Knights grabbed Miller from the Bruins in last summer's expansion draft and the defenceman has, as of this writing, scored 38 points in 71 games while posting a 56.8 (!) Corsi%.

The Kings didn't help their draft position by dealing away most of their first-rounders, either. The Lucic deal was a dud, as was giving up their 2011 first-rounder to get a rapidly declining Dustin Penner. Trading their 2013 first-rounder along with Jack Johnson to get Jeff Carter was a huge win, however, as he played a big part of those Stanley Cup wins and continues to thrive in LA.

26. St. Louis Blues

Given how consistent the Blues have been for such a long time, I was expecting this list to look better. Outside of Parayko, though, is there anyone here to get particularly excited about. As with the Kings and Blackhawks, the Blues appear to be a part of a major power shift in the Western Conference. Their inability to get many quality players in the draft of late probably has a lot to do with it.

For all the talk of Blues GM Doug Armstrong's dedication to asset management due to recent trades of pending UFAs Kevin Shattenkirk and Paul Stastny during playoff drives, he also dealt away three first-rounders in the five years we're looking at. The return was Shattenkirk (good, but at the cost of a first plus Erik Johnson and other assets), Jay Bouwmeester (bad), and a couple of months of Ryan Miller (terrible).

25. New York Islanders

I struggled with whether or not to move the Isles up from this spot due to Barzal's emergence this season, but their sheer inability to draft NHL quality players is really startling. They've gotten the lowest average GP per pick, and, had they not found Barzal at 16, they'd be dead last in this ranking.

Want to know why they've never been able to build around a franchise player in John Tavares, who might walk as a UFA in the summer? This is a big one.

24. Montreal Canadiens

The Habs deserve a lot of scorn for their inability to draft good players, and it's made worse by the fact that the best guy they did pick, Alex Galchenyuk, was nearly run out of town at the trade deadline. Since getting Galchenyuk at No.3, their first-round picks were Michael McCarron, Nikita Scherbak and Noah Juulsen.

If you know who any of those guys are and aren't a Habs fan, here is a gold star for you.

23. New York Rangers

As I mentioned, the Rangers were one of the teams that dealt away a lot of quality picks in order to add to a really high-end, contending roster. They did well, too, getting Rick Nash, Martin St. Louis and a Cup final appearance out of the deal. Unfortunately, they're now paying the cost for that win-now mentality. It looks like the Rangers could be in for a pretty lengthy rebuild.

22. San Jose Sharks

The Sharks have done fine when it comes to getting NHL games out of their picks, but there's just nothing very exciting happening here. Hertl scores 20 goals and 40 points in a good year, and Meier looks like a player, but neither screams "star player." If the ageing Sharks don't start finding those kinds of players at a higher clip, they're destined to join the Blackhawks, Blues and others on a long trip down the standings.

21. Ottawa Senators

The Senators deserve credit for getting a lot of mileage out of their picks, but as with the Sharks, they really get dinged here by their inability to find top-end talent. Ryan Dzingel's 20+ goal season has been nice to see, but he's already 26 and hadn't done much of anything before that. Thomas Chabot could move the Senators up fairly quickly if he could show he's a top-pair defenceman now, but he hasn't been given the opportunity to do so. Cody Ceci's been a disaster, despite the beliefs of Good Hockey Men, and Lazar is hanging by a thread as an NHLer. All in all, it's not a very impressive group.

20. Detroit Red Wings

The Wings aren't particularly terrible by either of our measures nor are they very good. They just traded one of their top forwards in Thomas Tatar, they're probably going to lose Mike Green off a D-corps that was already really weak to begin with and their goaltending is a shade below mediocre.

The result is this very blah rating that suggests it'll probably be many years before they get another sniff at the playoffs.

19. Washington Capitals

It must be very depressing for Capitals fans to think about what might have been had their team not traded away Filip Forsberg before he'd



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even played a single game in a Washington sweater, so we won't harp on it here.

18. Vancouver Canucks

If the Canucks wind up having another quality player or two emerge from the 2016 draft, we'd be looking at a very different ranking a year from now. Boeser's pure goal-scoring talent is a potential game-changer for this down-in-the-dumps franchise.

17. Buffalo Sabres

The Sabres have had the second-highest average pick during our time period and they're still a complete tire fire. That tells you all you need to know.

16. Toronto Maple Leafs

The Leafs have picked up some nice players over our five-year span, which is why they're ranked as high as they are. They've completely flubbed it at times, too. In 2011, they had two first-round picks and selected Tyler Biggs and Stuart Percy (12 GP combined). Their first-round pick in 2013, Frederik Gauthier, has also been a dud so far. They've shown some flashes in the draft, but they could be better.

15. Pittsburgh Penguins

That the Penguins have gotten anything of value while remaining near the top of the league every single year is a feat in itself, which is why they're as high as they are despite perhaps not getting as many top-end players as some of the teams behind them.

Jake Guentzel and Olli Maata have been very useful additions, and the Penguins seem to be onto something with goalies: Matt Murray has already helped to deliver two Stanley Cups by age 23 and Tristan Jarry showed enough that the Penguins felt safe dealing the top goaltending prospect behind him to the Senators at the trade deadline.

14. New Jersey Devils

The Devils have been very average, thus their very average ranking. But they did turn one of their average players into Taylor Hall (one-for-one!), and Hall is probably going to carry them to the playoffs. So they do have that feather in their cap.

13. Calgary Flames

The Flames have gotten a lot of games out of their players on average, while the top-end guys in Sean Monahan and Johnny Gaudreau (a particularly inspired pick) would be strong additions to any core.

The problem is that their second-tier guys who were good enough to make Corey's list at the start of the year — Bennett and Granlund — have had pretty lacklustre seasons and probably wouldn't be in green if he re-did that ranking today. As such, while their numbers look nice in this exercise, the reality doesn't necessarily match.

12. Colorado Avalanche

It can be hard not to screw up top picks sometimes, so credit to the Avs for not doing that. Rantanen, MacKinnon and Landeskog finally look like the core of a playoff team. Butcher didn't sign with the Avs and is projected to put up 40 points as a defenceman in New Jersey.

11. Nashville Predators

The Predators have made a ton of picks — third-most in the NHL during the period in question — which hurts their averages a bit. Considering they've turned up a lot of NHL players — and stars in Arvidsson and Jones — it seems to be working for them.

10. Philadelphia Flyers

Flyers are a lot like the Devils, in that they've been average in both games per pick and the percentage of picks that turn into top young players. The difference is that the top-end guys for Philly are way better.

9. Chicago Blackhawks

No team made more draft selections between 2011-2015 than the Blackhawks' 43 and, since they're pretty decent at it, they've turned up a lot of NHLers. Perhaps that was their strategy: "if we aren't going to get any high picks as a Cup contender, let's just throw a bunch of darts at the wall and hope a few of them hit the bullseye." More than a few of them have.

8. Boston Bruins

As with the Flyers, the top-end guys for the Bruins are really good and they've got some really nice second-tier finds as well. Heinen is already past 40 points and DeBrusk would be if he were healthy. Carlo has zero offence to speak of, but Dougie Hamilton is a top defenceman in the league. Everyone is familiar with Pastrnak by now.

It's crazy to think of where the Bruins might be had they not blown it at the 2015 draft. They got DeBrusk at 14, which is fine, but they also had the No. 13 pick, Jakub Zboril (0 GP) and the No. 15 pick, Zachary Senyshyn (0 GP). The next three picks? Mathew Barzal, Kyle Connor and Thomas Chabot.

7. Columbus Blue Jackets

As with the Blackhawks, the Blue Jackets drafted a ton of useful NHL players between 2011-2015. Unfortunately, outside of Zach Werenski, they haven't gotten any game-breaking skill players. That's what's holding them back from climbing higher on this list.

6. Edmonton Oilers

I've found it extremely difficult to find the right place for the Oilers, because when you pick at the top of the draft almost every single year, it's tough to get a sense of where you'd be otherwise.

Picking McDavid at No. 1 was a no-brainer. RNH was hard to pass up as the consensus No. 1 guy in 2011, but there were plenty of great players who went in the top 10 that year. I'm not sure how they could get away from taking Yakupov first in a really awful 2012 draft.

There are signs that they would be OK otherwise — Klefbom and Nurse are good young defencemen — which, combined with their bushel of high picks, keep them firmly in the top 10.

5. Florida Panthers

As with the Oilers, the Panthers have gotten a lot of top three picks in this window. Unlike the Oilers, they didn't miss on any of them. A core of Ekblad, Barkov, Huberdeau and Trocheck is definitely worth getting excited about. Now if only the Panthers could finally figure out a way to build around those pieces. Perhaps someone like a Jonathan Marchessault or a Reilly Smith is available *hand-on-chin thinking emoji*?

4. Carolina Hurricanes

The Hurricanes have gotten a lot of good, young, smart players and have hit on a high percentage of their picks for a while now. Noah Hanifin was an all-star this season, while Jaccob Slavin remains one of the more underrated defencemen in the league. The only thing holding the 'Canes out of the top-three has been their limited ability to find premium scoring talent. The closest they've gotten is with Aho, who has 25 goals already this season.

3. Tampa Bay Lightning

It's odd that the third-overall pick that the Lightning got as a result of a weird hiccup year wasn't the most, or even second-most, crucial choice they made during our chosen time period. No, the real game-changer was finding current league scoring leader and Hart Trophy candidate Nikita Kucherov at 58 in 2011, and following that up with current Vezina favourite Andrei Vasilevskiy at 19 in 2012.

Brayden Point has given the Lightning even more strength down the middle, while Namestnikov and Drouin brought back fantastic assets to



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an already strong squad. The Lightning are a powerhouse, and strong drafting is the main reason why.

2. Winnipeg Jets

Although the Jets got fewer games played per pick on average than the handful of strong drafting teams we've just examined, what set them apart was their ability to consistently select star players. When trying to place them among these top-tier teams, the question I asked myself was: "which core would you rather have if you were starting a team today?"

Certainly, the player you'd most covet is Connor McDavid, but as this season showed, one player does not a team make. The Panthers have some great high-end players too, but not in the same quantity, while Carolina's talent level is good but flatter in terms of scoring prowess.

In the years 2011-2015, the Jets added a top-five centre in the league, a high-end, top-pair defenceman, a solid second pair defenceman, two top-line wingers who are close to 30 goals each this season, a Vezina contender in net and two useful bottom-six forwards. The end result is what you see this season: an elite, young team that's primed to stay near the top of the league for years to come, and yes, before you chirp me, I realize Patrik Laine (drafted in 2016) is playing a huge part in that.

Tampa is Winnipeg's closest comparable, and while Kucherov and Vasilevskiy may have slightly higher ceilings than Scheifele and Hellebuyck (though I'd argue the jury's still out on that), Winnipeg's probably done better with the rest of the players mentioned. And they did it all without ever picking in or near the top three between 2011-2015

1. Anaheim Ducks

What can we say about the Ducks? Not only did they finish at the top of both of our main measures, they've had great success drafting at the toughest positions: defence and goaltender. They found two No. 1 goalies (the only reason Freddy Andersen isn't in green above is because the Ducks drafted him when he was older) and just an embarrassment of riches on the blueline. They also nabbed a 30-goal scorer in Rakell, and Kase looks primed to join the green club, too.

You'll notice that the Ducks had the third-highest average pick position, but it's not because they were picking particularly high in the first round outside of the Lindholm choice. The key for them is that they dealt away a lot of their junk picks and rarely missed in the first and second rounds. Compare that to our last-place team, the Coyotes, who drafted a high volume of players but got low quality out of them.

In 2011, they selected seven players, but only two outside of the first three rounds (one first, two seconds and two thirds). In 2013, they only picked five times, but kept their picks in the first three rounds. They only used five picks again the next year, including a first and two seconds.

In Anaheim, it seems quality trumps quantity. And there's been a high quantity of quality as a result.

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The Athletic / LeBrun: Hockey is fun again for the surprising Avalanche

By Pierre LeBrun Mar 20, 2018 16

If the first round of the playoffs began Tuesday, the Vegas Golden Knights would face the Colorado Avalanche in about the most improbable series in NHL history.

What with one team not existing, player-wise, 12 months ago, and the other lucky it's not European soccer for it would have been relegated after its disastrous 30th-place finish last season.

And certainly, if it wasn't for the historical season of the expansion Golden Knights, the story of the season would be the near-miraculous turnaround of the Avalanche.

"It started with us having a different group coming into training camp," captain Gabriel Landeskog said Monday, trying to explain the stunning turnaround of his team. "A lot of new faces, a lot of young guys coming in who were excited to play and excited to make a difference.

"And really, the guys who were here last year, we felt that wasn't who we really were," he said. "We wanted to prove we were a much better hockey team than that. We were pissed off after last year and a little bit embarrassed. We all took it to heart to play well and perform."

In an era where we rely so much on different metrics to better understand the reason behind performances in the sport, some good old fashioned human pride is also a big part of what's happened with the Avalanche. A group of players in Colorado were determined to change those mocking one-liners from a year ago and gain some respect.

That's been achieved. Although just being in the fight right now isn't good enough for them. Failure to make the playoffs at this point will be considered a stinging disappointment by a team that's re-adjusted its standard.

To the point where after a so-so February, Landeskog says the team talked about the stretch run ahead and their desire as a group to do more. They're 7-1-3 in their last 11 games.

"By the time March started, we just talked as a group: 'I know we're in it right now, but that's not going to be good enough. We don't want to be remembered as just being in the middle of it and being close. We want to make it,'" Landeskog said. "We want to make a push here. And we want to make sure we're doing everything we can to put ourselves in the playoffs.' You could sense that it surprised some people we were even involved in the race, but our group and the rest of the organization, we weren't happy with that. We want to keep going."

I reached out to three NHL head coaches to get their perspective on the Avs. Their teams have all faced Colorado over the past month.

Head coach No. 1, via text message:

"Definitely a playoff team. (Nathan) MacKinnon does what superstars do, he makes everyone around him better ... He drives his line and his line drives the team. He puts you on your heels with his speed/skill and the other players get to play downhill...they work extremely hard on forecheck and track... MacKinnon is a top five player in league, he has impact similar to (Connor) McDavid but with better supporting cast in terms of identity (speed)...They have solid D-corp with different elements and solid goaltending... their best attribute is their top line's ability to get you on your heels... with that said we played them at least even, we created opportunities but we don't seem to score and they do... my point is they aren't upper echelon yet"

Head coach No. 2, via text message:

"MacKinnon driving that team. When he's playing, the team believes they will win all the time. Plus (Semyon) Varlamov out of his mind as well playing like (a) Vezina goalie right now."

Head coach No. 3, over the phone:

"They're really opportunistic right now. They're playing a little bit of a rope-a-dope but their skill is high end. That one line is doing lots of damage, scoring big goals at big times. There's some areas of their team game that have improved. They've got a couple of defencemen that are little sneaky in terms of playing more solid than they used to. They've got three guys on the right side that can skate and move the puck and get involved offensively; and three guys not the left side that are just more solid and a little more reliable. I don't think Varlamov is playing at the



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level he was a few years back when they made the playoffs but he is playing good right now.”

So there’s some unbiased commentary from coaches on the other side. I love the comment from the first coach that they’re not “upper echelon yet.” That’s about a team that was only 30th last year because 35th wasn’t available.

And yes, no question the simplified view is that the big line of Landeskog with MacKinnon and Mikko Rantanen is doing most of the damage but if you have arguably the best line in the NHL, that’s something.

And what a line it’s been.

“You want to make sure that you’re a tough line both in our end and offensively,” said Landeskog. “Nate and Mikko are two offensive guys with a lot of skill that can really challenge any defensive pairing out there. It’s been a lot of fun to be a part of. We’re looking to keeping it going.”

Rantanen, arguably, remains the most underrated player in the NHL, his breakout season not getting full value league-wide.

That MacKinnon is a front-runner for the Hart Trophy as NHL MVP is a complete no-brainer from a linemate, who, well, is not objective on the matter, but still...

“I am a little biased but I don’t think I’ve ever seen anything like it,” Landeskog said of MacKinnon. “He’s been carrying us as far as the team goes. He’d have my vote every day of the week. I know there are other players producing and playing well, but the way he’s been carrying us offensively, it’s obviously a huge part of our success. In my mind, no doubt. He’s got my vote.”

Landeskog is just happy he’s around to enjoy all this. Last season before the trade deadline, his name was out there, not because Colorado was putting it out there but because teams were calling hoping to vulture the Swedish winger off the last-place Avs who were looking to rebuild.

Thing is, Landeskog wanted to be part of that rebuild.

“Definitely relieved. I never wanted to be moved, I never wanted to go anywhere,” he said. “I wanted to stay here and be part of the solution instead of jumping ship and leaving and going somewhere else. Everyone goes through adversity. Sure last year was miserable, but it was a big motivation being part of the solution. No doubt I’m happy I’m here, my mindset never changed. I want to be in Colorado for a long time.”

The way the team looks now, you can see why.

Hockey is fun again. The Avs as a group are a tight unit.

“The way our group is, how close we are together, we’re a young group but it brings everybody together,” said Landeskog. “We have a lot in common and like to be together and spend time with one another and push toward the same goal. It’s been a lot of fun.”

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The Athletic / Jonathan Cheechoo’s career — and especially that 56-goal season — is worth celebrating

By David Pollak Mar 20, 2018 11

Each has his name engraved on NHL hardware that reflects how special that season was a dozen years ago.

Jonathan Cheechoo captured the 2006 Maurice “Rocket” Richard Trophy, given to the NHL’s top marksman, after notching 56 goals — a Sharks franchise record not likely to be broken anytime soon. Linemate Joe Thornton racked up 96 assists and 125 points to win both the Art Ross Trophy as the NHL’s scoring leader and the Hart Memorial Trophy as its MVP.

The sniper and the playmaker have taken different paths since that 2005-06 season.

Thornton’s lengthy career has solidified a future spot in the Hall of Fame as one of hockey’s all-time top passers. A series of injuries, however, limited Cheechoo’s time in the NHL and that has dimmed the memory of what he accomplished. Yet even back then, some contended that Cheechoo only had his moment of greatness because he skated at right wing alongside Thornton.

Not the case, says Thornton.

“We needed each other,” he explained. “He was so hungry to score goals. A great goal scorer and a great playmaker need something me and Cheech had. And I don’t think too many find it in the course of their careers, that complementary player that fits the other’s needs.”

What set Cheechoo apart?

“I’ve played with some 40-goal scorers, but with Cheech, his release and his range for getting one-timers off with good shots is large ... bigger than other players’ windows,” Thornton said. “And he has one of those shots. It just was so pure. He always knew where it was going and he rarely missed.”

It has been more than eight years since Cheechoo’s final NHL game and he has spent the last four seasons playing overseas. So it was understandable that his March 6 retirement announcement registered only a small blip on the sports radar screen.

He’ll get more well-earned attention Saturday night at SAP Center when the Sharks honor him before their game against the Calgary Flames. But to fully appreciate what Cheechoo accomplished, you need to go beyond the numbers and video highlights.

His Moose Cree First Nation roots always have been important to Cheechoo.

Which is why he was in a Toronto suburb last week, watching his 6-year-old son, Jack, play in the tyke division of the Little Native Hockey League tournament. It’s a family tradition — Cheechoo’s father, Mervin, skated in the initial event and Jonathan competed in it, too.

Jack will be starting first grade in the fall and that, as much as anything, explains why his father decided that his just-completed season with Bratislava in the KHL will be his last as a player.

“We kind of wanted to get him into a stable spot,” Cheechoo said of his decision to retire at 37. “I was still playing at a high level and wasn’t forced out the door. I still had the option to go back if I wanted to, but family-wise it was time to come home.”

Home is in San Jose’s Willow Glen neighborhood. But Cheechoo’s path to the NHL began some 2,200 miles away in the exquisitely named Northern Ontario town of Moose Factory. An island outpost just south of James Bay, it is accessible only by boat most of the year, though in winter you can drive there across the frozen Moose River.

Cheechoo left home at 14 to develop his hockey skills. Four years later, the Sharks made him the 29th player taken overall in the 1998 draft, and two years after that he turned pro with their AHL farm team, the Kentucky Thoroughblades.

Scoring was never an issue, according to Roy Sommer, the current coach of the AHL’s San Jose Barracuda and Cheechoo’s coach with the Thoroughblades that first season as well as with the Worcester Sharks a decade later after his NHL run had ended.



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"Not a great skater, but around the net he was money," Sommer said. "He got pucks away before the goalies could get set. Like anywhere he would take a pass, he wouldn't hold it or dust it off. It was like boom-boom."

By the time Cheechoo reached the NHL, his defensive play had improved to the point that he spent his first full season on a checking line with Mike Ricci and Scott Thornton. Yet Cheechoo still managed to score 28 goals in 2003-04.

"With us, playing against top lines, he knew he had to be conscious defensively or we'd get scored on," said Ricci, now a Sharks development coach. "I think that might have helped him a little bit, too, because a lot of times when you struggle, you can fall back on your defensive game and create some offense from there."

Still, Ricci said he knew Cheechoo's future was on a scoring line.

"You didn't have to tell him to go to the slot or the front of the net. He was there," Ricci said. "Playing with me and Scott, the corners were always full. But we'd tell him to get ready to shoot."

The NHL lockout wiped out the 2004-05 season. Then on Nov. 30, 2005, general manager Doug Wilson acquired Joe Thornton from the Boston Bruins. Cheechoo knew instantly what that might mean for him.

Cheechoo had been in the stands watching Thornton play in junior hockey with the Sault Ste. Marie Greyhounds. A year younger, Cheechoo skated on a different team in the same city and was routinely given tickets to Greyhound games.

Thornton, on the other hand, said he knew nothing about Cheechoo's potential as a triggerman. He would find out soon enough as then-coach Ron Wilson immediately put them on the same line.

"I think Ron told me the day Joe was getting here that they were going to try me out on his line," Cheechoo said. "And I said OK."

In their first game together, Cheechoo scored twice with Thornton getting both primary assists in a road win over the Buffalo Sabres.

"I bought myself a few more games with him," Cheechoo said. "Things kind of took off from there."

It took Thornton a little longer to figure out he and Cheechoo might have something special.

"The first couple games, I was still in a little bit of shock at being traded," Thornton said. "But a week, 10 days in, it probably clicked."

In 24 games before the Thornton trade, Cheechoo had seven goals — slightly below his 2003-04 pace. In the 58 games they skated together that season, Cheechoo found the back of the net an amazing 49 times.

Consider that only three Rocket Richard Trophy winners — Pavel Bure, Alexander Ovechkin and Steven Stamkos — have scored more than 56 goals in the 19 years since the award was first handed out, and Cheechoo's season is even more impressive.

