



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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THE NEWS & OBSERVER

Carolina Hurricanes desperate to pick up where they left off, anyway, anyhow, anywhere

BY LUKE DECOCK

It wasn't just that the Carolina Hurricanes were on a three-game winning streak when the NHL was forced to "pause" its season because of the coronavirus. It was that, nearing the end of the regular season, they had finally started to recapture the identity that brought them so much success a year ago.

It had been a long and elusive quest, but as February rounded into March, the Hurricanes were rounding into form. Finally. They won both games of a road-road back-to-back against the New York Islanders and Pittsburgh Penguins, rolled over the Detroit Red Wings and were in New Jersey to play the Devils when everything shut down — in part, amid fears Hurricanes employees had been exposed to COVID-19 in Detroit.

The Hurricanes had 14 games to go, and almost a month later, they're desperate to find a way to play any or all of them, or at the very least get their chance to post back-to-back playoff seasons for the first time in 18 years. At the time the NHL shut down on March 11, the 38-25-5 Hurricanes were in the first wild-card spot in the Eastern Conference, both by total points (81) and points percentage (.596) -- the latter to be used if the NHL can't finish the regular season, since teams had played varying numbers of games.

"For me the importance is to finish the season, in some form or fashion," Hurricanes coach Rod Brind'Amour said. "And if they can't fit in regular-season games, there has to be, for me, I'd like to see a conclusion, someone is awarded the winner. We've put in 68 games, three-quarters of the season plus, we need to finish this year out, just to have some sort of closure before we move on."

And to do that, Hurricanes general manager Don Waddell said they're willing to play along with even the NHL's most outlandish proposals, one of which commissioner Gary Bettman has acknowledged has included sequestering teams at neutral sites in out-of-the-way places like Grand

Forks, N.D., Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, and Manchester, N.H., to try to finish out the regular season and/or playoffs.

It's ludicrous, of course. The NHL isn't the only pro league desperately searching for a "coronavirus loophole," with baseball proposing a similar plan to start its season in Arizona. All it would take is one positive test to shut the whole thing down, and once the logistics come into focus, it requires so many more people than just teams and players and officials to be impossible.

But at this point, given the stakes, the Hurricanes are willing to entertain just about any notion that keeps the season alive.

"If you look around what's going on around our country there's probably some cities you don't think you can play in," Waddell said. "It's all obvious, too, some of those cities. If you're going to play regular-season games it might make sense to come up with some neutral-site places. Obviously you're bringing 31 teams back you're going to have multiple sites you have to go to.

"But I think this goes into the bigger picture that (Bettman) keeps talking about, playing regular-season games, and if it means going to certain cities that don't have shutdowns anymore, states, cities, states, counties, then that makes sense for the league as a whole. We'd be in favor of that also."

If and when the season does resume in some form, the Hurricanes should have Dougie Hamilton and James Reimer available, Waddell said Thursday, even if Brett Pesce is still rehabbing his shoulder after surgery. Both Hamilton and Reimer would be skating by now, Waddell said, if they could.

It just adds more fuel to a fire the Hurricanes would like to reignite, any way they can.

"Things were looking positive and obviously we had to pause it all, but I liked where our team was for sure," Brind'Amour said.



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THE ATHLETIC

Hurricanes update: Player's health, staying ready and Rod Brind'Amour's home gym

By Sara Civian

Hurricanes head coach Rod Brind'Amour and GM and President Don Waddell formally "met" with the media via Zoom on Thursday for the first time since the NHL season was suspended. They answered our questions about what they're up to, the plan for the rest of the season and player recovery timetables.

Dougie Hamilton would've been ready to go for the playoffs on Earth2

In bittersweet news of the day: If the playoffs resumed as normal, Dougie Hamilton would've been cleared.

Waddell: "His rehab has gone very well, he's done everything he's needed to do. He's been cleared. He has not taken the ice yet — we talked about it last week and he said he didn't want to rush on the ice because he knows we're not going to be playing for the next few months. We'll address that in the next few weeks, but 100 percent he'll be back. If we were playing today we would've sped up that on-ice performance. He'll be ready to play when we drop the puck."

