



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • April 6, 2018

THE NEWS & OBSERVER

McGinn may be Hurricanes' most improved player

By Chip Alexander

calexander@newsobserver.com

April 05, 2018 10:12 AM

Raleigh

Brock McGinn has a hockey team headed to the playoffs, just not the one he wanted.

The Carolina Hurricanes forward is a minority owner — along with his father Bob and two hockey-playing brothers, Jamie and Tye — of the Roanoke (Va.) Rail Yard Dawgs. The Southern Professional Hockey League team soon will be competing for the SPHL's Presidents Cup.

"It's pretty cool and fun for our family," McGinn said. "It's an investment. It shows us the other side of hockey and lets us learn about the business side."

While all that is interesting for the family, the Hurricanes missing the Stanley Cup playoffs is a downer for McGinn. While he has made noticeable strides with his game individually in his first full NHL season, setting career highs in games played, goals, assists and points, it will hurt to have the playoffs begin and have to watch from afar.

"It's really disappointing," McGinn said Wednesday. "I think the expectations this year were really high. I think there were a couple of stretches there where we didn't get this points we needed. Unfortunately we're going to miss it this year."

At one time, the Canes expected to be going into Philadelphia for a meaningful game Thursday against the Flyers. It will be for the Flyers (40-26-14), who are looking to lock down a playoff spot while the Canes (35-34-11) can do little more than try to finish above NHL-.500.

Tom Dundon, who became the Canes' new majority owner in January, recently had this assessment: "There is no outcome worse than this. It's a simple game, win or lose. We lost."

Those kind of comments must be stinging for the players who put in the work doing the 82-game grind that is the NHL season. For some players, it's not that simple.

McGinn, 24, is an all-effort kind of player, playing with injuries, playing with an edge, killing penalties, willing to drop the gloves if need be. In the Canes' road loss Monday against Florida, he was smacked from behind along the boards by the Panthers' MacKenzie Weegar in the second period and had to leave the game, but returned to play the third period.

McGinn is not the biggest guy, listed at 6-feet and 185 pounds, but gives as much as he takes. He has some snarl to his game. As Jamie McGinn, the oldest of the brothers, once put it, he "hits like a mack truck."

Canes coach Bill Peters recently has had McGinn at left wing on Jordan Staal's line opposite winger Justin Williams. It's a line that has both physicality but skill.

"At the beginning of the year he was up and down the lineup, all over the place, trying to find a home for him," Peters said. "Now he can go anywhere and help two people out. He's a real good player and plays hard. Just an honest two-way guy. All 200 feet are looked after."

McGinn has 16 goals but easily could have topped 20. He's among the league leaders in posts hit (10) and also had two attempts go off the crossbar during the season. As Peters said, "He has been snakebit around the net."

Against the New York Rangers on Saturday, McGinn could have given the Canes the lead 54 seconds into the game but hit the post. The Rangers won 2-1.

"I don't think there's anything more frustrating than that," McGinn said. "It's an inch here or there but I have hit a lot this year."

McGinn said he believes he has done a better job this season of hanging on to pucks and making plays.

"The last couple of years I was kind of more timid with the puck but this year I think I gained a little more confidence with my game," he said. "I've just got to continue to grow as a player."

McGinn said professional pride would carry the Canes through the final, less-than-meaningful two games of the season — Carolina closes the regular season Saturday against Tampa Bay at PNC Arena. The Canes, out of the playoffs for a ninth straight year, then will face another long offseason and one that could be both intriguing and unpredictable given the new owner.

If Peters is named to coach Team Canada in the 2018 IIHF World Championship in Denmark, as some expect, he could press to have McGinn on the team's early roster. If not, it's back to Fergus, Ont., for the McGinns.

With maybe a stop in Roanoke.



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Voracek's goal leads Flyers to crucial win over Hurricanes

By AARON BRACY Associated Press

April 05, 2018 11:48 PM

Updated 8 hours 26 minutes ago

PHILADELPHIA

A crucial victory kept the Flyers in control of their own playoff destiny.

Jakub Voracek scored with 5:45 left in the third period to lift playoff-chasing Philadelphia over the Carolina Hurricanes 4-3 on Thursday night.

Claude Giroux, Ivan Provorov and Michael Raffl also scored for Philadelphia, which began play holding the second and final wild card, four points ahead of Florida. The Flyers would have clinched a playoff spot if Boston beat the Panthers, but Florida topped the Bruins 3-2 later Thursday.

Philadelphia can secure a playoff spot in its final regular-season game on Saturday with a victory over the Rangers or an overtime loss. A Florida loss in either of its final two games, Saturday against Buffalo and Sunday at Boston, also would send Philadelphia to the postseason.

"We got the job done tonight," Flyers coach Dave Hakstol said. "Now we have a big one Saturday afternoon."

The Flyers seemed in great shape when Giroux put them up 3-2 with 9:42 remaining behind a wrist shot that beat goalie Scott Darling. It extended the Flyers captain's career-high totals to 31 goals and 98 points. Flyers fans shouted "M-V-P!" "M-V-P!" when Giroux was shown on the video board following the tally.

The Hurricanes erased the lead when Brian Elliott let in his second soft goal of the game, this one Jordan Staal's backhand from a sharp angle near the side boards with 6:19 left.

Elliott returned to work after missing the last 25 games following core muscle surgery on Feb. 13. Elliott, who was injured on Feb. 10, entered 21-11-7 with a 2.72 goals-against average and .908 save percentage this season. He finished with 19 saves.

"It's almost like opening-night jitters again," Elliott said. "It's hard to replicate a game in practice."

Voracek scored on a wrist shot from a sharp angle that got past Darling's left shoulder.

It was enough to send the Flyers to victory.

"We battled hard, we grinded it out and we played the right way," Giroux said.

Philadelphia's captain is feeling good about his team's chances in their final - and most important - game.

"We like the way we're playing right now," he said. "Everybody is doing their job, doing what they're best at. Normally when you do that, you get wins."

Klas Dahlbeck and Sebastian Aho also scored for Carolina, which has lost three straight and four of five. The Hurricanes had already been eliminated from playoff contention.

"We got better as the game went on and more competitive as the game went on," Hurricanes coach Bill Peters said.

The Flyers dominated the opening 10 minutes, outshooting Carolina 13-3, but couldn't get on the board. The Hurricanes finally struck with 6:15 left in the first when Dahlbeck netted his first goal in his 32nd game of the season and just the sixth in his 169-game career.

Raffl answered 53 seconds later when he banged home a shot in front after Giroux's pass was intercepted by Carolina's Justin Williams but went fortuitously to Raffl in front of the net.

The Hurricanes quickly broke the tie when Aho scored on a backhand from a sharp angle to the right of Elliott 14 seconds after Raffl's tally. The goal was a soft one for Elliott.

Philadelphia scored the only goal in the second period when Provorov finished an excellent pass from Sean Couturier right in front of Darling to tie it at 2. The tying score came after some near misses in the period for Philadelphia, as Jori Lehtera hit the post from close range and Voracek missed a golden opportunity from Darling's doorstep two minutes later.

NOTES: Giroux has five goals and 10 assists during a nine-game point streak. ... Aho extended his team-leading totals to 29 goals and 65 points. ... Couturier and Shayne Gostisbehere each had two assists.

UP NEXT

Hurricanes: Host Tampa Bay on Saturday night to end regular season.

Flyers: Host Rangers on Saturday to finish regular season.



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Recap: Canes Drop Road Finale in Philadelphia

Canes suffer 4-3 loss in final road game of season

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

April 5th, 2018

PHILADELPHIA - The Carolina Hurricanes dropped a 4-3 decision to the Philadelphia Flyers in their final road game of the season.

[Klas Dahlbeck](#) scored his first goal of the season, [Sebastian Aho](#) scored his 29th goal of the season and [Jordan Staal](#) tied the game late in the third period, but Jakub Voracek netted the game-winner with just under six minutes left in regulation.

Here are five takeaways from tonight's road finale.

One

For the second game in a row, the Hurricanes squared off against a team fighting for its playoff life. The Flyers, just as the Panthers were on Monday, were a desperate bunch, and the Hurricanes had trouble matching their energy early. Head coach Bill Peters talked on Wednesday about finding a way to become engaged in the game from puck drop, setting the tempo of the game from the get-go. Despite the team scoring first and taking a lead into the second period, the Flyers were the better club early.

"They were doing everything they could to get that win. I think we weren't quite there," Aho said. "We didn't have the same level."

[Scott Darling](#) was a big reason why the Hurricanes took a 2-1 lead to the locker room after 20 minutes. He was tested early and often and was sharp.

"He kept us in the game. We weren't very good," head coach Bill Peters said. "I thought we got better and more competitive as the game went along, but Darls gave us a chance to build a game."

Two

Twenty-nine.

With one game left to play in the season, Aho is one goal away from scoring 30 in his sophomore season.

Aho scored his 29th goal of the season tonight, reclaiming the lead for the Hurricanes just 14 seconds after the Flyers tied it at one in the first. Aho was circling behind the net when [Valentin Zykov's](#) shot was just off the mark. Aho scooped up the puck and backhanded it in off Brian Elliott's

head, a crafty bounce mixed with just the right amount of luck.

"It was kind of a lucky bounce," Aho said. "I saw a little hole there and tried to make a quick shot. I got lucky."

Three

Three goals were scored in the first 20 minutes of the game, but if you got up to get a snack, you might have missed all three, which were scored in a 67-second span.

It was [Klas Dahlbeck](#) striking first in a 4-on-4 scenario, beating Brian Elliott with a simple wrist shot for his first goal of the season.

"It's not something I've been thinking about too much, but it's always fun to score a goal," Dahlbeck said. "It's very frustrating that we seem to let up in the third periods and can't win games."

"It's a reward for staying with it and being a good pro," Peters said. "He's got a heavy, hard shot."

Then, Michael Raffl banged in a loose puck at the top of the crease to tie the game at one. Just 14 seconds later, it was Aho putting the Canes back on top, 2-1.

Four

Typically, it's the Hurricanes limiting their opponents' shot total. Tonight, it was the opposite, as the Canes managed just 22 shots on goal, one more than the fewest they've recorded in a single game this season.

And that, according to the locker room, was more about what the Canes were unable to do than what the Flyers did.

"I didn't think we moved the puck all that well, especially early," Peters said. "We made it hard on ourselves."

"I think they spent a lot of time in our zone," Dahlbeck said. "I think they had a good forecheck, and we had a hard time breaking out of it."

"We didn't defense well today, and if you don't defense well, you don't get opportunities to score goals at the other end," Aho said. "That was the problem today."

Five

This season will be dissected more and ultimately put to rest next week, a bitterly disappointing end to an 82-game campaign that once held so much promise and hope. Before that is game 82, a chance for the Hurricanes to end on as



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much of a positive note as there can be given the circumstances.

"We've got to do it right," Aho said. "In the last game, we want to play well and do it right, the way we want to do it."

"We've got to really come together as a group and finish this off," Dahlbeck said. "Tonight is not the way we play to our identity. Everybody in this room knows we can do a lot

better, even though they are in a playoff hunt and we're not. We're a better team than we showed tonight."

Up Next

It's curtains on the 2017-18 regular season when the Hurricanes host the Tampa Bay Lightning on Saturday.



Recap and Ranker: Hurricanes Fall to the Flyers 4-3

The Hurricanes looked uninspired in a loss tonight on Broad Street.

By [Andrew Ahr@andrew_ahr](#) Updated Apr 5, 2018, 10:25pm EDT

PHILADELPHIA — While meaningless April games have become the status quo in Raleigh, the [Philadelphia Flyers](#) are having a much more exciting month. They needed a win tonight to keep pace with the last Wild Card spot. They played like a team hungry for a playoff berth, and their desperation was rewarded as they took down the [Carolina Hurricanes](#) by a score of 4-3.

The first period opened up fairly uneventful until around 14 minutes in, when [Derek Ryan](#) streaked up the boards into the offensive zone and curled up, finding Jeff Skinner at the top of the opposing circle. Skinner left it for Klas Dahlbeck who made no mistake in scoring his first goal of the season.

The Flyers would answer almost immediately, though, earning a two-on-one against [Noah Hanifin](#) as Trevor van Riemsdyk pinched at the blue line. He got back, but a defensive breakdown left van Riemsdyk screening Scott Darling as Michael Raffl put it away from the center of the slot to tie the game.

[Sebastian Aho](#) reclaimed the lead just 14 seconds later with a beauty. Teuvo Teravainen stickhandled his way to the face-off dot and found [Jacob Slavin](#) in the slot. Slavin quickly moved it to [Aho](#) just behind the net, who came around the other side and put a backhand past Brian Elliott.

The second period started fast and the Flyers seemed to be out-skating the Canes. Jori Lehtera missed a large hole on Scott Darling's stick side sitting right on the doorstep about six minutes into the second.

A few minutes later a scrum developed at the blue line next to the Canes bench and Jeff Skinner somehow ended up receiving an interference call from the bench. Brandon Manning was assessed a slashing as well. Manning was looking for someone to go with, even throwing down the

gauntlet to Flyers Hall of Famer and Canes assistant coach Rod Brind'Amour at one point:

The Canes took advantage of four-on-four hockey generating a lot of zone time and some shots but couldn't get one where it counts.

The second saw a good amount of energy from both sides and some tempers flying, but no Canes goals. With five minutes remaining in the period, Sean Couturier held the puck along the half boards and found [Ivan Provorov](#) streaking to the slot with a great pass. Darling was beaten to his stick side as [Provorov](#) scored his 16th goal and 40th point in a breakout season for the young defenseman.

The Canes came into the third period tied on the scoreboard but with only 13 shots to Philadelphia's 28. The Canes didn't even record a shot on goal until the 13 minute mark.

Just over 10 minutes into the third, Sean Couturier moved the puck into the zone creatively and found Claude Giroux floating in the high slot. Giroux had an open look at Darling and buried a sharp wrist shot to the glove side low to make it 3-2 Flyers as the building erupted.

The captain secured his 31st goal of the season, a new career high for him. He received a huge standing ovation from the Philadelphia fans in the following commercial break.

The Canes tied it up three minutes later when Jordan Staal carried the puck down into the corner and threw it at the front of the net. Brian Elliott made a big mental error and let the puck right through his legs in a goal he will really want back.

But Jakub Voracek quickly found the net to reclaim the lead with just under six minutes to play. He snapped a wrist shot from just under the faceoff dot to beat Darling on the short side glove high to make it 4-3.

The Canes pulled Darling following a timeout with a minute to go but it amounted to nothing. The Flyers took the last game of the season series by a score of 4-3.

Quotes

Bill Peters:



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"We started with the lead and it was 3-3 with half a period to go so the game's right there hanging in the balance. And they scored the winner on a shift right after a TV timeout, I think it was the last timeout, it was a two-on-two. I didn't think we moved the puck all that well, especially early. We made it hard on ourselves."

On Dahlbeck scoring his first of the season:

"It's a reward for staying with it and being a good pro. He's got a heavy shot, he's got a hard shot and he scores a lot in practice. It's a four-on-four situation and he typically wouldn't be out there if we were 100% healthy and it's good to see him take advantage of the opportunity."

Game Notes

- The Hurricanes end an ugly season series against the Flyers with a loss to bring them to 1-2-1 on the

year against the Metropolitan Division opponents. Tonight was a high energy game for Philadelphia as they creep closer to securing a playoff berth.

- We've said it before, but the team seemed very complacent with their fate at this point. The players and coaches alike seemed lifeless and defeated.
- To my previous point, Hurricanes put just 22 shots on Brian Elliott tonight. They've only tallied less than that once and it was in October against Edmonton. When told the shot totals, Bill Peters just shook his head in disapproval.
- The Canes are off tomorrow and will skate at 10 AM on Saturday in preparation for their last game of the season.



Flyers close in on playoff berth with win against Hurricanes

Voracek scores go-ahead goal with 5:45 remaining

by Adam Kimelman [@NHLAdamK](#) / NHL.com Deputy Managing Editor

12:06 AM

PHILADELPHIA -- The Philadelphia Flyers moved closer to a berth in the Stanley Cup Playoffs with a 4-3 win against the Carolina Hurricanes at Wells Fargo Center on Thursday.

The Flyers (41-26-14), who hold the second wild card into the playoffs from the Eastern Conference, would have clinched with a win and a Florida Panthers loss, but Florida defeated the Boston Bruins 3-2.

Philadelphia can qualify for the postseason with one point in its final game of the regular season, at home against the New York Rangers on Saturday.

"We had a lot of ups and downs this year, but we never gave up," said forward [Jakub Voracek](#), who scored the game-winner with 5:45 remaining in the third period. "I don't think anybody expected us to get into the playoffs after [a 10-game losing streak in November], but we battled back. It's in our hands for Saturday. It's a great thing."

Voracek won it with a shot off the rush from the right side that went over Darling's left shoulder.

"I didn't see it go in, to be honest," Voracek said. "Just tried to get it at the net."

[Michael Raffl](#), [Ivan Provorov](#) and [Claude Giroux](#) scored, and [Sean Couturier](#) and [Shayne Gostisbehere](#) each had two assists for Philadelphia. [Brian Elliott](#) made 19 saves in his first game since Feb. 10.

"It's almost like opening night jitters again, get back into it," said Elliott, who had core muscle surgery Feb. 13. "After the first period, I felt like I settled in there a little bit. ... It's always tough coming back. It's always hard to replicate a game in practice. You do things, you're out of breath more than in practice. It's awesome to get a win out of it."

[Klas Dahlbeck](#), [Sebastian Aho](#) and [Jordan Staal](#) scored, and [Scott Darling](#) made 30 saves for Carolina (35-35-11).

"They were doing everything to get that win," Aho said. "I think we weren't quite there. We didn't have the same level."