The right wing knows that he benefited from Thornton's skill set.

"He's such a good passer and the thing people don't understand is that he holds off two or three guys while he's doing that," Cheechoo said. "He'd buy me some time to get open."

Aware that some gave Thornton the bulk of the credit for those 56 goals, Cheechoo said that doesn't bother him.

"All the people that know me understand how much hard work I put in," he said.

"I don't think I was maybe given as much respect, but I'm OK with that. I was just happy to be playing with him. Obviously, I wouldn't have scored 56 if I didn't have him passing me the puck, so a lot of the credit goes to him."

That said, no one else has come close to 56 goals with Thornton as their centerman, and only three forwards have broken the 40-goal mark alongside him: Glen Murray (44) with the Bruins, Patrick Marleau (44) and Joe Pavelski (41) with the Sharks.

"Yeah, that's one thing too," Cheechoo said. "You've got to go to those areas if you want to score and I went to those areas."

Cheechoo scored a very respectable 37 goals the following season, but his slide from the NHL's top tier was set in motion as injuries began taking their toll. His production dropped off dramatically following double-hernia surgery in the summer of 2007.

He would get another 35 goals spread over two more seasons with the Sharks before being traded to the Ottawa Senators as part of the deal that brought Dany Heatley in return. A mere five goals in 61 games for the Senators brought an AHL demotion in February 2010, and Cheechoo never returned to the big stage, finishing his NHL career with 170 goals and 135 assists in 501 games.

Repairs for those two hernias in 2007, it turns out, addressed only part of his injury problem.

"I had some knee injuries, I had the hernias, I had some stuff with my shoulders," Cheechoo said. "It was a culmination of all those, maybe."

Sommer said Cheechoo's drive to succeed may have pushed him back into action over the years before he was ready.

"He never really got to do much conditioning over the summer because he was always banged up," Sommer said. "He played hard. He finished hits. He wasn't a perimeter guy by any means."

Cheechoo doesn't reject Sommer's theory.

"Who knows? It's too late to sort it out," he said, "but either way, I lost a step and I think that caused a lot of chances to not be there for me."

His attempted comeback in 2010-11 playing again for Sommer in Worcester was cut short when Cheechoo suffered a back injury. Another two AHL seasons playing for the Peoria Rivermen and Oklahoma City Barons followed, but Cheechoo's hopes declined each year.

"It was disappointing," he said, "but at the same time, it was like, 'You know what? I'm getting older now. Maybe my chances passed me by.'"

Cheechoo had met his wife, Ashley, in 2006, and the following year they vacationed in Croatia. In 2013, they had been married for four years when he had the opportunity to play for a KHL expansion team in Zagreb, and they decided the time was right for a European adventure.

"It kind of appealed to me because they were going to have a lot of North Americans on the roster," Cheechoo said. "It was an easy way to ease the transition going over there."

KHL salaries were better than those in the minors, too, and Cheechoo has good memories of his time in Europe. The league is based in Russia, but he never lived there as he played one season in Croatia, two in Belarus and one in Slovakia.

Life in Russia, Cheechoo noted, "can be harder on families. A lot of decisions when we were overseas were about making sure our family was comfortable, enjoying our time together and also playing in a competitive level."

For now, Cheechoo is ready to slow things down.

"I want to take a little bit of time for myself, get the body feeling back to normal and basically spend a little bit of time with my son as he's starting different things," he said.

But Cheechoo already has been talking with the Sharks alumni group and would welcome a formal role with the team down the road.

"Definitely, if we could work something out with San Jose, I'd be interested," Cheechoo said. "They were a big part of me becoming who I am and I still talk to a few of the other guys."



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Cheechoo and the center who fed him passes during that 56-goal season have remained in contact, too.

"He still comes over to the house for dinner and our kids play," Thornton said.

Retirement also means more opportunities to get back to Moose Factory. His most recent visit was last fall after his grandmother died at 95.

"Now there's a lot more time for me to make my way up there," Cheechoo said. "My grandfather is getting a little older, so I'll probably make quite a few more trips up to see him."

If he decides to visit the Moose Cree First Nation office in his hometown, he'll find it located at 22 Jonathan Cheechoo Drive — a street-name tribute made not too long after his 56-goal season.

"Pretty cool," he acknowledged.

The same can be said of his entire career.

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The Athletic / Analytics vs. the eye test: A comprehensive look at the Jets penalty kill and why it might regress

By Murat Ates Mar 20, 2018 28

One of the sincere pleasures of my expanded role with The Athletic over the past couple of months has been being granted access to Winnipeg Jets players, coaches, and staff.

It began in an unlikely place, with LeAnne Poolman's endearing perspective on her son's long and unexpected journey to the NHL. In my first interview with Jets players, Adam Lowry and Andrew Copp opened up about how they operate in Winnipeg's defensive zone. And, when Mark Scheifele was hurt (the first time), the Jets' temporary top line of Mathieu Perreault, Bryan Little, and Nikolaj Ehlers shared their expertise on breakouts, forchecking, and the importance of zone entries with possession. It's been a fascinating ride and I am thrilled to share that with you.

It should be no surprise, then, that my ears perked up when Paul Maurice referenced the Stars' strengths with respect to "slot shots" and "zone time" before Sunday night's game against Dallas.

I had to ask Maurice about these metrics, especially with respect to the penalty kill in light of Brandon Tanev dressing over Jack Roslovic against the Stars. Officially, his justification of the move had been Tanev's contribution to penalty killing, a rationalization which raised the ire of Roslovic fans and fancy-stats enthusiasts alike.

Before getting to Maurice's response, here are Winnipeg's forwards sorted by unblocked shot attempts against per 60 minutes at 4-vs-5:

FA: Unblocked shot attempts against

SA: Shots against

xGA: Expected goals against

Among NHL forwards, Tanev has been on the ice for the NHL's most shot attempts against per minute, unblocked shot attempts against per minute, and shots on goal per minute at 4-on-5 this season. He's 10th worst (of 184) in xGA/60. In short, the publicly available metrics I value don't support the idea that Tanev has been altogether too successful while killing penalties.

With that in mind, I commented on Maurice's decision to dress Tanev specifically for the PK and asked the Jets head coach which metrics he uses to evaluate Winnipeg's penalty kill.

His answer shed a tremendous amount of light on Winnipeg's decision making.

"We try to define where the shot comes from. And, at times, we're willing to have that shot come from (distance).

Benn's goal in a lot of ways is a shot that we'll allow to have happen so that we don't have a seam play off that — so that it doesn't go back across the middle of the ice. So our shot metrics on our PK won't be as strong as our final number.

What we do have is an outstanding save percentage on our PK, in part because we think we've done a far better job this year defining that shot. We have more clears, stronger entry stance and denials, too. At least contested pucks — not clean possession.

But on most of what you'll see on shorthanded metrics, you would think that we give up more shots and our expected goals shorthanded is quite a bit higher than what it eventually gives up.

In part, we define where that shot comes from, what it's going to look like after the shot comes and we give our goaltender a reasonable chance to stop — every once in a while you're going to see one like one of those goes in — or it will be a rebound that we can't handle. But you'll also notice that our goaltending rebound metrics are very, very strong. We give them a good chance to get a handle on those pucks."

Essentially, Maurice gave the argument that shot quality is more important than shot quantity. By protecting the middle of the ice, reducing seam plays, and forcing shots to the outside, Maurice feels that Winnipeg can keep pucks out of its net — even if the Jets allow more total shots as a result.

By the end of this piece, I'll evaluate Winnipeg's penalty kill with respect to each of the metrics he cited. First, let's look at how it works with help from Brandon Tanev and Andrew Copp.

The system

Let's look at Winnipeg's typical set-up. As Maurice explained, it's designed to prevent cross-seam passes and limit shots to the outside:

This is what Winnipeg's penalty killing formation has looked like in every single game so far this season. In this particular case against Pittsburgh, Matt Hendricks is Winnipeg's top forward (who I'll call F1) and Tanev is its bottom forward (who I'll call F2). Josh Morrissey is to Connor Hellebuyck's left and Jacob Trouba is to his right.

Meanwhile, Pittsburgh is using a 4F1D unit with Kris Letang at the top and Phil Kessel and Sidney Crosby each ready for a one-timer on their off wing inside the circles. Patric Hornqvist is the player at the top of the crease while Evgeni Malkin is immediately to Hellebuyck's left.

Winnipeg's players are focused on zones as opposed to Penguins. Here is each player's responsibility once Pittsburgh has established possession:

F1: Hendricks is not so much marking the pointman as he is guarding his shooting lane. Upon a pass to either wing, he will follow the puck to its recipient if he can get there in time. Otherwise, he drops into the slot and it becomes the bottom forward's job.

"We have rules for the top guy," Tanev said. "If there's a puck going from the top to either side, it's all dependent on how far you're coming over and if you have the ability to get over on the puck. If you're already too far over and they swing it back the other way, it's the bottom guy's read to pressure out and then you read off him."

F2: With the puck at the top, F2 is a secondary blocker, doing his best to guard the shooting lane. As soon as the pointman passes the puck, F2 has a judgment call to make. Once again, Tanev is your guide:



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"We have rules in the middle of the ice. If (the pass) makes it too difficult for that top guy to get over and put pressure on the wall guy, then the second guy below... It's his job to pressure out (to the wall) and give that opportunity for the top guy to get back."

That read – whether or not the top forward can cover the pass, depending on how much distance it covers – has to be made quickly. As Copp explains, the Jets forwards make this split-second decision based more on his gut than through communication.

"It's a little bit of talk from the lower guy but the top guy kind of goes off instinct and starts pushing down when he thinks he can. As soon as a play happens from there, the lower guy will jump out into a shooting lane."

In this case, Letang goes across to Crosby and Hendricks can't get there in time from the top. As a result, Tanev kicks out from the bottom to face Crosby:

With the puck rotated to Crosby at the wing, the forward's job becomes about preventing cross seam passes. This is wise: a cross seam pass forces the goaltender to move post-to-post and is almost always met with a one-timer – it's an extremely dangerous play.

"(The most important thing) is making it easier on your goaltender to go from one post to the other post," Tanev said. "If you get a one-timer shot that's a difficult save to make so, (as the) bottom guy, if you can get a stick in that cross-ice lane, it's imperative."

As you can see in the image, if Crosby wants to find Kessel for the cross-seam one-timer, he has to beat Hendricks' stick and Tanev's, too. We'll come back to that but, for the moment, let's move on to the Jets' defencemen.

D1: We'll call Morrissey D1 in this sequence. His job isn't to guard either player in front – it's to block off Crosby's shooting lane as he receives the puck. Copp describes Morrissey's job as Crosby receives the puck:

"If they're taking a one-timer from over there, our D kind of come out in part of the lane and we rely on Bucky to make those saves... I think it's worked. We've had everyone on the same page and Bucky's obviously been great in net."

D2: While Morrissey is challenging the shooter, Trouba is left to cover in front. Note that he's still playing a zone and while Hornqvist is in that zone, Trouba is still responsible for Kessel's shooting lane if Crosby is able to pass it all the way across.

If Letang had passed to Kessel instead of Crosby, Trouba would be challenging Kessel's shooting lane as Morrissey has done here. Either way, Malkin is left alone.

Here's what happens next:

As Crosby receives the pass, Morrissey and a sprawling Tanev have his shooting lane blocked. Crosby sees this, so he attempts a pass across the ice to Kessel on the opposite wing. If the puck gets to Kessel, Pittsburgh has a deadly scoring chance with a moving goaltender and Kessel in terrific position to tee it up.

Here's how the play ends:

Owing to his low position, Hendricks is able to cut off the pass and the Jets clear the puck down the ice.

This sequence shows the Jets penalty kill working as it's intended to. To me, it demonstrates its two biggest strengths and one biggest weakness.

First, the Jets consistently put bodies in the way of any shooting option. In theory, at least two Jets are in position to block each of Pittsburgh's three shooting lanes: Hendricks and Tanev are in Letang's way at the top, Morrissey has Tanev helping him against Crosby in the circle, and Trouba would have had Tanev sliding over to help had Letang passed to Kessel instead.

Second, Winnipeg always has at least two players with sticks available to take away a cross seam pass. In the case above, it was Tanev and Hendricks. If the Penguins had set up shop lower in the zone, it would have been Tanev plus the closest defenceman.

Finally, look back at Winnipeg's initial set-up:

It's passive as can be. If Letang wants to chance a shot to the net, he has all day to figure out an angle. Similarly, if Crosby or Kessel start one-timing Letang's passes, their first three might get blocked but the Jets system is designed to cede a fourth and a fifth. If you readily give up that kind of time and space for free, you're going to give up a lot of shot attempts.

Before going into just how many shot attempts, here are Copp and Tanev on how Winnipeg determines which shots are OK to give up.

"Anything from the outside is usually decently OK," said Copp. "Usually from the top, that's our forwards' job to block. We definitely don't want shots from the slot and we try to avoid shots from the point. We're not pressuring them too much but we're in the lane, trying to deter him from shooting."

"If he's outside the dots and he's far away," Tanev added, "you're most likely giving those shots to the goaltender. Not every shot can be blocked – there are some shots that you want to give up rather than others."

The results

Recall Maurice's opening comments. He essentially makes three claims:

Winnipeg gives up more shot attempts but controls shot quality

By keeping shots to the outside

By reducing seam plays (and therefore one-timers against a moving goalie)

Despite the extra shots, the reduced shot quality gives goaltenders an easier job to do

Resulting in fewer rebounds

Resulting in fewer goals against

Goals against will be better than shot metrics as a direct result of Nos. 1 and 2

Let's get some basic facts out of the way.

Winnipeg's penalty kill is currently ranked fifth in the NHL at an impressive 83.0 per cent.

And Winnipeg does, in fact, give up more shot attempts than other teams do.

I went through the past 11 NHL seasons on Corsica and Natural Stat Trick and pulled rates for shot attempts, unblocked shot attempts, shots, high danger scoring chances, and expected goals against for all 331 team seasons at 4v5.

Here is how the 2017-2018 Jets 4v5 penalty kill ranks compared to those 331 teams.

Shot attempts against: 331/331

Unblocked shot attempts against: 331/331

Shots against: 329/331

High danger scoring chances against: 243/331

Expected goals against: 330/331

Objectively, Winnipeg's goaltenders are getting shelled on a per-minute basis. They are being made to square up against more shot attempts than any team's goaltenders in the past eleven seasons and are facing a simply legendary number of shots on goal. That part is not debatable.



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What about Maurice's claim that Winnipeg keeps shots to the outside? It mostly checks out:

To me, this is a very impressive heat map – Winnipeg does an excellent job of preventing shots from the prime real estate right in front of Hellebuyck, just as Maurice wants. Still, it comes with a concern. The incredible shot volume Winnipeg allows from further away still comes from good scoring locations.

Think back to Winnipeg's PK set-up. When Letang had the puck at the point, Crosby and Kessel were each sitting well inside the top of the circle. Each player was on his off wing, meaning that just like Mark Scheifele and Patrik Laine on Winnipeg's power play, their one-timer was an easy option.

While a one-timer from a point-to-wing pass involves less movement for Hellebuyck than a cross-seam pass from wing to wing, I still believe this type of shot to be a dangerous scoring chance – one that Winnipeg is willing to give up in droves to protect the slot.

What about cross-seam passes? I tracked 51 Jets penalty kills this season, watching each one on repeat and counting 49 cross-seam passes – approximately one per kill.

While there are conclusions I'd like to make from this process, I am limited by my data. One cross-seam pass against per penalty kill sounds great to me. I would wager Blake Wheeler completes that pass to Laine at a greater rate. But I have not tracked the amount of seam passes that other NHL teams give up while killing penalties – I can't make this claim with objective certainty.

On Maurice's first claim – that Winnipeg gives up more shot attempts, fewer shots from in close, and fewer cross-seam passes – I think he's gone three-for-three. I've shown that the first two are true and, after watching and tracking 51 penalty kills in a row, it appeared but was not conclusive that his third statement is true, too.

Winnipeg gives up fewer rebounds and fewer goals against.

Thanks to data shared by colleague Tyler Dellow, I can cut straight to the chase with respect to Maurice's claim about rebounds.

If you look at the raw counts, Winnipeg has given up more shots from rebounds at 4-vs-5 than any team in the NHL this season. They have also given up the most goals from rebound shots: 13.

Based on Maurice's quotes, this is not a shock. He acknowledged that the types of goals Winnipeg gives up while killing penalties are largely in the form of "rebounds we don't get to." The point I want to make here though is that Winnipeg gives up more rebounds and goals from those rebounds than other teams do. I believe it's fair to suggest the Jets do so because of the historically high number of unblocked shots they allow.

It's quite clear that Winnipeg gives up relatively few goals against, though. The Jets are ranked fifth in the NHL. We'll evaluate how sustainable that is with respect to Maurice's third major claim.

Winnipeg does have excellent 4v5 save percentage. Is it sustainable?

Maurice was absolutely right to cite save percentage. At 0.911, Winnipeg currently boasts the NHL's best 4v5 save percentage – a rate that is so good, it ranks 14th best out of the 331 team seasons since 2007-08. Let's explore that.

As a general rule, PK save percentage is more random and is worse at predicting future save percentage than 5-on-5 save percentage is. For Jets fans, the fact that a goalie's 4-vs-5 save percentage is more likely to trend towards league average than it is to stay consistent from one year to the next should be extremely concerning.

We can further investigate the types of shots Winnipeg is having success with.

Thanks to Natural Stat Trick, I can filter save percentage on all shots and save percentage on High Danger Scoring Chances separately. Before I show you the numbers, let's be clear about the definition of HSDC.

While the phrase "dangerous scoring chances" often gets thrown around haphazardly, the High Danger Scoring Chances tracked by Natural Stat Trick have a specific definition.

For our purposes, this means:

Any shot from the red zone

Rebounds or rush shots from the orange zone

While this definition ignores pre-shot puck movement and misses some dangerous scoring chances, the ones that it does include are from prime real estate and consistently do have a much higher likelihood of going in than your average shot.

Let's compare Winnipeg's save percentage on all shots to HDSC over the past 11 seasons:

Winnipeg's 2017-18 save percentage (overall): 14/331

Winnipeg's 2017-18 save percentage on High Danger Scoring Chances: 213/331

Hellebuyck and his backups have actually been worse than average at stopping High Danger Scoring Chances. This means that, when opposing power plays do succeed in generating rebounds or shots from the slot, they've had a great deal of scoring success.

I don't mind that at all. You've seen the system, read the role descriptions, and looked at the heat map for unblocked shots Winnipeg gives up. The one thing we can say with objective certainty is that the portion of the ice Jets goaltending has the most trouble with is exactly the one Winnipeg has been best at protecting.

Conclusions

The Winnipeg Jets are clearly invested in analytics. When Maurice contrasts the Jets penalty kill to shot based metrics, he does so with a precision in his language that conveys understanding.

Just as clearly, the Jets are prepared to ignore traditional warning signs of shot-based metrics in their quest to control shot quality.

For Maurice to be right in the long run – for Winnipeg's penalty kill to keep outperforming shot metrics, two things need to happen.

The Jets need to continue limiting shots from in tight and shots from cross-seam passes.

Jets goaltenders will need to continue stopping more shots from far away than any team has done in the past 11 years.

We've detailed Winnipeg's aim, outlined its strategy, received instruction from two regularly used penalty killers, and evaluated each of the coach's claims about the metrics he uses.

For the most part, Maurice is very accurate in describing what has happened with the Jets at 4-vs-5. They give up a lot of shots, they protect the slot, and their goaltending has been excellent. Via Dellow, he largely overstates their success at preventing rebounds. Perhaps most worrisome, he ignores history with respect to PK save percentage – it's historically been more random than repeatable.

Shot quality is real. Winnipeg's quest to control it is admirable and some of its success on this front is demonstrably real. I also believe that, in the long run, the sheer volume of shots Winnipeg allows will catch up to them. Hellebuyck is good but I'm not willing to bet he's the best there's ever been.

How do these two items reconcile? My conclusion is that Winnipeg's 4-vs-5 save percentage is likely to regress – not to the average, but to the as of yet unknown theoretical average for this system. I'm willing to bet that the end point is an above-average penalty kill. If opposing teams – especially playoff teams, with several days to plan – find a way to penetrate the middle, then all bets are off.

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The Athletic / Q&A with Josh Bailey: 'Before the season, I knew I wanted to stay'

By Arthur Staple Mar 20, 2018 11

Josh Bailey reached his first All-Star Game this season and has career highs in goals (18), assists (49) and points (67). He also has a six-year, \$30-million contract, signed on Feb. 23, just a few days before the NHL trade deadline.

The 28-year-old Bailey also played his 700th NHL game on March 3, becoming just the eighth Islander to do so. He sat down with The Athletic in Calgary last week to discuss his decision to sign, his love for Long Island and his dislike for social media.

The Athletic: What went into your decision to sign so long before free agency?

Josh Bailey: We had chatted a little bit through November and then a couple times right up before signing. Before the season, I knew I wanted to stay and I made it known to them too. It just takes some time to get things done. I was comfortable signing ahead of free agency. This is where I've been my whole career, I'm comfortable here, I enjoy Long Island, my wife enjoys it. It's a great place for us to raise our kids. So away from the hockey side of it, that was an easy decision. The hockey side of it was easy as well. A lot of great friends here and I enjoy being an Islander.

Athletic: That's not really the standard procedure for someone heading into free agency for the first time, especially with a year like you're having. Any second thoughts, especially seeing what John Tavares is doing?

JB: Obviously it's something you take into account, you think of all the different aspects. It's a big life decision and one I was very comfortable making. I've been here my whole career. Going into a season like this, you are thinking about what else could happen. But I wouldn't say I spent a whole lot of time during the season thinking about it. You get wrapped up in the season, focused on hockey, being successful and trying to win.

Athletic: When you're starting this process, do you lean on friends in the league who have been through it before?

JB: A little bit. Not so much this year, more when those guys I played with were going through it. Seeing how things went. I've obviously been around long enough to know plenty of guys who have gone through it, either guys who sign here or guys who have left. I knew how the process worked.

Athletic: A few of your old teammates have gone on to teams that haven't had success. Does that go through your mind as well?

JB: You think about everything. There's plenty of different aspects everyone thinks about, I'm no different. There's uncertainty going to a different team. There are lots of decisions and honestly, it wasn't a difficult one for me to stay.

Athletic: How much does becoming a father (he and his wife, Megan, have two boys, Wyatt, 19 months, and 6-month-old Mack) affect those thoughts?