Waddell told The Athletic a few weeks ago that Hamilton would be expected to return as early as April.

At least he will be back whenever the puck drops.

Thoughts on season returning

Waddell: "Like everybody has probably heard, the commissioner has made it very clear that if at all possible we'd like to play some regular-season games for multiple reasons — playoff positioning, draft positioning. We don't know how that would look and we don't have a timetable. I think we're all living in a world right now where nobody can predict what's gonna happen, not only in a month from now but even, maybe, longer than that. I think there's a lot of hope that we'd be able to finish the regular season before we get into a playoff situation."

Brind'Amour: "I'd be happy just to start the playoffs as long as we're included (laughing). But for me, the importance is finish the season in some form or fashion. I'd like to see a conclusion in some way. We put in 68 games, three-quarters of the season, plus. We need to finish this year so we can have some form of closure and move on. That's my opinion. However we're able to do that, if we are able to do that it's a positive sign in the bigger picture. I'd like to see some sort of finish to the year whether we would play regular-season games or not. I'd like to see somebody win the Stanley Cup this year."

On communicating with the team and staff

Brind'Amour: "(Keeping players in shape) was probably our main concern. It has come down to an individual basis based on where players are at and what they have available to them. I think we have the best strength coach in the world right now in Billy B. (Bill Burniston). We were really treating this as our offseason and how players would go about that — he's in direct communication with our guys daily, he sends workouts to them and he knows their situations. Some guys don't have access to much where they're at and he figures out a way to send them a workout, whether it's going for a run, pushups, whatever. The guys that stuck around here, he actually brought stuff to them so they can stay in the best condition that they can. But it's definitely tough for that, it's become individualized workouts for guys."

Waddell: "We have several conference calls going, including one with the amateur staff, because there's going to be a draft. We've engaged our coaches with our pro scouts, we're treating this as our offseason and doing what we do normally in that. There are updates sent to the players (via TeamWorks), it's pretty much open communication. There have been players leaving town that we've talked to before they left town. We talk to (everyone) on an as-needed basis."

Brind'Amour: "The main message we've left to all the guys is 'Stay safe', make sure you're doing your part, take care of your families. Stay home and try your best to stay in shape.' For me, it's about trying to find different avenues to the game and be better, there are certain little things I've been doing to stay busy on that front. ... It's tough. I heard someone say something on one of these conversations 'I'm bored,' it's a luxury to be that right now. We're trying to just be safe and do what we can here. My message to all the players is just try to make sure you stay in shape — use this time to get better at something. Family time, our guys during the year it's one of the things they don't get — utilize this. We're in the same boat as everyone."

Rod maintaining 'the bod'

Brind'Amour: "I'm big on routines, so I'm lucky I have a little gym in my house here, every day that's how I start my day. Sometimes I got my little guy in school and I'll help my wife because she loses her mind trying to homeschool him. Trying to keep my pulse on the coaching thing."

Waddell, when asked a different question: "OK, first let me comment on Rod's weight room. It makes PNC Arena's weight room look very tiny. We all know how Rod trains."

Loose pucks

Waddell: "We have a task force we've put in place to talk about options (for the season returning). One is we come back with no fans. How are we going to deal with that? The



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second is we come back and can only have (X) amount of fans, we've talked at length and have plans for all types of situations. Anything that gets thrown our way we'll be able to handle — that's the nice thing about controlling your building, we control (PNC Arena) so we're going to do it not only the way the league and government needs to do it but the way we need to do it."

Brett Pesce is going through rehab, a six-month healing process. As previously reported, he won't be back for this season. But Pesce is projected to be ready to go for next season.

Like Hamilton, James Reimer hasn't skated yet but Waddell feels he's "100 percent." The Hurricanes expect him to be ready to go.

