



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • March 23, 2020

## THE NEWS & OBSERVER

### Canes' John Forslund, symptom-free for coronavirus, eager to end self-quarantine

By Chip Alexander

At 8 p.m. Sunday, John Forslund was to leave the basement of his Apex home, rejoining his family, symptom-free for the coronavirus, his self-quarantine at an end.

"It's been an ordeal," Forslund said Saturday, thankful that a 10-day period filled with uncertainty and mind games would be coming to a close.

Forslund, the Carolina Hurricanes' longtime broadcaster, also quickly qualified that comment. Others, he said, face grave health challenges from COVID-19 during a global pandemic that has made life as we know it far from the life we once knew. And there are other life-threatening diseases.

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Forslund has stayed put in his basement since returning with the Hurricanes from New Jersey on March 12, the day the NHL announced it was suspending — the league called it "pausing" — the season because of the threat and spread of the novel virus. Another Canes employee, video producer Zackary Brame, also went into self-quarantine.

The NBA was the first major professional league to suspend play, that after one of its players, Rudy Gobert of the Utah Jazz, tested positive for the virus. The Jazz had just been in Detroit to play the Pistons, using the Westin Book Cadillac Detroit as its team hotel. When the Jazz left the Westin, the Canes then moved in for their March 10 game against the Red Wings.

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"Unbelievable," Forslund said.

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At the same time, Forslund was extremely thankful his family — wife Natalie and three children — was at home, safe. He said he has been able to hear some of them laughing at times and their mood upbeat, which is reassuring.

"I can't wait to get fully engaged with the family again. That's been the hard part," he said.

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information provided by the immunologist and director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Disease.

"And even when you're not paying attention you're thinking about it," Forslund said. "You think about the kids' lives being turned upside down and how's that going to play out. How is the season going to play out and professionally what's going to happen. There's a lot of things to think about and I've had too much time to think about it."

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"Then," he said, "a screeching halt. It has been a weird change. It's not like the offseason, when the season ends and now you're done. You're not prepared for this and all of a sudden there's nothing. It comes to an abrupt end, and with all this gray area of where it's headed."

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Forslund said he's trying to stay optimistic that the NHL season can resume at some point, that the health crisis will ease and the threat will pass and there's a chance of playing games, perhaps the Stanley Cup playoffs. Then again, he understands the timing of it may preclude any more hockey in the 2019-20 season.



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“At some point we’re going to have to get back to normalcy. I think all sports will play a role in boosting the morale of the country and the economic state of the country. Everyone will be so hungry for it.”

## Will the Hurricanes play again this season? There’s always hope

By Chip Alexander

Everyone is hoping the Carolina Hurricanes and the NHL will play hockey again this season, that at some point it’s safe enough to get back on the ice. Play games. Get back to normal.

That might be wishful thinking given the scope and the threat of the coronavirus pandemic. With so many every-day restrictions being enforced, in the U.S. and Canada, there may be no foreseeable way of resuming the 2019-20 season.

But there’s always hope ...

What if the COVID-19 crisis level eases to the point that games could be played, even initially without fans, by June or July and then the Stanley Cup playoffs held? And how might the Canes be affected?

The Canes would be back at full strength. Defenseman Dougie Hamilton, out since Jan. 16 with a broken fibula, should be back. Goalie James Reimer, injured Feb. 22, would be back and defenseman Sami Vatanen, on injured reserve when he was obtained in the Feb. 24 trade with New Jersey, should be ready and available.

The Canes (38-25-5) won their last three games before the March 12 league suspension and held the first wild-card playoff spot in the East. They had just gotten a nice offensive boost from rookie forward Morgan Geekie, who had three goals and an assist in his first two NHL games, road wins over Pittsburgh and Detroit. Goalie Petr Mrazek had returned from injury and in the net against the Red Wings on March 10 in the 5-2 win at Little Caesars Arena.

Something like a two-game regular-season finish — a warm-up for the playoffs — would be interesting, especially if the 2019-20 schedule is followed. The Canes are scheduled to close with a home game against the Columbus Blue Jackets, then a road game at Boston. Even a one-game warmup could create a scramble for playoff positions in the Eastern Conference.

Several scenarios have been mentioned in the past week, including one to immediately begin the playoffs, in some

fashion, with no warmup games. A 24-team format has been suggested, the seedings based on points percentage and the top four seeds — two from each division — joined by the winners of four play-in series in each conference.