The Flyers took a 3-2 lead on Giroux's goal at 10:18 of the third. He has 15 points (five goals, 10 assists) during a nine-game point streak and moved into a tie with [Nikita Kucherov](#) of the Tampa Bay Lightning for second in the NHL with 98 points (31 goals, 67 assists), eight behind [Connor McDavid](#) of the Edmonton Oilers. Fans were chanting "M-V-P," but Giroux said he didn't hear it.



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"I think everyone is doing their job, everybody is doing what they're best at," Giroux said. "When everybody does that, we get wins. We're all on the same page here, guys want to play for each other. As nerve-wracking as the game was tonight, we had a great time doing it."

Staal tied the game 3-3 when his shot from a sharp angle found space between Elliott's right pad and the post at 13:41 of the third.

But the Hurricanes had three shots on goal during the final 6:19.

"I don't think we moved the puck all that well, especially early," Carolina coach Bill Peters said. "We made it hard on ourselves."

Dahlbeck gave the Hurricanes a 1-0 lead at 13:45 of the first period.

Raffl scored on a loose puck in front to tie it 1-1 at 14:38 of the first, but Aho chipped a backhand shot over Elliott's right shoulder at 14:52 to put Carolina ahead 2-1.

Provorov tied it 2-2 at 14:56 of the second period when he jammed a centering pass from Couturier under Darling.

Goal of the game

Voracek's goal at 14:15 of the third period.

Save of the game

Elliott stopping [Jeff Skinner](#) at 12:28 of the third period.

Highlight of the game

Giroux's goal at 10:18 of the third period.

They said it

"Looked slow, looked like we didn't want to be out there. They looked real good out there, and we made them look good. But [goaltender Scott Darling] played good, and we had a chance at the end." -- Hurricanes forward [Elias Lindholm](#)

"This is what you play for all year long. I worked really hard. I rehabbed a lot and tried to get back. Luckily, the guys pulled it out there at the end for me." -- Flyers goaltender [Brian Elliott](#)

Need to know

Hurricanes forward [Derek Ryan](#) had an assist on Dahlbeck's goal to give him eight points (two goals, six assists) during a six-game point streak. ... Before the game, Giroux was presented the Bobby Clarke Award as Flyers MVP, Gostisbehere was awarded the Barry Ashbee Trophy as best defenseman, and Couturier was given the Pelle Lindberg Award for most improved player. ... Gostisbehere has 64 points (13 goals, 51 assists), the most by a Flyers defenseman since Garry Galley had 70 in 1993-94.

What's next

Hurricanes: Host the Tampa Bay Lightning on Saturday (7 p.m. ET; FS-CR, SUN, NHL.TV)

Flyers: Host the New York Rangers on Saturday (3 p.m. ET; NBC, NHL.TV)

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1107705 Carolina Hurricanes

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BY CHIP ALEXANDER

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With maybe a stop in Roanoke.

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1107706 Carolina Hurricanes

Voracek's goal leads Flyers to crucial win over Hurricanes

BY AARON BRACY

Associated Press

April 05, 2018 11:48 PM

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The Flyers dominated the opening 10 minutes, outshooting Carolina 13-3, but couldn't get on the board. The Hurricanes finally struck with 6:15 left in the first when Dahlbeck netted his first goal in his 32nd game of the season and just the sixth in his 169-game career.

Raffl answered 53 seconds later when he banged home a shot in front after Giroux's pass was intercepted by Carolina's Justin Williams but went fortuitously to Raffl in front of the net.

The Hurricanes quickly broke the tie when Aho scored on a backhand from a sharp angle to the right of Elliott 14 seconds after Raffl's tally. The goal was a soft one for Elliott.

Philadelphia scored the only goal in the second period when Provorov finished an excellent pass from Sean Couturier right in front of Darling to tie it at 2. The tying score came after some near misses in the period for Philadelphia, as Jori Lehtera hit the post from close range and Voracek missed a golden opportunity from Darling's doorstep two minutes later.

NOTES: Giroux has five goals and 10 assists during a nine-game point streak. ... Aho extended his team-leading totals to 29 goals and 65 points. ... Couturier and Shayne Gostisbehere each had two assists.

UP NEXT

Hurricanes: Host Tampa Bay on Saturday night to end regular season.

Flyers: Host Rangers on Saturday to finish regular season.

News Observer LOADED: 04.06.2018

1107841 Tampa Bay Lightning

Win vs. Bruins is template Lightning wants to follow

By Roger Mooney | Times Staff Writer

TAMPA — The way the Lightning forechecked. The way it moved the puck out of the defensive zone. The way it did not turn the puck over. The way it forced turnovers. The way it limited scoring chances. The way it created scoring chances.

If you built a template for how the Lightning should play in the postseason, it would look like Tuesday's 4-0 win against the Bruins.

"That's what we've been trying to get across the last couple of months, so it was good to see it," associate coach Rick Bowness said. "It came at the right time. Now it's important that we continue that style of play going into next week."

The Lightning's play was the result of all the defensive work in practice, all the yelling from Bowness and coach Jon Cooper when the drills went awry, all the harping on the little things were meant to weed out the bad habits that seeped into the Lightning's game.

Among those bad habits: It held on to the puck too long, which increased the chance of a turnover. It made the extra pass, and maybe another one after that, which allowed scoring chances to evaporate. Instead of forcing its opponent to scramble to defend the Lightning's speed and skill, it was slowing itself, doing the other team's defensive work for it.

Tuesday, all that went away against the team the Lightning is chasing for the top spot in the Eastern Conference.

"We played a better 200-foot game," Bowness said. "There wasn't nearly as many east-to-west turnovers that just slowed us up and killed our attack. We worked a lot harder for 60 minutes; we stayed with it."

Now the question is can the Lightning keep up this style of play in the postseason?

"I think so," defenseman Dan Girardi said. "I think the other night was a great step, for sure."

It was not as if the Lightning found a new way to play. That blueprint is the one it used to climb to the top of the conference standings this season. It is the Lightning's game.

"When we get into a little bit of trouble is when we start deviating from the game plan and trying to change things up, trying to make plays when they're not there, start turning the puck over," Girardi said.

It does not matter how much talent you have on the ice, Girardi said. If you allow the other team enough odd-man rushes, you are going to give up goals. That was not an issue against the Bruins because each Lightning player followed the game plan.

"I think that was a pretty complete game for us from top to bottom," Girardi said. "Everyone was pulling in the same direction, nobody going off on their own page. (It was) everyone playing together for 60 (minutes), and you see what we can do."

"We did what we wanted to do," forward Tyler Johnson said. "That's how we have to play in the playoffs to succeed."

The Lightning begins regular-season-ending back-to-back games Thursday against the Sabres and Saturday at Carolina, teams not going to the playoffs. Tampa Bay's postseason seeding depends as much on how it plays in those games as it does on how the Bruins fare in their final three, which began Thursday against the Panthers.

Girardi said the Lightning has to play against the Sabres and Hurricanes the same way it did against the Bruins.

"It doesn't matter where they are in the standings. We need to play the same way against everyone," he said. "I think that's where we get into trouble the last month or two, getting up for the big games, then letting down in the other ones."



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"We're up and down. We're not playing the same way the whole time. As long as we can follow that effort up from Boston, we're going in the right direction, for sure."

Slap shots: Bowness said the status of Steven Stamkos (lower body) had not changed Thursday. He was still listed as day-to-day, which meant he might play in one of the two remaining regular-season games or he might rest until the playoffs begin next week. ... Bowness said decisions on whether to rest other key players in the final two games would be based on what the Bruins did Thursday against the Panthers.

Tampa Bay Times LOADED: 04.06.2018

1107842 Tampa Bay Lightning

Bruins fall to Panthers, stay tied with Lightning for first in division

By Times Staff Writer Published: April 6, 2018

SUNRISE — Jared McCann scored with 5:37 left and Roberto Luongo got the win in his 1,000th career game, helping the Panthers stay in contention for the playoffs with a 3-2 victory over the Bruins on Thursday.

The loss means Boston remains tied with the Lightning for the lead in the Atlantic Division and No. 1 in the Eastern Conference with 110 points. Each team has two games left. The Lightning owns the first tiebreak, regulation and overtime wins (47 to 46).

The Panthers trail the Flyers by four points for the second wild-card spot in the Eastern Conference, the only playoff spot left in the East with the Devils and Blue Jackets clinching Thursday. Florida has two games left, Philadelphia one. Florida needs to win both games and have the Flyers lose to the Rangers in regulation Saturday.

Luongo, 39, became the third goalie to reach 1,000 games, joining Hall of Famers Martin Brodeur (1,266) and Patrick Roy (1,029). He is the 322nd player overall to reach the milestone.

"I thought this was our best game of the year," Luongo said. "The boys played phenomenal in front of me."

Preds clinch West: Craig Smith scored twice and Ryan Johansen had the go-ahead goal late in the third period to help the Predators beat the host Capitals 4-3 and clinch the top seed in the Western Conference and the Presidents' Trophy for having the league's best record. Nashville also clinched the Central Division title.

Devils back in: The Devils, the worst team in the East last season, ended a five-year postseason drought with a 2-1 victory over the visiting Maple Leafs.

Jackets get a berth: The Blue Jackets clinched a playoff spot for the second consecutive season by gaining a point in a 5-4 overtime loss to the visiting Penguins. Phil Kessel scored 1:06 into overtime to give the Penguins a 4-0 season sweep of the Blue Jackets. The teams could meet in the first round of the playoffs.

Around the league: Jakub Voracek scored with 5:45 left in the third period to lift the playoff-chasing Flyers over the visiting Hurricanes 4-3.

Tampa Bay Times LOADED: 04.06.2018

1107877 Websites

The Athletic / Custance: What it's like doing radio hockey color commentary (hint: exhausting)

By Craig Custance Apr 5, 2018

At first, it sounded like a joke. Rob Simpson, a hockey TV and radio media veteran, sent a text asking if I had any interest in doing color commentary during a radio broadcast of a Red Wings game.

Simpson, unlike myself, is an absolute pro on the airwaves. He has a daily radio show talking hockey on Sirius/XM. He's been doing play-by-play for years, with thousands of hours of experience. I write words for a living.

He was looking to work on his craft, update some tapes he was sending out and needed someone to pitch in as a color commentator.

"Wouldn't hurt," he urged via text. "You never know down the line in the NHL or college hockey when you might be called upon."

No, I do know.

The best color analysts are typically those who have played the game. It's John Davidson, the best ever. Or Eddie Olczyk breaking down a replay before we even see it. Or Ray Ferraro with his rare mix of raw honesty and humor.

"I have no idea what I'm doing," I texted back.

"Pretend you're sitting at home drinking a beer making the usual comments, only slightly more thoughtful," he responded.

Well, when you put it that way. Plus, there was no pressure. This wasn't a live broadcast, despite all the equipment. This was a tape being sent to NHL teams. If he was willing to risk me sabotaging his hard work, I was willing to give it a shot.

"Just be prepared for me to ruin the tape," I warned.

Then, I kind of forgot about it. Other stuff popped up. Other stories emerged. I'm pretty easily distracted.

Then, suddenly, the Rangers were in town. This was the game we were broadcasting and I was showing up with little-to-no preparation.

Thankfully, the media room at Little Caesars Arena before a game is a beautiful thing. There is ample space for everyone to hang out and get ready for the game. If you need a minute with Detroit GM Ken Holland, he sits in the corner near the cash register where you pay for food. If you want to grab somebody from the local television production crew, they tend to eat closer to the back. Scouts and opposing executives usually hang out in the middle.

If you're looking for advice on anything, there are a ton of options.

With my radio debut now ticking down by the minute, I was cramming for the exam and looking for someone to guide the way. Ken Daniels, the Red Wings television analyst, was wrapping up a meal and kind enough to help.

He shared his quick thoughts: Get in and out with the analysis. But more importantly, when the attacking team is in the offensive zone, keep your mouth shut in case there's a goal. Nothing worse than talking over a goal call. This would turn out to be important advice.

Then, he added this: "Preparation is everything. Make sure you overprepare," he said, before excusing himself to join Mickey Redmond to get ready for the upcoming telecast.

It was too late for that. But overzealous preparation was advice heard often when I circled back to talk to people about their first experience doing radio.

As a kid with dreams of broadcasting, NBC's Mike "Doc" Emrick would carry a tape recorder into Memorial Coliseum in Fort Wayne, Ind., find an empty section and call games into his recorder. By the time he first had an opportunity with a real audience at Bowling Green, he'd had plenty of experience.



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"This was a chance to make good on all those fake games in Fort Wayne," Emrick told The Athletic of his debut.

He was fairly comfortable doing play-by-play but he also alternated in shifts as a color analyst, which didn't flow quite as naturally. The best in the game don't tell us what happened, they explain why and what the players were thinking. That's not an easy task in the moment.

"I didn't do any of that. I was giving the time of the score and, 'Wasn't that a good shot?' And all that. I was doing dumb stuff," Emrick said. "I didn't know any better."

Through the years, Emrick saw up close what it took to be great as a color analyst and it came down to exactly what Daniels said — preparation.

When he was partners with Bill Clement, the two would do their own version of training camp before the season, honing their craft in front of a camera at Clement's house. It was something Emrick had never done before.

"We would practice interviewing and practice various things that we had to do. We would practice our opens," Emrick said. "It was his idea and it was a great idea. We would just take one whole afternoon, go up to his house and he had a video camera set up and we had training camp."

He also watched how John Davidson worked. Davidson is now the Columbus Blue Jackets team president but previously was one of the best to ever analyze a game on television. To understand what a player is thinking and share those thoughts live on the air, it helps to have that knowledge ready to go. On the day of broadcasts, Emrick would see Davidson working the hallways of the arena, talking to players and coaches. There were no cameras, no recorders, no notepads. Just insight being shared back and forth.

"He would duck around the corner and write feverishly after he got information," Emrick said.

It's what made Davidson one of the best.

"I thought he was just fabulous. He was my favorite," Ferraro said of Davidson. "He's been as good as anybody in the last 30 years. His enthusiasm, his love of the game — and he's a people guy."

Then there's Olczyk. He's the guy who can break down a play with minute details without seeing a replay. Emrick believes it's because of a photographic memory.

Like, for real.

"I think he does. I always tell him, 'Pat Foley says you have a photographic memory. If that's true, why do you have to buy a racing form?'" Emrick said, with a laugh.

Those are the guys I think of when doing color. That's what I'm up against while putting on a headset, standing next to the (very tall) Rob Simpson as he describes the action with the Red Wings and Rangers taking the ice.

Simpson dives right in.

"We have the Red Wings in their home red traveling right to left down the ice and across your imagination here in the first period, their goal defended by Jimmy Howard..."

Rob Simpson (right) and I during the action at Little Caesars Arena. If it looks like I'm about to pass out, it's because I was. Calling a game is surprisingly mentally taxing. I was completely gassed by the second period. (Rob Simpson/Special to The Athletic)

Simpson is such a pro. It's like he's been doing it a million years because he has. At this point, I'm just praying there aren't any whistles because I'd rather just let Simpson do all the talking.

Later, talking with others about their first time behind the mic doing color, I discovered I wasn't alone here.

Craig Ludwig is wrapping up his first season doing color with the Dallas Stars, with Daryl Reaugh showing impressive versatility by sliding over to do play-by-play. The self-effacing Ludwig said he's still searching for a comfort zone.

"Every night seems like my first time ever," he joked.

He's learned a few lessons along the way. Like, when he has the producer in one ear talking and Reaugh in the other and he doesn't quite hear the question he's being asked, he speaks in generalities. He's also learned never to answer a question from Reaugh with another question right back, which he did once when he was drawing a blank on the air.

"The next day, guys were like, 'What are you doing?'" Ludwig said, laughing.

And then there's knowing when to jump in. Sometimes Reaugh is so impressive with his big words and smart analysis that Ludwig just sits back for a listen.

"You have to get a rhythm. (At first, I didn't know when he'd stop and I'd start," Ludwig said. "Once, it was going on and on and it was a short break. There was nothing to talk about. At the end of the period, he takes his headset off and goes, 'You can jump in anytime you like!'"

The first time Ferraro did color, he was working for ESPN doing studio work as an active player. An ESPN exec told him he needed to be in Dallas to fill in as a color analyst, something he'd never done before. He agreed, then got on the phone with Darren Pang. Here's how Ferraro remembers that conversation:

"Hey, Panger, what do I do?"

"Who are you working with?"

"Dave Strader."

"Oh, you'll be fine."

Strader was one of the best. He also had a great sense of humor.

"The puck drops and for three minutes the puck goes up and down the ice," Ferraro said, telling the story. "I don't say a word. I don't know when to jump in. Dave always joked that he made a critical mistake in my career that he asked me a question and I haven't shut up since."

Simpson was good in the same way. Because he's a pro, he prompted a response with questions he knew I could answer. That helped. So did the nerves going away. By the second period, it was mostly just a conversation between a couple friends.

By the third period, I was exhausted.

What you don't realize is how much closer you have to watch the game when you're weighing in at any given moment. You're frantically searching for insight. When writing about the game, you're messing around on Twitter or chatting with the reporter next to you.

Doing radio is intense. The plus side is you have more of a feel for who is playing well and who isn't because you have to constantly make observations. You're watching much closer. I found staying focused and maintaining energy a real challenge, and Simpson noticed.

During the second intermission, he encouraged me not to trail off in my thoughts. To finish strong. And maintain the energy I started the game with. It was a good pep talk, like a coach during intermission.

By the time it was over, I was toast. It was a blast, but certainly more intense than a beer with a friend. At that point, that was exactly what I needed.