Brind'Amour said he and other NHL coaches have been jumping on Zoom several times a week. "I'm actually reaching out to a bunch of other coaches. We go on a little Zoom meeting ourselves three times a week. It's actually been pretty good for me, just hearing how other coaches are dealing with this, but also really talking hockey, diving in. Different topic every day that we meet. That's been interesting."

Speaking of which — Brind'Amour, Rick Tocchet and Craig Berube are meeting the media on Zoom on Friday. Anything you want me to ask?

The Athletic's Hurricane survey: Tell us what you think of the franchise

By Sara Civian Apr 1, 2020

First off, thank you.

For real.

We're all collectively going through an unprecedented, scary and incredibly stressful time right now, but one thing I have felt so grateful for every day is your continued support of *The Athletic*. You are the reason my colleagues and I have one less worry these days.

I can only hope I'm reciprocating by giving you a little distraction [here](#) and [there](#).

Expect that to continue as we all search for a new normal together. We also thought it would be fun to put together a series of surveys seeking your opinion about what's currently going on with the local teams.

Though the Metropolitan Division was the tightest race in the league and it's impossible to say how the playoff picture would look today, [Dom's trusty model says the Canes would have made it](#) (more on that from both of us soon).

The Canes went through some brutal injuries, with Norris contender Dougie Hamilton out months ago, then rock-solid Brett Pesce and both Petr Mrazek and James Reimer out right before the deadline. [The most eventful trade deadline in franchise history](#), though, brought reinforcements in Vincent Trocheck, Brady Skjei and a recovering Sami Vatanen.

We obviously don't know if this season will get to resume in light of the COVID-19 crisis, but I wouldn't bet on it. So maybe it's time for some reflection, then some looking ahead?

Have fun.



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NHL's Steve Mayer addresses all uncertainties - including Canes' 2021 outdoor game

By Lauren Brownlow, WRALSportsFan columnist/reporter

With the hockey season up in the air as of now, NHL Chief Content Officer Steve Mayer could understandably be cagey about who the Hurricanes' opponent will be in their 2021 outdoor game at Carter-Finley Stadium on February 20.

"We're on a pause, obviously, and I'll use that as an excuse," Mayer said when he joined The Adam Gold Show on Thursday and Gold jokingly pressed him on the topic. "Listen, there's so much there's up in the air and the opponent for next year's game in Carolina is also one of those things that's still up in the air."

Jokes aside, of course, the NHL - like nearly every facet of society - is dealing with the serious ramifications of the COVID-19 outbreak that put its season on pause. Three Colorado Avalanche players have now tested positive for the virus, with the third positive test coming just a few days ago. The Ottawa Senators had two players test positive as well.

Once everyone is healthy and it's safe to do so, though, the NHL would love to continue its season if that's possible. The how and the where and the why are yet to be worked out as social distancing is still running its course nationwide to help flatten the curve.

As things slowly inch their way back to normal, though, Mayer said that all options will be considered. Even playing without fans.

"I've read what you've read and I'm sure what you've reported. It's all sports. Baseball was going to play in Arizona in May. There was a report about us in North Dakota, the NBA in Vegas. Everybody's looking right now at every potential option there could be," Mayer said. "Our goal is to get back out there and start playing as soon as we can, but when is the as soon as we can? That's the biggest question right now. We are keeping all options on the table."

"If it means to come back but we have to play without fans, that is absolutely an option that we will consider. It is in our interest to get things back on schedule in some manner and certainly to play next season as full as we possibly can. We

are discussing so many different scenarios. Certain things will be reported. Don't believe everything that you read, but there's probably a little truth in everything. But there's no one plan that is the way we're going to go."

In the meantime, though, they're trying to give their fans a little fix of the NHL when they can, including starting the Hockey at Home series. The first episode featured NHL brothers, including all of the Staal brothers.

The next one will be Alex Ovechkin and Wayne Gretzky talking about their mutual admiration, and they have an episode planned about NHL couples - wives and girlfriends and their significant others who play in the league.