Canes president and general manager Don Waddell said Friday that the NHL had asked for tentative PNC Arena dates stretching through the end of July. The NHL has said meetings are being held daily to consider all options.

Under the 24-team format, the Canes, for example, could be matched up against, say, the Florida Panthers in a play-in series.

Another proposal, according to Frank Seravalli of TSN, would be the league blending the end of the 2019-20 season into the start of the 2020-21 season. Play some warmup games and begin the 2020 playoffs in August. Then begin the 2020-21 season in November after a month-long break for the draft, free agency and training camps.

All that is speculative, especially with many in the U.S. on a lockdown to try and slow the spread of the virus. One decision the NHL has made is to allow players to return home, including those from outside North America, where a player’s quarantine is to continue through March 27. Some of the Canes players have done that.

Those who have remained are not allowed to use the team’s facilities for workouts or practices. The NHL has said its objective was to potentially open a training-camp period roughly 45 days into the 60-day period recommended by the CDC’s March 15 directive about canceling gatherings of 50 or more people.

The NHL noted “world developments” could change that. Commissioner Gary Bettman has said the season would resume when it’s “prudent and safe.” There’s still no timetable on how long it might be before we reach that prudent-and-safe point.

“You just stay ready,” Canes owner Tom Dundon said when the NHL season was suspended on March 12. “We’re assuming at some point we’ll be back but you don’t know.”



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## Trocheck Answers Your Questions on Instagram

New Canes forward answers fan questions

by Michael Smith

Since the National Hockey League's 2019-20 season has been paused, everyone has a little more free time, including hockey players.

Vincent Trocheck took to Instagram stories on Thursday night to answer your questions. Here is a collection of answers to help you get to know one of the Carolina Hurricanes' newest forwards.

"Hey Canes fans. Hope you're all healthy and doing well with everything going on," Trocheck posted. "Since we're away from hockey I figured now would be a good time to answer some of your questions. So, fire away!"

How are you liking Carolina so far?

So far so good! Great group of guys and a nice place to live

What have you been doing with your time off?

Mostly just hanging out, drinking juice with this guy

Do you think the season will return?

I sure hope so!

Who's the best chirper you've ever played with?

Shawn Thornton

Favorite player growing up?

Peter Forsberg

Favorite song right now/type of music?

Right now it's "Blinding Lights" by The Weeknd

Where in Pittsburgh did you grow up?

Upper St. Clair

Funniest guy on the team?

Teuvo Teravainen

What have you been binge watching?

F1 series on Netflix

Which movie genre do you prefer: horror or comedy?

Comedy. I don't mess with horror movies

Favorite hobby in the offseason?

Mainly golf

Coffee order pregame?

Venti cold brew

Favorite restaurant back home in Pittsburgh?

All of Richard DeShantz's restaurants are great

Do you like The Office?

Love it

Pregame meal?

Chicken, pasta and peas

Who is your favorite athlete not from hockey?

Tiger Woods

Favorite golf course?

Laurel Valley

Who is your favorite F1 driver?

Daniel Ricciardo

What's your handicap?

7

What's your favorite TV show?

Of all time? Breaking Bad

Favorite rapper?

Jay-Z and Eminem

Were you nervous coming to a new team?

I was nervous at first, but the team helped me transition smoothly

What's your dream foursome, alive or dead?

Wow. Tough one ... Tiger Woods, Mario Lemieux, Will Ferrell

Do you have any pets?

Two dogs. Golden retriever (Porter) and golden doodle (Romeo)

"Thanks for all the questions guys!" Trocheck signed off. "Stay healthy all."



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## Inside the toughest hockey game you never hear about

by Jason Shaya

If you happen to be on the roster for the Charlotte Checkers but find yourself outside the gameday lineup, you still have a game to play. It's a game so intense that it burns with a fire more powerful than the sun itself. Comparing it to an actual AHL game is like comparing an Oldsmobile to a Ferrari.

The game is three-on-three, half-ice against the coaching staff.

This event takes place every morning skate before a game. It deserves a crowd and player introductions. It needs pyrotechnics and all the pomp and circumstance of a Stanley Cup Playoff game.