JB: Big-time. That was something that played a big role. Meg and I really like Long Island and having the kids was obviously part of the decision as well – school's a couple years away but you have to think about those things. It's just a great place to live, to raise kids and with so many great

friends on the team and on the Island we've made over the years, that made it that much easier.

Athletic: Playing your 700th game recently means that if you play out this new deal you could end up atop the games played list for a franchise with some big names up there. What would that mean?

JB: It would be crazy. You need a certain amount of luck to go into that, staying healthy and all. It's still so far down the road I don't think that far ahead. Playing 700 and to do it all with this team was pretty special.

Athletic: You came up to the NHL at a time when Twitter and other social media was just getting started. Now it's pretty prevalent in sports and the posts are not always kind, especially to you. How do you keep that stuff away?

JB: I just never really got into Twitter and stuff like that, for some obvious reasons. It seems like there can be a lot of negativity with it. I just didn't want to have that creeping into my head. You're always working to stay focused in this game, especially on the positives. It just never appealed to me all that much.

Athletic: Which family member gets the most outraged on your behalf at some of the social media posts?

JB: (Laughs) I think they all do. They're protective of me, obviously. My wife for sure... But they've all been through it with me, they know how I feel about all of it so they've made their peace with it too.

Athletic: Having made your first All-Star Game, a lot of people who didn't know about the contract talks might have figured you'd test free agency for sure after that kind of season. As the year went along, did you have any second thoughts about the commitment to sign?

JB: It really didn't change much for me. I was just concerned with playing well and winning. To be honored with something like that was just... an honor. It didn't change much as far as my status with the team or free agency. Just something that was a thrill to be part of.

Athletic: You've been here through a lot of ups and downs. Does this season feel any different?

JB: We certainly expected to be in a different place than we are right now. I just feel like we have too good a team to put ourselves in this position. We feel like a team that could compete for a Stanley Cup and it's frustrating to not be there. It is what it is at this point. You keep pushing forward, trying to get better and win games, that doesn't change.

Athletic: John is a good friend of yours and now your future is set and his is uncertain. How has that been in your conversations with him?

JB: It doesn't affect what we talk about, anything like that. Selfishly, we all want him to stay. As a friend, you just want what's best for him and we'll all support him no matter what the situation is.

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The Athletic / USA Hockey formulating a plan for a World Championship roster with serious potential

By Craig Custance Mar 20, 2018 18

BOCA RATON, Fla. — It all ended so quickly for the Americans in the men's Olympic hockey tournament. They got to overtime against the Czech Republic in the medal round. They had their opportunities. A hit crossbar. A power play in overtime. Then, maybe the worst way to lose a meaningful hockey game, a shootout that went the other direction.



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In the locker room afterward, the players were crushed. There were tears.

Head coach Tony Granato spoke to the team and let them know that Jim Johansson would have been proud of them — proud of the way they competed, proud of the way they represented USA Hockey. That was part of the devastation; this group of guys, hand-picked by Johansson, wanted badly to win gold in his honor. Johansson, the team's GM, died in January.

But sports, no matter how desperately you want to control the outcome, don't always cooperate.

Now, the Americans are starting to plan for another tournament, another opportunity to honor Johansson. That men's Olympic team was the one that Johansson built, but it's the World Championship that Johansson might have been most connected with. It's a huge commitment, both in preparation and actually being in Europe to manage the team. For years, that was Johansson's job and one he did tirelessly.

Now, USA Hockey is in the process of developing what it will look like for the first time in years without Johansson calling the shots.

On Sunday in Boca Raton, the American general managers met with USA Hockey executive director Pat Kelleher to formulate a gameplan on a couple of fronts. USA Hockey will soon be posting at least one job to help with the massive workload created by Johansson's death.

"We're not too far away from posting it," Kelleher told The Athletic. "(It's) a role similar to Jimmy's but certainly not the same or someone who can fill his shoes. We have to split it up a little bit, which we knew. (We'll) decide where we split and find someone to do that."

That's a bit of a long-term play. In the short-term, USA Hockey has to field a team for the World Championships in Denmark. And they don't want to just assemble one, they want one that can go win the whole thing.

That was the focus in Sunday's meeting. The hope was to identify a point person as GM and move forward. Of the American NHL GMs — Stan Bowman, David Poile, Ray Shero and Dale Tallon — Bowman would be the most available since his is the only team in the group you can say with confidence isn't a playoff team. But this is also a huge offseason for the Blackhawks, an organization that still believes it can turn things around and return to contender status.

That essentially removes Bowman from candidacy.

"I'm not going to be the GM, not because I don't want to or they don't want me to," Bowman told The Athletic. "JJ was always the guy there for the full three weeks. It's just hard for any of us to be gone the entire 25 days, and we have a lot of work to do this offseason. But I'm going to be very involved with it."

USA Hockey has often taken a group mentality when it comes to naming an executive team for the World Championship, but according to multiple sources, there will be one GM named for this year's worlds. This year is a chance to restructure how this has been done. It's a lot to ask an acting general manager to run the entire thing, but it's a great opportunity for an assistant general manager to get this experience. According to multiple sources, that's the direction USA Hockey is headed and there are at least a few candidates at the top of the list in Columbus assistant GM Bill Zito, Pittsburgh's Bill Guerin and New York's Chris Drury. All three have experience working with Johansson in building a world championship roster. Zito was part of the 2015 management group that won bronze in the Czech Republic. Guerin and Drury were part of last year's team that got off to a great start but ended up finishing fifth. If it's a rotation, Zito might be the leading candidate.

Typically an Olympic year isn't a great one for the World Championship, but since NHL players weren't in the Olympics, organizers are optimistic that they'll look at this tournament as a chance to get international play.

"Maybe some of the guys will say, 'We didn't get to play in the Olympics but we want to play in USA Hockey and represent Team USA again,'" Kelleher said. "Certainly we hope that will be the case."

Last year, there was real momentum among players to field a good team. There was more active recruiting among Americans than there's been in years as American NHL players seemed eager to end the international tournament failures that have happened too often for best-on-best tournaments.

The success that Team USA has had in the world juniors hasn't translated into the Olympics, World Cup and World Championship, and there's definitely a movement to change that.

It's part of the reason why it wouldn't be surprising to see big names in this year's World Championship for Team USA. According to one source close to Chicago's Patrick Kane, he hasn't ruled out going. It may depend on what the roster looks like but his participation could very well be the domino that attracts the most talent.

"If he's in, everyone is in," said one NHL source.

Kane nearly played last year and he could lead a pack of Blackhawks this year that could also include Alex Debrincat, Vinnie Hinostroza, Connor Murphy, Brandon Saad and Nick Schmaltz.

"We have a lot of Americans on our team," Bowman said. "It's obviously up to the players. I would encourage them to go. Some of them have had good years, some haven't had their best years. Do they want to maybe go recapture their game or re-focus on training? I don't know until we have that conversation."

But Bowman agrees that he sensed a movement among the players last year to end Team USA's international struggles.

"We had a great team last year," Bowman said. "We were undefeated and lost the first game in the elimination round and we were out."

That team had a strong Red Wings connection with head coach Jeff Blashill the U.S. coach. Blashill is again a top candidate to be Team USA's coach if he's interested, with Buffalo's Phil Housley and New York's Doug Weight also in the mix.

If the Americans on the Red Wings show the same commitment — and it was Dylan Larkin doing a lot of the recruiting last spring — this roster quickly becomes a medal contender. Jimmy Howard, Larkin and Danny DeKeyser all were on the 2017 roster.

Add in Jack Eichel, the Tkachuk family, Clayton Keller along with half of Carolina's defense and Team USA has the potential to be really, really good. If they want to be special, the Minnesota Wild contingent could make it happen if they don't go on a run in the playoffs.

It's up to the players to decide if this is something they want to do — make a statement for USA Hockey while also honoring a person they all know well who gave so much to this tournament.

Ultimately, it'll be their call.

"We haven't had maybe the success or the commitment from some of the top, top players, but I think this year could be different," Bowman said. "Hopefully."

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The Athletic / A critical thinking guide to Hart Trophy voting and Taylor Hall's chances



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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Someone is absolutely going to win the Hart Trophy this season.

That's about the most definitive statement anyone can make about the most prestigious individual award in the NHL, even though the regular season will be over in less than three weeks. This is one of the weirdest years for the league MVP landscape since ... maybe ever?

For a large chunk of the NHL's history, it was defined by a small number of people winning the Hart Trophy. From 1965-93, 11 players won an MVP award, and only two of them — Bryan Trottier and Brett Hull — won just once.

In the 23 years since, 19 different players have won. Dominik Hasek, Sidney Crosby and Alex Ovechkin (three) are the only players who have won more than once in that span.

Even with the increased parity, it's hard to say the award has ever been quite this wide open. Some years there were five or six plausible candidates. At the moment, it feels like a top 10 list might not cast a wide enough net.

How did this happen?

The reigning winner, Connor McDavid, got off to a slow start and his team stinks. There are 10 players with at least 79 points, but no one has run away with the scoring title and previous winners/top contenders like Sidney Crosby, Alex Ovechkin, Patrick Kane and John Tavares aren't in that group (though Ovechkin is close and could win the Rocket Richard Trophy).

Nikita Kucherov set the pace in the scoring race for much of the season, but the Lightning have looked like a juggernaut and he doesn't have the cachet of previous winners. A lot of people seem reluctant to believe he's MVP-worthy, and now his scoring has tapered off and others have closed the gap.

Devils star Taylor Hall is in the middle of this large group of contenders. As he was putting the finishing touches on a 26-game point streak two weeks ago, there was real momentum to consider him the favorite.

If the past few days were any indication, the MVP chatter is probably going to be an all-consuming daily debate until PHWA members cast their votes. Actually, it's going to rage on long after that. This year is almost certain to produce about a dozen forlorn fan bases complaining that "their guy" missed out.

The discussion can get heated. Everyone cherry picks a selective argument that absolutely proves beyond a shadow of a doubt why Candidate X deserves to win.

Some of those arguments have become the standards for how people determine who should win. Which of those arguments are going to work in Hall's favor?

Let's take a look at some of the big ones.

1. A Hart Trophy winner must lead his team to the Stanley Cup Playoffs

This theory could really use some updating, and this year feels like the perfect one to point out its inadequacies. Here's the thinking: If Player X couldn't help his team be one of the top 16 in the league, how can he be the most valuable player? It's prominent in other sports as well.

There's one problem with such a black-and-white rule: Hockey in 2018 is different than it was 15, 25 or 35 years ago. The salary cap has increased parity. Some games are worth three points in the standings, while others are worth two. That muddles up the standings even more.

Hall's team is currently in the final playoff spot in the Eastern Conference. There are other Hart candidates — Nathan MacKinnon and Anze Kopitar chief among them, but also fringe guys like Tyler Seguin, Claude Giroux and Sergei Bobrovsky — who are on teams that are trying to secure one of the final playoff spots in their conference.

There will be voters who say "if the Devils (or Avalanche, Kings, etc.) make the playoffs, then Hall (or their guy) should win the Hart Trophy." That's fine.

What feels less fine is this: Let's say the Devils finish one point out of the playoffs. The Panthers and Blue Jackets have easier finishing schedules, and they both just eke out enough points.

There are really going to be voters who say Hall was going to be the MVP, but then he isn't because the Devils lost a couple of shootouts? The difference between teams that finish somewhere between 10th and 20th in the overall league standings is often very little and often determined by luck and injuries.

The backlash is this: So McDavid should be the MVP then, right? He's carrying his team as much or more than Hall and MacKinnon.

Well, a good compromise could be "Player X led his team to the playoffs, or kept them in contention in the final days of the season." That way, if a team missed by a few points, the player shouldn't be punished. If a player like McDavid has been on a team that was out of it in November, that seems more rational to exclude him as a potential winner.

Hall's chances are entirely tied to the Devils making the playoffs. This rule is too strictly enforced by too many voters. Maybe if someone was far superior statistically, he could still win over voters. In a year where there are at least a dozen guys with compelling arguments, eliminating the ones who didn't make the playoffs will be a first step for many.

2. The games in March/April matter more

This is not true, but it remains a staple of how fans and media consume and analyze the sport. The points matter just as much in October as they do in March. There is no added bonus for performing better late in the season (like the weird rule in figure skating that awards bonus points for doing jumps later in a program).

We all think these games matter more. The standings are clearer. The stakes feel higher.

For NHL players, the added pressure for a game on March 20 compared to November 15 is not nearly as large as people who are not NHL players make it out to be. The playoffs are different. Elimination games in the final week of the season are different.

All of that said, some voters are currently leaning towards MacKinnon and Evgeni Malkin because they're the two hottest players among the leading scorers.

MacKinnon has 18 points in his past nine games. He's "carrying" the Avalanche towards a playoff berth. For some voters and fans, that is huge. When Hall was on his point streak, he was getting the same love.

It shouldn't matter nearly as much when the points happen. Kucherov's huge start helped the Lightning just as much as Malkin is fueling the Penguins now.

Here's a big thing that gets left out of this debate: The competition in March and April fluctuates wildly. Some teams that sold before the trade deadline are now really terrible. A lot of teams have players missing with injuries that were healthier in November.

If Hall gets five points April 1 against the Canadiens, there will be all kinds of "Taylor Hall helps his Hart case" buzz. If anything, wouldn't a great game against Montreal when it had Carey Price and Shea Weber and Max Pacioretty be more valuable than lighting up a bunch of guys who were on the Laval Rocket in December?

For Hall's chances, he's probably going to need to heat up again. He got a big narrative push with the streak, but others are shining brighter at the moment.

3. The leading scorer should win

Can you name the last non-goalie Hart Trophy winner who didn't also win the Art Ross Trophy or the Maurice Richard Trophy? It's been a while.



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Some voters are always just going to end up landing on the guy with the most goals or points. Honestly, in a year like this where there are so many candidates, a chunk of the electorate just picking either Kucherov/Malkin or Ovechkin/Patrick Laine because of one stat might be enough with everyone else splitting votes.

When someone wins by a large margin, it's hard to argue against picking them. In a year like this, it's why people are looking further down the scoring leaders in search for other candidates. Don't just pick Kucherov or Ovechkin because of that. There are other good reasons to support their cases.

Obviously, this is not a good spot for Hall. He's not getting any first-place votes from anyone who falls back on this.

By the way, the last non-goalie to not win a Ross or Richard and win the Hart was Joe Sakic in 2000-01.

4. Goalies and defensemen have their own awards

This is not great. They should be allowed in the Hart discussion every year. Judging them against forwards does take more work. This is a space for critical thinking. We're in favor of that.

There might not be any strong MVP candidates among the goalies or defensemen this year, anyway. If there was a vintage Carey Price or Erik Karlsson season and their teams weren't so bad, this would be a good year for them. It's not.

Hall is not a goalie or a defenseman, so anyone who thinks this has a better chance of voting for him than not. So there's that.

5. He has too many other good teammates

Great players on great teams split MVP votes all the time. This was never a problem in the pre-1993 days. Wayne Gretzky never lost an MVP award to Dale Hawerchuk because Jari Kurri or Paul Coffey had such a great season.

Penalizing a player for his general manager being good seems kind of weird. It's possible to figure out how valuable a great player on a great team is. It takes a little more digging, maybe.

No one is using this argument to vote or not vote for Hall. But ...

6. His team would be terrible without him

... this seems to be one of the biggest parts of Hall's Hart case. It's the same as the previous one, only in reverse. Rewarding a player for his teammates being less productive than another candidate's teammates seems kind of weird.

Is getting a potential lottery team into the playoffs as a low seed more valuable than a helping a good team get a high seed? There are different ideas about what "valuable" actually means, which leads to most of the spirited debates.

Yes, this is where a lot of people will make the case for Hall.

The thing is, he shouldn't need it. Hall is having a phenomenal year. He's one of the best, most productive, most valuable players in the NHL.

People who want to vote for Hall or advocate for his candidacy don't need to fall back on how many more points he has than Nico Hischier. Just like MacKinnon fans don't need to get stuck on his current hot streak, or Kucherov supporters and his potential Art Ross win.

There are better ways to think critically about who are the best, most valuable players in the NHL. Getting everyone to shed some out-of-date ideas about what it takes to be MVP might be way harder than trying to choose between the vast array of candidates this season.

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The Athletic / Andrei Vasilevskiy admitted he was tired, so what is the ideal number of games for a goalie?

By Katie Strang Mar 20, 2018 5

TAMPA, Fla. — It was the type of practice during which there were as many expletives as there were pained grimaces, with players stalking off the ice last Wednesday at Amalie Arena as the Zamboni driver paved a fresh surface for the team's second session.

The Tampa Bay Lightning were trying to erase the sting of a 7-4 loss to the Ottawa Senators the night prior, and with three days between that clunker and an important match against the team's divisional foe, the Boston Bruins, that weekend, not a lot of energy was spared.

There were two notable absences that day: One was that of head coach Jon Cooper, who was laid up after undergoing a minor medical procedure (it was associate coach Rick Bowness thereby responsible for the colorful language and emphatic stick-banging during practice). The other was goaltender Andrei Vasilevskiy.

The 23-year-old netminder was pulled for only the second time this season the previous night after giving up six goals on 29 shots, an anomaly of a performance for Vasilevskiy in the midst of what has been an otherwise phenomenal season.

With less than a month remaining before the playoffs begin, the 6-foot-3, 207-pound Tyumen, Russia, native is tied for the league lead in wins (40) and ranks second in shutouts (7). He has been the backbone of a dominant Lightning team, and his name will be among the select few in the conversation for the Vezina Trophy, along with Nashville's Pekka Rinne.

But Vasilevskiy did something else somewhat remarkable this season, especially for someone of his age and relative inexperience:

He admitted he was tired.

In an interview with the Tampa Bay Times earlier this month, Vasilevskiy acknowledged his fatigue, telling beat writer Joe Smith that "tiredness" is why he hasn't been as sharp in recent weeks. Hence, the day off Vasilevskiy was given during the team's vigorous double-session practice, allowing him to trade post-to-post drills for the therapy table and simply conduct a short interview outside the locker room as his teammates shirked their practice jerseys and pads in the communal laundry hamper following an exhausting day of work.

"It's more the rest for my mind than for my body, because I think my body — I feel pretty good. ... But sometimes when you're tired mentally, you're tired physically, too," Vasilevskiy said. "You just need to get away from hockey."

And even a cursory look at the numbers should provide a pretty clear indication of why. Entering Tuesday's action, he is one of five goaltenders in the league who has played in 58 games or more — Winnipeg's Connor Hellebuyck leads the league with 60 — and ranks second in shots faced and fourth in total time on ice. He is on pace to play 66 games this season; entering this year, the most he had previously played in a single season was 50. It is important to note here that he did not decamp to some tropical locale in January, but rather played in the All-Star Game, as well.

And yet, in the canons of hockey's time-tested, often-archaic code of permissible admissions, fatigue and injury are both rarely acknowledged, particularly as the playoffs draw near. Stoicism is revered, and, at its expense, honesty is often discarded.

And so Vasilevskiy's candor on the topic caused people around the league to take notice.



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"I thought it was interesting for him to say," said former NHL goaltender Martin Biron, who now works as a television analyst with the Buffalo Sabres broadcast team. "That's a very mature conversation to have. Some coaches don't want to hear it."

Vasilevskiy's comments, coupled with the fact that he is backstopping a team that may enter the postseason as the Stanley Cup favorite, not only caused the Lightning to take notice, but also reignited a debate that becomes all the more fierce during this time each year: What is the ideal number of games for a goaltender to play?

That question must take into account a delicate balance — how to optimize rest and recovery, while also remaining sharp heading into a playoff push. Asked what he thought was best, Biron settled on this number — 62. That's the number Rangers goaltender Henrik Lundqvist played in 2011-12, when Biron served as his backup. Lundqvist went on to win the Vezina Trophy that year and led the Rangers to the Eastern Conference Finals, while posting a .931 save percentage in 20 games in the postseason.

That number falls into Lightning goaltending coach Frantz Jean's optimal range as well, even though Vasilevskiy is trending toward the higher end.

"I'd say for a No. 1, you want between 55 and 65, then you're kind of in the sweet spot, depending on the guy," Jean said. "There's not a lot of goalies who won the Stanley Cup who played 70 games, or 75 games in the history of the league."

And Jean's assumption checks out. According to Elias Sports Bureau, only five times in the NHL's expansion era (1967-68) have goaltenders played 70 or more games in a regular season and even gone on to win a single playoff game. Martin Brodeur did it three times (NJ; 2000, 2001, 2003), and the other two netminders to accomplish this ironman feat were Bernie Parent (PHI, 1974) and Grant Fuhr (EDM, 1988). According to Elias, Fuhr's 75 regular season games in 1987-88 were the most by a goalie who went on to win the Cup in the same season.

Heading into the final three weeks of the season, Vasilevskiy is on pace to play 66 games, along with Lundqvist and Toronto's Frederik Andersen. Columbus' Sergei Bobrovsky is on pace to play 65. Only one other goaltender is expected to play more — Hellebuyck (68) — and it is significantly more games than last season's career high of 56 games played (a situation thoughtfully examined by Murat Ates and Cat Silverman here). That difference is no small thing for a young goaltender.

Biron, who played 16 years in the NHL, didn't quite know what he was up against when he was handling the bulk of starts for the Sabres back in 2001. That year, he finished the season having played 72 games. In retrospect, he can't believe he was able to make it through that season, given what a toll it exacted on him both physically and mentally.

"My first year as a starter in Buffalo, I was 24 years old. I wanted to play every game, even though I was maybe tired, I didn't feel tired, I said 'keep playing me,'" Biron recalled. "It wasn't until the season was over, that I realized I was working on fumes for probably 50 percent of those games."

However, it's not so simple as just limiting games, which is why scrutinizing that number remains an imperfect way to manage fatigue. In Vasilevskiy's case, Jean tries to take a more qualitative approach, considering games played, scoring chances against and practice days as the most critical components to keeping Vasilevskiy fresh.

The latter factor may be the easiest for teams to control, but it also is dictated largely by a goaltender's preference. Some netminders opt to forego morning skates, while others try to enjoy a lighter practice schedule. But another point to consider: While it is one thing for someone like the 36-year-old Lundqvist, who has played six seasons of 65 games or more, to take a maintenance day, it's something entirely different for a younger player to opt for a similar strategy.

There are expectations and pressures within the organization's ecosystem, and that can play a factor.

"Sometimes with young guys, it's a little different. You're young and you wanna go out here and bust your ass off in front of anybody and be a team guy. Even though that might be the absolute worst thing to do," said former NHL goaltending coach Mike Valley. "Yes, it's the amount of games you play, but it's also how you're practicing, especially with a guy like Vasilevskiy, who only knows one speed — all out."