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1107878 Websites



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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The Athletic / Duhatschek: Drew Doughty is still hungry for another Norris Trophy and another Stanley Cup

By Eric Duhatschek Apr 5, 2018

There is a part of you that would think Drew Doughty would be hard to overlook, even if he plays in Los Angeles, for the Kings, a middle-of-the-pack NHL team that did manage to win two Stanley Cups in the past six years, with him as a core piece. For starters, Doughty leads the NHL in minutes played. Currently, he is at 26:49 per night. He has indefatigable stamina. In a game where quality of play frequently drops off, if a player gets overplayed, Doughty never seems to run out of gas. Secondly, while Doughty provides a respectable level of offence – 59 points in 80 games, heading into Thursday's next-to-last regular season game against the Minnesota Wild, he is acutely conscious of the fact that the position he plays is defence. So, for example, among all the other top players on defence, he has logged over 215 minutes playing shorthanded, most on a team that also happens to be the best penalty-killing team in the league.

Annually, the Norris trophy is awarded to the player "who demonstrates through the season the greatest all-around ability in the position." Doughty won the Norris in 2016, largely because voters took the definition of the award precisely to heart, but in a lot of years, it tends to go to the defenceman who also produces the most offence. This, by the way, cannot be entirely dismissed as a part of the voting criteria, not the way the NHL game has evolved. 'Stay-at-home defenceman' has become a quaint but dated hockey term, conjuring up images of the hack-and-whack era. Nowadays, so much of a team's offence starts with a defensive-zone breakout and if you can't handle the puck and move the puck, you're a relic.

But Doughty can play on both sides of the puck, and has matched his career scoring high, established back in 2009-10. That was his second NHL season, which is when he made Canada's 2010 Olympic team just after his 20th birthday. Some were surprised that Doughty was included and surprised even further when he emerged two months later as one of Mike Babcock's go-to-guys on the blueline, ahead of more experienced players. Babcock was and presumably still is a big fan, same as the man who picked him for the team, Steve Yzerman, the general manager of the Tampa Bay Lightning. Doughty's primary challenger for the 2018 Norris is the Lightning's Victor Hedman, and there is a strong case to be made for Hedman's candidacy, too. He is also a big minute muncher, kills penalties (though not as efficiently as Doughty) and was arguably the most important player this year for a team that led the overall NHL standings for the better part of the year.

It will be interesting to see how that unfolds and if voters are swayed by the notion that this generation of defencemen has so many great players that it might be Hedman's turn, since Doughty and PK Subban have already won the Norris at least once. Doughty will freely admit that he'd like to win the Norris Trophy again this season, but he isn't about to change the way he plays to enhance his candidacy.

"I'm not starting the season, thinking 'oh I got to get the most points I can, so I can win the Norris,'" Doughty said in an interview with The Athletic. "I'm starting the season, thinking, 'I've got to get my defensive game even better, because that's where my team needs me the most – to lead the charge in that area. It's a team game and it's about winning championships."

The Kings qualified for the playoffs Wednesday night when the Chicago Blackhawks defeated the St. Louis Blues 4-3. This was helpful and weirdly ironic because in the six years between 2010 and 2015, the Blackhawks were the Kings' greatest rivals. Chicago won three championships – 2010, 2013 and 2015, while the Kings won in 2012 and 2014. Los Angeles lost the conference final to Chicago in 2013, as the Kings were trying to defend the Stanley Cup; and then the Blackhawks lost the conference final to L.A. in 2014, while they were trying to defend

theirs. The Blackhawks will be no factor in this year's playoffs and their championship window may already have closed.

Not so in L.A., where the Kings are in a tightly bunched division and getting a Norris Trophy-caliber season from Doughty, a Hart Trophy-caliber season from centre Anze Kopitar and a Jennings Trophy-caliber season from goaltender Jonathan Quick. The engines of their championship teams are revving and Doughty is acutely aware that the years they won the Stanley Cup were eerily similar to this. They had 95 regular-season points in their 2012 championship season and 100 regular-season points in their 2014 championship season. One year, they finished eighth overall in the conference; the other year they finished sixth. In neither season did they have the home-ice advantage much – and they didn't really need it.

"Obviously, throughout the season, we didn't show we were one of the top teams in the league," said Doughty. "We're barely in the playoffs here. But once you get into the playoffs, it's a whole new story.

"I'm the biggest believer in the fact that defence wins championships and I'll say that until the day I die. We all take so much pride in that. The way our team is built and the way our team plays defence and the pride that every single player takes in playing defence, I do think we have a chance, just solely because of that. We have one of the best goalies in the world. If he gets hot, no one's going to be able to score on him.

"In the playoffs, you just never know what can happen. I definitely think we have a shot. I'm not going to go out there and say we have the best shot but there's no doubt in my mind that we can make a deep run and hopefully get to the final."

There is one major change from the Kings' championship formula. After missing the playoffs twice and exiting in the first round once in the past three years, the Kings replaced Darryl Sutter behind the bench with his long-time associate coach John Stevens. According to Doughty, the biggest single difference between the two regimes is that the Kings now play faster with the puck.

"That was one of the things he implemented into the system, which we've done a good job with," Doughty said. "With winning, some fun comes along with that too. With a new coaching staff (Dave Lowry, Don Nachbaur, Pierre Turgeon), they're good at teaching, but they know how to teach and have fun at the same time, and then get down to business when we need to. That's been the biggest difference."

Doughty has a kind of natural charisma and doesn't mind blurting out what's on his mind. Earlier this season, for example, he told The Athletic's Craig Custance that when his contract expired, he would ponder options and set in motion wild speculation that he might actually be interested in moving once his contract expires at the end of next year. Most people in L.A. dismissed this as Drew being Drew. Of course, his remarks ignited a firestorm in Ottawa where his Newport Sports stablemate Erik Karlsson echoed Doughty's statements – and that became a cause celebre mostly Karlsson plays in Canada and Doughty in California, where every single syllable uttered isn't scrutinized every single day.

My own feeling is that Doughty will end up staying in L.A. just for that reason. He has a good set-up there. He can play on a good team in a relatively anonymous market and win his share of hardware – team and individual – without having to deal with the intrusive Fourth Estate every single day. But he does love to come back to Canada in the summer – dividing time between London, Ont., his hometown, and his cottage, 45 minutes away. Doughty's attractiveness to the Toronto Maple Leafs would be immense, but the fit probably just isn't there.

As for the minutes he plays, Doughty says it helps – rather than hinders him – eating up all that ice time, which will probably only rise going forward, considering the injuries on the Kings' blueline to Jake Muzzin and Derek Forbort, his two most consistent partners.

"Everyone wants to play as much as they can – and I struggle when I don't play those minutes because I'm so used to being out there and I



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want to be out there all the time,” he said. “You work really hard in the summer to get in shape and then use training camp to get into better shape. I’m just used to it. As a player, one of my best attributes is my hockey sense, so I’m able to not put forth as much energy at certain times because I’m good positionally. It’s not hard to deal with.”

Is the motivation to succeed higher now, considering how the last three seasons ended, given that the Kings’ core group is still in place?

“For sure,” Doughty said. “Obviously, we’re getting older, but we’re all kind of in our primes right now. Those guys we’ve been talking about – Quick and Kopi – have really stepped up their games this year and led the charge and helped bring some of the young guys along, and they’ve done a good job too. We’re definitely trying to make a push, but we’re pushing for it every year. It’s not like we’re thinking, ‘oh, we’re getting older, we need to make a push before we get too old.’ We’re always trying to push to win every single season.

“But definitely, you can see a different kind of confidence in this group.”

This is Doughty’s 10th NHL season already, after being the second player chosen behind Steven Stamkos in the 2008 entry draft. He must wonder sometimes, where did the time go?

“It’s absolutely insane,” Doughty said. “I’m 28 now but I don’t feel that old. Time has flown. I hope to play another 10 years, but you never know what can happen. It makes me sad to think of the day it’s going to end – and it’s sad to think I’m already thinking of that every once in a while because I don’t want it to end. I’m loving absolutely everything about it. I love the game of hockey. I love being around the guys and the organization. I don’t know what I’d do without it.”

The Athletic LOADED: 04.06.2018

1107879 Websites

The Athletic / Powers: John McDonough’s decision to retain Stan Bowman, Joel Quenneville shouldn’t come as a surprise

By Scott Powers Apr 5, 2018

Undoubtedly Blackhawks fans will be split on president John McDonough’s announcement Thursday to retain general manager Stan Bowman and coach Joel Quenneville after this season.

Some fans wanted both gone. Some wanted Bowman gone. Some wanted Quenneville gone. Some believed both deserved more time.

McDonough went with that fourth option, and no one should be surprised.

McDonough is a loyal person who is extremely proud of the continuity he and chairman Rocky Wirtz have created throughout the organization over the past decade. They’ve won three Stanley Cups under the same owner, president, general manager and coach, among many, many others. That’s important to McDonough.

And for those who are angry about McDonough’s decision, the reality is three Stanley Cups buys you more time. It just does.

That said, there is an expiration to that time. There has to be, and McDonough understands that. You can’t be upset about the results over and over again without doing anything substantial about it. This is the third consecutive season the Blackhawks failed to reach their “One Goal,” and they’ve never been this far away from that goal since McDonough came onboard.

While some of the Blackhawks’ misfortunes this season can be placed on Corey Crawford’s unexpected absence since late December, this wasn’t a Stanley Cup-contending team even when he was on the ice. Even if he

returns to the old Crawford next season — the Blackhawks are optimistic he will — changes need to be made if they’re truly going to turn this around.

Bowman has made mistakes in recent years in reshaping the Blackhawks’ roster after their 2015 Stanley Cup. Some of those mistakes were understandable, some not. What matters now is that Bowman gets his next steps right.

Quenneville can be handed some criticism over the power play’s struggles, his impatience with lines and pairings and some parts of his system, including restricting his defensemen’s freedom to carry the puck and make plays out of the defensive zone. But ultimately whether the Blackhawks get back to winning games, making the playoffs and contending for more Cups will depend on the personnel Bowman puts on the ice.

Bowman has shifted his focus to making the Blackhawks a younger team, and it is the correct approach even if it came a few years late. For so long the Blackhawks had been about winning now, and they failed to look ahead.

You can’t blame them entirely for that approach, but it eventually comes back to bite you, especially if the moves don’t lead to immediate success. Not all of Bowman’s did, and the Blackhawks began to feel that the past few years as the prospect pipeline failed to produce players that could help the NHL club and reduce the responsibilities of the team’s core.

That was especially seen in the defense in recent years. Duncan Keith and Brent Seabrook shouldn’t be carrying as much weight as they are now. While the Blackhawks have found solid NHL defensemen through other avenues, including trades, free agency and overseas, what they’ve brought in mostly hasn’t been top-4 defenseman talent. The Blackhawks addressed that in this past draft by selecting Henri Jokiharju and Ian Mitchell with their first two picks, but they will need some time before they arrive.

The Blackhawks will have some cap space to address that issue this offseason, and it has to be a priority for them. They can’t go into next season believing this same defenseman group will provide different results. Sure, some of the defensemen could improve, but some will likely decline. It’s not a young group.

It’s not unfathomable to think the Blackhawks could turn this around in a year’s time. As poorly as this season went, they’re not that far off from being a strong team.

Crawford’s return is, of course, essential, and the Blackhawks need to upgrade the defense. But the forward group is where the Blackhawks have to be immensely optimistic. There’s a lot of skill, youth and potential among their forwards. If Brandon Saad can regain his touch, Patrick Kane and Jonathan Toews can sustain their play and all of the young forwards like Alex DeBrincat, Nick Schmaltz, Vinnie Hinostroza, Anthony Duclair and Dylan Sikura, among others, can make strides, the Blackhawks should score a lot of goals next season.

Up until Thursday, McDonough had stayed quiet on the future of his GM and coach, and his silence created speculation. On Thursday, he announced the direction the Blackhawks are going after this season.

That direction is the old direction of Bowman and Quenneville. Now it’s up to Bowman and Quenneville to take the Blackhawks in a new direction.

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1107880 Websites

The Athletic / John Tavares provides few hints at his future before what could be his last Islanders home game



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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By Arthur Staple Apr 4, 2018

EAST MEADOW, N.Y. — John Tavares doesn't know how he'll react if the Barclays Center fans give him a long ovation. Thursday night could be the final home game for Tavares in an Islanders uniform, the penultimate game of yet another losing season as the Isles captain enters the home stretch of his year of decision to either stay with the Isles or head elsewhere in free agency.

"I don't want to signal it as the end," he told reporters after Wednesday's practice. "I'm not approaching it that way."

Tavares has betrayed no inkling of what he may do once the season ends Saturday, saying he hasn't decided yet if he's going to sit down with ownership or GM Garth Snow in the coming days to either say he's staying or say he's definitely leaving and the Isles should consider either trading his rights or a complicated sign-and-trade. The third option, that Tavares will conduct his exit meetings Sunday and Monday with the front office and head home without any sort of decision while the offseason unfolds and the tension mounts, still seems like the most likely path.

He said the contract situation did not make this season tougher. "I would just say being where we are makes it tough," he said. "Missing the playoffs makes it tough. It sucks. We're going to be watching again. It's another missed opportunity."

But Doug Weight acknowledged that there was plenty of concern around Tavares after his camp informed owners Scott Malkin and Jon Ledecky last April that Tavares would play out the final year of his deal.

"I had a feeling it was going to be tougher than we all talked about but that's not the time to bring that up," Weight said. "It's life. Guys play and earn a right to do it and we're all dealing with it... But as far as what he said he was going to do and how he was going to handle it, he's done that. That's why I was so confident about it, because I knew he was going to do what he said."

Tavares enters these final two games of the season with 83 points, needing four to set a new career high. When he posted 86 points in 2014-15, he was a Hart Trophy candidate for a team that finished with 101 points. Now, his 83 points still leads the Islanders, but no one is talking about his impact.

"I see the same impact, but it's a different league even from three years ago," Weight said. "Having guys on our team with the seasons they've had pulls the focus away from him a little bit. He's got 36 goals, Anders (Lee) getting 39, (Josh Bailey) getting to 70 points, (Mathew) Barzal with what he's done, even (Anthony Beauvillier) getting 20 goals — there's a lot of stuff to talk about."

"Around the league, you see the same. Connor (McDavid), (Nikita) Kucherov, (Anze) Kopitar coming back, the 3-4 months (Evgeni) Malkin put together. Guys are doing some things, it's just a deeper look to the league. What they want to talk about with John is his contract. It's a credit to him. Guys like Sid (Crosby), John, you know what you're going to get with them. It's expected he's going to be over 30 goals and 75 points; he's at 36 and 83. It's due to all those things. I don't think it's his season hasn't been as good. It's the depth of our scoring and the depth around the league."

And even with the personal numbers, Tavares and his Islanders have been the league's worst team since the All-Star break. He wouldn't share his views on that but he's surely as bewildered as everyone in the Islanders room as to how they got where they are.

"It's a fair question," he said. "You start to think about that once the season's over. For now you stay in the day-to-day frame of mind. I know at least me personally, from the first day of training camp it's one day at a time. Obviously we know our fate but you don't want to change your mindset going game in and game out. Once the season's over, you take some time to not think about hockey for a few days, a week or two, then

you revisit it and it gives you a chance to reflect and get a better sense of why things ended up the way they did."

Tavares took some precautions to avoid the mess of speculation he's created by choosing to wait. "My Twitter app isn't on my phone anymore so I don't read that at all," he said. "I don't really try to read into so much day to day, different points of the season. When you're watching highlights on TV you see some things, but that's nothing new for me. I definitely don't go out there searching for it."

And of the fans, friends and neighbors on Long Island who have likely beseeched him to stay — and will likely give him some sort of sendoff on Thursday?

"People have been very supportive, our fan base has been tremendous ever since I got here," he said. "People say certain things. I hope it all works out too and I'm back as well. That's all I can really control right now. In the days and weeks ahead, we'll have plenty of time to think about it and start looking at the future."

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The Athletic / Breaking down Sean Couturier's case for the Selke Trophy

By Charlie O'Connor Apr 5, 2018

There was no hesitation on the part of Philadelphia Flyers general manager Ron Hextall on Monday when he was asked whether his top center deserved to be a frontrunner for the Selke Trophy, given to the forward who demonstrates the most skill in the defensive component of the game.

"To me, [Sean Couturier is] the guy," Hextall bluntly stated. "Am I a little biased? Yes, I probably am, but I do watch other games quite often. He's a horse for us. He's played against top lines every night. He's produced at a high level. His defensive play is phenomenal, and you look at what he's done offensively, and to me, I believe he should win."

In 2017-18, Couturier has delivered a breakout season of epic proportions. Already the team's most effective 5-on-5 player for two years running, Couturier's offensive performance took a leap into elite territory even as he remained the team's "shutdown" center. Alongside Claude Giroux (who is rightfully receiving legitimate consideration for the Hart Trophy), Couturier has established himself as one of the best all-around forwards in hockey.

But he isn't the only NHL forward having a great season, nor the only one finding himself in the midst of Selke conversation. It doesn't take an expert to determine that Couturier deserves to be in the running for the award, but it does require comprehensive comparisons with his competition to truly determine if he should be the frontrunner.

The rules of the game

Before we begin the process of stacking Couturier up against his peers, we need to determine who those peers are, so let's set some ground rules.

To start, the hard truth is that wingers don't receive legitimate consideration for the award anymore (Jere Lehtinen was the last to win it back in 2003), and while I'm sympathetic to the argument that they deserve more consideration, right now it's a wasted vote. Therefore, we'll only discuss centers.

Second, we'll limit the pool to pivots who have the benefit of current momentum or previous Selke reputations. Not only does this leave us with only likely winners, it also gives us a comprehensive group of the



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best all-around candidates, anyway. We in the hockey media do get it right on occasion. We now have the following eight centers to evaluate: Couturier, Patrice Bergeron, Anze Kopitar, Aleksander Barkov, Mikko Koivu, William Karlsson, Jonathan Toews, and Mikael Backlund.