Do you want to know what the rules are? So do I. They're made up on the spot. There is only one constant rule: the coaching staff plays to win. If you go for a change after a stoppage, the coaching staff takes the opportunity for a breakaway. If you think they'll go easy on you in a fight for the puck, think again. It's anarchy on skates. It's basically Thunderdome. You better be prepared.

You might be wondering how professional hockey players could have a hard time battling it out against a bunch of old, slow, aging coaches. Well, let's run down the coaching staff roster to explain why this is no easy challenge:

Patrick Dwyer. A quiet, cerebral assassin who logged over 400 NHL games with the Carolina Hurricanes. Patrick is a hard-working right-shot winger who only skates at full speed. If you're going to beat him, you're going to have to earn it. Once the puck drops, he goes from amicable hockey coach to skilled puck-distributing winger in an instant. He's a guy any centerman would want on his line.

Next up, Tim Gleason. A former first-round draft pick of the Ottawa Senators with a face only a mother could love. But I must say, even though he has the death stare of a serial madman, he's actually one of the nicest and friendliest people you'll ever meet. Tim is a good, Michigan-born kid who has an incredible base of knowledge to help young defensemen develop into NHL-ready players. He's universally respected... and feared. He didn't make his living on skill but if you ever have to go into the corner against him to get the puck, you should say a prayer first. His aim isn't exactly stellar and his passing skills have diminished, but I'd take six Tim Gleasons on my blueline any day (although, you would probably have to run five forwards on the power-play).

Now let's add one of the most skilled players to ever put on a pair of skates – Sergei Samsonov. Another former-first round draft pick, this Moscow native played over 1,000 NHL games

– including going all the way to game seven of the Stanley Cup Finals. At 17 years old, he won the Turner Cup in the IHL with the Detroit Vipers. He was born to be a hockey player and his career numbers speak for themselves. I've said this before but if Sergei decided to un-retire tomorrow, he'd need about two weeks of training and he'd put up 80 points in the AHL without breaking a sweat.

It only makes sense to follow up the high skill and NHL experience of Sergei with Noah Segall, the video coach. Noah's job is rather simple – skate as quickly as you can and get the puck to anyone else. Noah never runs out of energy and never takes a shift off. Nice kid, loves the game.

Finally, let's move onto Charlotte Checkers head coach Ryan Warsofsky. It needs to be said that compared to the NHL players listed above, Warsofsky's playing resume is basically non-existent. We're not counting games played in the Federal League but if we did, the total is one – and let's leave out that he was minus 3 in that game. But that's not important. What makes Ryan the de-facto captain is his sheer determination to win at all costs. He will win (or he will change the rules on the fly). As far as his playing ability, he plays like he coaches – with face-melting intensity. Slapshots at head level to win the game? Yes. Skating around someone who just collapsed because a puck hit their ankle? Yes. Getting mad at his teammates even though they were some of the best players of their generation? Yes. Warsofsky plays to win the game. He doesn't have time for your feelings. The often-heard phrase about him is that he hates to lose. It's true and to be honest, I am actually not sure he enjoys winning! He just expects it to happen. That's what makes him such a great coach and such a dangerous player in the world's most intense hockey game you've never heard of before.

Some great Charlotte Checkers players have scars to prove the importance of the morning tradition including Colin Markison, Brian Gibbons, Alex Nedeljkovic, Anton Forsberg, Gustav Forsling, Derek Sheppard and the best three-on-three player in league history, Cavan Fitzgerald. Those are just a sample of the players who came out of the cauldron and went back into the Checkers lineup in a regular, boring, slow AHL hockey game. After three on three against some legendary NHL players, the AHL is like a walk in the park.

Ultimately, this game is always played by kids who want to have fun and win. The game is what you make out of it. Whether it's the Calder Cup Finals or three-on-three skate in the morning, we are all blessed to be part of it. Except when someone hits you with a slapshot. Then it's more a bruise than a blessing. You need thick skin and a good medical trainer if you're going to survive the toughest game on ice.



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# SportScan

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

1181427 Carolina Hurricanes

Canes' John Forslund, symptom-free for coronavirus, eager to end self-quarantine

BY CHIP ALEXANDER

MARCH 22, 2020 11:25 AM

Carolina Hurricanes TV announcer John Forslund does the pregame show in the booth before an NHL game at PNC Arena.