Vasilevskiy's teammates confirm that there is little middle ground once he goes into competition mode. Try scoring on him in a shootout drill following a 75-minute practice and you'll quickly find out it's not much different than during a game.

"He doesn't have this, 'Oh, it's practice, I can take it easy' [mentality]," Lightning forward Nikita Kucherov told The Athletic. "He wants to face every shot and save it. He doesn't want to give up a goal in drills. He doesn't want you to score on him. And if you do score, the next time, it's like a game. ... If he gives up a goal, it drives him even more to be competitive. He's going to try even harder."

As such, Jean, in collaboration with the Lightning coaching staff, tries to be strategic in managing Vasilevskiy's workload. Consider last Wednesday as a perfect example. Following a night in which he faced a barrage of shots, Vasilevskiy would have two solid days (the Lightning had an off day on Thursday) to rest, while still practicing on Friday in advance of Saturday's game against the Bruins. That's Vasilevskiy's preference, according to Jean. He likes to either skate the day before a game or the morning of, to get in some work, get his blood pumping and "feel the puck."

Other goaltenders are on the opposite end of the spectrum.

"Ben Bishop, for example. Him? If you would have just told him to play the game, he would have been fine, because he's probably more of a cerebral goaltender than an athletic goaltender, so for him, it didn't bother him that much not to practice," Jean said.

However, simply making plot points on the schedule and crafting carefully-curated practice plans cannot guarantee to offset fatigue issues. For one, workload can vary widely within a game, and within different segments of the season. In the past 13 games, Vasilevskiy has faced an average of 34 shots. Five of those games required overtime. Even the best-tailored plans are subject to some level of randomness, or at least variability. And that's also assuming you even have the cushion to map out such a blueprint. With a logjam of clubs jockeying for position in the standings, many teams can't afford to be selective in which starts their starting goaltender can skip.

The Lightning have already clinched a playoff berth and are pacing the rest of the conference with 102 points, so they have some wiggle room, but the parity that now exists among teams makes this increasingly difficult to accomplish for others around the league. And that's when workload and fatigue management can go out the window.

"The reality is, it's such a tight, close league, you don't even have that luxury because you have to find a way to win every night and position yourself," Valley said. "Maybe you can manage it a little bit, but you need wins every single night, and you can only find rest in between games. You should be in the mental state of thinking games, games, games and really reducing your workload in practice."

"There's really not a good answer, unless you win. And then that's the right answer."

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The Athletic / Meet Quinton Byfield, hockey's latest and least likely 15-year-old sensation



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By Scott Wheeler Mar 20, 2018 25

Richmond Hill, Ont., October 11 — Inside Elgin Barrow Arena, in Toronto's suburbia, parents and Ontario Hockey League scouts gather on a rainy Wednesday night to watch one player.

By the second period, the scorekeeper has already stopped keeping track. Once a game reaches 5-0, that's what you do in minor hockey.

The York Simcoe Express are undefeated on the season, having outscored their opponents 63-6 in their first seven games. They ride 13-0 and 12-0 wins into their game, this time against the Richmond Hill Coyotes.

At the centre of their bench, with a sloppily-stitched 'C' on his chest, 15-year-old Quinton Byfield stands above his Grade 10 teammates. He's already 6-foot-3 and more than 190 pounds.

By now, he's leading the minor-midget Triple-A level's ETA league in scoring with 25 points and 15 goals in seven games.

A weekend earlier, in London, Ont., he and his 13 goals led the Express to an 8-0 record at the Wendy Dufton Tournament, which brings together 42 of the best teams in Ontario and the United States. In May, while playing in the under-15 World Selects Invitational, Byfield tied the records set by 2018 NHL draft prospects Joel Farabee and Mathias Emilio Pettersen when he posted 19 points in nine games, nearly twice as many as previous tournament standouts such as Mitch Marner.

The scouts in the rink have known for a while now that No. 55 was destined for what's next. By the time he caps off his latest hat trick on a 2-on-1 for the 9-0 goal, his status as the first overall pick in the 2018 OHL draft and a top prospect in the 2020 NHL draft class is already solidified. Barring catastrophic injury, he's got limitless potential, the perfect blend of size, speed, power, and finesse.

Still, the scouts stand, black jackets on, notepads in hand, dutifully watching one of the best young hockey players they've ever seen.

Mike De Pellegrin, a longtime Triple-A and prep school coach at St. Michael's College, stands behind Byfield on the bench, occasionally whispering something in his ear. De Pellegrin has helped develop top NHL players and prospects such as Tyler Seguin, Chris Tierney, Lucas Lessio, Andrew Cogliano, and Robert Thomas.

And he has never seen a player this good, this early.

"He is probably the most naturally gifted hockey player I've had an opportunity to coach in 20 years," De Pellegrin told The Athletic.

"All the opportunity in the world is in front of him. He is well-rounded in just about every aspect. He's committed to every zone, he wants to work on defence first, he's good at everything right now. There's no glaring weakness I see at all in his game, it's just a matter of developing in each area over the course of time."

He knew Byfield was special when he was called up to play above his age group as an affiliate player the year before and posted four points in four games.

"He's always been that guy. I know in social media he's been getting a lot of attention recently but he's always done that," De Pellegrin said.

Those around Byfield describe him as a confident, driven, humble, understated kid with a great sense of humour who has done everything he can to just be "one of the guys" during his last year of minor hockey.

"With all the fanfare that goes along with him and his accomplishments as a minor hockey player, I don't think you'd ever realize that he's that sort of player when you sit down and talk to him. You certainly wouldn't know it without having seen him play," De Pellegrin said. "You don't necessarily always get that so I think that's a really strong asset that he has."

Two months earlier, after talking to just about every agency in hockey, Byfield signed with the Orr Hockey Group (home to first overall picks like Connor McDavid, Taylor Hall, and Aaron Ekblad) and mega-agent Jeff Jackson.

Jackson watched Byfield play a few years earlier. Just like everyone else, he knew.

"We try as best we can to keep him grounded. He's a great kid. Kids like him and Connor, Aaron and Taylor have to kind of take a one-day, one-week-at-a-time approach and not get too far ahead of themselves. When they're this young, we just want them to concentrate on being a good teammate with his buddies and enjoying the year," Jackson told The Athletic.

"That's about it really. We recognize his talent level."

At the end of the summer, shortly before Byfield signed with Jackson, he was invited to their summer camp, where he was educated on nutrition and sleep and got a chance to meet and work with Gary Roberts and McDavid.

Despite playing on a team rife with several other top picks in the forthcoming OHL draft (and Division I NCAA commits), as scouts leave the rink, Byfield's the only player they're talking about.

"I think he's special, a super athlete who isn't even scratching the surface in my opinion," one recruiter with close ties to Byfield and the Express said.

"Once he learns how to play in open ice, watch out. His balance, agility and elusiveness in tight spaces is off the charts good. He works hard and he has a lethal shot at this level. I hate to do this to the kid but I think he's a more athletic version of an Auston Matthews-type of player."

Aurora, Ont., March 3 — Status at 15 aside, Byfield is a lot unlike the great minor hockey players who've come before him.

By the OMHA's year-end tournament at Saint Andrew's College, home to the Express, Byfield's parents still aren't ready for what's next.

They never even envisioned their son a hockey player.

Byfield's father, Clinton, is a Jamaican immigrant. His mother, Nicole, grew up in Keswick, Ont., in a family of three sisters and one brother who didn't play hockey.

When she took Byfield skating for the first time at 2, it was simply as something to do, not because she planned on someday enrolling him in hockey.

But he just skated. He didn't fall down. He didn't cry.

From there, there was no turning back.

At 4, he was in the advanced group at hockey schools for 5 and 6 year olds. In his first year in house league in Georgina, Ont., he scored five of his team's six goals in the final. After dominating Super 7s and Double-A, the Express approached Nicole and asked if he'd join the program. At first, she said no. She thought he was too young. Eventually, he joined the team — where he has stayed for seven seasons.

He fell in love with the sport, a hockey player from a family without any.

In more ways than one, his story runs counter to the vast majority of top young hockey players.

The Express are a finely-tuned machine run by hockey people. Their president, Dave Haggith, is the senior director of communications for Maple Leafs Sports and Entertainment. Their coaches are recruited.

But Byfield doesn't come from money. His parents, both in their late 40s, have relied on sponsors to afford the massive costs associated with playing at minor hockey's highest level. Nicole works in administration. Clinton manages a Toys 'R' Us.



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"We live very simple lives. It's very expensive. We've never had a family vacation. Our vacations are, I guess, when we go on the road for hockey. Everything goes into hockey because we know how much he likes it," Nicole said.

He gets his quiet, soft-spoken humility from that upbringing. Those in Byfield's inner circle describe Nicole and Clinton as "good, salt of the earth people."

This is all very new to them, and they need people like Jackson to help navigate what's to come.

"We're very proud but we kind of don't think about the whirlwind ahead too much. I think it's a little surreal still," Nicole said. "We know it's going to happen, though."

Jackson and Byfield will soon begin visits with all of the OHL teams near the top of the draft, including the Sudbury Wolves — who own the first overall pick.

"They want to be very supportive of him obviously but they also recognize that he's a pretty unique talent and he probably will need some different type of advice as we go forward," Jackson said. "There's always these weird pressures. The family recognizes that they've never been through it before so they're going to rely on us to help him."

In a few months, he will have to leave home and his friends at St. Maximilian Kolbe Catholic High School in Aurora.

After Byfield's older sister left for university, Nicole is afraid of being an empty nester.

"I'll miss him very much. I might be his billet," she said, laughing. "I don't know if they'll allow you to do that but it will be tough, it will be really tough. I don't know how I'll handle it."

By the time Byfield takes on the first day of OMHAs, there's a different kind of crowd gathered than six months earlier in Richmond Hill. OHL scouts still mingle in the rink, but so do area hockey fans. They want a glimpse of No. 55.

Perched high in the corner, Jackson stands with agent David Gagner and famed junior hockey owner, manager and executive, Sherry Bassin.

Byfield has just wrapped up a regular season in which he posted 92 points in 34 games. In the history of the ETA, only two players have scored at a higher clip than his 2.71 points per game: Steven Stamkos (2.98) and Taylor Hall (2.88). Both became first overall picks in the NHL.

De Pellegrin has since joined the Major Bantam Coyotes in Richmond Hill, replaced by Iler Mehmeti behind the York Simcoe bench.

On the ice, his hair now dyed bleach blonde for the playoffs, Byfield stands out. He's still bigger than everyone else despite a late birthday (August 24, 2002).

In the 8-5 loss to the Barrie Colts, York Simcoe's lone loss on route to winning OMHAs, Byfield picks up two goals and three assists.

Below Jackson at ice-level, Clinton, wearing a black and red hoodie and an Express hat, screams "Yes!" and bangs on the glass when Byfield dances through the offensive zone to cut into the Colts' lead in the final minutes.

When the tournament is over, Byfield picks up the phone from the townhouse his parents rent to reflect on the championship and look forward to the penultimate OHL Cup a week later (a tournament he calls a "once-in-a-lifetime experience" and goes on to score seven points in six games before losing in the semis).

His legs feel like rubber, but he's going to miss it.

"It's really sad. Last time playing with all of them," Byfield said, almost in a whisper. "But everyone's also going to be moving onto the next chapter next year so I'm also excited for them."

He too, doesn't really get what's to come.

But no matter what's ahead, he wouldn't change anything about his story.

"It's unique, my story, and not having hockey parents. Especially when I was younger, I always tried to get help from everyone else to teach you. Everyone else had their parents to help but I think they've learned a lot over the years and we've all learned a lot together so it has been a good experience for all of us. I think it's pretty cool," he said.

He tries not to think about going first overall, knowing that it could change after meeting with the teams and going over his options. In the OHL, the best player doesn't always go No. 1. The fit for Byfield and his family could play a major role.

He distracts himself with video games, friends, and road hockey.

But his schedule is demanding during the season. The Express practiced on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Fridays and played on Saturdays and Sundays. On Mondays and Wednesdays, he worked out.

He tries to be a quiet, supportive leader, someone who can pick up a teammate when he's down.

While he's excited to see all of the prospective teams' facilities and meet their staffs, he's also scared — and thankful for Jackson's guidance.

He's still just a kid.

"I'll miss my family. My parents do a lot for me. They drive me everywhere, they make me food, they do all my laundry. And I'll also miss my dog and my cat," he said. "I'm nervous. I get asked about it a lot at school. It is surreal, just knowing that you have to be home early and live with a billet family, but I think it's going to be a cool experience."

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The Athletic / Mirtle: How Auston Matthews' injuries will cost him most of his bonuses — and help the Leafs' cap situation

By James Mirtle Mar 20, 2018 44

TAMPA — The continuing battle for the top of the Atlantic Division will play out on Tuesday night without Auston Matthews.

I mean, realistically, the fight between these two teams has been over for a while, with the Lightning nine points up on the Maple Leafs with 10 games to play. But with Tampa on a run (10-2-1 in their last 13) and Toronto hot streaking for even longer (17-4-2 in their last 23), there'll be a little intrigue on the line nonetheless.

The game will be Matthews' 20th out of the lineup. No one is particularly stressed about that, not with third in the division basically guaranteed and three weeks until the playoffs open in Boston or Tampa in Round 1.

But there are some extenuating ramifications from all those missed games. Ramifications on the Leafs' salary cap situation not just for next season but likely in 2019-20, too.

According to a source with knowledge of what's in Matthews' contract, he is likely to miss out on the majority of the bonuses in his entry-level deal this season due to all of the injuries. While he will earn \$850,000 in Schedule A bonuses, he will almost certainly miss his \$2-million Schedule B bonus.

Matthews' contract has a section — standard among first-overall picks — which reads as follows:

Scoring Bonus (Goals, Assists, Points or Points per Game)



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Top 10 forward in NHL: \$2,000,000

*minimum 42 regular season games played by Player and comparison group.

The problem here is there is no provision for goals per game, where Matthews ranks eighth in the NHL. He is well beyond the top 10 in the other categories, coming closest in goals in a tie for 23rd.

"The injury probably cost him the \$2-million, as he would have been top 10 in goals," the source said. "Technically, he could still make it in points per game but highly unlikely."

Among players who will hit the games played cutoff, Matthews ranks 36th in the NHL — with 50 points in 53 games — at 0.94 points per game.

The cutoff to finish among the NHL's top 10 is currently 1.11 points per game. Even if Matthews returns to the Leafs' lineup in Nashville on Thursday and plays their final nine games, he would need 19 points in those nine games to get to that mark.

To get into the top 10 in goals, meanwhile, he would have to make up at least six on the 10th place player. (Connor McDavid is currently in that spot with 34 goals. And he could have more by Thursday.)

It's not impossible but highly improbable.

The only other way for Matthews to get his Schedule B bonus would be to win a major league award. Since the Hart, Richard and Selke are out of the question given the games he has missed, only the Conn Smythe could get it done.

We'll call that unlikely at this point. Not impossible but highly improbable.

These bonuses are a big deal for the Leafs. Because they're using the long-term injured reserve provision with Nathan Horton and Jeff Lupul, all performance bonuses they accrue will cost them against next season's salary cap.

At the moment, the Leafs will owe Matthews and Mitch Marner \$850,000 each and William Nylander \$637,500 in bonuses, meaning they'll have a \$2.34-million overage that will come off their available cap space next year.

(Nylander has earned or will earn three bonuses for ice time, plus-minus and assists. He can still get another \$212,500 if he hits a fourth and final bonus over the season's final 10 games. Thanks to Cap Friendly for confirming those details.)

Whether the Leafs' final bonus overage is \$2.34-million or \$2.55-million, that's considerably lower than it would be had Matthews hit his big kahuna bonus.

You might say "So what — the Leafs have plenty of cap space next season?" And you'd be right. Last month I looked at the Leafs' cap picture with John Tavares added to it, and they still had roughly \$11-million in cap space with him in their lineup.

Where not having Matthews' extra bonuses may make a difference is in 2019-20. That season, cap space will be tight no matter what because all three of Matthews, Marner and Nylander will be on their second contracts.

What the Leafs would love to avoid is having a cap overage next season that causes further problems in 2019-20.

Lupul's contract ends this summer, so he'll no longer be a problem. The Leafs' last LTIR issue is with Horton, whose deal still has two more years beyond this one. What's interesting is Toronto has so much cap space next season that it's plausible they will not have to use LTIR at all next season.

If they don't, then the performance bonuses accrued by Matthews and Marner — Nylander will no longer have them — don't necessarily need to be carried over. Only the portion that puts them over the cap.

If the Leafs are far enough under the cap that they don't have to use LTIR and they can absorb Matthews' and Marner's bonuses, there'll be no overage at all for 2019-20.

At that point, the organization won't have many ELC bonuses to worry about at all. At least until Timothy Liljegren starts making an impact at the NHL level. (Which would be a good problem to have given their issues on right defence.)

The Leafs' glorious cap situation this summer is going to open a lot of possibilities for them. Obviously the most enticing one involves adding a bunch of star talent on one-year deals, if possible. They could also eat some bad contracts in return for getting additional assets.

Failing that, however, they can get themselves out of this LTIR-related bonus pickle that is tied all the way back to the horrific David Clarkson contract that was signed five years ago by the previous regime.

You never, ever want to see your star centre get hurt, but in this case, Matthews missing games could help give the Leafs some more flexibility in their contending years. Which is never a bad thing when you've got some huge contracts on the way.

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The Athletic / Three things we learned against Florida

By Arpon Basu Mar 20, 2018 3

Panthers 2, Canadiens 0

- This was the 12th time this season the Canadiens were shut out, extending the team record they set a long, long time ago. It was the third time in a row they were shut out by the Panthers. Think about that. The Canadiens deserve some credit, I suppose, for keeping this game close, because they looked completely uninspired and were facing a team that was fighting to stay on the fringes of the Eastern Conference playoff race. But honestly, the Panthers squandered opportunity after opportunity the Canadiens handed them on a silver platter while Roberto Luongo had one of the easiest shutouts he will ever get. An example? Through two periods, the Canadiens had three shots on goal on three power plays. Over the course of those power plays, the Panthers had four shots on goal and they were of a much higher quality than the ones the Canadiens had. Antti Niemi was the biggest reason this game was close, but the Panthers failing to bury their chances had a big role to play as well. Aleksander Barkov had two open nets to shoot at early in the third period and missed them both. He then scored shortly afterward when an intended pass went in off Logan Shaw. Hockey is a funny game sometimes.

- Speaking of Niemi, here is his regular spot in the Three things we learned. Honestly, this spot should be sponsored at this point. This was his third straight start against a team that had let him go recently, and as he did in the first two against the Dallas Stars and the Pittsburgh Penguins, he more than held his own, making 38 saves and preventing his teammates' performance in front of him from being too embarrassing. The Panthers had approximately 47 odd man rushes and breakaways in the game and didn't score on any of them. The only shots that beat him was the aforementioned bank off his teammate's stick and one by Aaron Ekblad after he undressed Jeff Petry with a toe drag and was left alone in tight on Niemi.

- That once again segues nicely to Petry, who looks tired. He's looked tired for a while. After more than two months of basically impeccable hockey since Shea Weber was taken out of the lineup in mid-December, Petry's mind doesn't appear to be working properly. On the Ekblad goal,



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he hit Michael McCarron with a pass in the heart of the slot in the Canadiens zone. McCarron promptly gave it up to Ekblad, but maybe giving McCarron that pass in that position on the ice is not the best thing to do, either. It was indicative, however, of some of the mental foginess that has plagued Petry's game. The same was true in Toronto on Saturday. The same's been true for quite some time. Entering the game, Petry had played 1,701 minutes this season. His career high for total minutes played came last season, at 1,769. So he should pass that over the upcoming road trip, probably in Buffalo on Friday night. It shows. He looks exhausted.

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The Athletic / On one-year anniversary of playoff clinch, Blue Jackets peaking at the right time this season

Tom Reed Mar 20, 2018 14

BOSTON — One year ago, it was bottoms up after wheels down in Columbus.

The Blue Jackets clinched a postseason berth on March 19, 2017, with 11 games remaining in the regular season. On the plane ride home from an afternoon win in New Jersey, players decided to meet at Yogi's Bar & Grill in Dublin to commemorate the occasion.

Glasses were raised and praises sung. It was a nice bonding moment for a team that had known for weeks it was postseason bound.

"We had some fun, but the message was: 'We've got more to do,'" captain Nick Foligno told The Athletic on Monday night. "Nobody was satisfied. It was good to clinch a playoff spot, but we had work left to do."

What the Blue Jackets didn't know that night was their best hockey was behind them. They lost their way and won just three more regular-season games before being dispatched by the Penguins in the opening round of the playoffs.

On the one-year anniversary of that celebration, the Blue Jackets have a different look to them. They are desperate, focused, resilient. They are hardened by the circumstances of a tight postseason race and finding ways to win games even when not playing at their best.

The Blue Jackets won their eighth consecutive game with an improbable 5-4 overtime victory against the rugged Bruins at TD Garden. Outplayed for the majority of the night, they received a wondrous performance from backup goaltender Joonas Korpisalo and a few big moments from key contributors.

The game ended with the indefatigable Artemi Panarin outworking two Bruins for the puck in three-on-three play to start a cycle that led to Cam Atkinson's winner at 2:55 of overtime.

"We stuck with it and that's what good teams do," Atkinson said. "It wasn't our prettiest by no means, but we find a way to get two huge points."

A year ago at this time, Atkinson and several teammates were descending into scoring slumps that lingered into the playoffs. The diminutive winger is peaking at the right time this season. He has seven goals and six assists in the past 12 games.

A club that struggled to generate offense for months has erupted for four or more goals in six of the past eight contests.

Panarin, who delivered a third-period stunner off a Foligno faceoff win, is rolling. The Blue Jackets are getting production from three lines. Boone

Jenner can't stop scoring. His linemates, Thomas Vanek and Alexander Wennberg, remain hot.

The Jackets rallied from a 3-1 deficit late in the second period to end the Bruins' seven-game home winning streak.

"I don't want to take anything from the guys," Blue Jackets coach John Tortorella said. "I don't think we played well at all tonight, but we found a way to score some timely goals and make some key plays at key times. But let's face it guys, we stole two points tonight."

The Bruins, missing six key players due to injuries, showed why they are among the favorites in the Eastern Conference. They came in waves at the Blue Jackets, playing without All-Star defenseman Seth Jones. If not for Korpisalo, the Bruins might have duplicated the 7-2 tanning they applied to Columbus here on Dec. 18.