Finally — and this is the most controversial assumption — we'll acknowledge that the Selke Award (in spite of its definition) is no longer given to strictly the "best defensive forward" in hockey. While the definition remains unchanged, it's become clear that the award is now interpreted to mean the best two-way forward in the NHL, a player who combines stellar defense with above-average offensive production. Hextall's above comments blatantly endorse that interpretation, and he's surely not alone in the hockey world. One can absolutely argue that the two interpretations don't conflict — the best defense is a good offense truism, for example — but that possible conflict can't be ignored. Again, this goes back to the winger debate, in that the Selke has seemingly been redefined by the hockey world based upon the voting results of the past decade, and any analysis would be foolish to ignore that fact.

Now that we have our pool of candidates, let's evaluate them based on seven categories, to see if Couturier or any of his competition separates from the pack.

Games/Minutes Played

The Selke isn't a "value" award like the Hart Trophy, so a player is not inherently disqualified if he misses a large portion of the season due to outside factors. However, it is more impressive if a player delivers stellar results over a full 82-game (or close to it) sample rather than missing time. Not only does a full season give the player more opportunities to positively impact the game, more games and minutes add to the difficulty of sustaining Selke-level results. It seems fair to say that a candidate playing fewer games or receiving fewer minutes than his peers needs to be head and shoulders above the competition by results to overcome that black mark on his Selke resume.

In terms of games played and minutes per game this year, three candidates in particular stand out, and one seems to clearly lose ground.

Player	Games Played	Minutes Per Game
Aleksander Barkov	78 (1 missed)	22:08
Anze Kopitar	80 (0 missed)	22:02
Sean Couturier	80 (0 missed)	21:40
Jonathan Toews	74 (5 missed)	19:41
Patrice Bergeron	61 (18 missed)	19:26
Mikael Backlund	80 (0 missed)	19:03
William Karlsson	80 (0 missed)	18:44
Mikko Koivu	79 (0 missed)	18:29

Barkov, Kopitar and Couturier are the clear clubhouse leaders. They've missed only one game between the three of them, and all average in the 22 minutes per night range. None of the other candidates even break 20. The fact that the trio has continued to put up fantastic results by rate stats (as we'll see shortly) is even more impressive accounting for the extra wear and tear of 2-3 additional minutes per game.

The player who takes the biggest hit here is Bergeron. He's won four out of the last six Selkes, and therefore has become something of the "chalk" choice. But 18 missed games is nearly 22 percent of the season, and when he has played, he's averaged substantially lower minutes per game than rivals Barkov, Kopitar and Couturier. This doesn't rule out Bergeron as a candidate, but it does force him to measurably outperform his competition in other areas in order to catch back up. If he's playing less, Bergeron would need to be way better than everyone else in those minutes to truly deserve the award in 2017-18.

Stock Up: Barkov, Kopitar, Couturier

Stock Steady: Toews, Backlund, Karlsson, Koivu

Stock Down: Bergeron

Offensive Production

Now we move to the category that arguably shouldn't be part of consideration, but clearly is: offensive production. Bergeron's 53-point season in 2016-17 was the lowest total from a winner in a non-lockout shortened year since 2004 (when Kris Draper won), but none of the nominees topped 60 points last season. That's not the case this time around.

Player	Total Points	5v5 Points/60	5v5 Primary Points/60
Anze Kopitar	90	2.17	1.69
William Karlsson	77	2.60	1.82
Aleksander Barkov	74	2.15	1.40
Sean Couturier	71	2.00	1.70
Patrice Bergeron	61	2.27	1.76
Jonathan Toews	51	1.64	1.47
Mikael Backlund	43	1.39	1.06
Mikko Koivu	42	1.23	0.76

Kopitar first appears to be the runaway winner, but he gains most of his separation via power play production — the furthest thing from a "two-way" situation. When looking at his rate production at 5-on-5, he's right with his peers.

Karlsson and Barkov benefited substantially from secondary assists at 5-on-5. For Karlsson, that only serves to bring him back to the rest of the pack, but for Barkov, it's a drop out of the top tier entirely, which does take the sheen off his production a bit. Bergeron's numbers are great, but at least in this area, they're not so great as to outweigh the games/minutes played gap. The three players who take the biggest hit here are Toews, Backlund and Koivu.

Stock Up: Kopitar, Karlsson, Couturier, Bergeron

Stock Steady: Barkov

Stock Down: Toews, Backlund, Koivu

5-on-5 Differentials

For believers in advanced metrics, this is where the meat of a player's Selke case originates. There's no better way to measure two-way play than by the outcomes that occur when a player is on the ice at 5-on-5 — if the team is outshooting, outchancing and outscoring the opposition when a certain forward goes over the bench, he's probably doing something right.

That's what metrics like Corsi (on-ice shot attempt differential) and Expected Goals (differential weighted for location and quality) provide — a window into whether a player is truly "driving" positive outcomes when he skates. An above-50% rate in either of these stats implies that the team is winning the territorial battle with him on the ice, and the further over that break-even point the better.

But raw Corsi or xG rates does not account for important context, such as the impact of linemates on results. That's where RelTM comes in. Essentially Relative stats on steroids, RelTM stats evaluate whether all of a player's teammates perform better or worse when skating alongside him. A positive Corsi RelTM, for example, implies that a player is "dragging up" his linemates; a negative one hints that teammates' results get worse when they happen to skate on his line.

Let's start by evaluating the candidates' results by Corsi — raw on-ice shot differential — and then checking their RelTM stats as well to make sure that these Selke hopefuls are truly making their teammates better.



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Player	Corsi For%	Corsi For% RelTM
Sean Couturier	53.54%	+9.40%
Patrice Bergeron	57.42%	+5.67%
William Karlsson	53.59%	+5.13%
Jonathan Toews	55.77%	+3.98%
Mikael Backlund	55.97%	+3.42%
Aleksander Barkov	52.18%	+2.68%
Mikko Koivu	50.91%	+2.14%
Anze Kopitar	52.03%	+1.63%

None of the candidates come off poorly here — we've got the right group of hopefuls. But some do score better than others. Couturier in particular is head and shoulders above the competition in terms of positive impact on his teammates, though Bergeron and Karlsson also grade out well. Kopitar is the biggest surprise, as he brings up the rear in raw play-driving and in his impact on linemates.

The limitation of Corsi is that it assumes each shot is of equal value and quality, so to prevent against overrating a player because he helped his team to create lots of weak shots and failed to prevent quality chances from the opposition, let's take a look at the candidates' respective performances by xG as well.

Player	xG For%	xG For% RelTM
Sean Couturier	54.85%	+10.44%
William Karlsson	54.68%	+9.24%
Mikko Koivu	61.27%	+6.96%
Jonathan Toews	52.75%	+3.89%
Aleksander Barkov	51.85%	+3.89%
Mikael Backlund	52.64%	+2.79%
Anze Kopitar	49.58%	+0.73%
Patrice Bergeron	52.48%	-0.36%

Yet again, Couturier leads the pack, but at least now he has some competition. Karlsson's performance by xG nearly mirrors that of the Flyers' center, and Koivu's raw xG differential is downright astounding at upwards of 60 percent. The shocks come at the bottom of the list — Kopitar again is just middling (and actually drops below 50% by on-ice xG) while play-driving stalwart Bergeron is slightly underwater in his impact on teammates. For someone who needed a pristine resume to make up for his lack of games played in our analysis, he's not off to a great start.

Before we move on, let's do one final check — performance by on-ice goal differential. For some, this is the most important part of Selke analysis, as plus/minus is often cited by writers and TV talking heads alike as justification for consideration. Those in the analytics community generally view it as a useless stat, subject to inherent flaws in construction and also the simple fact that it grades skaters based largely on the performance of the goalie behind them.

For me, I'll use 5v5 Goals For Percentage as a final check when evaluating Selke contenders, but not as the primary tool. Advanced metrics aren't perfect, and if a player is killing it by Corsi and xG but getting buried in goal differential, it at least raises the possibility that the metrics could be missing something about the finer points of his game. So do any of the players in our pool fit that bill?

Player	5v5 Goal Differential RelTM
William Karlsson	+23.74%
Sean Couturier	+15.72%

Patrice Bergeron	+9.58%
Aleksander Barkov	+7.42%
Anze Kopitar	+5.40%
Jonathan Toews	+3.40%
Mikko Koivu	-0.97%
Mikael Backlund	-13.33%

Last year's third- and fourth-place finishers in the Selke race take big hits here, particularly Backlund. He may have simply been done in by bad luck and poor goaltending, but it's hard to give the Selke to a player whose teammates did far better by goal differential away from him versus with him.

Stock Up: Couturier, Karlsson, Barkov

Stock Steady: Toews, Bergeron, Koivu

Stock Down: Kopitar, Backlund

Penalty Differential

Here's a straightforward yet oft-underrated category. A major part of stellar two-way play is avoiding needless penalties that can come back to bite one's team. Truly great defensive players can frustrate the opposition without resorting to illegality, which risks putting their teams at major disadvantages.

Penalties are going to happen occasionally, and that's why drawing them to counterbalance the inevitable mistakes is essential as well. A player with a strong overall differential is one who can be relied upon in all situations, and provides under-the-radar value to his team.

Player	Penalty Differential
Aleksander Barkov	+13
Sean Couturier	+10
William Karlsson	+9
Anze Kopitar	+4
Patrice Bergeron	-7
Jonathan Toews	-11
Mikko Koivu	-16
Mikael Backlund	-21

Our group is split down the middle, with Barkov, Couturier, Karlsson and Kopitar coming out on the positive side of the ledger, and Bergeron, Toews, Koivu and Backlund taking far more penalties than they draw. It's clear who helps and hurts their cases here.

Stock Up: Barkov, Couturier, Karlsson, Kopitar

Stock Down: Bergeron, Toews, Koivu, Backlund

Usage

This one gets overrated a bit by some analysts, because for all of the players in this particular pool, differences in usage are minimal at best. All of our candidates generally face top lines, play heavy minutes on the penalty kill, and are used to close out games.

As a result, usage statistics essentially function as a mere check on whether a player's coach truly views him as his best defensive option, both in terms of taking faceoffs in one's own end, and facing off against top competition. For the former, we'll look at Zone Start Rate (ZSR), which presents the rate of offensive zone faceoffs taken to all non-neutral zone draws. As for the latter, a quick look at the average Corsi For Percentages of a player's opponents should do nicely.

Player	ZSR	CF% Quality of Comp
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Aleksander Barkov	39.53%	50.00%
Mikko Koivu	42.09%	50.42%
Sean Couturier	42.82%	50.13%
Anze Kopitar	45.02%	50.29%
Mikael Backlund	46.00%	50.09%
William Karlsson	52.39%	50.12%
Jonathan Toews	55.15%	50.30%
Patrice Bergeron	60.62%	49.58%

Patrice Bergeron	-0.40%
Jonathan Toews	-0.29%
Anze Kopitar	-0.07%
Sean Couturier	+0.13%
Aleksander Barkov	+0.20%
Mikael Backlund	+0.59%

As you can see, there's little separation here between the candidates. Five of our eight received more defensive zone draws than offensive zone ones, and all but one faced competition that on average drove play over 50 percent. The only player who gets hurt here is the biggest name — Bergeron. His coaches appear to have deployed him in a more offensive role this year than usual, which hurts his case just a bit.

Stock Down: Bergeron (minimally)

Stock Up: Everyone else

5-on-5 Defensive Results

Defensive performance is notoriously difficult to measure by statistics. After all, it's an attempt to quantify the absence of something, as opposed to offensive results that can be clearly judged by shots, chances, goals and points. To truly measure defensive impact accurately, advanced tracking systems would probably be necessary.

In the absence of that, our best move is to evaluate defense by proxy. In other words, do a player's teammates suppress shots, chances and goals better when on the ice with him compared to when they skate with other linemates? To that end, we'll go back to the RelTM well, except isolate our analysis to only the suppression half of the Corsi/xG equation. In this case, grading out "negative" is better, because it means a player's teammates allow fewer shots/chances when skating alongside him.

Player	Shot Attempt (Corsi) Suppression RelTM	xG Suppression RelTM
Mikko Koivu	-9.01%	-0.67%
Mikael Backlund	-7.03%	-0.39%
William Karlsson	-5.53%	-0.32%
Sean Couturier	-9.36%	-0.19%
Anze Kopitar	-3.38%	-0.04%
Aleksander Barkov	-3.98%	-0.01%
Jonathan Toews	-0.23%	+0.13%
Patrice Bergeron	-3.82%	+0.16%

This is where defensive stalwarts Koivu and Backlund grade out best, unsurprisingly. But Couturier and (in a minor surprise) William Karlsson are right there with them in shot and xG suppression. Kopitar and Barkov hold their own but don't especially stand out. And again, it's Bergeron who brings up the rear in xG, as his linemates have actually done better in quality chance prevention away from him than with him. Bergeron started out this analysis behind the proverbial eight-ball due to his 18 missed games, and the rest of his resume certainly isn't closing the gap.

Before we move on, let's take a quick check on the goal-based results as well, just as we did in the differential section, to see if any discrepancies pop up.

Player	5v5 Goal Differential RelTM
William Karlsson	-1.25%
Mikko Koivu	-0.51%

These are really the first hits that Couturier and Barkov's candidacies take. While both players have performed well by shot and chance suppression metrics, their goal prevention results aren't stellar. Both players are fine by overall goal differential, but those shiny stats have been driven by an increase in on-ice goals for, not goals against. It's not a resume killer (especially because bad luck or poor goaltending could easily be at play) but it is a slight blemish.

Stock Up: Koivu, Karlsson

Stock Steady: Kopitar, Couturier, Toews, Backlund, Barkov. Bergeron

Shorthanded results

We'll close things out with shorthanded performance. Considering the sample size involved — only Backlund even tops 180 minutes at 4-on-5 this season — this is the category where stats are the least reliable. In fact, the general consensus is that individual shorthanded performance is rarely evaluated when it comes to the Selke. The simple fact that a player is given PK minutes by his coach has been enough for voters. Still, we'll take a quick glance at the numbers anyway, armed with the knowledge that they're not especially reliable. Remember when it comes to suppression, negative is good and positive is bad.

Player	4v5 Shot Suppression RelTM	4v5 Goal Suppression RelTM	4v5 xG Suppression RelTM
Patrice Bergeron	-5.86%	-0.84%	-1.06%
Aleksander Barkov	+4.52%	-0.60%	-5.47%
Mikael Backlund	+11.54%	-0.50%	-1.37%
Anze Kopitar	+3.75%	-0.49%	-2.22%
Sean Couturier	-8.16%	-0.42%	+1.64%
Jonathan Toews	+2.05%	-0.27%	+1.50%
William Karlsson	-5.54%	-0.12%	-0.57%
Mikko Koivu	+6.72%	+1.51%	+1.71%

Not a ton of concrete observations to be made here, aside from Bergeron being universally good by PK results and Koivu being universally poor. The rest of the players have a mix of grading out well by one metric and then poorly in another. Again, these aren't especially reliable numbers — true penalty kill evaluation requires tape study and extensive manual tracking, which we unfortunately do not have.

Stock Up: Bergeron

Stock Steady: everyone not named Bergeron or Koivu

Stock Down: Koivu

Breaking down the findings

Now that we have all of the information, it's time to synthesize it into a meaningful conclusion. The simplest way to do so is to simply count up the performances of our candidate pool in each category, and see what we find. That's far from a final answer, but it at least provides some general direction as we make our final decisions.

Player	Stock Ups	Stock Steadies	Stock Downs
Sean Couturier	5	2	0



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William Karlsson	5	2	0
Aleksander Barkov	4	3	0
Anze Kopitar	4	2	1
Mikko Koivu	2	2	3
Patrice Bergeron	2	2	3
Jonathan Toews	1	4	2
Mikael Backlund	1	3	3

There's an obvious split down the middle — Couturier, Karlsson, Barkov and Kopitar excel in the most categories, and struggle in the least. On the other hand, the group of Koivu, Bergeron, Toews and Backlund appear to lag a bit in terms of all-around resume.

Backlund very clearly has the weakest overall case, which isn't surprising considering the fact that he's barely been mentioned in connection with this year's award. It's unfair to penalize him too much for his weak goal differentials since those seem fairly fluky based on his strong performance by Corsi and xG, but Backlund just doesn't stand out in enough other areas anyway. His ice time isn't on par with the top candidates, his offensive production is underwhelming, and his negative-21 penalty differential is ghastly. It's easy to drop him out of the race.

Jonathan Toews has actually driven play very well this year, in the wake of sagging performance in that area over the previous two seasons. But Toews is hurt by his middle-of-the-road scoring, his mediocre defensive results and poor penalty differential. This isn't his year to earn a second Selke.

Considering the fact that many writers seem ready to give Patrice Bergeron the award despite missing over 20 percent of the season, the Boston forward's case is surprisingly weak. Even if Bergeron had played a full 82-game schedule, his performance by xG would lag in comparison to the top candidates, as would his negative-7 penalty differential. In addition, he hasn't even been used in a true defensive role by his new coach, Bruce Cassidy. His presence in the race is due to offensive production and name recognition, not a rock-solid statistical case.

Koivu is intriguing, because he legitimately might be the best choice for those adhering to the strict definition of the award. His usage might be the toughest out of the bunch, and his defensive results at 5-on-5 have no equal. But his 42 points of offensive production simply is not going to move the needle for most voters. In addition, he possesses the second-worst penalty differential of our candidates and was clearly the worst performer in shorthanded situations. Koivu is the hipster choice more than anything else.

That leaves us with four candidates, and each brings an extremely strong Selke case. The race is so tight between the group that we move into the realm of opinion — which categories you value highest will decide your final order.