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News Observer LOADED: 03.23.2020

1181447 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / NHL's top 20 UFAs of 2020: Latest rumours, reports

Emily Sadler | March 22, 2020, 9:15 AM

A lot has changed on the UFA front since we last checked in — and that's just on the roster and contract front.

Some of the league's top pending unrestricted free agents have been moved (Robin Lehner, Tyler Toffoli, Erik Haula, to name a few) while others (Jake Muzzin, Chris Kreider) stayed put and removed their free agency bids by re-signing with their current clubs. Jean-Gabriel Pageau did both, signing a six-year pact with the Islanders upon being dealt to New York from Ottawa.

Here's an updated (and re-ranked) look at the top 20 pending UFAs of 2020, which we'll continue to update as the season (hopefully) continues.

1. Taylor Hall, LW, Arizona Coyotes

Age: 28

2019-20 cap hit: \$6 million

Back in the fall, the big question in New Jersey was whether Taylor Hall would be traded. It didn't take long for that question to catch up with him after he was dealt to the desert in December, though both Hall and the Coyotes quickly made it clear that he'd be finishing the season in Arizona.

Now, the conversation shifts to what he might earn on his next contract, and where that might be. Trade rumours featured the Colorado

Avalanche as potential suitors, and the Montreal Canadiens were floated around among other intriguing options as well.

Hall scored 10 goals and added 17 assists for 27 points through 35 games with the Coyotes. Add that to his totals with the Devils this season, and he's got 52 points in 65 games. We know what Hall is capable of — his 39-goal, 93-point, Hart-winning 2017-18 season showed his ability to single-handedly pull a team into the playoffs — but might injury fears and slower production prevent him from hitting a double-digit cap hit?

2. Alex Pietrangolo, D, St. Louis Blues

Age: 30

2019-20 cap hit: \$6.5 million

One season after leading St. Louis to the Stanley Cup, the Blues captain has scored a career-high 16 goals and was just two points shy of his highest total ever before the season was put on hold. If that doesn't earn you a sizeable raise, I don't know what will.

Early-season reports projected the AAV on Pietrangolo's next deal to come in at around \$8 million per, and that would turn out to be a bargain at this point. The Athletic's Jeremy Rutherford pointed out recently that Blues general manager Doug Armstrong said he'll wait to talk contract with his captain until after the season, though you can't help but wonder if that changes over the course of this current hiatus.

3. Braden Holtby, G, Washington Capitals

Age: 30

2019-20 cap hit: \$6.1 million

The emergence of rookie Ilya Samsonov made us all question the future of veteran netminder Braden Holtby. So have Holtby's career-low numbers nearing the end of an up-and-down season in the crease. But Capitals GM Brian MacLellan put that to rest back in January.

"Holtby's our guy. I mean, he's got a Cup, he has a history, he's been a huge part of our organization," MacLellan said during a radio appearance. "I think what we've been trying to do is develop Samsonov and he's handled everything we've thrown at him very well. He's continually gotten better, he works at his game, he's calm under pressure."

When we last checked, it appeared the Capitals were prepared to wait until after the season to negotiate with the netminder who could very well cash in on a Sergei Bobrovsky-like contract — though, that particular deal hasn't looked good on Florida's books thus far which could make other clubs wary should Holtby hit free agency.

4. Torey Krug, D, Boston Bruins

Age: 28

2019-20 cap hit: \$5.25 million

He's one of the league's best offensive defencemen with plenty of sandpaper in his game. In other words, should Krug hit the open market, there would be a mile-long lineup of GMs vying for his services.

Even with Boston's cap-clearing moves around the deadline, they could find themselves hard pressed to re-sign the rearguard. Speculation around the Michigan native's desire to head home has had many seeing Red Wings red in his future.

For now, though, we wait.

5. Tyson Barrie, D, Toronto Maple Leafs

Age: 28

2019-20 cap hit: \$5.5 million (this AAV is split between Colorado and Toronto)



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Barrie's Toronto tenure hasn't gone how he or Maple Leafs brass intended. GM Kyle Dubas explored the possibility of trading Barrie at the deadline but ultimately didn't get a return offer to his liking. A slew of injuries on Toronto's blue line made him less dispensable, too.