The Finnish goalie made 34 saves, including six on a first-period Boston power play.

"That game belongs to Korpi," Tortorella said. "It could have been 9-4. He was outstanding. I'm thrilled for him."

It was a night the Blue Jackets could have rolled over and rested on their seven-game win streak. They took four penalties in the first two periods and turned over the puck repeatedly.

But unlike last March, there is repercussion for losing. The ninth-place Panthers won again Monday to remain six points behind the Blue Jackets with three games in hand.

That's why Sonny Milano's goal — a tap-in off a beautiful diagonal slap pass from Ryan Murray cutting the deficit to 3-2 late in the second period — was so critical. It extended the Blue Jackets a lifeline.

"We can't crumble," Foligno said. "We just have to find a way to get wins."

Despite setting a franchise record with 50 wins, the Blue Jackets could not manufacture such urgency down the stretch last season. The club-record 16 game win streak all but assured their playoff bid in January. It was a young club with no experience at handling success.

"Everything went so well," Foligno said. "You were able to look so far ahead, where as right now we are laser focused on what we have to do."

"I think this has helped our group grow up. I think it's helped us understand the position we are in and hopefully we can continue to do this and carry it into the playoffs."

A year ago, the Jackets made only tweaks at the trade deadline with the additions of Kyle Quincey and Lauri Korpikoski, players who didn't supply a spark. This time around, the Blue Jackets have been ignited — they are 10-2-0 since Feb. 26 — by the acquisitions of Ian Cole, Vanek and Mark Letestu.

Vanek scored a beautiful third-period goal on a redirection of a Markus Nutivaara point shot. The veteran winger has three goals and four assists in the past six games.

"We got huge goals at big times from guys, and that's why you bring those type of players in," Foligno said.

You can feel the confidence growing in a locker room where contributions are coming from all corners.

There's no question the Blue Jackets miss Jones, who sat out his second consecutive game with an upper-body injury. His steady play often eases nerves on the back end. But depth defensemen Nutivaara and Murray contributed again. Murray notched two assists, including a primary one on the game winner as he spotted Atkinson darting off the bench and into the offensive zone.

"We kept chipping away," Murray said. "We probably didn't deserve to win that game but we found a way."



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The Penguins, who sit second in the Metro Division, are just two points ahead of the Blue Jackets. The pace-setting Capitals are just four points in front of them.

On the one-year anniversary of their trip to Yogi's, there's nothing yet to celebrate for the Blue Jackets. And that's not a bad thing.

Notebook

- The biggest goal of the game was Milano's, which came just 25 seconds after the Bruins took a 3-1 lead late in the second period.

"He's a crafty guy, and we just kind of locked eyes," Murray said of Milano. "He knew that I saw him and he just got open. He showed me his stick. It was a heckuva play to get open."

- The Blue Jackets took a brief 4-3 lead thanks to quick thinking from Foligno and an even quicker shot from Panarin. The captain noticed Bruins forward Ryan Donato — making his NHL debut — was a few feet away from Panarin on the inside hash marks of the right circle.

Instead of drawing the puck toward the wall, Foligno went to his left. Panarin fired the puck into the net on a one-timer.

"I normally don't win it to the middle," Foligno said. "I usually win it to the wall. But I noticed (the defender) off Bread. ... He made a helluva effort to shoot it. A lot of guys would corral that and throw it back. He just ripped it."

- Jenner has goals in four consecutive games and five in the past six games. He's riding a career-high six-game point streak.

- Tortorella is not a fan of the Kepi, the Civil War-inspired hat the Blue Jackets present to the game's best player after a win. It was given to Murray on Monday.

"That's a silly lookin' hat, too," the coach said. "That's the first time I've seen it. ... As I went in to congratulate Korpi, and I saw Murr with something stupid on, and it was that hat. But Murr deserved it, too."

- Korpisalo was excited to beat his idol, fellow Finn and summer training partner Tuukka Rask.

"I have been looking up to Tuukka since he came to the NHL," Korpisalo said. "He was the guy I was looking up to and it's fun to play against him and other Finns, too."

- Goaltender Sergei Bobrovsky is expected to start Tuesday night in New York against the Rangers.

The Athletic LOADED: 03.21.2018

1104870 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Takeaways: Maple Leafs blow three-goal lead in Tampa

Luke Fox | @lukefoxjukebox March 20, 2018, 11:26 PM

If Tuesday's clash of Atlantic titans felt like a playoff preview (minus the intensity and Auston Matthews), well, Leafs Nation might wish to avert its eyes.

Controlling the pace of play and pouncing on its opportunities, the Toronto Maple Leafs jumped to a 3-0 lead they should have never relinquished.

But Tampa's arsenal exposed the Leafs' weaknesses late and often to stun its visitors with a 4-3 victory.

The comeback not only gave goaltender Andrei Vasilevskiy a franchise-record (and NHL-leading) 41st win but also made the Lightning the first club to hit 50 wins this season.

Here are seven takeaways from a game Toronto can't forget soon enough.

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History would not be kind to Leafs in a Tampa series

The Lightning most certainly would hold a home-ice advantage over the Leafs if these two club were to meet in an all-blue-and-white series in Round 1 or 2 this spring — and that's good news for the Bolts' confidence.

With Tuesday's win, Tampa improved to 9-3-1 in its past 13 games versus Toronto and 9-2-1 in the past dozen home games against the Leafs.

"They're a team we're eventually going to see if we want to go deep in the playoffs," Toronto goalie Frederik Andersen said.

Andersen was just OK in return game

The common belief in Leafs Nation is that Toronto is bound to live and die by Andersen's play—logical thinking when it comes to a team that is routinely outshot. But when Andersen went down to an upper-body injury Wednesday, backup Curtis McElhinney performed splendidly, securing three straight wins in the big Dane's absence.

Rested and healed, Andersen got tapped Tuesday.

"When you're playing some of the top teams in the league, you want to bring your best game," he told reporters. "I'm happy to be back."

Though he never allowed an obvious stinker, Andersen posted an .840 save percentage in the loss and has now surrendered three or more goals in 11 of his past 13 outings. He has three weeks to get sharper.

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JVR, are you ready to get paid?!

James van Riemsdyk is the hottest goal scorer not named Patrik Laine.

Bound to become hockey's most coveted UFA winger on July 1, JVR rang in his 600th career NHL game with style, staking the visitors to a 2-0 lead on the strength of two strikes in tight with an extra skater in white. Bread and butter.

The first was a quick-release, blocker-side shot from the slot thanks to a smart pass from Mitch Marner during a delayed penalty call, the second a roofed backhand from the blue paint on the power play.

Van Riemsdyk now has seven goals in his past four games and leads all Leafs with his career-high 33 (a well-balanced 17 on the road, 16 at home).

"James is on fire in front of the net," Zach Hyman said on the broadcast.

Marner's primary helper on JVR's opening score gives him eight points during his six-game point streak. With a team-leading 61 points (19 goals, 42 assists), Marner has matched his 2016-17 output precisely, with nine games to go.

Maple Leafs' PP is A+, while Lightning's PK is PU

At 76.8 per cent and tumbling, Tampa's penalty kill could well be this powerhouse's undoing in the post-season. Tampa operates the sixth-worst defensive specialty team in the league, and the only club currently sitting in a playoff position with a worse PK is Philadelphia.



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Conversely, the Maple Leafs are an incredible 9-for-14 (64.3 per cent) on the power play in their last six games. Although it didn't officially register as a PP marker, van Riemsdyk's first goal of the night did arrive on a delayed-call, 6-on-5 man-advantage. Don't give this group of playmakers and finishers numbers.

"It's real important you have good specialty teams, whether it be the penalty kill or power play. It gives guys opportunity to feel good, too. It's hard to score 5-on-5, [and] scorers like to score," Babcock said recently.

"You want to be in the top-10 in both, top-five if you get real greedy. You want in to be a situation that it's a strength for you. Any time things aren't going good on specialty teams, it almost becomes a weight for you and a lack of confidence and it shows. It's great that we got a good feeling."

The Leafs' power-play ranks fourth overall. Their penalty kill is ninth.

Hyman's hard work pays off

The under-appreciated Zach Hyman (Coach Babcock notwithstanding) pumped the road side's lead to 3-0 in the second period when he intercepted a Tyler Johnson pass in the O-zone, spun and whizzed the puck high past Andrei Vasilevskiy. An unassisted effort that wove diligence with skill.

"I just tried to pick off the puck and get it off as quick as I could," Hyman said. "It's hard to beat him down low, so I tried to get it up on him." There's the book.

Big-name defencemen cue the comeback

"They will challenge our defensive play," Leafs rookie Andreas Johnsson correctly proclaimed pre-game.

It took a while for Tampa to bother mounting much of an attack — 36:40, to be exact — but once the home side got rolling, thanks to back-to-back goals from blueliners Victor Hedman and Ryan McDonagh, the Leafs bent under pressure.

Tuesday was an especially rough night for Toronto's top shutdown pairing of Ron Hanisey and Morgan Rielly, who each finished the night a minus-3.

"In the third they came out with a new push, and we weren't able to answer," Rielly told reporters.

"We're going to have some conversations amongst the guys and try to figure out what we can do moving forward to get better and not let that happen again."

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Kucherov continues Art Ross, Hart campaign

Nikita Kucherov knotted the game in the third with his NHL-leading 94th point. Whipping a puck from a bad angle toward the crease, the disc nicked off Rielly's left heel and scooted past Andersen.

Thirty of Kucherov's 37 goals have come at even strength.

Alex Killorn put the finishing touches on the Bolts' remarkable retaliation when he converted on a nice feed from recent AHL call-up Anthony Cirelli.

Four unanswered goals furthered widened the gap between Toronto and Tampa in the standings.

"There's going to be momentum swings in big games all the time. You've just got to stay calm and continue to execute," Babcock told reporters.

"We shouldn't feel great. We didn't do what we were supposed to do, and we didn't get the job done. We'll get up tomorrow and get on with our life and get ready for Nashville [Thursday]."

The victory boosted the Lightning's points percentage in one-goal games over .700 — making Jon Cooper's bunch the NHL's most successful team in close games.

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1104871 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Auston Matthews antsy as Maple Leafs pump brakes on return

Luke Fox | @lukefoxjokebox March 19, 2018, 8:33 PM

We already pity the Nashville Predators (Thursday) or the Detroit Red Wings (Saturday) or whichever team draws the short straw that is Auston Matthews' return game.

If body language and vocal tone are any indication, the Toronto Maple Leafs' stern franchise face is fed up with sitting on the sidelines and watching his team win games without him.

"Boring" is the adjective Matthews used to briskly sum up the past 26 days of his life, as he endures the third and longest break from action in this sophomore season.

Watch the 20-year-old's mannerisms and listen to his answers Monday as he addressed local reporters after participating in a full-contact practice, then tell us this guy isn't frustrated.

So, yes, the centreman says the right things — how "awesome" it was to join friend Morgan Rielly courtside Sunday to watch his favourite out-of-market NBA team, Oklahoma City, defeat the Toronto Raptors in a 257-point bucketfest, how pal Mitch Marner has excelled in his absence — but it's evident that coach Mike Babcock's downgrading of Matthews' status from "I think he's playing right away" to ruling him out for Tuesday's match in Tampa is eating at the competitor.

While he's nursed his separated right shoulder, Matthews has seen James van Riemsdyk pass him in goals and fellow super sophomores William Nylander and Marner leapfrog him in points.

"I'm just trying to get back and play hockey," said Matthews, set to miss his 20th game of a season leading into a potential contract-extension summer.

It's not just Matthews with whom the Maple Leafs are treating with kid gloves as they play out a mostly meaningless 10-game string before gearing up for a first-round playoff series that'll kick off in either Tampa or Boston.

Top-four defenceman Nikita Zaitsev finally practised with the full group Monday after 10 days off with a nagging illness and insisted twice that he was ready to play a game. Despite describing his health as "unbelievable," Zaitsev, too, will sit out Tuesday against the division leaders.

"I'm pretty proud to watch this hockey team playing," Zaitsev said. "We're doing the right things here."

There's one more cautionary tale.

Number 1 goalie Frederik Andersen, who practised for the first time since suffering an upper-body injury Wednesday, has gone from probable to uncertain to start against the Lightning. At the very least, the big Dane will back up the overachieving Curtis McElhinney, as third-stringer Garret Sparks was returned to the AHL Marlies.

Thing is, it's hard to argue with Toronto's tactic of holding back their horses, even if they're champing at the bit.



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The Leafs have gone a remarkable 5-2-2 during Matthews' latest rehab and 3-0-0 since McElhinney slid into Andersen's crease.

"He's been unreal," Andersen said. "I feel a lot better. You do what you need to do to be at your best, and that's what we've been doing."

All four of the Leafs' walking wounded — Matthews, Andersen, Zaitsev and Leo Komarov (whose day-to-day leg injury should keep him out at least another week) — will travel with the club on its two-stop road trip this week against the two best teams in the NHL.

Facing powerhouses Tampa and Nashville — each first in its respective conference, each still battling for home ice all the way through — will present the Leafs with a difficult test and yet another chance to boost the confidence and experience of the healthy players benefiting from all that ice time Matthews & Co. aren't using.

"I never thought much about the injuries. Guys get hurt and you gotta play. The biggest concern is when they get back, are they ready to play?" Babcock said.

Forget the just-win-the-next-one mentality or the five-game segments, fans. The coach's full focus is on the post-season and ensuring his lineup is as fit as possible for April 11. If some guys are so healthy, they're irritated, well, maybe that's not a bad thing.

This is a group about to rocket from weeks of getting motivated with practically nothing on the line to everything on the line in a snap.

"We're going to have to play better and harder than we have thus far this year," Babcock said, "and we all know that."

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1104872 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Overwhelmed Canucks can't keep up with Golden Knights' magic act

Iain MacIntyre | @imacSportsnet March 21, 2018, 2:02 AM

LAS VEGAS – The greatest show in Vegas is the Golden Knights hockey team. They're more popular than Wayne Newton and better than any expansion team in National Hockey League history.

The Vancouver Canucks were cramped front-row seats Tuesday, where they watched the Knights' act – speed, directness, relentlessness – and were beaten 4-1 on the Las Vegas strip.

But the NHL, anywhere, is a pretty good act. Not many players get this stage. It's too bad that many Canucks seem ambivalent about keeping their place in the spotlight.

Yes, it's tough mentally to rouse yourself to play games in garbage time that are meaningless to everything but the draft lottery, which is what bad teams like the Canucks are doing in March.

But this also might be the best chance some of their players get to making the NHL or staying in the league.

Young players like Derrick Pouliot, Brendan Leipsic, Jake Virtanen, Nikolay Goldobin, Tyler Motte and Reid Boucher are trying to prove they belong. Other guys like Jussi Jokinen, Sam Gagner, Nic Dowd and Troy Stecher are trying to show they deserve to stay.

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In that context, these final games for the Canucks, who have lost seven straight, may as well be the playoffs.

"It's super tough," Canucks captain Henrik Sedin said of the mental challenge. "But again, there's no excuses for anyone to give up or give in. Frustrated is when you see guys who should be battling for spots, who should be excited to play in this league because it's a really tough league to play in. We can't take anything for granted here. No one can. We know there's going to be changes next year and guys have to show up and show they want to be here."

But the two points almost always stay in Vegas.

The Knights are 26-9-2 at T-Mobile Arena, where the rollicking atmosphere starts long before the game begins and is fuelled by the home team's attacking, offensive style and its fans' eagerness to have fun. This is a very difficult place to play.

Exactly, Sedin said. All the better stage to show something.

"It's a tough building to come into," he said. "In here and San Jose, Nashville and LA, Anaheim, those are tough buildings to play in. That's where you want to see guys show up and do the things you need to do to win. At home, things usually come by themselves. It's easy to play at home. But on the road in tough buildings, that's where you see where guys are."

Where are the Canucks?

Stalled at 59 points and with only seven goals during their seven-game losing streak, the Canucks are exactly 40 points behind the Knights. Forty! Think about that. Vegas could stop playing now and it would probably be sometime in 2019 before the Canucks caught up in the standings.

The Knights led 2-0 after five minutes on Tuesday. Sure, there were lucky bounces on both goals. Penn and Teller couldn't recreate Cody Eakin's swatted goal that bounced off Pouliot's shoulder and up and over Markstrom at 4:53.

But it was already clear by then which was the better team. The Knights will win 50 games this season and start the Stanley Cup Playoffs next month as a first-round favourite. The Canucks will fail to win 30 and finish as the worst Vancouver team this century.

"Their team came ready to play tonight, and it's a good hockey team," Canucks coach Travis Green said. "When you get down 2-0 early and 3-0 after one (period), you're not going to come back against a team like that. We're not."

"Obviously it's frustrating. It's frustrating to lose. The players are frustrated. I don't blame them. It's a combination of not scoring – 30 shots, one goal – and losing. That will frustrate a group. But you've got to get ready to play."

"Guys have a lot to play for. Guys are getting ample opportunity to play in the NHL. That's what a lot of these guys have been waiting for. It shouldn't be hard for them to get ready to play."

After the early goals by Eakin and Jonathan Marchessault, whose shot from the slot hit Canuck Bo Horvat and ricocheted post-and-in, Pierre-Edouard Bellemare made it 3-0 at 19:27 of the opening period when he rattled a shot through Markstrom after Stecher was separated from the puck by Ryan Reaves' hit behind the net.

Tomas Tatar scored in the second period for Vegas and Brandon Sutter in the third for Vancouver, forcing a shap-angle shot between goalie Malcolm Subban's pads.

Nobody has more fun at an NHL game than fans here, but it should give them pause that Knights' starting goalie Marc-Andre Fleury left the game in the first intermission after stopping the seven shots the Canucks directed on net.

Short of the Winnipeg Jets or Nashville Predators, not much can stop the Knights. But a significant injury to Fleury could.

"I remember playing them at home the first time they came into our building, and I was surprised how fast they played," Sedin said. "They



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have five guys taking off as soon as they get the puck. And they make plays. Even when you play in their end, you battle and battle and battle. And when you give the puck away, a lot of teams would just chip it out and change. But they keep coming at you, and then you have to backcheck and all of a sudden you're tired in your end. That's how they scored their fourth goal tonight. That's how they score a lot of goals."

The Canucks do not know what that feels like.

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1104873 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / GM Meetings, Day 2: goalie interference, offsides and taxes

Chris Johnston | @reporterchris March 20, 2018, 7:20 PM

BOCA RATON, Fla. – As the NHL seeks to solve an unsolvable problem, they are narrowing the sphere of influence on goaltender interference reviews.

Rather than having 34 different referees render final decisions, there's a push to shift the task to the Fearsome Five in charge of the Toronto-based situation room: Colin Campbell, Mike Murphy, Kris King, Rod Pasma and Kay Whitmore.

To be clear, those men aren't to be feared. They're to be feared for. Assuming the NHLPA and NHL board of governors sign off on the proposed change – a good bet – they're going to be handed a political hot potato a few weeks before the Stanley Cup playoffs.

"My opinion on that is you can put the King of England in there ... the team, the coach, the players, the fanbase are not going to like the answer," Campbell said Tuesday. "My opinion is it doesn't matter who is giving you the answer, they're not going to like the answer if it's something in a key game."

The biggest games are oh-so-close.

Take it from here, boys.

That the NHL general managers are expected to wrap up their annual March meeting on Wednesday with a proposed in-season rule change speaks to how serious the situation has become. Heck, Buffalo's Phil Housley became the latest coach to outright state that he doesn't understand the rule following a game on Monday night.

There were just 170 coach's challenges for goaltender interference through the first 1,100 games this season – a little more than one per night, on average – but they've generated a disproportionate amount of focus and debate.

Internally, the league says referees only landed on a call the video room didn't agree with on five or six occasions. It is those small handful they're looking to smooth over now.

"What I'm hearing from the managers is they want consistency," said Campbell. "It's not who is doing it, it's that we've got five guys in there that participate in it, two that do 90 per cent of [the guys] and in the playoffs we've got one individual that does them all."

It doesn't make the call themselves any easier to make. But it does add an extra layer of accountability for GMs who would like to see the rules applied in a more predictable manner.

"You can clarify the standards, but each referee and you and I and everyone has a different opinion within that room," said Tampa Bay Lightning GM Steve Yzerman. "Everyone has a little different opinion on

"Did it impact the goaltender?" It's subjective, so no one's ever going to agree 100 per cent on the vast majority of them."

And so, the prevailing thought goes, shrink the number of voices involved in the final call.

The GMs are pushing to have that happen before the end of the regular season. If the NHLPA signs off, all 31 owners must register a "yes" vote by fax to bring it into effect immediately.

Here are some other news and notes from Day 2 of the GM Meetings:

Offside Challenges

One area where there won't be change is how offsides are reviewed.

After kicking around the possibility of adopting a more liberal interpretation of possession and control when a player crosses the blue-line, there wasn't enough support to enact a revised rule. It's the second straight year that's happened.

"I don't even think we got to the vote last year," said Campbell. "Some people wanted to leave it as it was. The managers have a good feel for the game. They have a feel for what their coaches and players are thinking, and that's where they're at."

The head of the NHL's hockey operations department is among those who would like to see the rule changed to allow players with a skate off the ice to be considered onside. But he can live with the status quo after Tuesday's discussion.

"It goes to a vote of the room," said Campbell. "We need two-thirds (support) to take it to the competition committee and eventually the board of governors. We got about 10 managers who felt that it was a problem and we should move it and the rest felt it was working fine."

Maybe next year.

Paying Taxes on Trades

The NHL has been in touch with U.S. Congress about a new tax law that could see its American-based teams forced to pay capital gains taxes if they trade an asset for something more valuable.

The new law was signed by President Donald Trump and has raised concerns inside Major League Baseball and the NBA, according to Monday's New York Times, and like those leagues the NHL is trying to get a handle on exactly what the fallout will be for its clubs.

"We are looking in to it," commissioner Gary Bettman told Sportsnet on Tuesday.

According to the Times: "The law changed a corner of the tax code that mostly applies to farmers, manufacturers and other businesses that until recently could swap certain assets like trucks and machinery tax-free. But by adding a single word to the newly written tax code — 'real' — the law now allows only real estate swaps to qualify for that special treatment."

While professional sports aren't believed to have been targets of the change, an unintended consequence could see teams taxed when they trade players.

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Mittelstadt Watch

Buffalo Sabres general manager Jason Botterill expects to have clarity on the future of top prospect Casey Mittelstadt by the end of the week.

The first order of business is determining whether the eighth overall pick from last year wants to return to the University of Minnesota for his sophomore season.