For me, Karlsson drops off the list first. He's delivered a stellar season, but his usage gives me just enough pause to keep him out of my top three. He's received two minutes less ice time per game than Kopitar, Barkov and Couturier, and his performance in those fewer minutes isn't so substantially better than his competition that it makes up for the gap. In addition, much of Karlsson's elite offensive production is the product of a ridiculous 23.6% shooting percentage that screams fluke. Those concerns are just enough to have him miss out on a trip to the awards show in June.

It's appropriate that we're left with the three most-used forwards in hockey on a nightly basis as our nominees. Ice time from a coach implies trust, and these three players all have rightfully earned it this season through their stellar play. Aleksander Barkov, Sean Couturier and Anze Kopitar would all be worthy Selke winners. But which one is the most worthy?

The battle between Couturier and Kopitar really comes down to what you value more in a Selke candidate — raw point production or stellar on-ice results. Kopitar clearly has the edge if you favor the latter, as no one in the race comes close to his 90 points. But Couturier blows Kopitar away by advanced metrics. In fact, Kopitar has barely kept his head above water by on-ice Expected Goals, a stat that a Selke candidate would be expected to thrive in. Couturier, on the other hand, led our pool of candidates by Corsi RelTM and xG RelTM, and was second only to Karlsson when looking at goal-based results. In my opinion, that gives Couturier the edge as an all-around player.

As for Barkov, his case is nearly identical to that of Couturier. He brings no obvious blemishes to the table and leads Couturier barely in both points and penalty differential. But across the board elsewhere, Couturier is just a little bit better. Even Barkov's slight scoring edge is nullified by Couturier's advantage in primary point production. It's just hard to find enough statistical areas where Barkov is obviously superior to Couturier to justify putting him ahead on the ballot.

This year's Selke race is undeniably close, and there are multiple candidates who would fit the award's requirements. But on the whole, Sean Couturier appears to be the best choice. He's truly done it all this season — face opposing top lines, help to facilitate offense, rack up lots of points himself, and completely shut down the other team when the situation calls for it. When asked whether he agreed with Hextall that Couturier should be the clear Selke favorite, Flyers head coach Dave Hakstol echoed those sentiments, not holding back one bit in his praise.

"Coots does so many of the things that when you look at the details of what that award is all about. ... Coots does all of that and more every night for our hockey team. With the number of minutes that he plays, the different situations that he's in, and how he produces on a nightly basis, there's no question he embodies that award."

He's certainly done enough to justify raising the trophy that he's embodied come June.

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The Athletic / Forget rebuilding, Minnesota Duluth is back in the national championship game

By Chad Graff 5h ago

Scott Sandelin took the front seat on the team bus with 150 quiet miles north in front of them. It was three weeks ago and his Minnesota Duluth Bulldogs were losers in both of their conference tournament games at Xcel Energy Center, what he thought at the time may have been enough to keep his team from another NCAA Tournament appearance.

UMD, fresh off a trip to the national championship game the year before, wasn't supposed to be among college hockey's best, and yet Sandelin couldn't help but sulk, feeling like his team had what it took to make a run.

By the time they arrived in Duluth, Notre Dame was finishing up a win that made the Bulldogs the last team to earn an at-large bid in the tournament, besting the Gophers by .0001 percentage points.

In his office, Sandelin took a deep breath and cracked a beer.

"That's exactly what I did," he said.

On Thursday, Sandelin smiled as he looked back on that night, back on the low expectations of six months ago, back on the 7-9-2 record his team once had. Thanks to a 2-1 win over Ohio State, the 18-year coach



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has Minnesota Duluth headed to a second straight national championship game, this time to face Notre Dame, which beat Michigan in a thrilling nightcap on a goal in the final seconds. It's a remarkable run for the Bulldogs, even before considering Sandelin lost more than half of his lineup from their national championship loss to Denver a year ago or that he used eight freshmen in the Frozen Four on Thursday. All of which begs the question: How in the heck is UMD back in the national championship game?

"I don't know," Sandelin said with a laugh. "You know what, you just don't know. We knew we had some good freshmen coming in. But we had big question marks, there's no question about that. So, I think even with a lot of people, there was doubt."

So much doubt that Sandelin felt the need to talk to the few older players he had at the beginning of the season. The year before, they were on a team stacked with professional talent and elder leadership. A season later, they were looking at a roster of underclassmen so young and inexperienced that it included some, like Saturday's goal-scorer Louie Roehl, who was brought to campus a year earlier than expected to fill the big holes left by early departures.

"Louie's not the biggest goal-scorer," senior Jared Thomas, who netted the game-winner, said. "No goals in high school, right?"

Roehl nodded at the question, confirming that he indeed went 52 games at Eden Prairie without a tally.

And yet, that's how this UMD team continues to win, relying on balanced contributions and strong team defense, a combination that has them a game away from the program's second national championship.

Saturday will be the school's third championship appearance in eight years, dating back to their 2011 title that came at the site of Saturday's game. They are the first team to reach successive championship games since Boston College went to three straight from 2006-08.

"It's pretty remarkable getting back to this game," Thomas said. "Last year we had a much older group and expectations were super high. This year, it's the complete opposite, I guess."

They won Thursday's game behind a quick start that gave them a two-goal lead before three minutes, five seconds had elapsed. But they got here, they said, because of what they changed after that NCHC tournament three weeks ago.

Sandelin described the bus ride back as, "pretty dramatic." Players and coaches perused their phones, trying to find combinations that would yield a tournament result.

When they finally realized they had reached a fourth straight NCAA Tournament, a different team emerged.

"I'll tell you, the way we got in was really an eye-opener for our guys because they knew it could have been done, and I think it gave them a second life and a new opportunity," Sandelin said. "And they've taken advantage of it."

If Sandelin uses the same lineup on Saturday, only eight of the 19 Bulldogs that take the ice will have played in last year's national championship game, something even captain Karson Kuhlman — one of three seniors in the lineup — called, "wild."

"I think going back to that NCHC tournament here we kind of got a taste of how hard playoff hockey was and I think losing those two games that weekend was a turning point for our club," Kuhlman said. "We don't want our (season) to end."

They extended it one more game Thursday with a suffocating defense that allowed just 20 shots on goal and few quality scoring chances for Ohio State.

A defensive group that includes five freshmen scored the game's first goal and used quick outlet passes to keep the Buckeyes from establishing much offensive zone time.

"Obviously, a lot of people doubted us," said Scott Perunovich, one of the five freshmen defensemen. "But it just shows, our coaching staff, how good they are and their leadership is the best I've ever had and they can really get the boys going. It took everyone to come together. I think the freshmen did a good job stepping up throughout the year and the whole team came together. You know, we're playing Bulldog hockey right now and can beat anyone."

Sandelin was celebrated a year ago for living up to expectations, navigating a talented team to within a goal of a title.

But now, his work has a team that thought it was eliminated from NCAA Tournament contention three weeks ago in the championship game for a second straight year.

"I couldn't be more proud of this group," Sandelin said. "We sat here three weeks ago and we thought our season was done. That would have sucked for our seniors to end it that way because we didn't give ourselves a chance to win those games and we went back and got lucky. I think it gave us a second life. And here we are."

The Athletic LOADED: 04.06.2018

1107883 Websites

The Athletic / A 12-year-old Ryan Donato stole Alex Killorn's stick, and he's still benefitting from it with the Bruins

By Joe Smith Apr 5, 2018

TAMPA, Fla. — When Lightning winger Alex Killorn was playing for Harvard, then-12-year-old Ryan Donato was a fixture at his hockey practices.

Donato's dad, retired NHL forward Ted Donato, was — and still is — the Crimson coach. So Killorn wasn't surprised Donato's son was a smooth skater. Sneaky, too.

"He'd steal my sticks," Killorn quipped.

It's true.

Donato, 21, now a prized rookie with the Bruins, said he admired Killorn, the Crimson's star player, and would collect his broken sticks during practice. And Donato would play with them.

Donato still does, in a way. He used the same toe-curved blade as Killorn throughout his Harvard career and has continued to use it with the Bruins. It's worked out well, with Donato racking up four goals and three assists in his first nine NHL games heading into Thursday's game against the Panthers in Sunrise.

Alex Killorn has the same stick curve he used at Harvard. (Courtesy of the Lightning)

Two days earlier, Donato said it was cool to finally face Killorn, a childhood idol, in a 4-0 loss at Amalie Arena.

"I mean, he was always scoring goals, that's why I loved watching him," Donato said of Killorn, who had 38 goals his final two years at Harvard. "As a little kid, you always look up to the goal scorer who is making plays. I would always watch him, no matter who he was playing."

Ted Donato, 48, said his son's admiration of Killorn wasn't just on the ice.

"Ryan watched our team, how guys carried themselves, and Alex was a great player for us," Ted Donato told The Athletic. "But he was also a true gentleman, always dealt with people in a positive way. All those things you hope rub off on young kids when they get to see that."



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The Donatos kept tabs on Killorn, a Lightning third-round pick in 2007. They went nuts when Killorn scored his first NHL goal Feb. 16, 2013 against the Panthers. They marveled at Killorn's sick re-direction during Game 1 of the 2015 Stanley Cup final against the Blackhawks. Using that same curve.

"Alex had found a curve that was different, it was a little bigger," Ted Donato said. "And I think Ryan's eyes lit right up. He saw how well Alex played with it."

Killorn, who visits his alma mater on some Lightning trips to Boston, said he was really impressed with Ryan Donato's remarkable run. Donato played in the Olympics for Team USA in February, returned to Harvard and now is with the Bruins, signing a two-year, entry-level deal in March.

"I knew he was going to do well," Killorn said. "It's so important when you step in as a pro and play your best hockey. And he was playing the best hockey of his life, so he has that momentum and confidence and he scores a goal in his first (NHL game). I'm really happy for him."

The two former Crimson stars still share the same blade, a decade later. Who knows? A goal off either one could play a role in whether the Lightning or Bruins win the Atlantic Division. Or win the Stanley Cup.

As an NHL player, there is no shortage in the supply of these sticks. But as a kid, they were prized possessions.

"They were definitely expensive, but (Killorn) would always break them," Ryan Donato said. "And you knew where they were going after. They'd always bring them right to me."

The Athletic LOADED: 04.06.2018

1107884 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Sedin twins give Canucks fans yet another magical memory

Iain MacIntyre | April 6, 2018, 2:13 AM

VANCOUVER – Rogers Arena was not so much a hockey rink Thursday as a memory studio.

Nearly 19,000 people came to get their shot, to fix in their minds and hearts what it was like, and to use these memories like cherished photos to pull out years from now and remember and be glad they were there.

Daniel and Henrik Sedin gave them something priceless.

In the twins' last touch of the puck in Vancouver – their final home game as Canucks at the end of 18-year Hall of Fame careers – Danny shot from Hank's pass to lift the team they came to define to a 4-3 victory against the Arizona Coyotes.

No. 22 scored from No. 33 at 2:33 of overtime. Daniel scored an even prettier goal, on passes from Henrik and their longest-tenured teammate, fellow Swede Alex Edler, at 33 seconds of Period 2.

Truly, you could not dream these things as a finale at Rogers Arena for the two greatest players in Canucks history.

"I didn't sleep much last night, so I didn't have any dreams," Daniel smiled after a long, slow, victory lap on the ice with his brother. "But it was amazing, especially for Hank and Eddie to be the setup men.

"It was a tougher today for sure when we realized it was the last game. We tried to go out there and play the right way, but I was tired today. (But) when the fans show up, you want to put on a good game for them. I hope they go home happy. I know we are."

After a combined 2,634 games in the National Hockey League, the 37-year-old identical twins from Ornskoldsvik were once again the best Canucks in their final home game. They have a Saturday road game in Edmonton before they are finished as players, having announced their retirement on Monday while still productive NHL scorers.

Amid an electric, emotional atmosphere unseen outside a playoff game in Vancouver since Canucks president Trevor Linden, one of the Sedins' early mentors and advocates, retired as a player exactly 10 years earlier, the crowd chanted "Hall of Fame! Hall of Fame!" in the third period, then "One more year! One more year!" after the Sedins won the game on an overtime power play.

In their final, fleeting two weeks with the Sedins, the Canucks are 6-1-1.

"Absolutely, it means something," Henrik said of generating goals in their final game in Canucks home blue. "The way the crowd showed up ... it was just an incredible night. To be able to win and finish it off like we did, that's something they can walk away and remember as well. It's a better feeling for us.

"Before the game in here, you could hear the crowd. Everyone was really amped up for the game. The guys (on the team) have been great. It's tough to play in these games. I played in the one Trevor played in, and it's not easy. I think they wanted to do the best for us, and they did."

One of the most powerful and remarkable aspects of sports is that they mark not only athletic achievement but time itself. The biggest moments, joyous or heart-breaking, are like mile markers in our lives. It happened, and we were there. And if we weren't there, at least we witnessed it through television.

On the West Coast, where the Canucks haven't yet blessed our memory banks with a Stanley Cup after 48 years in the NHL, Thursday was one of those mile markers everyone will remember. April 5, 2018, the night the Sedins won their final home game and were cheered off the ice.

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Daniel scored twice, including the game winner, and registered 10 shots on net. Henrik set up both goals and attempted six shots, which is about a month's worth for the all-world playmaker who has just three goals this season.

"I get a big bonus at four goals, so I needed to get one," Henrik joked. "But I didn't get it. We had 15 seconds of energy (for shifts) and then we were dead tired. That's not normal. I think our heart rate was through the roof the whole night."

So imagine what they might do Saturday in Edmonton after a couple of good sleeps.

With 23 goals and 55 points – five more than his brother – Danny has moved into a tie with injured rookie Brock Boeser for the Canucks' scoring lead. A point against the Oilers, the source of more Sedin points than any other club, will give him the team scoring title in his final season.

"It really doesn't happen like this where two Hall of Fame guys that have been on one team as long as they have, go out on their terms and are still playing games," Canucks coach Travis Green marvelled after the morning skate. "It's very special.

"Take it all in, enjoy it. Hopefully everyone remembers it. And hopefully some of our players learn something from it."

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Several of the Canucks are too young to remember a Vancouver team that did not include the Sedins, who arrived in Vancouver before the 2000-01 season as second- and third-overall draft picks.

Expectations for them were impossibly high, and yet the Sedins surpassed them.



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"The fans, how loud it was, how they played, and the ending ..." Edler said when asked how he will remember this night. "It couldn't get much better. It was definitely special to be part of. You're going to think back to this night, how the building was, how the game ended.

"It was really special."

Henrik said his best memories from Thursday will be from the overtime goal on – the time both fans and twins were able to celebrate a relationship as rare as the Sedins.

"But even the whole day ... when I woke up this morning, I knew it was going to be a big day," he said. "We tried to enjoy every minute of it."

Memories for a lifetime.

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 04.06.2018

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Sportsnet.ca / Golden Knights are playoff contenders the Oilers were supposed to be

Mark Spector | April 5, 2018, 11:34 PM

EDMONTON — Up was down and down was up last night in Edmonton, as it has been all season for these Vegas Golden Knights.

How much money could you have won back in October if you'd have wagered that, in this April 5, Game 81 meeting between the Stanley Cup-favoured Edmonton Oilers and the tomato can expansion Golden Knights, that the latter would be the team prepping for the playoffs, and the former sending players to the world championships?

"Five months ago we weren't talking about playoffs, and today we have an X and a Y beside our name," marvelled affable Golden Knights head coach Gerard Gallant. "After the first 10 games (Vegas went 8-2-0), people said the same thing: 'Ah, they're going to fall.' And don't get me wrong. I said the same thing too! 'When's it going to happen?' And it didn't happen."

It is as absurd for Edmonton as it is awesome for Vegas.

The teams met for the final time Thursday in Edmonton, with the Oilers coming way with a 4-3 victory.

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Vegas, the best expansion club any North American professional sports league has ever seen will roll through Calgary on Saturday, then return home to host Round 1 of the playoffs. It is just another remarkable milestone in a Disney-esque season that has been full of them.

"That first road trip, we were 1-4-1," said defenceman Deryk Engelland, the Las Vegas resident whose touching opening night address after the Vegas hotel massacre cemented the bond between fan and team. "It's tough losing, but we thought we were in those games for the most part. We won the first (11 of 13 games) at home, but we never really got too high. Not in over our heads."

As the pudding brewed, the proof rose into sight. Long before the rest of the league started to take this team seriously, the people who were around it every day began to see a legit, competitive club here.

"For me, it was a game in Nashville and a game in Dallas, on back-to-back nights (on Dec. 8 and 9)," said Gallant. "We were playing good, but those two teams were playing unbelievable hockey at that time. We went

in there, outplayed Nashville and won a hockey game. The next night we went into Dallas, outplayed Dallas, and won a hockey game.

"That was the time when the guys said, 'You know what? We've got a real good hockey team.' When you beat those teams on the road? We were pretty excited."

Now, with one meaningless game left for the Pacific Division regular season champs, the next challenge awaits. Will it be any different when the opposition isn't simply coming through Vegas for a night, but is actually game-planning against Vegas for a two-week series?

What will happen when an opponent sends its best checker after William Karlsson every night, and pour over the video to exploit whatever weakness Marc-Andre Fleury might have. Do weaknesses in the Golden Knights' game that can survive 60 minutes of pressure, hemorrhage over the course of a seven-game series?

"I don't think too many guys have playoff experience. We have a lot of new (to the playoffs) guys here," began Fleury, who has by far the highest pedigree of playoff experience here due to his days in Pittsburgh. "Every play matters. Intensity is up, both teams are skating harder, hitting more. More blocked shots ...

"The little things that make the difference," he said. "We don't have a Crosby or a Malkin. Everybody has to contribute for us to have success."

The coach's job is to simply keep this unlikely ball rolling. The last thing Gallant plans is to mess with the recipe for success this expansion club has authored thus far.