6. Jacob Markstrom, G, Vancouver Canucks

Age: 30

2019-20 cap hit: \$3.67 million

Markstrom has been putting up MVP-worthy numbers in Vancouver behind a surprising Canucks club, and his strong play couldn't come at a better time — for both the team and his own outlook. While age could work against him, Markstrom's next paycheck should be a pretty big increase from his current modest cap hit. A mid-term deal — say, three or four years — would make a lot of sense here, as would an AAV of perhaps up to \$6 million.

7. Evgenii Dadonov, RW, Florida Panthers

Age: 30

2019-20 cap hit: \$4 million

Dadonov quietly put up back-to-back 28-goal campaigns down in Florida, tallying 65 and 70 points in his past two seasons, and a scoring spree in January has him just three markers shy of that total through 69 games. He's one of the league's most underrated sharp shooters and his production over the past three years all but guarantees he won't be underpaid come free agency — though age may deter clubs from offering long-term pacts.

8. Mike Hoffman, RW/LW, Florida Panthers

Age: 30

2019-20 cap hit: \$5.1875 million

Florida has been one of the most intriguing teams to watch down the stretch, considering their position in the standings straddling the line between contention and, ultimately, not.

Hoffman is coming off the best season of his career (by a pretty wide margin) in 2018-19, leading the Panthers in goals (36) and tallying 70 points in his first year with the club. The Panthers' goals leader (he's third in overall points, with 59) looked like an intriguing rental candidate at the deadline but wasn't moved.

9. Robin Lehner, G, Vegas Golden Knights

Age: 28

2019-20 cap hit: \$5 million

Last year's Masterton Trophy winner thrived as part of an excellent tandem with the New York Islanders and then completely stole the show in Round 1 of the Stanley Cup Playoffs. Paired with veteran (and fellow pending UFA) Corey Crawford through much of this season with the Blackhawks, he brought that same game-saving consistency to Chicago's crease. Now as part of the NHL's best goalie tandem, alongside Marc-Andre Fleury, Lehner has a chance to prove to a team that's he's worthy of a long-term pact. Will that team be Vegas? Considering Fleury's still under contract as the undisputed starter for two more seasons, it would be difficult to see Lehner signing there long-term without a guarantee of more starts. For now, his time in Vegas feels like a rental-only situation.

10. Tyler Toffoli, RW/LW, Vancouver Canucks

Age: 27

2019-20 cap hit: \$4.6 million

Toffoli had a down year in 2018-19 with 13 goals and 34 points on a floundering Kings squad. Considering how early the trade rumours began, it's a bit surprising it took until one week before the trade deadline

for the Kings to finally move him. He's gotten off to a strong start in Vancouver, posting six goals and 10 points in 10 games with the Canucks prior to the season being put on hold.

11. Mikael Granlund, C/RW, Nashville Predators

Age: 27

2019-20 cap hit: \$5.75 million

Granlund was a deadline acquisition for the Predators a year ago, and his status with the club felt very much up in the air as we looked at this year's deadline. He'll be an intriguing name to watch — despite not striking great success in Nashville, it feels like it's only a matter of time before he heats up again, likely with a different team.

12. Travis Hamonic, D, Calgary Flames

Age: 29

2019-20 cap hit: \$3.857 million

Hamonic reportedly wanted to leave negotiations until after the season was through, but the stay-at-home d-man looks like a safe bet to stay in Calgary long-term.

13. T.J. Brodie, D, Calgary Flames

Age: 29

2019-20 cap hit: \$4.65 million

Brodie's name has been in trade rumours before, but injuries to fellow blue liners Travis Hamonic and Mark Giordano made him in pretty indispensable as far as any possible deadline deals went.

14. Jaroslav Halak, G, Boston Bruins

Age: 34

2019-20 cap hit: \$2.75 million

Signing Halak to a two-year, \$5.5-million deal in July 2018 proved to be GM Don Sweeney's best move of the off-season, as his presence brought load management to the Bruins' crease and has other teams attempting to build similar one-two punches in net. Re-signing him this year could be just as smart.

15. Erik Haula, LW, Florida Panthers

Age: 28

2019-20 cap hit: \$2.75 million

Haula was part of a head-scratching deal made between the Hurricanes and Panthers at the deadline, which saw Florida deal away Vincent Trocheck for a package that included Haula. A string of injuries have hindered Haula's ability to match the success he had with the Vegas Golden Knights in 2017-18. Health will be a factor in his next deal, too.