If he's willing to turn pro, Mittelstadt could join the Sabres or their American Hockey League affiliate before the end of this season. That



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would require him to sign an entry-level contract – which would come with a \$92,500 signing bonus and could see the first year immediately burnt off by playing one NHL game – or potentially an amateur tryout agreement with the AHL's Rochester Americans.

Mittelstadt was a star for the U.S. team at the world junior championship and had his NCAA season end over the weekend when Minnesota failed to qualify for the regionals.

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1104874 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Cassie Campbell-Pascall steps down as a CWHL governor

Steven Loung | @loung_s March 20, 2018, 9:00 PM

Cassie Campbell-Pascall has resigned as a governor of the CWHL.

According to The Hockey News' Ken Campbell, the two-time Olympic gold medallist and Hockey Night in Canada reporter resigned from her position with the league over the weekend.

A league spokesperson confirmed to Sportsnet that Campbell-Pascall has resigned as a league governor but wouldn't offer any further comment on the matter.

Campbell reports that Campbell-Pascall stepped down as director of the CWHL two years ago and actually didn't want to be a governor of the league but was asked to stay on and over the past two years she's worked mainly to try to secure sponsorships for the league rather than her official governor duties.

This resignation comes on the heels of comments NHL commissioner Gary Bettman made shortly after the Pyeongchang 2018 Olympic Games concluded in regards to women's hockey and the two rival North American leagues: the CWHL and NWHL.

"If those two leagues didn't exist, we would probably start our own women's league to work in conjunction with our existing clubs," Bettman said.

"There isn't enough talent for three leagues right now and we're not looking to get into a competition with the two women's leagues. If at some point they both want to work with us in ways we haven't been able to so far, we are open to that conversation."

To Campbell-Pascall, that conversation has to start with the two leagues joining forces and doing what's best for the women's game.

"To me it's a no-brainer," she told Sportsnet 960 the FAN after Bettman's comments came out. "Both commissioners know exactly what needs to happen and the fact that it's been almost three or four years now since the initial conversation started and nothing's happened you have to point the finger at both commissioners."

"It's a hard thing for me to do publicly. I've spoken to both of them, been in meetings with both of them. Enough is enough. Let's take women's hockey to the next level. If I'm commissioner and I finally hear Gary Bettman come public and finally say those comments what am I waiting for? And, what am I doing? For them not to be in a room every single day trying to figure out how this is supposed to happen, I don't get it. To me, they're both not doing their jobs."

Strong comments, and not ones Campbell-Pascall can make when affiliated to one of the leagues in question. Thus, it makes sense that she's stepping down from her official involvement with league.

Campbell-Pascall will be a major part of Sportsnet's broadcast of the Clarkson Cup final between the Kunlun Red Star and Markham Thunder this Sunday at Ricoh Coliseum in Toronto.

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Sportsnet.ca / Flames GM Treliving: 'I'm not ready to sit here and give last rites'

Chris Johnston | @reporterchris March 20, 2018, 4:27 PM

BOCA RATON, Fla. – The sun came up the day after another crushing loss for his Calgary Flames, but that didn't make things any easier for general manager Brad Treliving.

The Flames fell six points out of a Western Conference playoff spot with Monday's 5-2 loss in Arizona. They've only got eight regular-season games remaining and might need to run the table for a chance to get in.

"Probably what you'd imagine," Treliving said Tuesday at the NHL's GM Meetings, when asked how he felt about the team's recent performance.

"It's been a tough stretch for us. It's put us in a real tough spot and it's frustrating. So we'll get ready for our next one (Wednesday against Anaheim). But we certainly put ourselves in the position where the hill is that much steeper and we're going to have to address some things."

It may already be too late.

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The Flames have gone 3-7-1 since late February and are now playing without Matthew Tkachuk because of an upper-body injury. Top goaltender Mike Smith has also struggled since returning from a month-long absence due to a lower-body issue.

Tensions are running high.

Last week, cameras recorded head coach Glen Gulutzan dropping several expletives during practice in an effort to spark his players – although Treliving rightly took issue with that being labelled a "blow-up."

"He's like any other coach, he's trying to find solutions right now and he's working away at it," said Treliving. "Like I said, it's been a disappointing stretch. We've underperformed, no question. We've underperformed. I'm not ready to sit here and give last rites and start doing the post mortem."

"We've still got hockey to play, but it's certainly disappointing and especially recently with the slide we've been on."

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Compounding matters for the organization is the fact they're built to win now.

Treliving was aggressive following a first-round loss to Anaheim last spring, dealing away a first-round pick and two seconds to the New York Islanders for Travis Hamonic while also acquiring Smith from Arizona and signing Jaromir Jagr as a free agent.

That first-rounder is for this June's draft and wasn't lottery protected by Calgary, which means there's an outside chance it could win the No. 1 overall pick and see it transferred to the Islanders. As it stands now, the Flames don't own any selections until Round 3.



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Suffice it to say that management is as surprised as most onlookers about the direction this season has gone.

"Well you can be shocked all you want – we are where we are," said Treliving. "A wise man once said you are what your record says you are. So that's where we're at."

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Sportsnet.ca / Canadiens are right to allow healthy Carey Price chance to play

Eric Engels March 20, 2018, 3:15 PM

BROSSARD, Que. — Carey Price just wants to do what he's being paid to do.

Given that the 30-year-old goaltender has medical clearance to do it, he should be allowed to do it.

Yes, we're aware Price suffered a concussion on Feb. 20. We know that returning to play any of the Montreal Canadiens' remaining nine games seems like a fruitless endeavour — with them virtually eliminated from post-season contention. We understand and even acknowledge that concerns about him being exposed to further injury when he's set to make record-breaking money at the start of next season are reasonable.

Even Price appreciates that perspective.

"Sure, I get that," he said after Montreal's practice on Tuesday. "But if anybody was standing here in my shoes, they'd know what it's like to be here. So, as an athlete, you want to get back in and play the game. That's what I'm here for: to play."

And that's what Price will do when the Canadiens visit the Penguins in Pittsburgh Wednesday.

He has no trepidation about it and neither do we.

"The old saying back home is: You can't go worrying about the fall if you're going to ride the horse," Price said.

He's right.

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We'd feel differently about it if he was rushing back to action just days after suffering the second documented concussion of his career (the last one was in 2012).

We'd definitely feel uneasy about it if the Canadiens weren't being particularly careful with Phillip Danault, who suffered a concussion back in January, returned for 10 games and is now sitting out because neck pain is causing him headaches.

Heck, Andrew Shaw was knocked out in a game against the Dallas Stars on March 13 and though he hasn't been diagnosed with a concussion, the Canadiens are treating it as though he has one and proceeding with extreme caution.

Ales Hemsky suffered a concussion on Oct. 20 and though he's been skating on his own and was even cleared for contact a few weeks back, there hasn't been enough substantial progress in his case to activate him.

"I'm not optimistic he'll return this season," said Canadiens coach Claude Julien on Tuesday. "Minimal chance. There's nine games left and we won't say he won't be back, but I'm doubting we'll see him again this season."

The right approach has been taken in all of these cases. If there was any doubt about Price being 100 per cent, he wouldn't be returning.

We saw the merit of shutting No. 1 defenceman Shea Weber down — even before we knew he was going to need season-ending surgery to repair tendons in his left foot. He had been playing hurt since the first game of the season and in spite of all the different treatments taken to help solve the issue, he just wasn't getting better. He was only feeling worse as time wore on.

But that isn't the case with Price, so why prohibit him from doing what he's under contract to do?

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"These are athletes being paid to do a job," said Julien. "We have to make decisions and I think in Carey's case he wants absolutely to play. Maybe it's important for him to finish the season on a good note and he wants to do everything he can to accomplish that. We can't be too delicate with situations like this where we're telling him his season's done and that it'll help him next year. Will it hurt him? We can't say. Athletes are proud and want to play and I think we want to see Carey in front of our net.

"No matter what we say, people will have opinions that vary, but at the end of the day it's us who make decisions based on the information we have."

Julien also said Price won't be overtaxed from here to the end of the season and that he's committed to playing both him and Antti Niemi in a rotation over the final nine games.

If you're worried about Price's return affecting Montreal's draft lottery odds, keep in mind he still has 12 players in front of him who played in the AHL at one point or another this season. He's good enough to keep them in games and make them believe they can win some, but Niemi — and Charlie Lindgren to an extent — has been doing the same in recent weeks and the Canadiens haven't improved at all in the standings.

Price just wants to finish the season on his terms. "Just give a good effort and stay positive throughout the rest of the season," are things he said he's hoping to accomplish.

"We don't have high expectations, but we want to make sure we really have a really good effort and that's what matters most," Price said.

He's healthy enough to contribute and that's a good enough reason to allow him to do it.

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Sportsnet.ca / NHL should look to CFL when defining Hart Trophy criteria

Ryan Dixon | @dixononsports March 20, 2018, 7:19 PM

As the NHL season dwindles, the chants rise up in a number of cities.

MVP! MVP!

The letters hit with undeniable oomph, the acronym itself giving some insight into the weight of the award. Most Valuable Player talk in any sport drives discussion like no other trophy. But in the case of hockey,



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there's often a two-part conversation happening. In addition to arguing about who deserves the Hart Memorial Trophy, there's often a secondary debate raging that centres on what, precisely, the trophy is meant to honour.

It's the rare instance of major sport problem with a CFL solution.

Yes, the three-down league takes more than its share of guff, but whoever penned the language for the circuit's highest award nailed it: The person who should receive the highest honour at the end of the year is the league's Most Outstanding Player.

It's a vital distinction because the world "valuable" is vulnerable to a semantics nightmare.

If you're taking the most literal definition, a goalie should probably win the Hart about every third time they give it out. Quite simply, the nature of the position is such that a goalie stands to impact the game far more than any other participant. Is Connor Hellebuyck more valuable to the Winnipeg Jets than Nikita Kucherov is to the Tampa Bay Lightning?

I'm not sure it's even close.

Hellebuyck, though, will be hard-pressed to get a single high-ranking Hart vote because while he's having himself a wonderful season, a handful of goalies can best his .925 save percentage and a half-dozen more are right on his heels.

Kucherov, meanwhile, is likely to garner votes based purely on the fact he could lead the league in scoring. That's a huge achievement, but it doesn't necessarily mean he's more valuable to his club than any one of about eight high-end puckstoppers.

The approach we should take is the one applied at Westminster Dog Show, where judges don't compare a poodle to a Rottweiler. Instead, they determine how each dog stacks up to the breed standard. If a goalie is having an exceptional showing relative to those turned in by masked men in the past, then he's the most outstanding player. Nobody need rap on Dominik Hasek's door and ask for his Harts back.

The idea, though, is to highlight truly noteworthy performances.

There's absolutely a scenario where Kucherov could have continued his early-season scoring tear, netted 60 goals and — by the letter of the law — still not been as valuable to his club as five goalies who had very solid years. I bet it's a rare Toronto Maple Leafs backer who'd rather lose Frederik Andersen than Auston Matthews for the entire playoffs. Or, for that matter, a Jets fan who'd rather stare down a seven-game series without Hellebuyck as opposed to potential Rocket Richard Trophy winner Patrik Laine.

But had Kucherov become just the third guy in 20 years to reach the 60-goal mark, he should take home the most prestigious hardware for doing something so rare.

Football, basketball and baseball also feature an imbalance in terms of certain positions having more to say about the outcome of a game, but it comes with a caveat in each case. In the former two sports, the players who most impact the game — quarterbacks and whoever the offence runs through on a given NBA team — also tend to put up the most gaudy, easy-to-fawn-over numbers. That makes them obvious candidates for glamorous awards. With baseball, nobody can alter the complexion of a night like a lights-out pitcher, but that person also only appears in every fifth contest, meaning he's got to do something truly exceptional over a six-month stretch to convince people he's the one guy the squad couldn't live without.

Goalies, it turns out, really are a different breed. And for the record, I don't buy for a second that they have their own trophy and should be left to battle for the Vezina while only skaters are considered for the Hart. (And if you don't believe people think this way, explain why no puckstopper won league MVP between Jacques Plante in 1962 and Hasek in 1997.) Goalies play the most stressful position and are the most frequent objects of scorn: You're damn right they deserve to be considered for the league's signature award.

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While we're on the topic of other trophies, let's tackle the Ted Lindsay Award, given annually to, yep, the "most outstanding player" as determined by the 700-odd men in the National Hockey League Players' Association. Here's the thing; the distinction between the Lindsay and the Hart — which is voted on by the members of the Professional Hockey Writers' Association, including this one — isn't so much about finely parsing definitions as who's doing the honouring. Listen to any Ted Lindsay/Lester Pearson winner and it's, understandably, about the feeling of being recognized by your peers. My guess is that most of the NHLPA membership thinks they're voting for the MVP as determined by the people who actually know best.

Beyond that, the Hart is the trophy that's been handed out for nearly 100 years. It's the NHL's biggest deal on awards night and that demands clarity in terms of the criteria for winning it.

Additional murkiness can form when team success becomes a significant factor in the mind of voters. It's sort of the micro version of the broader and misguided "How great a player was he if he didn't win a Cup?" notion.

When determining value, think less about how high an athlete was able to drag his team and more about how far they'd crash down the mountain without him. You can't tell me Taylor Hall and Anze Kopitar — two players who lead their teams in scoring by 31 and 27 points, respectively — are any less valuable to their clubs if both the Devils and Kings slip out of the playoff spots they presently hold. Regardless of how the chips fall, those are fantastic seasons that should be in the running to be recognized with a trophy. If the word valuable muddies the waters, get it out of the mix.

Naturally, there will be numerous instances where the most outstanding season doubles as the most valuable, leaving the appropriate player to put on a Bond suit, kiss the person sitting next to him, and work his way through an acceptance speech. The bottom line, though, is that while there's never been a truly outstanding season that didn't inherently hold a ton of value, every year there are probably a dozen critically valuable performances that don't necessarily warrant a new trophy in the case because a handful of other players — quite likely goalies — turned in roughly the same work.

Does the flip from "valuable" to "outstanding" eliminate all room for interpretation? Of course not. But a little latitude is different than wondering who's working off what definition every year.

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Sportsnet.ca / Four amazing Bobby Orr stats in celebration of his 70th birthday

Sportsnet Staff | @Sportsnet March 20, 2018, 4:30 PM

Happy birthday to one of the best players to ever suit up in the NHL.

It's incredible to think No. 4, Bobby Orr, turns 70 on Tuesday.

From the late-1960s to the mid-1970s, Orr redefined the defence position in the NHL, being far more of a freelancing player than anyone before him at the position. But at the same time, Orr was far from a liability in his own end and was often used on the penalty kill. He was a fabulous



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skater and offensive generator, but Orr was strong on the defensive side, too.

And even though when you look through his numbers and accomplishments he seems to have come from another world, Orr was still human and had his moments. Take, for instance, this story re-told by Don Cherry about the time Orr shot the puck into his own net.

"Boston Garden ... No. 4, Bobby Orr, the greatest hockey player who ever lived, he went to shoot the puck in the corner just like [Kris Russell earlier this season], and picked the corner," Cherry said. "There was deathly silence in the Boston Garden. Deathly. And nobody knew what to do, I didn't know what to do. And he stood there, and somebody from the gallery goes, 'Ah, don't worry, Bobby! Cheevers should've had it!' and everybody laughed.

"So don't worry," Cherry said. "If Bobby Orr can do it, you can do it."

But there were a lot of things Orr did that no one can do, and few, if any, NHLers have approached since. As we celebrate Orr's 70th birthday, here are some amazing stats from his career.

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

+124: OK, so not everyone values the plus-minus stat the same way, and many would do away with it altogether as a tool to measure a player's ability or impact. That's fine. But even still, when you stack up Orr's number in 1970-71 to almost anyone else's (including even his own in any other year of his career) in recorded history, his performance that season shines among the all-time best.

Orr posted the insanely high mark in 1970-71, the year he won his second Hart Trophy. Six years later, Larry Robinson became the only player to ever challenge the mark when he finished with a plus-120 rating on an all-time best Canadiens team that finished with a 60-8-12 record.

To give you an idea of how unattainable that mark is in today's NHL, the best plus-minus posted by any player in the salary cap era is plus-50 by Jeff Schultz on the high-scoring 2009-10 Washington Capitals. Plus-40 has only been reached seven other times in the past 13 years.

120 and 139: In the season before Orr posted his plus-124 rating, he also became the first (and still the only) defenceman to win the Art Ross Trophy. And it wasn't even close.

Orr had posted 41, 31 and 64 points in his first three NHL seasons and hadn't finished as a point-per-game player yet. Still, those 64 points he put up in his 20-year-old season set a new NHL record for offensive production from the defence position.

He started his fourth season (1969-70) as a 21-year-old and finished it as an all-time NHL record holder on a whole different level. Orr posted an incredible 120 points in 76 games to destroy all competition in the Art Ross Trophy race, finishing 21 points ahead of second-place Phil Esposito.

At the time, Orr's 120 points were more than double the amount any other defenceman had posted in the league's history. Pierre Pilote's 59 points in pre-expansion 1964-65 were the most by a blue-liner before Orr came along. Orr was generating so much offence he blew past the defence scoring record he set a season earlier by the all-star game.

One season after posting 120 points, Orr went past even that mark.

In 1970-71, when Orr was setting the unbreakable plus-minus record, he was able to get there partly because he scored 139 points. That is a record to this day and was seriously challenged just once by Paul Coffey in 1985-86, but the Oilers defenceman fell just one short.

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8: Despite being ranked among the best players to ever play in the NHL, right up there with Wayne Gretzky, Mario Lemieux, Gordie Howe or whoever you have at the top of your list, Orr was at the top of his game for only eight seasons.

After winning the Calder Trophy at 18, Orr dominated the NHL for the next eight years and redefined what a defenceman could do. From 1968 to 1975, Orr won all eight Norris Trophies, two Conn Smythes, two Harts and two Art Ross Trophies. But knee injuries started to take their toll and Orr was limited to just 10 games in 1975-76.

After winning his eighth Norris Trophy at just 27 years of age, Orr played just 36 more games in the NHL before retiring at 31.

1.24: Orr won two Cups and Conn Smythes with Boston in '70 and '72 and played in a total of 74 Stanley Cup Playoff games in his career. Given he played in an era with fewer teams and post-season rounds, Orr isn't close to the all-time record in post-season production, but when you look at his per-game average, Orr again has no peer.

Three defencemen in league history have averaged more than one point per playoff game with at least 12 played in their career: Orr, Brian Leetch and Paul Coffey. While Hall of Famers Leetch and Coffey finished with post-season point-per-game averages of 1.02 and 1.01 respectively, Orr is in a class of his own at 1.24: 92 points in 74 games.

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Sportsnet.ca / Down Goes Brown: 10 best Rocket Richard Trophy races in NHL history

Sean McIndoe | @DownGoesBrown March 20, 2018, 11:09 AM

With less than three weeks left in the season, most of the attention is focused on the playoff races. And rightly so, as teams battle it out down to the wire to see who'll earn a spot and how the matchups will sort out.

But there are other races worth watching, including for some of the individual honours. The Art Ross battle is shaping up as a great one, with season-long leader Nikita Kucherov trying to fend off late surges from Connor McDavid, Nathan MacKinnon and Evgeni Malkin among others. Meanwhile, Kucherov's teammate Andrei Vasilevskiy is trying to hold off Pekka Rinne and Connor Hellebuyck for the wins title.

But with all due respect to those races, the best of the bunch is for the Rocket Richard Trophy. The goal-scoring title is shaping up as a potential head-to-head fight to the finish between Alex Ovechkin and Patrik Laine, a classic contest between the old guard and the next generation. Laine is the teenaged whiz kid hungry to claim the title in just his second season, while Ovechkin represents the grizzled veteran who isn't ready to give it up. Mix in Malkin, Eric Staal, the stunning underdog story of William Karlsson and a few others, and this one could come down to the wire. If so, it may be remembered as one of the greatest Rocket Richard races we've ever seen.

So today, let's put together that list, if only to give Laine and Ovechkin something to aim for. The Rocket Richard Trophy has been around since the 1998-99 season, giving us 18 races to work with. Some of those were duds; even in the dead-puck era, the award has been won by a margin of 10 goals or more a half-dozen times. We'll narrow it down to a top 10, counting our way down to the best race we've seen... at least until this year's.

No. 10: 2000-01



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The race: One year after running away with the 2000 title by 14 goals, Pavel Bure had his sights set on a second straight win. It seemed like he'd get it by a similar margin, but a late-season slump saw him finish with just one goal in his final six. That opened the door for two veteran stars who finished hot: Jaromir Jagr, who scored nine in his last six games, and Joe Sakic, who had eight in his last four.

The winner: Bure had built such a big lead that the strong finishes only managed to make the gap respectable. Bure took home the crown with 59 goals, easily topping Sakic (54) and Jagr (52).

The legacy: As races go, it wasn't all that dramatic. But the fact that it featured three first-ballot Hall-of-Famers earns it a spot in our top 10, narrowly beating out Corey Perry's win in the similarly lopsided 2011 race.

No. 9: 1998–99

The race: The Rocket Richard didn't even exist when the season began; it was only unveiled that January. Still, it looked like Teemu Selanne would capture the inaugural trophy relatively easily when he hit the 45-goal mark with eight games to play. But he went cold down the stretch, opening the door for a field that included Jagr, Alexei Yashin, Tony Amonte and John Leclair to at least make things interesting.

The winner: Jagr and Amonte made a late push, with each scoring four times in their final three games to hit the 44-goal mark. But Selanne coasted home to the crown, finishing the year with 47.

The legacy: The race was just OK, and is probably best remembered just for being the first for the new trophy. Still, given the increased profile that came with attaching Richard's name to the goal-scoring race, Selanne felt like a worthy winner. An odd fact: The 47 goals made this only the fifth-highest goal-scoring season of his career, but it was the only time he ended up alone in top spot on the leaderboard.

No. 8: 2015–16

The race: It came down to a two-horse race, with Alex Ovechkin gunning for his fourth straight crown while Patrick Kane looked for his first.

The winner: Kane finished the season with a two-goal performance, but Ovechkin topped him with a hat trick. That gave him the title by a four-goal cushion, and even that makes it sound closer than it really was — Kane needed seven goals in his last five to even get that close, and nobody else came within nine of Ovechkin.

The legacy: In terms of star power, this race was right up there; Kane took home the Hart Trophy that season, and Ovechkin had already won it three times. But there wasn't much suspense, beyond wondering whether Ovechkin would get to 50. He did, with 10 minutes to spare.