"We all know the intensity goes up five per cent, and everyone is excited to play (in the post-season)," Gallant said. "But I don't want our team to change one bit. We're a fast, quick team that moves the puck real well. We know the intensity goes up, but let's play our game."

The final word goes to Engelland, a cast-off like all of these players, who has found a home in the town where he met his wife and his kids were born.

"Look back on the season. It's been a storybook season — from the tragedy that happened, right from then on," he said. "Playoffs are a whole other ballgame. We've played 82 games to get here. It's another season now."

They can only hope that this one is as good as the last.

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Sportsnet.ca / Devils beat Leafs in reminder of how far each team has come

Chris Johnston | April 5, 2018, 9:48 PM

NEWARK, N.J. — "It's no better feeling than to prove people wrong," Taylor Hall was saying after the roof nearly came off Prudential Center. After his New Jersey Devils booked their first ticket to the Stanley Cup Playoffs since 2012.

Given how recently the Devils and Toronto Maple Leafs were mired in mediocrity, it was the kind of moment several NHL fanbases could appreciate from afar.

If you were sitting in Montreal or Vancouver or Buffalo on Thursday night, this was a blinking, roaring beacon of hope. Why? Just two seasons ago, the Leafs and Devils finished off forgettable campaigns in this building with a 5-1 New Jersey win that "clinched" Toronto a 30th-place finish.



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That set the lottery balls in motion to get Auston Matthews fitted for a Leafs sweater and propelled the organization immediately into the post-season. Now it's playing out the string with a (franchise) record-tying 103 points and harbouring thoughts about making a run at the Stanley Cup.

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The Devils, meanwhile, stumbled to 27th overall last season after prying Hall out of Edmonton. Then they stumbled into some lottery luck of their own – grabbing Nico Hischier in June after winning the No. 1 pick and then taking a giant step forward these last couple months.

"It's just a fun team," said goalie Keith Kinkaid, who stopped 31 shots in Thursday's 2-1 victory over Toronto to clinch the playoff berth.

There are plenty of markets where fun isn't being had right now. Plus, the real fun starts next week after 15 teams have already cleared out their lockers.

But with the exception of Calgary, which traded its first-round pick to the New York Islanders in the Travis Hamonic deal, all of those teams still have something to cheer for: The draft lottery goes April 28 and there's a huge prize on the line in the form of Swedish defenceman Rasmus Dahlin.

Whoever is lucky enough to be gifted the chance to draft him could very well follow the Devils and Leafs by jumping straight to the post-season. By now the path is well-established.

Looking back, it's almost comical how confident Mike Babcock sounded here on April 9, 2016 after his team wrapped up a 69-point season.

"Lots of really good things have happened," he said.

"The future of our organization, I think, is very bright," he added. "There's still some pain coming, but we're going to get a lot better very fast."

Even if there was an element of fake-it-till-you-make-it in those comments, the coach was clearly on to something. His Leafs were sluggish for 40 minutes in New Jersey, but still head to Game 82 of this season needing one point to establish a new all-time organizational mark.

William Nylander scored Toronto's lone goal against Kinkaid to hit 60 points – joining Matthews and Mitch Marner as the first players in Leafs history to open their careers with at least that many in each of their first two seasons.

Sportsnet's newest podcast is a weekly deep dive into the biggest hockey news in the world. New episodes every Thursday.

That also turned this Leafs team into the first since the 1998-99 version to feature six 20-goal scorers. They have a lot of ways to beat you.

On Thursday, they also had much less to play for than the red-hot Devils and it showed. The home side burst out of the gates with seven shots in the first four minutes and wound up clinching its first playoff berth since 2012 thanks to second-period goals from Pavel Zacha and Miles Wood.

"We didn't have it going at the start of the game and it looked like it and in the end we made some mistakes – sticks in feet and just guys skating by us," said Babcock. "It is what is it. Get ready for the next game and then get ready for what we've earned."

There is hope here that the Devils might be able to chart a similar rise to what we've witnessed in Toronto. No one was more elated about the playoff berth than Hall, who needed eight seasons and 529 career NHL games to reach this position.

Without being asked, he mentioned feeling a measure of redemption after the trade out of Edmonton. He also spoke of the wild scene inside the arena as Toronto unsuccessfully swarmed for the tying goal in the final seconds.

It was, well, positively playoff-like.

"Fan appreciation night, to clinch, to have it come down to the last second there – it's just, it's a lot of fun," said Hall. "It was a really good feeling to hear that buzzer go and see the playoff logo on the jumbotron, hear the ovation. That's what it's all about."

The noise should travel a lot farther than Newark.

There are a couple franchises out there that should remember the playoffs are occasionally like objects in the mirror: Much closer than they appear.

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Sportsnet.ca / Marc Crawford: Legacy of Canucks' Sedins is professionalism, selflessness

Daniel Nugent-Bowman | April 5, 2018, 10:13 AM

In the five seasons Marc Crawford coached Daniel and Henrik Sedin with the Vancouver Canucks, he can only remember one time he was truly angry with either one of them.

He was furious.

Crawford berated Henrik in front of the whole team during an intermission for what he deemed to be a missed faceoff assignment. Henrik silently took the tongue-lashing in stride.

It was only after the Canucks players headed back to the ice that Daniel pulled Crawford aside to explain the target of his "supreme crap" was misplaced.

"Daniel said to me, 'I just want you to know that was me who took the faceoff. It wasn't Henrik,'" Crawford says. "He didn't want to embarrass me. He didn't want to make me feel bad in front of the team."

"I don't think there's many guys (like Henrik) that would allow you to give them crap, even though they were saving their brother. They were terrific, terrific guys. I laugh every time I think of that story."

Now an associate coach with the Ottawa Senators, the memory brings Crawford great joy – especially in light of Monday's announcement the Canucks' twin stars are retiring from the NHL at the end of the season.

To him, it's the perfect example of why they're known as two of the classiest players in the league. Either one of them could have questioned Crawford for the tirade or the misidentification. Instead, it was handled quietly.

"That's the way that they were," Crawford says. "They were so respectful."

The Sedins will play their final home game Thursday in Vancouver for the only NHL franchise they've ever known.

Daniel and Henrik Sedin will play their final home game with the Vancouver Canucks on Thursday, April 5 against the Arizona Coyotes. Watch the game on Sportsnet Pacific, East, Ontario, 360 and Sportsnet Now at 7 p.m. PT / 10 p.m. ET.

After being selected second and third overall in the 1999 NHL Draft, they've gone on to become two of the most accomplished players in Canucks history.

They rank first and second in games played, points and assists, with captain Henrik leading the way. No Canuck has ever scored more goals



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than Daniel's 391. Henrik won the Hart and Art Ross Trophies in 2009-10, while Daniel claimed the Ted Lindsay and Art Ross Trophies the following season.

But their careers in Vancouver took some time to round into form.

As rookies in 2000-01, the Sedins were asked to take on secondary scoring roles behind the likes of Markus Naslund, Todd Bertuzzi and Brendan Morrison — an offensive trio that would be dubbed the West Coast Express. Crawford felt the brothers were perhaps asked to do too much that season as Daniel recorded 34 points and Henrik had 29.

"We always knew it was just a matter of strength and maturity," Crawford says. "It's like (Senators rookie) Thomas Chabot now. He's a great player and he's going to be a great defenceman. But he's only got young-man strength. When he gets man strength, he's going to be an excellent player."

"That was the same with Daniel and Henrik. You knew as soon as they filled out, as soon as their legs got stronger, as soon as their upper bodies got stronger, they were going to be (elite) guys."

The Sedins eventually settled into that secondary role. Daniel cracked the 50-point mark in the season before the 2004-05 lockout and they both emerged from the work stoppage as front-liners by surpassing the 70-point barrier. That was Crawford's last season as their coach.

"You saw flashes of brilliance from the start. They did things that brought you out of your seat. And then they started doing it on a more and more consistent basis," Crawford says.

"I was happy to see that happen in front of my eyes while I was there. They did so much of that because they have great qualities, great character and great drive and ambition. That's what the great players have."

There was no doubt in Crawford's mind the Sedins would one day become NHL stars. But as confident as Crawford was about their hockey abilities, he was even more sure about them as people.

Crawford recalls meeting with the two Sedins as rookies to explain that adjusting to the NHL isn't easy due to increased travel, a busier schedule, and physicality of opponents. They assured their coach they'd be fine.

Then Crawford warned the players he'd be tougher on them than any of their previous coaches. The Sedins jokingly conceded that point, which Crawford still chuckles about.

But, as it turns out, he didn't have many reasons to be frustrated with them anyway.

"I can't ever remember being disappointed in them for anything other than them losing a battle once in a while," Crawford says.

"You always knew you were going to get their best effort. You always knew they were going to be selfless. You always knew they put the team success before anything else. That is their legacy."

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TSN.CA / After late-season struggles, Andersen finds his form

Kristen Shilton

With their playoff hopes on the line, the New Jersey Devils had an urgent need to beat the Toronto Maple Leafs on Thursday. And they played with a sense of urgency on this night, downing the Leafs 2-1 to secure one of

the final Eastern Conference bids to the postseason. With nothing to play for themselves, the Leafs didn't match the intensity of the Devils in their penultimate regular-season game, scoring only one goal for the second time in their last three games. The loss moves Toronto to 48-26-7 on the season.

TAKEAWAYS

Freddie has most of the answers

If the Leafs are going to have any success in the postseason, then Frederik Andersen has to be their backbone. It's a role he's become accustomed to since arriving in Toronto in the summer of 2016, and he's played the part well for much of this campaign.

But a sub-.900 save percentage over his last six weeks of play has put Andersen in the spotlight for the wrong reasons, and getting him back on track has to be Toronto's top priority. He looked a lot like his mid-season self in the early goings against New Jersey, a team desperate to clinch a playoff berth of their own. Andersen had a terrific opening five minutes to keep the Devils from jumping out to an early lead while the Leafs were getting outshot 7-1 and helped his team to a 1-0 advantage after the first period while Toronto was out-attempted 31-11 by New Jersey.

Andersen looked more confident and sure in his crease after weeks of being leakier than he'd shown since a brutal month of October. In the second period, he made an incredible read on the Devils' first power play, when there was a traffic jam in front of him and he still managed to send the puck aside while splayed out on the ice. For the game's first 38 minutes, Andersen had all the answers — until near the midway point of the second period when Pavel Zacha capitalized on Andersen failing to seal his post and tied the game with a shortside strike. He didn't let the soft goal rattle him, though, making a point-blank stop off speedy winger Michael Grabner minutes later to keep the game tied.

But the desperate Devils kept on top of the Leafs and Miles Wood, against whom Andersen had made a brilliant stop from in-tight back in the first, had the Devils out ahead to start the final period. He was solid the rest of the way for Toronto, turning aside a total of 37 shots on the night.

In defeat, however, Andersen missed out on his chance to become the winningest goaltender in Leafs' franchise history by failing to secure his 38th victory of the season. Regardless, it was a positive night for the Leafs starter as he looked more calm and efficient in net, while holding an opponent to two or fewer goals for the first time since March 22 in Nashville.

The kids are all right

Next to Andersen, the most important pieces for Toronto in the postseason will be their Big Three forwards — William Nylander, Auston Matthews and Mitch Marner. Nylander had been going through a quiet stretch on the scoresheet prior to last Monday's game against Buffalo, but he exploded that night with a two-goal, three-point performance for Toronto, in a game where his power-play unit also generated its first multi-goal game of the season.

Nylander and that power-play group were back at it early in New Jersey, with Nylander needing his 11 seconds of power-play time to snipe his fifth extra-man goal this season, and 20th overall. While Nylander had downplayed the significance of hitting that 20-goal plateau (for the second consecutive year), it did activate a \$212,000 contract bonus with one game remaining for Toronto in the regular season. After that early score, the only one Toronto would post, Nylander's line with Matthews and Zach Hyman had an average outing against the Devils, posting a combined seven shots on goal with 38 per cent possession.

But beyond just his bonus, Nylander also joined his fellow sophomores Marner and Matthews at the 60-point milestone this season. That makes them the first three players in franchise history to reach the 60-point mark in each of their first two NHL seasons. Nylander was also the sixth Leaf to hit 20 goals this year, the first time that many players have hit the mark since 1998-99. In addition to Nylander, Matthews and Marner, James van



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Riemsdyk, Nazem Kadri and Patrick Marleau have also scored at least 20.

Matthews' point streak was also stretched to eight games with an assist on Nylander's goal. The 20-year-old has at least a single point in each contest since returning to the Leafs lineup on March 22 following a 10-game absence with a shoulder injury.

Second-period blues

There is something about the middle frame for Toronto lately, with a mediocre showing in that period proving costly again on Thursday. As a team, the Leafs are excellent in the first period, so strong their 90 first-period goals are tied for most in the NHL this season. The third period is also consistently good for the Leafs, especially since they've managed to curtail the number of blown third-period leads since last season; now they're outscoring opponents 88-75 in that frame.

But the second is the Leafs' weakest by far, and it was a problem again for them against the Devils. Toronto held a 1-0 lead after 20 minutes, but by the game's 40-minute mark they were trailing 2-1 and being outshot 28-20 overall (14-11 in the second).

Head coach Mike Babcock has pointed out the second period as being a weak spot for the Leafs after a few recent games, but when asked specifically earlier this week if he saw a pattern emerging he said that wasn't the case. On the season, though, Toronto is only narrowly ahead in goals-for in that period (83-82) and there has been a noticeable dip in the Leafs' second-period play lately as well. Just using a recent small sample size, the problem has been clear: In the Leafs' last five games, they've been outscored 8-4 in the middle frame, while breaking even in goals scored for and against in the first and third periods combined. Toronto has a 3-2 record in that stretch, over which they knew a playoff spot was locked up, but that doesn't bode well for them in the postseason if the trend continues.

Fourth-line folly

With Travis Dermott due back for the Leafs on Saturday against Montreal (barring any further setback from the lower-body injury he suffered on Monday), there is only one real personnel question the Leafs are facing ahead of the postseason – who will play on the fourth line? But perhaps another question that will have to be answered early on in the playoffs is who should be on that line?

On Thursday against New Jersey, a fourth line of Leo Komarov, Tomas Plekanec and Kasper Kapanen barely saw the ice after the first period; from the second period on, with Toronto tied or trailing for most of it, Babcock deployed that line for only eight more shifts. That line's 36 per cent possession was the Leafs' worst of the night, with Komarov trailing all skaters at an individual 35 per cent.

Komarov returning to the Leafs' lineup from an upper-body injury last week forced speedy rookie Andreas Johnsson (who has two goals and one assist in nine games so far) from a regular spot. But Babcock isn't one to bank on advanced stats (or most stats, really) and getting Komarov settled in again was necessary from his perspective because of Komarov's physicality and his penalty-kill prowess. In losing Johnsson though, the Leafs go without a player who makes Plekanec better (he said he's loved playing with Johnsson since day one) and who makes that line dangerous from both sides when he's opposite Kapanen.

Babcock said before Thursday's game that the end of this regular season would be important for Komarov to get back up to speed, but he hasn't looked strong in his two games back (Komarov had one shot on goal in 10:17 of ice time against the Winnipeg Jets last Saturday) and there isn't much time for the Leafs to gamble with when it comes to icing their best lineup.

Without revealing who it was, Babcock said he already knows whether Kapanen or Johnsson will start on the fourth line in Game 1 of the playoffs. But either way, one player will sit for Komarov, and given that both Johnsson and Kapanen can also kill penalties, it could be a tough

sell not to have both their offensive talents involved if the Leafs struggle out of the gate in the postseason.

Next game

The Leafs return home for their regular-season finale against the Montreal Canadiens on Saturday.

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TSN.CA / Jets aiming to be NHL's hottest team entering playoffs

Frank Seravalli

WINNIPEG — They say you cannot fake your way to a Stanley Cup, which is why the gruelling, 16-win tournament provides perhaps the most compelling theatre in sports each spring.

But the team that hoists Lord Stanley's mug this June may not be this season's best team. Part of the chase is peaking at the right time.

With four days left in the regular season, the Winnipeg Jets have the ability to stake claim to both of those elements – best team and hottest team – at least statistically.

The Jets are still in the hunt for the Presidents' Trophy as best team in the regular season. To do that, the Jets will have to run down the Nashville Predators for first place in the Central Division. They'll need to beat both the Flames and Blackhawks and see the Predators collect one or no points in their last two games.

That was their only focus on Thursday as they prepared to host Calgary.

"No one here is going after second place," Jets forward Nik Ehlers said. "No matter what, we're going out here trying to win both games."

Hanging the first banner in franchise history as Presidents' Trophy winners would also guarantee the Jets enter the second season as the NHL's hottest team.

They already have the league's best record over their last 10 games at 9-1-0. It's an impressive mark for a team that long could've felt comfortable about its position in the standings.

"I don't think we ever felt that things were wrapped up here," coach Paul Maurice said. "The Central Division wouldn't allow you to think that way."

What Maurice likes most about this stretch is the quality of test the Jets have faced along the way. Over these last 10 games, the Jets have squared off with the Predators, Bruins, Kings, Ducks, Maple Leafs and Stars – while Dallas was in the throes of choking their season away.

"We could play well and lose every single one of those games," Maurice said. "You take 10 points off us and we're feeling like we're in a little bit of a different situation. So there was never that comfort level, [but] there was never that gnashing of teeth that things were going bad there."

"We've worked very hard from the start handling our day-to-day, not spending a whole lot of time talking about last season or the sins of the past – and not about expectations."

Now, with 110 points in the bank, a Hart Trophy candidate in Blake Wheeler leading a group of young snipers and a confident team MVP in Connor Hellebuyck in net, the Jets will certainly have expectations entering the postseason.