16. Ilya Kovalchuk, LW, Montreal Canadiens

Age: 36

2019-20 cap hit: \$700,000

Montreal's Kovalchuk experiment got off to a great start — the veteran proved he's still got a little magic left in him, and his success looks even better with a \$700,000 price tag attached — and saw the club flip him to the contending Capitals for a profit at the deadline. It feels likely this wasn't the last we've seen of Kovalchuk in le bleu, blanc, et rouge, as he could be a strong candidate to return to Montreal as a free agent.

"This group of guys is special," he said in February (before being traded), via Sportsnet's Eric Engels. "They all care, they want to win, they want to be better. And all the young guys like (Nick) Suzuki ... and (Jesper) Kotkaniemi) and (Cale) Fleury — they sent them down, but they're all ready to play. This team has a bright future, and if I can be part of it that would be really good."



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17. Alex Galchenyuk, LW/C/RW, Minnesota Wild

Age: 25

2019-20 cap hit: \$4.9 million

Things didn't exactly work out in Pittsburgh. A lot is now riding on his performance with the Wild. Three goals and seven points through 14 games prior to the season hiatus suggests he might be a candidate to sign a one-year, show-me deal in Minnesota to get back on his feet.

18. Wayne Simmonds, RW, Buffalo Sabres

Age: 31

2019-20 cap hit: \$5 million

The past year hasn't been kind to Simmonds, who has struggled to find his stride since landing in Nashville at the 2018-19 deadline. Since then, he's scored just nine goals and 28 points in 85 games split between the Predators, Devils, and Sabres. He's just three seasons removed from back-to-back 30-plus goal campaigns and is a top candidate for a one-year deal on a team that can help revive his career.

19. Sami Vatanen, D, Carolina Hurricanes

Age: 28

2019-20 cap hit: \$4.875 million

Vatanen has yet to suit up for a game with the Hurricanes, the team that acquired from the Devils at the deadline, due to the lower-body injury that's kept him sidelined since Feb. 1. Injuries have prevented the rearguard from ever being able to play a full season, and will affect what he's able to earn on the open market, too.

20. Joe Thornton, C, San Jose Sharks

Age: 40

2019-20 cap hit: \$2 million

The veteran forward expressed disappointment that he wasn't dealt at the deadline.

"It would have been nice to at least have a chance," he told The Athletic's Kevin Kurz. "I wanted a shot, you know? Believe it or not. I've been hunting this thing down for 22 years, so I wanted another shot at it. I wanted to get something (for the Sharks) in return. It just didn't work out. Back to the grind, and that's how it is."

He'll be back in an NHL sweater next year – and probably a few more after that – but might it be teal? Sportsnet's Elliotte Friedman suggested after the deadline that Toronto could be his next destination if he chooses to leave San Jose.

Other notable pending UFAs to keep an eye on: Corey Crawford (CHI), Kevin Shattenkirk (TB), Thomas Greiss (NYI) Cody Eakin (VGK), Chris Tanev (VAN), Cody Ceci (TOR), Justin Schultz (PIT), Michael Frolik (CGY), Vladislav Namestnikov (OTT), Marco Scandella (BUF), Erik Gustafsson (CHI), Pat Maroon (TB), Zach Bogosian (BUF), Kyle Clifford (LA), Radko Gudas (WSH), Anton Khudobin (DAL)

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Sportsnet.ca / Brainstorming six Stanley Cup Playoff format ideas for 2020

Ryan Dixon | March 22, 2020, 10:22 AM

It's a rare moment in time when the people who run a billion-dollar professional league really don't know much more than those who cover and follow it, but here we are.

About all we can say in terms of possible playoff formats should the NHL resume play this season is the same thing deputy commissioner Bill Daly told Good Show on Sportsnet 590 The Fan Thursday morning: Essentially, anything is possible.

Asked if he could at least rule out a scenario where all 31 teams compete in some kind of mega post-season, Daly couldn't commit. "I guess I'm not even willing to say that at this point."

If commissioner Gary Bettman's righthand man is racking his brain for every possible setup —Daly said he was mentally running different scenarios, including one that could see an under-the-gun structure with fewer than the usual 16 teams in the playoffs, during his morning shower — then we'd like to follow suit, highlighting a few ideas that fall at various points along the hair-brained spectrum.