No. 7: 2012–13

The race: Thanks to a lockout-shortened season, only three players finished with more than 26 goals. But they were three big names, as we ended up with a battle between former first-overall picks in Ovechkin, Steven Stamkos and John Tavares.

The winner: This one stayed in play until there was a week to go. But Ovechkin's two-goal game against the Canadiens on April 20 made him the first to hit the 30-goal mark, and would turn out to be all he needed. All three players had a pair of goals the rest of the way, allowing Ovechkin to take home his first Rocket Richard in four years.

The legacy: Remember back in 2011 and 2012 when the Capitals decided they needed to play a defensive style and we all thought Ovechkin's days as an elite scorer were done? That was over 250 goals ago.

No. 6: 2016–17

The race: The field featured an eclectic mix, including a rookie (Auston Matthews), a blossoming superstar (Nikita Kucherov), and a one-time pest turned sniper (Brad Marchand). But the name on top was familiar, as Sidney Crosby headed into the home stretch with a comfortable lead.

The winner: Crosby didn't exactly blow the field away, finishing with just two goals in his last seven. But none of the other contenders could mount much of a push, and Crosby's 44 goals were enough to take the trophy by four.

The legacy: Man, this one still resonates so strongly that it feels like it was only a year ago. (Checks notes.) Oh, right. Still, it was neat to see the best player of his generation earn his first and so far only solo Rocket Richard as a veteran on the verge of 30.

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No. 5: 2006–07

The race: This one was basically a two-way race between Vincent Lecavalier and Dany Heatley, with Selanne and Ovechkin lurking in the rearview mirror. Selanne closed strong with three goals in his last two to get to 48 on the year, but it wouldn't be enough.

The winner: Heatley scored eight times in his last eight games to hit the 50-goal mark. But Lecavalier was able to barely hold him off, finishing with 52 to capture his only Rocket Richard.

The legacy: With both players in their prime at 26 years old, it felt like Lecavalier and Heatley would be in the Rocket Richard mix for years to come. In reality, both were about to fall off; each had only one 40-goal season left, and neither would ever finish better than eighth in the goal-scoring race again.

No. 4: 2003–04

The race: Three wingers battled it out to the wire, with Jarome Iginla, Ilya Kovalchuk and Rick Nash all making a push. This one had a bit of the same vibe as this year's Ovechkin/Laine race. Kovalchuk and Nash had gone first overall in 2001 and 2002, respectively, and represented the new crop of scoring stars. Iginla wasn't a greybeard by any measure, but at 26 he'd already won the award once.

Iginla and Nash went into April tied at 40 goals, with Kovalchuk one back. The Thrashers star scored in each of his last two games to finish with 41, a total Nash reached in his final game. That left it to Iginla, who was the only one of the three to suit up on the last day of the season schedule. He got this 41st midway through the second period, but was held off the board the rest of the way.

The winner: A three-way tie, with Iginla, Nash and Kovalchuk all finishing with 41 to split the award. It's the only three-way of the Rocket Richard Trophy era, and only the second for any goal-scoring race in league history. (1979–80 was the other.)

On the one hand, that's about as dramatic a finish as you can get. On the other, it's not really the most satisfying result.

The legacy: All three players built their legacies over the ensuing decade or so, so in theory this one holds up reasonably well. But at only 41 goals, this remains the lowest-scoring race for a non-lockout season since the early '60s. Even at the time, that had some observers wondering if the race was even worth rooting for.

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No. 3: 2002–03

The race: The 2003 Rocket race signaled a wholesale changing of the guard; it was the first time since 1992 that one of Iginla, Jagr, Selanne or Pavel Bure hadn't finished in the top two, and this time none of those guys even made the top 10.

Instead, it came down to a late race to 50 featuring Marian Hossa, Milan Hejduk and two Canucks teammates in Todd Bertuzzi and Markus Naslund. By the end of the night's action on March 25, Bertuzzi led the



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way with 46 goals, ahead of Naslund at 45 and Hejduk and Hossa both at 43.

The winner: Bertuzzi was held off the board the rest of the way, going goalless in five to open the door for the others. Hossa also finished slow, scoring just twice. Naslund had three to move to 48 goals on the year. But it was Hejduk who caught fire in the final two weeks, racking up seven goals in his last five games to finish with 50 on the nose and take the crown.

The legacy: This was one of the better races, with Hejduk and Naslund separated by just a goal heading into the season's final day. Somewhat weirdly, this year now looks like an outlier for all four players involved — not one of them ever finished as high as the top four in any other season.

No. 2: 2005–06

The race: After the low-scoring 2004 race was followed by losing a season to the lockout, it was nice to see players hit the 50-goal mark again. Five of them did, including a rookie Ovechkin and a breakthrough first season in Ottawa from Heatley. But with five games left, it seemed like it was coming down to a race between the two guys who had already passed the 50 mark: Jagr with 53, and Kovalchuk sitting at 51.

The winner: An upset special for the ages, as San Jose's Jonathan Cheechoo scored seven times in his last five games to finish with 56 and take the title.

The legacy: That depends on how you feel about Cheechoo. Some see the ultimate underdog beating out an all-time legend with a frantic final push. Others see a forgettable one-hit wonder, the NHL's answer to Brady Anderson. Maybe it's both.

Either way, this was Cheechoo's only top-10 finish; he'd be traded for Heatey within three years, and out of the NHL entirely within four. For his part, despite sitting third on the league's all-time goal scoring list, Jagr never actually led the league in a single season. This was one of his four second-place finishes.

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

No. 1: 2009–10

The race: You couldn't ask for three bigger names, As Crosby, Ovechkin and Stamkos battled down to the wire. And it really did come right down to the end — heading into April, Crosby was sitting at 47 on the year, just one up on Stamkos and Ovechkin, both at 46.

That lead had vanished by the time there was one game left to play, with both Stamkos and Ovechkin hitting the 50 mark while Crosby lingered at 49. That set up a classic three-way showdown on the season's final day.

The winner: Ovechkin fired a team-leading five shots against the Bruins, but Tim Thomas turned him away. Meanwhile in Long Island, Crosby hit the 50-goal mark in the first period to create a three-way tie. He broke that logjam in the second period by potting his 51st on a partial breakaway, giving him sole possession of the lead.

But the drama wasn't done yet. With just seconds left in a Lightning win over the Panthers, Stamkos raced down a loose puck to score his 51st into an empty net to tie the race.

Crosby was informed of the Stamkos goal by a teammate with minutes left in the Penguins game, and pressed hard to get his 52nd. He had plenty of chances, but couldn't find the net, and he and Stamkos ended up sharing the trophy, with Ovechkin one goal behind.

The legacy: You can dock this one a point or two for ending in a tie instead of with a close win — oddly enough, the Rocket Richard race has never been determined by a single goal. But other than that, this was pretty close to being the perfect race. You had the league's two biggest stars facing down the kid who was coming for their crown, and it all literally came down to the final seconds on the final day.

All in all, that sets the bar pretty high. But we'll see whether Ovechkin, Laine and friends can top it in the weeks to come.

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1104880 Websites

TSN.CA / Andersen, Leafs lose control in possible playoff preview

Kristen Shilton

The Toronto Maple Leafs were in total control against the Tampa Bay Lightning on Tuesday night — until they weren't. The Leafs let a 3-0 late second-period lead become a 4-3 loss in the final battle between the division rivals this season. It was also a potential first-round playoff series preview, and a reminder to the Leafs that no lead, however seemingly secure, is safe. In defeat, the Leafs snapped their four-game winning streak and moved to 43-23-7 on the season.

TAKEAWAYS

That's not the way

Toronto spent nearly 40 minutes building their lead over the Lightning on Tuesday, only to see it evaporate over 6:55 between the second and third periods. It was a slow road to get to that point, though. The first half of the opening frame was marked by uncharacteristic play by both teams, who are known for playing fast, transition hockey. Instead, play was choppy and disjointed, with few passes connecting and almost no dangerous scoring chances.

Andrei Vasilevskiy was the busier goalie, not only in shots faced but in the quality of chances, and the Leafs got their mojo going more as the frame went on. James van Riemsdyk's two goals in quick succession, including on the power play, put Tampa down early. The Lightning's penalty kill has been atrocious of late, with van Riemsdyk's goal the sixth Tampa Bay has given up in their last five games. On the other side, the Leafs now have at least one goal with the extra man in their last six games. A goal by Zach Hyman had the Leafs up 3-0 late in the second, and that's when the Lightning went to work.

First it was the Lightning's defenders stepping up, with Victor Hedman beating Frederik Andersen from the circle, short side, in the second, then Ryan McDonagh sent a one-timer from the slot top shelf past Andersen just 90 seconds into the third period to bring Tampa within one. Nikita Kucherov finished closing the gap when he scored the third Lightning goal at 3:32 of the third period, banking a shot off the skate of defenceman Morgan Rielly that re-directed past Andersen.

A lost defensive zone draw set up Alex Killorn's go-ahead goal midway through the period, putting Toronto firmly on its heels in a game they had masterful control of for more than 35 minutes. To preserve their lead, the Lightning had to freeze out one of the hottest power-play units in the NHL late in the third, but despite those penalty-kill struggles they did just that. It was a deflating loss for the Leafs, who could have taken a huge confidence boost from handily defeating the best team in the league at the time of year when every club aspires to be putting their best foot forward.

Nothin' but net for JvR

In the 600th game of his NHL career, van Riemsdyk continued to do what he does best — score big goals. The nine-year veteran has been unstoppable of late, and Tuesday's two-goal performance marked the third time in his last four games van Riemsdyk has put up multiple goals. Toronto is now 19-6-3 on the season when he scores at least once.



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Van Riemsdyk tallied his first of the night early in the first period, capitalizing on a delayed penalty with a shot from the slot that beat Andrei Vasilevskiy stick side. He was front and centre again for Toronto on the power play early in the second period, burying a Tyler Bozak pass to put the Leafs up 2-0. That was van Riemsdyk's seventh goal in his last four games, and second on the power play. He was playing so well that after two periods, van Riemsdyk had a Corsi-for of 100 per cent, meaning he hadn't played at all in the defensive zone at even strength.

The third period was more frantic for him and the rest of the Leafs as they battled to get their lead back but, on the whole, van Riemsdyk's game was as impactful as it's been for weeks. His pair of markers now put van Riemsdyk at 33 goals on the season. That's well past his career-high for goals (previously 29) but interestingly he's lagging significantly behind where he's historically been in assists. Van Riemsdyk has only 16 helpers in 72 games this season, after posting at least 29 in each of his last three full campaigns. He finished Tuesday's game with a team-high five shots on goal and 79 per cent possession.

And speaking of assists, Mitch Marner was in on van Riemsdyk's first goal, extending his point streak to six goals (two goals, six assists). That's the longest streak Marner has put together this season with at least a point.

Trying to find his way back

Andersen made his league-leading 59th start of the season on Tuesday, returning to action after a two-game absence spent dealing with an upper-body injury. In general, most goalies say they prefer to be busy early on and get in a rhythm, especially when they've missed time, but a choppy first period between the sides didn't generate many scoring chances for the Lightning.

He had to be sharp starting midway through the second period, however, when the NHL's best second-period team finally got their legs moving with the Leafs leading 3-0. After Toronto earned a 60 per cent edge in the possession battle for the first 20 minutes, the Lightning ignited after getting their first power-play chance of the night in the middle frame and they came at Andersen full-speed. He made a couple of his typically emphatic glove stops to keep Tampa at bay, and one especially superb pad save off the rush against Anthony Cirelli, a Toronto native who grew up cheering for the Leafs.

It wasn't until Hedman used Ron Hainsey as a screen on Andersen that the Lightning finally broke through late in the middle frame, a goal that felt a long time coming based on how much better Tampa played in the second period, when possession was an even 50-50. The more the Lightning pressed, the less Toronto was able to handle the pressure, and the less help Andersen got in front of him. The Leafs' top-four defencemen were consistently scrambling in their own zone to clear the puck and that left shots wide open for the Lightning to take.

Andersen has struggled against one-timers throughout the season and McDonagh and Killorn beat him from the same high-slot spot that way on Tuesday. Andersen finished with 21 saves on 25 shots, for just a .840 save percentage. He now moves to 1-3-1 all-time in his career against Tampa, which doesn't bode well if the Leafs end up meeting them in the postseason. With how well Curtis McElhinney has played in relief of Andersen lately – he was 3-0 with 1.57 goals-against average during Andersen's injury absence last week – it puts that much more pressure on the Leafs starter to get his game back, and fast.

Getting in the groove?

The William Nylander line with Andreas Johnsson and Hyman hasn't been together long, but they've been terrific for the Leafs over these last two games. The trio was buzzing late in the first against Tampa, playing well at both ends of the ice and generating Toronto's best scoring opportunities.

Johnsson's speed and skill really complements the dynamic pairing of Hyman and Nylander, honed over their last two seasons playing together. He made a great play in the second period, barrelling down the

far boards and feeding Nylander in front with a backhand pass that Vasilevskiy turned aside with his pad.

Hyman had a standout night around the net on his own, nearly scoring in the first period with a shot off Vasilevskiy's mask and then followed it up with another chance in the second, and this time he wouldn't miss – he sent an unassisted strike past Vasilevskiy as he was falling to the ice in the high slot, the 14th goal he's scored this season.

The Nylander line hovered around 50 per cent possession all night, dipping in the third when the Lightning started pressing, while combining for five shots on goal. The unit does stand to have a makeover forthcoming with Auston Matthews inching closer to a return by the day. Matthews has been out since Feb. 22 with a shoulder injury, and had previously been centring Hyman and Nylander for the better part of two seasons.

There is clear chemistry with Johnsson there, but even as the wins pile up it's more likely Johnsson moves down to the fourth line when Matthews returns, and then no matter how well he plays, he projects to be bumped out of the lineup entirely when Leo Komarov returns from a lower-body injury.

Next game

The Leafs finish off their two-game road swing against the Nashville Predators on Thursday.

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TSN.CA / GMs recommend Situation Room gets final say on goalie interference

Frank Seravalli

BOCA RATON, Fla. — The NHL's 31 general managers have recommended that the league's Hockey Operations department takes over final say in coach's challenge situations involving goaltender interference.

The proposed change – to have a handful of Hockey Operations staff members make the final ruling on challenges from the Situation Room in Toronto – would be instituted for the remainder of the regular season and Stanley Cup playoffs if the required approvals are granted.

The NHL began seeking that on Tuesday during Day 2 of the annual GM meetings here by formally presenting the NHL Players' Association with a proposal to change playing conditions.

If the NHLPA approves the change, and there is no pushback from the NHL Officials Association, then a unanimous Board of Governors vote must take place via fax to enact change midseason.

NHL senior executive vice-president of hockey operations Colin Campbell said an indication will be given Wednesday.

"We haven't heard anything yet at this point," Campbell said. "It's a change of playing conditions. [The NHLPA] always needs some input any time we have a change in playing conditions."

Part of the recommendation is that GMs would like to see a referee presence in the Situation Room, but that likely won't come this season, and besides none of these things change the overall issue because these judgment calls are subjective by nature.

"My opinion is that you can put the King of England in there, it doesn't matter who you put in there ... the team, the coach, the players, the fan



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base are not going to like the answer," Campbell said. "My opinion is it doesn't matter who is giving you the answer, they're not going to like the answer if it's in a key game."

Campbell said opinion of GMs is that "they want consistency." They felt that could be achieved by limiting the pool of people who have a say, from 34 full-time referees to a handful of Hockey Operations veterans who see all of the games in real time.

What would essentially happen, though, is a shifting of responsibility.

Hockey Operations already has final say for coach's challenges for offside, yet the linesman on the ice still makes the call, it's just that the Situation Room holds the hammer to overrule.

Campbell said Hockey Operations has agreed with the linesman every single time and hasn't overruled even once.

That same process is expected to play out with goaltender interference. The referee on the ice would still make the call, then the Situation Room has the ability to overrule if they felt it necessary.

Out of 170 challenges this season — including those triggered by the Situation Room in the final minute of games and overtime — Campbell admitted Hockey Operations has only disagreed with the referee five times.

That means the true impact this season would have been five different calls. That's it. Then in the Stanley Cup playoffs, the series supervisor takes on a larger role anyway.

"Final authority, yes," Campbell said. "We're not there yet. But if we do, nothing is going to change the way we do the games."

Two things could still derail the process. The NHLPA could balk; NHL deputy commissioner Bill Daly was scheduled to discuss the matter with NHLPA assistant director Mathieu Schneider on Tuesday night.

Or, the NHL Officials Association could raise their arms, since they have language in their bargaining agreement with the league that maintains their right to make the final call. The bet is that since this would take the heat off of referees, shifting responsibility to Hockey Operations, plus the potential presence of a former referee in the room, it would make this change more palatable.

"[The NHLOA] was well represented with retired guys and the head of their organization," Campbell said of the meetings. "...I think we'll give it time yet. I think they probably have to get back to their executives too. We haven't heard anything yet at this point."

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1104882 Websites

TSN.CA / Andersen eager to get back in rhythm after absence

Mark Masters

Frederik Andersen is good to go.

Toronto's No. 1 goalie sat out the last two games with an upper-body injury, but practised yesterday and skated again this morning before declaring himself fit for action. Considering the time off in the last week, will it be tough to get in a rhythm early against the NHL's highest-scoring team?

"We'll see, but the best way to do it is to play games so happy to be back and ready to play," he said.

The Maple Leafs appear to be locked in as the No. 3 seed in the Atlantic Division, but Andersen doesn't want any additional rest down the stretch. In fact, he believes these final 10 games are more important than they may seem.

"We want to keep working on our details," Andersen said. "We can't just turn it on when we get to the playoffs. It's important to come in with good momentum and good confidence."

After sitting out two games with an upper-body injury, Frederik Andersen will return to the Leafs lineup on Tuesday in Tampa. It's a huge test for Toronto's No. 1 goalie as the Lightning lead the NHL in scoring with the dynamic duo of Steven Stamkos and Nikita Kucherov leading the way.

The Leafs are 1-1-1 against the Lightning this season losing 4-3 in a shootout in their most recent meeting on Feb. 26 in Tampa.

While the Leafs have little to play for in the standings, the Lightning are in a battle with the Bruins for first in the Atlantic Division. Tampa Bay has a three-point edge, but Boston has played one fewer game and there are still two more head-to-head showdowns between the clubs. The Bruins just beat the Bolts 3-0 on Saturday at Amalie Arena.

"Our defensive play ... in this room, we know we have to be better," captain Steven Stamkos said. "We have to hold each other accountable in those areas. We know we can score, but if we can defend as well, that's the recipe come playoff time."

How valuable is finishing first in the division?

"It's huge," said defenceman Victor Hedman. "We had a little bit of a letdown against Boston, but we're still in the driver's seat."

How would the Leafs matchup vs. Lightning in playoffs?

TSN Hockey analyst Ray Ferraro joins Mark Masters to talk about the similarities between the Lightning and Maple Leafs and if he sees William Nylander as a centreman long term.

How would the Leafs matchup vs. Lightning in playoffs?

TSN Hockey analyst Ray Ferraro joins Mark Masters to talk about the similarities between the Lightning and Maple Leafs and if he sees William Nylander as a centreman long term.

The challenge against the Lightning top line is a big one. Stamkos is an elite goal scorer, but this season he has also been an elite playmaker with 57 assists. That's tied for fifth in the NHL (with linemate Nikita Kucherov) and already 11 more than his previous career high set in the 2010-11 season.

"Playing with a guy like Kuch, obviously you want to get him the puck in the scoring areas," Stamkos explained. "He was so hot at the beginning of the year you just deferred the puck to him because it was probably going in the net. So, it was a little bit of that. You know, I'd still like to shoot the puck a little more. Any time you get into that frame of mind where you're making some plays and getting assists you tend to want to do that and we have to keep our opponents honest."

Stamkos has gone six games without a goal, but has seven assists in that stretch. He's averaging 2.82 shots per game this season, which is down from his career average of 3.16.

With Auston Matthews missing a 10th straight game tonight due to a shoulder injury, William Nylander will continue to play as a centre. The 21-year-old struggled in showdowns with Stamkos and Brayden Point in the last game against the Lightning. Toronto was outshot 11-1 when Nylander was on the ice at even strength on Feb. 26.

Nylander said one lesson he learned from that night was that he must play Stamkos tighter.

Asked what Nylander will take from that experience coach Mike Babcock made it clear he isn't as concerned about the Swede's play in the middle as the media.



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"You ask me this every day so it must be a big deal," he said. "I don't really know. To me, it's just, each and every night when you're playing against good players and you're perceived as a good player someone's going to outduel the other guy. So, Freddie looks down at their goalie, Willie looks across at the guys he's playing and you got to outplay him, you got to beat them one-on-one."

Has Babcock given much thought to whether Nylander could be a long-term answer for the organization at centre?

"No," he said with a chuckle. "No. Like, I mean, we're playing here tonight, we got a game. Next year's going to come. We got lots of time. We got lots of time. We hope we don't have to think about next year until June."

Nylander insists he's on the same page.

"I haven't really thought about that but, I mean, wherever Mike wants me to play is where I'll be comfortable playing."

As for tonight's game, the Lightning aren't about to let their guard down just because Matthews is out. A couple of their top defencemen played with Nylander at the World Championships and know what he's capable of.

"Just his vision, really," said Anton Stralman when asked about what stands out about Nylander. "He seems to be able to find plays when no one else can and he's one of those guys you have to keep an extra eye on. And he's got a good shot too so he's not just a playmaker, but I think his vision is fantastic."

Nylander was named MVP at the worlds helping Sweden take home the gold medal.

"Unbelievable speed," said Hedman, "good stick handling and can make plays out of nothing and, obviously, a game changer. He can change the momentum of the game by himself. He's becoming a more and more complete player in this league and a big reason why Toronto is where they are. We're going to have our hands full with him tonight."

Much has changed for Nylander since his rough go in Tampa in late February. For one, he now has a new winger in 23-year-old countryman Andreas Johnsson.

"It's lots of fun," Nylander said. "I mean, we played together in the AHL for a little bit so there was chemistry there (already) so it's fun to see a fellow Swede score his first goal too."

After seeing only limited action in his NHL debut, Johnsson scored on Saturday while firing seven shots on the Montreal net in just his second career game.

"He had seven shots on goal, three other attempts and he made two unbelievable plays," Babcock observed, "so, you go through the year and how many guys have had seven shots on net? How many guys have made more than many plays in one game?"

Johnsson became just the seventh Leaf to register seven shots or more on goal in a game this season. James van Riemsdyk has done it five times, Mitch Marner twice, Nazem Kadri twice, Patrick Marleau once, Nylander once and Matthews has also done it once.