That's why first place is in their sights, to try and set themselves up with the easiest road possible by pulling down first place in the Central. That



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would present either Colorado or St. Louis, two teams who haven't exactly banged the door down in recent weeks.

Mark Scheifele said the Jets have focused on maintaining their own rhythm, trying to avoid bad habits.

"There's still lots of games left and lots of things that can happen in this league," Scheifele said. "When you clinch it's one thing, but you want to be in the best position possible. You don't want to be going in when your team's game isn't there or your game isn't there. That way when you get to the playoffs, we're raring and in the most prime form we can be in."

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TSN.CA / Hall's playoff drought almost over

Mark Masters

TSN Toronto reporter Mark Masters checks in daily with news and notes from Maple Leafs practices and game-day skates. The Devils had an optional skate at the Prudential Center on Thursday morning. The Maple Leafs held a media availability at 4:45 pm.

Taylor Hall has played 528 NHL regular-season games, but none in the playoffs. The 26-year-old is now tantalizingly close to ending that drought. The Devils can clinch a playoff spot with a win over the Toronto Maple Leafs tonight. New Jersey's magic number is two (combined points gained by them or lost by the Florida Panthers).

"For me, any sort of team success that we've had this year I've really enjoyed," Hall said. "The seasons that I've had early in my career may have had an impact on that. It's just I've been waiting to have a season like this."

The Devils, holding on to a wild-card spot in the Eastern Conference with 95 points, have surged to the brink of a playoff spot thanks to a 9-2-1 run. Hall has 19 points in that stretch.

"Coming into this season, if you were to tell me in Game 81 we'd be playing in a clinching game, I would've taken that in a heartbeat," he said.

Hall, the first overall pick in 2010, endured some down seasons in Edmonton while watching draft-year rival Tyler Seguin win a Stanley Cup in Boston. Hall then watched again as his old team made the playoffs and won a round in their first season after trading him.

Perhaps these trials and tribulations early in his career offered some good perspective, helping him mature and take his own game to the next level? Hall smiles at the suggestion.

"Ah, yeah, I would've liked to have been in the playoffs instead of having to get all this perspective, but, yeah, for sure. All the games early in my career, all the tough seasons, it's made me appreciate how much fun a good season like this is and how you have to enjoy it and really take advantage of it. The games are fun."

It sure looks like fun. Hall is playing like a man possessed, practically willing the Devils to the postseason. He has picked up a point in 36 of his last 39 games. Overall, he has 93 points on the season, which is 42 more than the next closest Devil, rookie Nico Hischier. That's the biggest gap between a team's top two scorers in the NHL.

"I've never seen anything like it," said Devils centre Brian Boyle, a veteran of 691 games with five NHL teams. "And I've played with guys who have scored 40, great players (having) great seasons. It just seems like you're on the bench and thinking to yourself, 'We need a play here,' and he seems to make it every time."

What stands out to New Jersey coach John Hynes?

"The consistency of his play at such a high level," Hynes said. "He's been very driven. He's really come through at clutch times for us, so to see him be able to deliver like that and play at the level he's played at night in and night out, that has been a real growth for him and been nice to see."

The amazing run has propelled Hall into the Hart Trophy discussion. He downplayed the MVP talk on Thursday morning choosing to focus on how this Devils team, which finished last in the East a year ago, has come together.

"You're starting to see the team that (GM) Ray (Shero) wants to put on the ice," Hall observed. "He finally has his footprint totally on our team. That's how we have to play: speed and skill. It doesn't matter how big you are. We try to speed our way through the game, essentially, and that's a fun way for me, personally, to play."

Although Hall, who leads the Devils with a career-high plus-14 rating, admits he has matured of late, becoming a more well-rounded player.

"We've gotten pretty good defensively," Hall pointed out. "We're able to hold teams to, especially lately, not a whole lot of odd-man rushes, not a whole lot of easy goals and, for myself, that's something I've had to buy into here.

"You don't always have to score a couple points, you can help your team in other ways. Let's say we're playing against the (Auston) Matthews line tonight, if you shut them down that's a pretty good thing for your group as well."

But Hall readily admits his role on the team is to produce offence. So, how does he cope with the pressure of knowing just how much the team leans on him in that regard?

"I've taken pressure off my offensive game because I know I'm much better in my own end, much better without the puck, much better defensively and that's a good thing for a player to have. I think as time's gone in my career, I've learned that there's more than one way to help your team in a game."

Hall: 'I've been waiting to have a season like this'

New Jersey Devils winger Taylor Hall is willing his team to the playoffs right now. The 2010 first overall pick has never made it to the NHL postseason. He watched draft rival Tyler Seguin win a Stanley Cup. Last year, he watched his old team, the Oilers, make the second round. Now, he's on the cusp of not just making the playoffs but being nominated for the Hart Trophy.

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Asked repeated questions about his amazing season, Hall made sure to send some love his linemate's way.

"Nico, for such a young centreman, the way he's come in, I feel like if he was maybe in a market like Toronto or Montreal he'd be such a household name already. He's been such a big impact for our team and for me as a player," he said.

Only Toronto's projected scratches and backup goalie Curtis McElhinney skated on Thursday morning. Forwards Josh Leivo, Matt Martin, Dominic Moore and Andreas Johnsson joined defenceman Travis Dermott on the ice. Dermott, who's recovering from a foot injury, is expected back in the lineup on Saturday.

This is the Leafs' second straight road game, which has seen the team keep their game players away from the rink in the morning. Previously, they held optional skates with some regulars getting out for a twirl.



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Sophomores William Nylander and Mitch Marner, for example, almost always took part. But the team wants to use rest as a weapon down the stretch.

Leafs Ice Chips: The most rested team in hockey?

The Leafs held an optional skate in Newark on Thursday. Defenceman Travis Dermott skated again as he continues to work his way back from a foot injury. Many of his teammates stayed off the ice this morning as the club continues to use rest as a weapon down the stretch.

Leafs Ice Chips: The most rested team in hockey?

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The Devils are sticking with the same lineup that beat the Rangers on Tuesday, which means Keith Kinkaid makes his eighth straight start.

"He's come up big for us," said Hynes. "He's, obviously, been very effective. Cory (Schneider) went down with the injury and that's another point in the season where you needed Keith to be able to come through so it's not just this last stretch, although he's played very well. He's been a big factor in our team being able to be competitive. I think when you look at the league, every team goes through injuries at every position at different situations and you need guys to step up and play a bigger role and Keith's certainly done that for us."

Kinkaid has 17 wins since Feb. 1, which is tied with Nashville's Pekka Rinne for most in that stretch.

Leafs head coach Mike Babcock confirmed Kasperii Kapanen is in for Andreas Johnsson tonight. Has he decided which one of the two will play Game 1 next Thursday?

"Yep."

Will he share that information?

"Nope," he said with a smile.

Leo Komarov will play his second game since returning from a lower-body injury.

"It's real important for him," Babcock said. "He got injured and then had a little family situation, so didn't get to play as much as he'd like. We've skated him hard to get ready. He knows this is important for him. We need him to be physical and hard and an agitator at playoff time. He can bring that. He's got great playoff experience, he's a big-time locker-room guy. We need him to be good so skating here tonight and getting up to speed is important for him."

Projected Leafs lineup:

Forwards

Hyman-Matthews-Nylander

Marleau-Kadri-Marner

van Riemsdyk-Bozak-Brown

Komarov-Plekanec-Kapanen

Defencemen

Rielly-Hainsey

Gardiner-Zaitsev

Carrick-Polak

Goaltenders

Andersen starts

McElhinney

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TSN.CA / Sedins last home game with the Canucks

Matt Sekeres

In a sense, this is for every Canadian hockey fan.

True, the final home game at Rogers Arena for Daniel and Henrik Sedin is a British Columbia happening, and a most British Columbia story. But NHL lineup editors who consider this a provincial story, a local celebration only, are sorely missing the bigger picture.

Vancouver Canucks fans are going to get a chance to bid an emotional farewell to their most iconic players in a way that no other Canadian hockey market has this millennium.

And that's because the Sedin twins are career Canucks. No complications. No compromises. No other sweaters required.

It's a much different story for the other six Canadian markets, who have suffered through the departure of their heroes. Who have watched them tearfully pack up their gear on trade deadline day, or be unveiled at press conferences in U.S. markets shortly after July 1st.

These days, the most cited bond between the Canadian 7 is the lack of Stanley Cup championships in the last quarter-century. Every spring, the debate rages around the final Canadian team left standing; whether they have coast-to-coast support, whether they are "Canada's Team."

Those who abide talk about bringing the Cup "home," and that word takes on particular resonances today, for every Canadian-based superstar who left "home" in search of a Cup.

They never got this night. They never got this applause. They never got this certainty.

There are no delusions here. No fingers-crossed about a new contract July 1st. No worries about a trade at the draft.

This is the final Sedins home game ever. And for Canadian hockey fans looking in, take comfort that some of your brethren are getting a proper goodbye. The goodbye you deserved and didn't get.

This is for Saku and Teemu as Ducks, and Mats as a Canuck.

For Alfie as a Wing, for Jarome as a King, and for Captain Canada's trail of tears from Edmonton to the Island.

Daniel and Henrik Sedin. Forever Canucks. And forever faithful.

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TSN.CA / Statistically Speaking: Honka still trying to crack the lineup

Scott Cullen

A look at Julius Honka and defencemen that thrive in a limited role; Dzingel, DeBrincat, Miller and more in Scott Cullen's Statistically Speaking.



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At the risk of dipping a toe into the Honka Wars, I'm going to look at some defencemen that have thrived in limited opportunities this season.

In the hockey analytics community, there can be a tendency to argue in favour of seventh defencemen, players that the numbers suggest might deserve more regular playing time and are perceived as being wronged by the hockey men that make out the lineup. Think of the Toronto Maple Leafs, where they use Roman Polak ahead of Connor Carrick on a regular basis, and it's those lineup decisions that seem to draw more intensive interest from those looking at the numbers.

One of the defencemen that has landed into this discussion is Stars defenceman Julius Honka, the 14th pick in the 2014 Draft, who has struggled to earn regular playing time in Dallas this season, despite posting strong possession stats in his limited duty.

Here are the defencemen that played fewer than 14 minutes per game at 5-on-5 (minimum 20 games) and had favourable relative possession stats.

Will Butcher	New Jersey	79	12:53	53.0
5.8	55.2 6.1	53.5		
Anthony DeAngelo	N.Y. Rangers	32	13:58	49.6
5.5	48.2 1.7	31.9		
Christian Djoos	Washington	62	13:20	51.7
4.8	51.9 8.3	57.5		
Ben Lovejoy	New Jersey	55	13:13	52.4
4.6	55.1 6.5	50.0		
Tim Heed	San Jose	29	12:20	55.1
10.6	57.7	4.1		59.9
Julius Honka	Dallas	40	11:25	53.2
55.7	2.6 55.6	4.0		
MacKenzie Weegar	Florida	57	13:37	51.7
50.0	2.5 55.0	3.7		
Alex Biega	Vancouver	42	13:46	50.4
3.7	51.1 6.0	54.6		
Nick Jensen	Detroit	79	13:52	51.5
49.2	0.9 44.6	3.6		
Mikhail Sergachev	Tampa Bay	78	12:58	53.8
2.8	54.9 2.9	59.3		

There are a lot of sixth and seventh defencemen there, but some of those players are young guys who haven't yet been given more responsibility. Butcher, Djoos, Heed, Weegar, and Sergachev are all rookies.

Maybe Honka is like David Rundblad, a player who puts up stellar numbers in spot duty, but ultimately didn't fit in the league. In Rundblad's final years, from 2013 through 2016, his relative Corsi ranked 13th among defencemen with at least 500 5-on-5 minutes, fitting between P.K. Subban and Marc-Edouard Vlasic. This obviously doesn't mean Rundblad is their equivalent, but he was hanging in pretty good company for a player that couldn't even secure regular spot in the league.

Often the first disclaimer for a part-time player putting up stellar shot differentials is to cite the player's usage. This certainly applies in Honka's case, as he had the most sheltered usage among Stars defencemen, facing easier opposition and rarely starting shifts in the defensive zone.

The question, then, is if Honka is succeeding in his sheltered role, why has he not been getting more challenging opportunities? It's one thing to say that that coaching staff doesn't trust him – his usage and ice time make that abundantly clear – but why would they not trust him even relative to players who are producing tangibly worse results? For example, before he was traded to Pittsburgh, Jamie Oleksiak was ahead of Honka on the Stars' defensive depth chart this season, but was getting crushed in that role.

The argument I'm effectively putting forth in favour of Honka is not even about him specifically, but it's about a broader issue and is more about possible coaching and management blind spots. As brilliant and accomplished as Ken Hitchcock has been as a head coach, for example, he doesn't have much of a history of playing undersized puck-moving defencemen. That's hardly a unique position among veteran NHL head coaches, and one that should be interesting moving forward because there does appear to be a trend towards accepting smaller defencemen in the game. In the 2018 Draft, for example, Adam Boqvist and Quinton Hughes are sub-6-foot defencemen expected to go in the first half dozen picks or so. That situation would have been unthinkable not so long ago.

Evaluating defencemen is difficult enough but there are some who can produce favourable overall results if given the opportunity.

A couple of examples (there are more)...

Cody Franson may not paint the prettiest picture on the ice, but he has consistently posted strong shot differentials, and the Blackhawks were outshooting and outscoring the opposition with Franson on the ice this season when he was waived, and every other team in the league passed on picking up the rest of his one-year, \$1-million deal.

Also consider Derrick Pouliot, a 2012 first-round pick who couldn't land a regular spot on the Pittsburgh blueline, playing 67 NHL games over three seasons, before he was traded to Vancouver.

Pouliot is not a star, but he was a serviceable NHL defenceman this season after he found an opportunity with a team that needed to take a chance on his upside, and maybe Honka needs that kind of opportunity if he's not going to get it in Dallas.

Wouldn't rebuilding teams like Buffalo, Detroit, Vancouver or the Rangers make some sense as a landing spot? On a team without expectations, Honka could be dressed regularly and given an opportunity to sink or swim; to show whether or not he's a legitimate NHL defenceman.

At this point, he's not playing enough to have a great answer one way or the other.

From Wednesday's games...

HEROES

Ryan Dzingel – The Senators winger had a goal and an assist in a 4-2 win at Buffalo; he has six points (1 G, 5 A) in the past seven games.

Alex DeBrincat – Chicago's rookie sniper had a goal and an assist in a 4-3 win at St. Louis, and he's finishing strong, with 10 points (6 G, 4 A) in the past nine games.

Ryan Miller – Filling in for an injured John Gibson, the veteran Ducks netminder stopped 26 of 27 shots in a 3-1 win against Minnesota. He has a .951 save percentage in his past seven appearances.

ZEROES

Colin White – The Senators rookie winger had a tough game (4 for, 14 against, 22.2 CF%, 2-7 scoring chances) in a 4-2 win at Buffalo.

Dmitrij Jaskin and Tage Thompson – The Blues forwards struggled (9 for, 15 against, 37.5 CF%, 4-8 scoring chances) and were on the ice for two goals against in a 4-3 loss to Chicago.

David Kampf – The Blackhawks rookie centre was on the wrong side of the puck (6 for, 20 against, 23.1 CF%, 4-12 scoring chances) and was on the ice for two goals against in a 4-3 win at St. Louis.

Nate Prosser and Carson Soucy – Minnesota's third pair was on the wrong side of the puck (9 for, 18 against, 33.3 CF%) and on the ice for two goals against in a 3-1 loss at Anaheim.

VITAL SIGNS

Bobby Ryan – The Senators winger suffered a lower-body injury at Buffalo and was forced to leave the game.



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SHORT SHIFTS

Blues C Brayden Schenn and RW Vladimir Tarasenko both had a goal and an assist in a 4-3 loss to Chicago. Schenn has nine points (3 G, 6 A) in the past 10 games and Tarasenko has eight points (6 G, 2 A) in the past seven games...Senators LW Alex Burrows had a goal and an assist in a 4-2 win at Buffalo. He had no points in his previous eight games...Ducks defencemen Francois Beauchemin and Josh Manson both had two assists in a 3-1 win over Minnesota. Beauchemin has six points (1 G, 5 A) in the past seven games and Manson has four points (1 G, 3 A) in the past six games.

FIRSTS

Blake Hillman – Chicago's rookie defenceman scored his first NHL goal, in his second NHL game, a 4-3 win at St. Louis.

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TSN.CA / Statistically Speaking: Power play helps Hall's case for Hart

Scott Cullen

Hall is making his case for MVP; Benn, Barzal, Panarin, Connor, Pirri and more in Scott Cullen's Statistically Speaking.

New Jersey's star left winger, Taylor Hall, continued his push for Hart Trophy consideration, lighting up the Rangers for two goals and two assists in a 5-2 victory. He has 17 points (8 G, 9 A) during a nine-game point streak, and is up to a career-high 93 points in 75 games this season.

The biggest difference for Hall in this career season is power-play production, as he's tallied 37 points with the man advantage this year, ranking third in the league behind Phil Kessel and Blake Wheeler (What do they all have in common? All three have been traded by Peter Chiarelli!). Hall's previous high was 21 power play points, set in 2011-2012.

That also means Hall has recorded an unusually high percentage of points relative to goals scored by the Devils on the power play when he's on the ice.