The notion of a 24-team playoff is already out there, as are a number of other possibilities. Allow us, then, to jump in on the fun and present some unique paths to the most beautiful trophy in sports.

- Lets' get this one out of the way. As fun as a March Madness-style, win-and-advance tournament would be, I don't think you can do a 16-team, single-elimination format that would require four wins in total for a team to win the Stanley Cup. Maybe you could do best two-of-three at every stage or make the final a real series, but even that doesn't feel quite right.

- Rank the teams by points percentage, the top seven in each conference get in, leaving one spot open on each side of the draw. Now have your single-elimination bracket, as the next eight teams — seeds eight through 15 — compete for that final playoff spot in both the East and West. Naturally, you rank the competing teams one through eight in each conference. Sorry, Detroit, you're the only one sitting this out.

- There are all kinds of variations you could do with the above. It just depends how many spots you want to reserve and how many you want to leave up for grabs in a bracket-style competition.

Senior Writer Ryan Dixon and NHL Editor Rory Boylen always give it 110%, but never rely on clichés when it comes to podcasting. Instead, they use a mix of facts, fun and a varied group of hockey voices to cover Canada's most beloved game.

- Take the top eight teams in each conference and rank them by points percentage. Now, have the first and final rounds be best-of-nine series. That allows teams more time to find their footing when they come back from a long layoff and gives us an elongated showcase series at the end. In the middle, you can whittle down to best-of-three or five to save some time. Can't you just see the headline: "Game 9: It's all on the line!" (If you're wondering, Major League Baseball has used best-of-nine series before, including the infamous 1919 Chicago "Black Sox" Series won by the Cincinnati Reds.)

- Speaking of hardball, if there's a real time crunch to get this thing in, why not follow MLB's October formula? Since there are only two divisions in each NHL conference as opposed to the three in both the American and National Leagues, you would once again rank the squads by points percentage in the East and West. Seeds four and five have a one-game play in to leave four clubs on either side of the ledger. Now, if time allows, you do best-of-seven series the rest of the way with an option to do a best-of-five first round if required. It takes three series wins to make the Cup final under normal circumstances and teams usually hang a banner to mark that achievement. Handing out rings for three series wins would be legit.

- Okay, I know I said you couldn't do single-game elimination all the way through, but forget that and the best-of-nine chat: What if we made just the final a winner-take-all affair? Could. You. Imagine! Nothing trumps the vibe of a for-all-the-marbles match, so if we're trying to squeeze this thing in, why not have three rounds of best-of-five or seven, give



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everyone a few days off to rest — we, the media, will take care of the hype — and then have them meet in a Super Bowl-style event. We could even do it in a neutral site, assuming travel restrictions have loosened and fans of both teams can make the trip. It would be a great note to go out on after all this craziness.

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Sportsnet.ca / Report: Bruins' Tuukka Rask says retiring after next season 'a possibility'

Sportsnet Staff | March 22, 2020, 7:52 PM

While the hockey world awaits a return to normalcy, it seems clear to all that even when the league does return from its hiatus, it won't be until next season at the earliest that we see a normal NHL campaign.

As it turns out, that 2020-21 season could also be the last bit of normalcy at TD Garden for quite some time, as there's a chance it could be the final NHL campaign for veteran Boston Bruins netminder Tuukka Rask.

The 33-year-old, speaking to Matt Porter of The Boston Globe last month, said retirement after 2020-21 remains on the table.

"I have one year left in the contract, so we'll see if I even play," he told Porter. Asked if that was a "real possibility," Rask replied: "We'll see. Always a possibility."

The Savonlinna, Finland native is in the midst of the second-last season of the eight-year, \$56-million deal he signed with Boston in 2013, carrying a \$7-million annual cap hit.

He won the Vezina Trophy in the first year of that contract, and led the Bruins to the Stanley Cup Final last year, where they lost to the St. Louis Blues in seven games.

Asked if he'd return to Finland following the conclusion of his NHL career to continue his career where it began, Rask told Porter he'd prefer to simply move on to the next phase of his life.

"No. No, I wouldn't," he told Porter, adding the focus would be on "family time."

"Just be home," he continued. "The wear and tear of the travel with two, almost three kids now, makes you think. I love to do it. But it's tough."

Rask has logged a total of 536 games in the big leagues over his 13-year career, all with the Bruins, after Boston famously acquired him from the Toronto Maple Leafs in exchange for netminder Andrew Raycroft.