"I feel like my speed, like, I'm still one of the fastest guys on the ice, but I got to move the puck fast or else you'll be eaten up," Johnsson said when asked about his early observations of the NHL game.

After Saturday's contest, Johnsson noted his parents had been staying up late back home in Sweden and he hoped they were able to stay awake for his third-period goal.

"My mom fell asleep," he admitted with a big grin today.

That grin really hasn't left his face since he was called up to the Maple Leafs. Is that his standby facial expression or simply a byproduct of being in the big leagues?

"I would say I'm more of a smiler all the time," he said ... with a smile.

Projected Leafs line-up for tonight's game (based on yesterday's practice):

Marleau-Kadri-Marner

Johnsson-Nylander-Hyman

van Riemsdyk-Bozak-Brown

Leivo-Plekanec-Kapanen

Rielly-Hainsey

Gardiner-Polak

Dermott-Carrick

Andersen starts

McElhinney

Injured: Komarov (lower body), Matthews (shoulder)

Illness: Zaitsev

Healthy scratch: Martin, Moore

All the injured players skated today although Leo Komarov was wearing a red non-contact sweater.

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1104883 Websites

TSN.CA / Statistically Speaking: Bruins' Donato has a great debut

Scott Cullen

Donato with an outstanding debut; Rinne, Ekman-Larsson, Doughty, Domi, Luongo and more in Scott Cullen's Statistically Speaking.

The Boston Bruins have been decimated by injuries lately, but they did get some positive news with the signing of 2014 second-round pick Ryan Donato, who just completed his junior season at Harvard, scoring 26 goals and 43 points in 29 games (he added five goals and an assist in five games for Team USA at the Olympics).

Donato made his NHL debut Monday, playing 19:40 in a 5-4 overtime loss to Columbus, and he was every bit as good as advertised, scoring one goal, assisting on two others and recording eight shot attempts (6 SOG).

One of the reasons to suspect that Donato's collegiate production can translate favourably to the NHL is that he is a shot generator. He put 175 shots on net in just 29 games for the Crimson this season, which is 6.03 per game, easily best in the nation.

In his debut, he skated alongside David Krejci and Danton Heinen on Boston's second line and while most nights aren't going to be quite as magical as his performance in his first NHL game, Donato gives the Bruins a legitimate scoring threat in their middle six group of forwards.

HEROES

Pekka Rinne – Nashville's veteran netminder posted a 35-save shutout in a 4-0 win at Buffalo. He's making a strong case for the Vezina late in the season, recording a .950 save percentage in his past 11 starts.

Oliver Ekman-Larsson – Arizona's star blueliner scored two goals in a 5-2 win against Calgary; he has 13 points (5 G, 8 A) in the past 15 games.



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Drew Doughty – The Kings blueliner recorded three assists in a 4-3 overtime win at Minnesota, giving him 10 points (1 G, 9 A) in the past six games.

Max Domi – The Coyotes winger put up two goals and an assist in a 5-2 win over Calgary, and has eight points (2 G, 6 A) in the past 10 games.

Roberto Luongo – Florida's veteran goaltender stopped all 28 shots that he faced in a 2-0 win at Montreal, and has a .928 save percentage in 13 starts since returning from injury.

ZEROES

Brendan Guhle and Scott Wilson – The Sabres' defenceman and winger had fine possession numbers, but were both on the ice for three goals against in a 4-0 loss to Nashville.

Michael McCarron and Nicolas Deslauriers – Montreal's fourth liners both scrapped, but otherwise had a tough night (3 for, 17 against, 15.0 CF%) in a 2-0 loss to Florida.

Nick Cousins and Jordan Martinook – The Coyotes forwards were on the wrong side of the action (13 for, 25 against, 34.2 CF%, 6-13 scoring chances) and were on the ice for both goals against in a 5-2 win over Calgary.

VITAL SIGNS

Trevor Lewis – The Kings winger, who recently returned from injury, suffered an upper-body injury against Minnesota and was forced to leave the game.

SHORT SHIFTS

Kings C Jeff Carter scored two goals, including the overtime winner, in a 4-3 win at Minnesota; he has 10 points (8 G, 2 A) in the past 11 games...Kings RW Dustin Brown had a goal and an assist in a 4-3 OT win at Minnesota, and has nine points (5 G, 4 A) in the past 12 games...Predators LW Filip Forsberg produced a goal and an assist in a 4-0 win at Buffalo, and has 11 points (4 G, 7 A) in the past 10 games...Predators RW Viktor Arvidsson added a couple of assists, giving him 18 points (8 G, 10 A) in the past 15 games...Blue Jackets LW Boone Jenner and RW Thomas Vanek both had a goal and an assist in a 5-4 overtime win at Boston. Jenner has eight points (5 G, 3 A) during a six-game point streak, and Vanek has seven points (3 G, 4 A) in the past six games...Blue Jackets LW Nick Foligno and D Ryan Murray both had two assists against the Bruins. Foligno had three points (2 G, 1 A) in his previous 11 games, and Murray matched his production from his previous 20 games...Bruins LW Brad Marchand contributed a goal and an assist in a 5-4 OT loss to Columbus; he has 20 points (9 G, 11 A) in the past 12 games...Bruins rookie winger Danton Heinen added a couple of helpers. He had two points (1 G, 1 A) in his previous 17 games...Coyotes C Derek Stepan earned two assists in a 5-2 win over Calgary and has eight points (1 G, 7 A) in the past nine games.

Panthers D Aaron Ekblad had a strong game (25 for, 6 against, 80.7 CF%, 12-0 scoring chances) and scored a highlight-reel goal in a 2-0 win at Montreal...Flames D Dougie Hamilton scored a goal and launched 16 shot attempts (6 SOG) in a 5-2 loss at Arizona.

Coyotes G Antti Raanta turned away 42 of 44 shots in a 5-2 win vs. Calgary, giving him a .948 save percentage in his past 11 games...Canadiens G Antti Niemi stopped 38 of 40 shots in a 2-0 loss to Florida, and has a .932 save percentage in 16 games since arriving in Montreal.

Many of the advanced stats used here come from Natural Stat Trick, Corsica and Hockey Reference.

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1104884 Websites

TSN.CA / Statistically Speaking: Karlsson crushing it for Vegas

Scott Cullen

Wild Bill has turned into a star in Vegas; Pietrangelo, Kane, DeBrincat, MacKinnon, Fleury, McElhinney and more in Scott Cullen's Statistically Speaking.

HEROES

William Karlsson - Wild Bill recorded a hat trick in Sunday's 4-0 win against Calgary. The Golden Knights' centre has 14 points (9 G, 5 A) in the past 13 games and is up to an astonishing 39 goals this season.

Alex Pietrangelo – The Blues defenceman scored two goals and added an assist in Saturday's 4-3 overtime win against the Rangers then added a goal and three assists in Sunday's 5-4 overtime win at Chicago. He has 11 points (4 G, 7 A) in the past five games.

Evander Kane – The Sharks winger scored four goals in Friday's 7-4 win at Calgary. After being held off the scoresheet Saturday, he has 10 points (5 G, 5 A) in nine games since he was traded to San Jose.

Alex DeBrincat - Chicago's rookie winger recorded a hat trick in Sunday's 5-4 overtime loss against St. Louis. He had just three assists in his previous 13 games, and yet is still tied for second among rookies with 25 goals.

Nathan MacKinnon - Colorado's star centre scored two goals and added an assist in Sunday's 5-1 win over Detroit. He has 24 points (13 G, 11 A) during a 12-game point streak.

Marc-Andre Fleury - The Golden Knights netminder stoned the Flames, stopping all 42 shots that he faced in Sunday's 4-0 win against Calgary. He has a .945 save percentage in his past six starts.

Curtis McElhinney – Toronto's backup netminder posted a 33-save shutout in Saturday's 4-0 win over Montreal. He has a .954 save percentage in his past nine games.

ZEROES

Jonathan Ericsson – The Red Wings blueliner had a tough weekend (22 for, 31 against, 41.5 CF%, 13-22 scoring chances) and was on the ice for no goals for and seven against in two Detroit losses.

Brock McGinn – The Hurricanes left winger was on the wrong side of the puck (18 for, 22 against, 45.0 CF%) and on the ice for four goals against in two games.

Michael McCarron – Called up to fill-in on the injured Canadiens forward lines, the towering centre struggled (5 for, 16 against, 23.8 CF%, 2-9 scoring chances) and was on the ice for two goals against in Saturday's 4-0 loss at Toronto.

Travis Hamonic – Calgary's hard-hitting blueliner was on the ice for five even-strength goals against in a pair of weekend losses, to Vegas and San Jose.

VITAL SIGNS

Jacob Trouba – Playing just his second game after returning from a sprained ankle, the Jets blueline was knocked out of Sunday's game against Dallas after taking a hit from Stars captain Jamie Benn.

Mark Scheifele and Adam Lowry – At the same time, the Jets did get a couple of centres back into the lineup for Sunday's game. Scheifele had missed a week-and-a-half with an upper-body injury, while Lowry had been out for more than six weeks with his latest injury.

Ben Bishop – Dallas' netminder suffered a lower-body injury against Winnipeg Sunday and will be re-evaluated in two weeks. That leaves the Stars' playoff chase in the hands of Kari Lehtonen.



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Jack Eichel – The Sabres centre returned to the Sabres lineup Saturday after missing five weeks with a sprained ankle.

Evgeny Kuznetsov – Washington's playmaking centre had two assists before suffering an upper-body injury Friday against the Islanders, enough that it kept him out of Sunday's loss at Philadelphia.

Vladimir Tarasenko – St. Louis' star winger suffered an upper-body injury against the Rangers Friday, causing him to miss Sunday's win at Chicago.

David Backes – The Bruins forward suffered a nasty gash on his leg, one requiring 18 stitches to close, against Tampa Bay Saturday.

Marc-Edouard Vlasic – San Jose's veteran defenceman took a slapshot in the throat Saturday against Vancouver.

Ryan Dzingel – Ottawa's winger suffered a head injury during Saturday's loss at Columbus.

Seth Jones – Columbus' Norris Trophy candidate suffered an upper-body injury last week and while he played against Philadelphia Thursday, the Blue Jackets kept him out of the lineup for Saturday's win against Ottawa.

Noah Hanifin – The Hurricanes defenceman missed Sunday's win over the Islanders with an upper-body injury.

Andrej Sekera – Edmonton's veteran blueliner, who has been struggling as he tries to return from a torn ACL, suffered a foot injury blockint a shot Sunday at Tampa Bay.

Vladislav Kamenev – Acquired from Nashville as part of the Matt Duchene trade, the Avalanche rookie broke his arm in his first game, but made his return to the lineup for Sunday's 5-1 win against Detroit.

Ty Rattie – The 25-year-old journeyman winger was called up from the AHL, and found himself skating on Connor McDavid's wing. He's put up three points (2 G, 1 A) and 14 shots on goal in four games. He had 43 points (21 G, 22 A) in 53 AHL games before getting called up.

SHORT SHIFTS

Jets RW Patrik Laine scored twice in Sunday's 4-2 win against Dallas. He has 26 points (18 G, 8 A) in the past 15 games...Jets RW Blake Wheeler added a goal and an assist against the Stars, giving him 22 points (5 G, 17 A) in the past 18 games...Avalanche LW Gabriel Landeskog put up a goal and two helpers in Sunday's 5-1 win against Detroit; he has 12 points (4 G, 8 A) in the past 11 games...Avalanche RW Mikko Rantanen added two assists, and Avalanche RW Blake Comeau contributed a goal and an assist. Rantanen has 21 points (6 G, 15 A) in the past 11 games, while Comeau has six points (2 G, 4 A) in the past six games.

Lightning RW Nikita Kucherov scored twice in Sunday's 3-1 win over Edmonton, and has 27 points (9 G, 18 A) in the past 17 games...Lightning C Steven Stamkos added a couple of assists, giving him 24 points (8 G, 16 A) in the past 19 games...Hurricanes C Victor Rask and D Jaccob Slavin both had a goal and an assist in Sunday's 4-3 win at the Islanders. Rask had nine points (1 G, 8 A) in the previous 20 games, and Slavin has five points (3 G, 2 A) in the past five games...Islanders LW Anders Lee scored two goals, C John Tavares put up three assists, and RW Josh Bailey had a goal and an assist in Sunday's 4-3 loss to Carolina. Lee has seven points (5 G, 2 A) in the past seven games, Tavares has nine points (2 G, 7 A) in the past seven games, and Bailey had three points (2 G, 1 A) in the previous 12 games

Flyers RW Wayne Simmonds scored two goals in Sunday's 6-3 win over Washington, giving him six points (3 G, 3 A) in the past five games...Flyers LW Jakub Voracek added a goal and an assist, and has nine points (5 G, 4 A) in the past nine games...Flyers C Sean Couturier and D Radko Gudas both had a pair of assists. Couturier has five assists in the past four games while Gudas matched his production from the previous 15 games...Capitals LW Alex Ovechkin and D John Carlson both had a goal and an assist in Sunday's 6-3 loss at Philadelphia.

Ovechkin has six points (3 G, 3 A) in the past four games and Carlson has 19 points (7 G, 12 A) in the past 20 games.

Blues rookie D Vince Dunn had a goal and three assists in Sunday's 5-4 overtime win at Chicago, giving him seven points (1 G, 6 A) in the past seven games...Blues LW Alexander Steen added a goal and an assist; he had just one assist in the previous seven games...Golden Knights D Nate Schmidt earned a pair of assists in Sunday's 4-0 win vs. Calgary, and has four assists in the past four games...Blackhawks RW Tomas Jurco and D Duncan Keith both had a pair of assists in Sunday's 5-4 overtime loss vs. St. Louis. Jurco has seven points (4 G, 3 A) in the past 12 games and Keith had three assists in the previous 14 games.

Oilers C Connor McDavid had a goal and two helpers in Saturday's 4-2 win at Florida; he has 23 points (11 G, 12 A) in the past 15 games...Oilers LW Ryan Nugent-Hopkins and RW Ty Rattie had a goal and an assist in Saturday's 4-2 win at Florida, and has seven points (4 G, 3 A) in the past eight games...Sharks RW Timo Meier scored a pair of goals in Saturday's 5-3 win at Vancouver, giving him four points (3 G, 1 A) in the past four games...Sharks C Logan Couture and RW Kevin Labanc both contributed a goal and an assist. Couture has five points (2 G, 3 A) in the past three games, and Labanc has four points (3 G, 1 A) in the past four games...Canucks D Alexander Edler had a goal and an assist in Saturday's 5-3 loss to San Jose, snapping a six-game scoring drought...Canucks RW Sam Gagner added a couple of helpers, matching his production over his previous 10 games.

Bruins D Torey Krug recorded three assists in Saturday's 3-0 win at Tampa Bay, giving him 13 points (3 G, 10 A) in the past 10 games...Sabres RW Nick Baptiste scored a pair of goals in Saturday's 5-3 win against Chicago. He had one assist in his previous 12 games...Sabres RW Sam Reinhart scored once and added two assists in Saturday's 5-3 win over Chicago. He has 26 points (11 G, 15 A) in the past 24 games...Sabres C Ryan O'Reilly added a goal and an assist against the Blackhawks and has 15 points (4 G, 11 A) in the past 16 games...Blackhawks C Jonathan Toews had a goal and an assist, while RW Patrick Kane earned two assists in Saturday's 5-3 loss at Buffalo. Toews has 11 points (4 G, 7 A) in the past nine games and Kane has 16 points (4 G, 12 A) in the past 15 games...Blues LW Vladimir Sobotka chipped in a couple of assists in Saturday's 4-3 overtime win against the Rangers, and has five points (2 G, 3 A) in the past five games...Rangers C Mika Zibanejad scored two goals in Saturday's 4-3 overtime loss at St. Louis, giving him 10 points (6 G, 4 A) in the past six games...Rangers LW Chris Kreider added a pair of assists, and has 10 points (2 G, 8 A) in the past nine games.

Predators C Colton Sissons and LW Filip Forsberg both scored two goals in Friday's 4-2 win at Colorado. Sissons has five points (2 G, 3 A) in the past seven games, and Forsberg has nine points (3 G, 6 A) in the past nine games...Predators RW Craig Smith contributed a couple of assists, and has 14 points (5 G, 9 A) in the past 15 games...Capitals RW Alex Chiasson produced a goal and two assists in Friday's 6-3 win over the Islanders. He had three assists in his previous 14 games...Capitals C Nicklas Backstrom and rookie LW Jakub Vrana both contributed a goal and an assist against the Islanders and both had an assist in Sunday's 6-3 loss at Philadelphia. Backstrom has 12 points (4 G, 8 A) in the past nine games and Vrana has four points (1 G, 3 A) in the past three games.

Islanders rookie C Mathew Barzal had a goal and an assist in Friday's 6-3 loss at Washington and had an assist in Sunday's 4-3 loss to Carolina. He has 20 points (3 G, 17 A) in the past 17 games...Islanders D Ryan Pulock added a pair of assists Friday and another assist Sunday, giving him six points (1 G, 5 A) in the past five games...Senators C Matt Duchene and LW Mike Hoffman both had a goal and an assist in Friday's 3-2 overtime win against Dallas. Duchene has 22 points (10 G, 12 A) in the past 20 games and Hoffman has 12 points (6 G, 6 A) in the past 11 games...Senators D Erik Karlsson chipped in a couple of assists and has 25 points (4 G, 21 A) in the past 24 games...Stars LW Jamie Benn earned a pair of assists in Friday's 3-2 overtime loss at Ottawa and scored a goal in Sunday's 4-2 loss at Winnipeg, giving him 13 points (5 G, 8 A) in the past 12 games.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 21, 2018

Tomas Hertl had a good run through Western Canada.

Sharks C Tomas Hertl had a goal and an assist in Friday's 7-4 win at Calgary plus another goal and an assist in Saturday's 5-3 win at Vancouver, giving him seven points (4 G, 3 A) in the past three games...Flames RW Micheal Ferland had a goal and an assist in Friday's 7-4 loss to San Jose. He has five points (1 G, 4 A) in the past six games...Ducks RW Jakob Silfverberg had a pair of assists in Friday's 4-2 win vs. Detroit and added a goal in Sunday's 4-2 win against New Jersey; he has seven points (3 G, 4 A) in the past eight games...Wild LW Jason Zucker scored a goal and added an assist in Friday's 4-2 win at Vegas. He has 16 points (7 G, 9 A) in the past 15 games...Golden Knights C Erik Haula had a goal and an assist in Friday's 4-2 loss to Minnesota; he has five points (4 G, 1 A) in the past four games...Golden Knights LW David Perron contributed a couple of assists against Minnesota and added another in Sunday's 4-0 win against Calgary, giving him 13 points (2 G, 11 A) in the past 13 games.

Avalanche G Semyon Varlamov saved 37 of 38 shots in Sunday's 5-1 win over Detroit and has a .939 save percentage in his past 11 games...Oilers G Cam Talbot stopped 40 of 42 shots in Saturday's 4-2 win at Florida, giving him a .933 save percentage in his past 13 starts...Lightning G Louis Dominique stopped 29 of 30 shots in Sunday's 3-1 win vs. Edmonton; he had a .894 save percentage in his previous five games...Predators G Juuse Saros had 33 saves on 35 shots in Friday's 4-2 win at Colorado, and has a .942 save percentage in his past 15 starts.

FIRSTS

Andreas Johnsson – Toronto's 23-year-old winger scored his first NHL goal, in his second career game, Saturday's 4-0 win against Montreal.

Andreas Johnsson was delighted to score his first NHL goal
pic.twitter.com/FKZoThHYvf

— Jeff Veillette (@JeffVeillette) March 18, 2018

Oskar Lindblom – Philadelphia's 21-year-old winger buried his first NHL goal, in his 14th career game, Sunday's 6-3 win over Washington.

OSKAR LINDBLOM SCORES HIS FIRST NHL GOAL TO GIVE THE FLYERS A 2-1 LEAD
pic.twitter.com/9fgEEMwm62

— Broad Street Hockey (@BroadStHockey) March 18, 2018

Many of the advanced stats used here come from Natural Stat Trick, Corsica and Hockey Reference.

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USA TODAY / Predators' Pekka Rinne has become the Vezina Trophy favorite

Kevin Allen, USA TODAY Sports Published 2:09 p.m. ET March 20, 2018

Tampa Bay Lightning goalie Andrei Vasilevskiy isn't losing the Vezina Trophy as much as Nashville's Pekka Rinne is winning it.

"When you do your player ratings after every game, he's usually one of the three stars," Predators general manager David Poile said.

With less than three weeks left in the regular season, Rinne, 35, has become the favorite to win the award over Vasilevskiy, Connor Hellebuyck (Winnipeg Jets), Tuukka Rask (Boston Bruins), Sergei Bobrovsky (Columbus Blue Jackets) and Marc-Andre Fleury (Vegas Golden Knights).

"That's why we are at where we are today," Poile told USA TODAY Sports. "There is nothing to pick apart on his game. The consistency is there every night."

Rinne's .931 save percentage, 2.21 goals-against average, eight shutouts and 40 wins are all at, or near, the top of the statistical charts.

But what has separated Rinne from his peers has been his exceptional performance level since Jan. 6.

Rinne is 21-1-1 since that date, with 11 wins in a row. He has given up two or fewer goals in 16 of those appearances.

"Whatever stat you think is relative he is right at the top," Poile said.

In his last five games, he has surrendered a total of five goals. By contrast, Vasilevskiy has given up 22 goals in his past five games and has not been as sharp in the second half of the season as he was in the first half, posting a .904 SV%.

Rinne's play has helped the Predators surpass the Lightning in the President's Trophy race for the league's best record.

"He's the best goaltender we've ever had," Poile said. "That's clearly one of the reasons why we are where we are."

It's been an amazing career for a player the Predators had to evaluate only in warmups because he wasn't playing much for his Finnish team before his 2004 draft eligibility.

Rinne posted a .930 SV% in the playoffs (and .918 SV% in the regular season) to help the Predators reach the Stanley Cup Final for the first time last spring.

This after a 2015-16 season in which he recorded a 2.48 GAA and .908 SV% and had some questioning how much he had left.

"You are never too old to learn," Poile said. "And Pekka has worked at his game. He has been known for the spectacular saves, to be able to get across the crease for highlight-reel saves. I still see those from time to time. But now it's his positioning, and his patience to let the puck come to him. It's probably the best it has ever been. He lets the game come to him. Not a lot of wasted time, movement and energy."

Rinne has been a finalist for the Vezina three times, but he has not won.

"We picked up right where we left off last season," Poile said, "and it starts in goal."

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