Here are the players with at least 30 power-play points compared to how many power-play goals their team scored when they are on the ice with the man advantage:

Blake Wheeler	Winnipeg RW	39	45	86.67%
Taylor Hall	New Jersey	LW	37	45
			82.22%	
Evgeni Malkin	Pittsburgh C	36	46	78.26%
Nikita Kucherov	Tampa Bay	RW	36	46
			78.26%	
Josh Bailey	N.Y. Islanders	RW	30	40
			75.00%	
Jakub Voracek	Philadelphia	RW	35	47
			74.47%	
Steven Stamkos	Tampa Bay	C	33	45
			73.33%	
Phil Kessel	Pittsburgh RW	40	56	71.43%
Patrik Laine	Winnipeg RW	30	42	71.43%

Nathan MacKinnon	Colorado C	31	44	70.45%
Claude Giroux	Philadelphia	LW	35	50
			70.00%	
Shayne Gostisbehere	Philadelphia	D	32	
		46	69.57%	
John Tavares	N.Y. Islanders	C	30	44
			68.18%	
John Carlson	Washington	D	31	46
			67.39%	
Mikko Rantanen	Colorado RW	33	49	67.35%
Sidney Crosby	Pittsburgh C	36	56	64.29%
Alex Ovechkin	Washington	LW	30	50
			60.00%	

Hall has 55 even-strength points, which is good, but is tied for 14th in the league and ranks as his second-highest even-strength production of his career (having recorded 62 even-strength points in 2013-2014).

It's been a fantastic season and Hall is going to be in the Hart Trophy discussion thanks to his power play production.

HEROES

Jamie Benn – Dallas' captain notched a hat trick in a 4-2 win at San Jose, giving him 21 points (11 G, 10 A) in the past 19 games.

Mathew Barzal – The Islanders' Calder Trophy front-runner scored two goals and added an assist in a 5-4 win over Philadelphia. He has 13 points (4 G, 9 A) in the past 11 games and is up to 82 points for the season.

Artemi Panarin – Columbus' talented playmaker is wreaking havoc down the stretch. He produced a goal and two assists in a 5-4 overtime win against Detroit, and has put up 27 points (9 G, 18 A) in the past 15 games to hit a career-high 80 points.

Kyle Connor – The Jets' freshman winger had a goal and two assists in a 5-4 overtime win at Montreal. He has 14 points (8 G, 6 A) in the past 11 games, and has taken over the rookie goal-scoring lead with 30. Not bad for a guy who started the season in the American Hockey League.

Brandon Pirri – The Golden Knights' 26-year-old forward scored two goals in his first NHL game of the season, a 5-4 shootout win at Vancouver. He had previously played 226 games for the Blackhawks, Panthers, Ducks, and Rangers, but was in the AHL this season, where he put up 51 points (29 G, 22 A) in 54 games.

ZEROES

Troy Brouwer, Mikael Backlund and Michael Frolik – The Flames trio was on the ice for three goals against in a 4-1 loss to Arizona.

Tomas Hertl, Logan Couture and Mikkel Boedker – The Sharks line was on the ice for three goals against in a 4-2 loss at Dallas.

David Backes – Boston's veteran winger was on the ice for three goals against in a 4-0 loss at Tampa Bay.

VITAL SIGNS

Damon Severson – The Devils continued to make their 23-year-old blueliner a healthy scratch, which is interesting given how important these games are for New Jersey as they try to clinch a playoff berth.

Nikita Scherbak – Montreal's rookie winger suffered a concussion against Winnipeg.

Mike McKenna – The 34-year-old goaltender, who has spent the vast majority of his career in the American Hockey League, entered the Stars game in relief of Kari Lehtonen and stopped all 17 shots that he faced in a 4-2 win at San Jose.



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SHORT SHIFTS

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John Tavares is up to 83 points for the season.

Islanders LW Anthony Beauvillier had a goal and two assists in a 5-4 win over Philadelphia, giving him 10 points (6 G, 4 A) in the past seven games... Islanders C John Tavares scored a pair of goals, and has 19 points (6 G, 13 A) in the past 15 games... Islanders RW Jordan Eberle added a couple of assists against the Flyers. He has 12 points (2 G, 10 A) in the past 12 games... Flyers C Nolan Patrick scored two goals and added an assist in a 5-4 loss at the Islanders. He has five points (3 G, 2 A) in the past six games... Flyers LW Claude Giroux had a goal and an assist, and has 14 points (4 G, 10 A) during an eight-game point streak... Flyers D Shayne Gostisbehere contributed a couple of assists, giving him 10 points (2 G, 8 A) in the past eight games... Devils D Will Butcher scored two goals in a 5-2 win against the Rangers and has 14 points (3 G, 11 A) in the past 14 games... Devils C Travis Zajac added a goal and an assist, giving him four points (1 G, 3 A) in the past four games... Red Wings LW Tyler Bertuzzi scored a pair of goals in a 5-4 overtime loss at Columbus. He has five points (4 G, 1 A) in the past six games... Red Wings C Henrik Zetterberg contributed three assists and has six assists in the past six games... Blue Jackets RW Cam Atkinson scored two goals in a 5-4 overtime win vs. Detroit, and has 24 points (13 G, 11 A) in the past 19 games... Blue Jackets D Seth Jones added three helpers and RW Oliver Bjorkstrand had two assists against the Red Wings. Jones has 16 points (6 G, 10 A) in the past 10 games, while Bjorkstrand had one assist in his previous seven games... Playing his first game in two-and-a-half weeks, Jets rookie RW Jack Roslovic produced a goal and an assist in a 5-4 overtime win at Montreal, his second straight multi-point game... Canadiens LW Alex Galchenyuk had a goal and an assist in a 5-4 overtime loss to Winnipeg and has 11 points (3 G, 8 A) in the past 11 games... Lightning RW Ryan Callahan and D Braydon Coburn both had a pair of assists in a 4-0 win against Boston. Callahan had one assist in his previous 12 games while Coburn matched his production from the previous 16 games... Coyotes LW Max Domi earned a couple of assists in a 4-1 win at Calgary, giving him 12 points (4 G, 8 A) in the past nine games... Golden Knights C William Karlsson continued his offensive assault with one goal and two assists in a 5-4 overtime win at Vancouver. He has 12 points (4 G, 8 A) during a five-game point streak... Golden Knights RW Alex Tuch and D Colin Miller both had a pair of assists. Tuch has five points (2 G, 3 A) in the past five games and Miller had no points in his previous seven games... Canucks LW Nikolay Goldobin scored twice during a 5-4 overtime loss to Vegas; he has six points (3 G, 3 A) in the past seven games... Canucks C Brandon Sutter contributed a goal and an assist, and has eight points (5 G, 3 A) in the past eight games... Montreal's line of Paul Byron, Jonathan Drouin and Brendan Gallagher controlled play (13 for, 2 against, 86.7 CF%, 7-0 scoring chances) in a 5-4 overtime loss to Winnipeg.

Lightning G Andrei Vasilevskiy turned away all 33 shots that he faced in a 4-0 win against Boston. He had a .873 save percentage in his previous seven starts... Panthers G Roberto Luongo stopped 45 of 46 shots in a 2-1 win against Nashville, to keep Florida's playoff hopes alive. He has a .932 save percentage in his past 14 games... Coyotes G Antti Raanta had 42 saves on 43 shots in a 4-1 win at Calgary and has a .954 save percentage in his past 16 games.

FIRSTS

Sami Niku – A 2015 seventh-round pick by the Jets, the 21-year-old defenceman scored a goal in his NHL debut, a 5-4 overtime win at Montreal. He had 52 points (15 G, 37 A) in 71 AHL games to earn this late-season promotion.

First NHL goal on his first NHL shot! Sami Niku gives the #NHLJets a 4-3 lead! #BelieveInTheJets pic.twitter.com/qRI0y07qUY

— #BelieveInTheJets Nation (@NHLJetsNation) April 4, 2018

Dylan Gambrell – A second-round pick of the Sharks in 2016, the 21-year-old centre made his NHL debut for San Jose. He had 43 points (13 G, 30 A) in 41 games as a junior at Denver University this season.

Alex Broadhurst – Undrafted out of junior, where he finished with the London Knights, the 25-year-old centre made his NHL debut for Columbus against Detroit. He had 41 points (19 G, 22 A) in 66 AHL games before getting the call.

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TSN.CA / Johnsson adds to Toronto's impressive forward depth

Travis Yost

One of the more intriguing lineup decisions Mike Babcock will have to answer as the Toronto Maple Leafs head into the postseason concerns the use of forward Andreas Johnsson.

Teams as successful as the Maple Leafs have been this year don't like to tinker with deployment in the days leading up to the playoffs, and that's probably doubly true for a coach like Babcock. The Leafs are realistically looking at finishing sixth or seventh in the league standings, and a lot of that has to do with how deep their forward pool is and how productive they have been in the offensive end.

So, naturally, the bar that Johnsson would have to clear is quite high. But it's not impossible. He more or less dominated the AHL during the 2017-18 season – enough to warrant spot minutes for the big-league team this year, either due to injury or rest opportunities for a team locked into their playoff seeding. And Johnsson has been solid in limited minutes.

Qualitatively, it appears as though Johnsson's attributes are translating well to the NHL level. He's a high-end skater who is creative with the puck, and that's a dangerous weapon to possess when you are talking about a twelfth forward in a lineup playing predominantly against other depth forwards. He has three points in about 100 minutes, or 1.7 points per-60 minutes. That's ahead of teammates such as Kasperii Kapanen, Leo Komarov and Tomas Plekanec. Deployment varies from player to player here, but it's worth noting that his counting numbers are already there in the first nine games.

But what's more interesting than that is the level at which Toronto has territorially dominated with Johnsson on the ice. One of the things speaks volumes about the competency of a depth player (true for any player, but probably more true for guys further down the lineup who don't possess the same type of finishing skills) is their ability to consistently play in the offensive zone. Not only does this keep the pressure on opponents, it keeps the puck out of the defensive zone. That's more minutes for Toronto's stars to rest, and less of a workload for an already heavily burdened Freddy Andersen.

Just take a look at how the shots and scoring chances are falling in the minutes he's out there. At five-on-five, Johnsson – playing predominantly with Tomas Plekanec and Kasperii Kapanen – has been dominant in all the ways you want to see. (Data via Corsica and NST.)

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It's possible that playing with a veteran like Plekanec or a lightning-quick skater like Kapanen is helping Johnsson's transition. It's possible that he's just eating up soft minutes against inferior depth lines around the league. And it's true that Johnsson's limited action has come against some weaker competition in general – his most common opponents by ice time are stacked against guys from Buffalo and Montreal because of the way the schedule fell.



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But none of that should marginalize what Johnsson has done so far. It's hard to transition into the NHL and it's probably more difficult to do it on a roster where the minutes are extremely competitive and just about everyone deserves ample ice time. The key thing for me isn't that Johnsson's minutes look great – any time you are pulling 55 to 60 per cent of shots or scoring chances, it's a good story. It's that his minutes are actually more impressive than the minutes played by Leafs skaters further up the lineup.

And that's the ultimate goal for any team looking to do damage in the postseason. Every team that makes the playoffs has quality. What's differentiated teams in the modern era is the ability to get out of top-heavy hockey – overreliance on one line and one pairing, or one outstanding goaltender – and towards a 23-man lineup that can decimate opponents shift after shift. It's why Nashville and Tampa Bay are considered two of the big Stanley Cup favourites this year. And it's why Boston has had such a strong bounce-back season after their depth was mercilessly exposed a season ago.

Right now, Johnsson is yet another option in what's becoming one of the deepest forward groups in hockey. But a few more games of this and Babcock may have little choice but to dress him in the postseason.

And for a rookie, that's all you can ask for.

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USA TODAY / Sure, the NHL playoffs will be fun. But there are reasons to be disappointed before it even starts

KEVIN ALLEN | 4:28 p.m. GMT+1 Apr. 5, 2018

The Pittsburgh Penguins head into the postseason next week on a quest to become the first team in 35 years to win three consecutive Stanley Cup championships. Sin City is all in on the Vegas Golden Knights' first playoff appearance.

The Nashville Predators have an All-Star cast of anthem singers lined up. The Los Angeles Kings are back in contention and fans in Winnipeg might have the most reasons to be excited since the days when Ulf Nilsson, Anders Hedberg and Bobby Hull wore a Jets jersey.

Fans have plenty of reasons to be optimistic about this season's NHL playoffs. But there are some negatives about the upcoming postseason:

No Connor McDavid: This would be like the NBA launching the postseason without LeBron James or the NFL starting the playoffs without Tom Brady. While the NHL has plenty of dynamic performers, none are quite as fast and magical as McDavid. Playing in a low-scoring era, McDavid has registered 251 points in his first 207 NHL regular-season games.

Flawed format: The NHL's divisional format means that it's probable that the top two seeds in each conference can meet in the second round, instead of the conference final. In the Western Conference, top-seeded Nashville and Winnipeg, No. 4 overall in the league, will meet in the second round if they win their opening round. Likewise, Tampa Bay, No. 2 overall, can play No. 3 Boston in the second round in the East. It's time for the NHL to switch from a divisional format to a conference No. 1 through No. 8 format.

Original Two? It's not good for the NHL to have four of the Original Six teams (Detroit, Chicago, Montreal and the New York Rangers) as non-playoff qualifiers. Those are major markets sitting on the sidelines. In a 31-team league, you expect a couple of those teams to be absent every season. But not four.

Critical injuries: Ryan Suter, the Minnesota Wild's No. 1 defenseman, has been lost to a broken leg. The Wild are not the same team without his all-around play. Colorado Avalanche workhorse defenseman Erik Johnson is also injured, as is Anaheim Ducks puck-moving defenseman Cam Fowler and goalie John Gibson, who is day-to-day with an upper-body injury.

No goodbye series: Vancouver Canucks stars Daniel and Henrik Sedin, retiring at the end of this season, won't have the opportunity to play a final playoff series. It's a shame because these are two of the classiest players in NHL history.

Controversy will come: The league chose to not make any changes to the offside rule, but it did make a tweak to goalie interference judgment so that the situation room has the final say. But you know there will be a game or two decided by one (or both) of these calls.

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USA TODAY / Wait till next year: Five NHL teams that will make playoffs in 2019

KEVIN ALLEN | USA TODAY SPORTS

With a 17-8-2 record over the past two months, the Coyotes have been the NHL's fifth-best team in that span. That's a 109-point pace for a full season.

"We are in a unique position in that we are doing a lot of development at the NHL level," Coyotes general manager John Chayka told USA TODAY Sports.

Historically at least five teams that don't make the NHL playoffs this season will make it in 2018-19, and Arizona is first on our list.

The Coyotes' recent success starts with goalie Antti Raanta, who has earned the team a point in 20 of his past 25 starts since Jan. 4. In that span, he owns an NHL-best 1.83 goals-against average and .942 save percentage.

"And Clayton (Keller) is the most interesting player in the group," Chayka said, "because he's so good already, and yet we think he's just starting to scratch the surface. He's already thinking two or three steps ahead of the NHL."

Keller, 19, could reach 70 points. Chayka said defenseman Jakob Chychrun, 20, "is playing the best hockey I've seen him play."

He was injured Wednesday, but he had been logging 20-plus minutes, including power play time. "He's looked like a veteran," Chayka said.

Christian Fisher, 20, has 14 goals, and Brendan Perlini, 21, has 17.

"Talent wins in the NHL and (Brendan) has all-world skating and shooting ability," Chayka said. "He has scored highlight reel goals that we haven't seen in this organization in a long time."

Christian Dvorak, 22, has 15 goals. First-round pick Dylan Strome, 20, looks as if he will be the big matchup center the Coyotes need him to be.

With 44 points, Max Domi, 23, didn't live up to offensive expectations this season, but has picked up his pace.

"He's really been good the last 10 or 15 games," Chayka said. "This was a case of a player who never had an offensive struggle in his life. Two periods used to be a slump for him growing up and in junior and all of a sudden this season he had struggles. He figured it out in the second half of the season."



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The Coyotes also remain optimistic about their ability to re-sign Oliver Ekman-Larsson, who is among the NHL's most skilled offensive defenseman.

Seven teams that didn't make the playoffs last season should qualify this season. Aside from Arizona, here are the other teams that won't make it this season but will make it in 2018-19:

Florida Panthers: Technically, the Panthers are still alive in the playoff race, although it's not likely they will qualify. Next season, they will not miss. Aleksander Barkov and Aaron Ekblad are only 21, and Vincent Trocheck and Jonthan Huberdeau are only 24. Mike Matheson is 23, and Denis Malgin is 20.

Defenseman Keith Yandle, enjoying one of his best seasons, is still in his prime. Skilled Owen Tippett, 18, will be a regular next season. This is a team on the rise, and GM Dale Tallon has proven he can make a team better.

Edmonton Oilers: You can't miss the playoffs two years in a row when you have Connor McDavid, the game's most skilled player. Regardless of who will be in charge next season, the Oilers should be able to return to the playoffs.

When you have McDavid and Leon Draisaitl as foundation blocks, there's no excuse for what happened this season. The Oilers need greater consistency from goalie Cam Talbot, an offensive defenseman and another scorer. That may sound like a big ask, but when you have McDavid, it is a small ask. If you do that, McDavid will do the rest.

Dallas Stars: The difference between missing the playoffs or being a 100-point team was bad luck. The primary reasons for the Stars being out of a playoff spot were extended injuries to Martin Hanzal and Marc Method, a late-season injury to goalie Ben Bishop and an ill-timed six-game road trip in March.

This team still has plenty of promise, particularly if GM Jim Nill can tweak their scoring depth and younger defensemen continue to improve. They will make the playoffs next season.

Carolina Hurricanes: Maybe pundits were a year early on the prediction that the Hurricanes were going to be a playoff team.

The signing of goalie Scott Darling didn't work out this season, and Cam Ward will be an unrestricted free agent. This team was 22-14-4 when Ward played and 13-20-7 when Darling played.

This team has skill and promise on defense and up front, but the new general manager will have a major challenge in finding a solution in net. Darling has three years left on his contract.

However, when you consider the New York Rangers, Ottawa Senators, Buffalo Sabres and Detroit Red Wings are rebuilding and the New York Islanders could lose John Tavares to free agency, the Hurricanes are in a good position.

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