He's twice led the league in shutouts over the course of his career (2013, 2014), though his finest campaign arguably came as a rookie in 2009-10, wherein he led the league with a .931 save percentage and a 1.97 goals-against average.

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Sportsnet.ca / A starting lineup of NHL players having surprisingly good seasons

Mike Johnston | March 22, 2020, 9:58 AM

There are plenty of reasons to be disappointed the NHL regular season was indefinitely put on pause — some far more serious than others.

Before the stoppage, hockey fans got their usual fix of superstars lighting up the league, but like every season there were also many pleasant surprises.

Since we don't yet know when or if hockey might return, we thought of putting together a starting lineup (three forwards, two defencemen and a goalie) of players who were in the midst of surprising seasons.

Mika Zibanejad, RW, New York Rangers

With 11 goals and 13 points in his six most recent games, there weren't many players hotter than Zibanejad before the NHL suspended play.

The 26-year-old Swede — acquired along with a seventh-rounder in 2016 from Ottawa in exchange for Derrick Brassard and a second-round pick — has improved in each year since arriving on Broadway. He had a career year in 2018-19 with 30 goals and 74 points but had been operating on a different level this season with 41 goals and 75 points through only 57 games, putting him seventh in the NHL in points per game.

Zibanejad began the season with back-to-back four-point outings and it was a sign of things to come. With 22 multi-point performances, including a five-goal game in early March, when Zibanejad's on he's really on.

J.T. Miller, C, Vancouver Canucks

There were more than a few skeptical eyebrows raised when Jim Benning sent a first- and third-round pick to the Tampa Bay Lightning in order to acquire Miller prior to the 2019 NHL Draft, but Miller's performance this season has been worth the price.

All indications are that in addition to his presence on the ice he's been a positive, calming influence in the locker room.

The 27-year-old had more of a depth role on a stacked Tampa Bay squad one season ago and has taken full advantage of his increased role and ice-time with the Canucks. Miller has already set new career highs with 27 goals and 72 points in 69 games with Vancouver, while boasting strong possession numbers. He had also been outstanding in the face-off circle, winning 59.2 per cent of his draws, which is the second-best in the NHL with only Sean Couturier faring better.

Dominik Kubalik, LW, Chicago Blackhawks

If you were to look at a list of Calder Trophy contenders at the start of the season you'd probably have to do quite a bit of scrolling before you got to Kubalik. After all, he was 23 and hadn't skated in a regular-season NHL game after being selected in the seventh round of the 2013 draft.

The versatile Czech forward had performed well with Ambri-Piotta in the Swiss league the past two seasons and a strong showing at the 2019 IIHF world championship helped land him a one-year deal with the Blackhawks. He leads all rookies with 30 goals and all rookie forwards with 46 points.

Tony DeAngelo, D, New York Rangers

Tied for third in goals and fourth in points among all blueliners, and doing so while averaging less than 20 minutes per game, DeAngelo has provided the Rangers with unexpected production in his third year with the team and isn't afraid to mix it up when things get physical despite being listed at 5-foot-11 and 180 pounds. DeAngelo, a first-round pick from 2014, has finally found his footing in the NHL after a pair of early-career trades. The only negative aspect of this for the Rangers is the 24-year-old pending restricted free agent is potentially playing himself into a big contract.

Jacob Slavin, D, Carolina Hurricanes



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Slavin is the type of defenceman who always fly under the radar due to his style of play and the fact his point production doesn't jump off the page. He has a career-high 36 points in 68 games this season, although 32 of which have come at even strength which ranks sixth among back end talent. The defensive stalwart notably tops the NHL in takeaways, a category almost always led by a forward.

Pavel Francouz, G, Colorado Avalanche

With a 21-7-4 record, a .923 save percentage and 2.41 goals-against average, Francouz has been terrific in the Colorado crease. Tristan Jarry, Elvis Merzlikins and Darcy Kuemper are also thriving on their respective teams but their success didn't come out of the blue like Francouz's. He put up great numbers with Chelyabinsk Traktor in the KHL before moving to the AHL last season. The Avs were two points behind the Blues for first place in the West with a game in hand and the undrafted 29-year-old is a major reason.

Francouz has been such a pleasant surprise for the Avs that he was rewarded with a two-year, \$4-million extension in February.

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