"These are just certain examples of the many things that we're doing have been able to do during the pause. It's really, really important for us. We all know we're all going through this together. These are obviously very different and crazy times," Mayer said.

"We are so sympathetic to everyone's health and staying safe and staying healthy, but at the same time, we also know that there's a lot of people at home who want to be entertained, who want to continue getting an NHL fix every once in awhile, and we're providing them with new content."

There's no telling what either a lengthened 2020 season or a delayed start to the 2021 season might entail as far as scheduling goes, but Gold asked Mayer if the Canes' outdoor game for 2021 was still going on as planned.

"At this moment, everything that's on our schedule is on our schedule," Mayer said. "The awards show, the draft, the combine and the draft lottery is the only thing that we've announced that is obviously either canceled or postponed. Outside of that, again - unpredictable, uncertain - we will try to preserve everything in the exact places that we've announced them but it's really hard to predict right now."

"We're just hoping like everybody else is that we're back playing hockey as soon as we can. That's what everybody wants. That's what we want. We're going to try to do our best but obviously we're going to listen to the health officials and the government officials as to when they give the green light."



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Canes captain Jordan Staal joined the OG to talk contingency plans, staying in shape and more

By Lauren Brownlow, WRALSportsFan columnist/reporter

When hockey was being played, Carolina Hurricanes captain Jordan Staal deals with daily aches and pains, constant ice time and the mental and physical exhaustion of a Playoff push.

Now? He's fighting off pollen trying to stay in shape.

"I've been running outside a fair amount but the pollen's been smoking me so I haven't done that as much," Staal said when he joined The OG on Tuesday. "Just finding whatever you can to get the heart rate up and obviously keeping that base strength as best you can too, whatever that is - it can be a body weight workout or finding little stuff in the gym that you have throughout the house. You've seen guys get creative."

And he's doing all of it on an uncertain timeline. It's not like the offseason, when there's a definitive ending. With the sports hiatus, there is no definitive ending.

The one hidden benefit to this for Staal is that he's been able to heal up and get healthy. But even that has come at a cost, and it will continue to come at a cost when - and if - hockey resumes this year.

"I wouldn't be saying there wasn't a few nicks I was dealing with throughout the season that have slowly healed up this last month. My knee's not bothering me as much, my hips aren't aching and the body is feeling pretty good," Staal said. "But knowing it would be hard to get back into it after taking a month off the ice for the most part, all of those things that you get in that daily routine of playing or practicing every day and you take that out of it completely, it's harder to get back into it. It would be difficult for obviously the whole league to jump right into it. I'm sure they'll find a way to make it as easy as they can on the players and get in some games quickly."

Various scenarios have been floated as to how and when hockey could return, including potentially playing the rest of the season and Playoffs out in North Dakota.

Staal says he's open to whatever can get hockey back.

"I've never been to North Dakota, so it'd be interesting to go see but it would be different. How ever this is going to play

out, it's going to be different. It's going to be hard. Some people are going to be happy, some people are going to be upset and it's never going to be perfect. If that's the best-case scenario to get in Playoffs and the players are willing to do it and the fans obviously, just to be able to watch it on TV, and if that's the only way we can do it then that's the only way we can do it," Staal said. "Obviously, this is a scenario that hopefully will never happen again and it's a different situation. Whatever happens, it's going to be the best-case scenario that we can do for both sides and for everyone and get back to some normalcy and see some playoff hockey."

Staal's normal now is texting and video chats with his three brothers and their families, and being a stay-at-home dad. He decided to stay here in Raleigh as opposed to go back to his hometown of Thunder Bay, Ontario.

"I'm enjoying myself with the family as best we can in this scenario. It's been nice just to hang out with the kids with nothing to do, but a month of it is getting to the point where you start pulling your hair a little bit. But we'll see how it unfolds here," Staal said.

And he couldn't help but lament the season stopping just when the Canes were getting things going.

New pieces had been added at the trade deadline, and it had taken some time for things to come together. But that's what was starting to happen, and the Canes would have a Wild Card spot if the regular season is called and it goes straight to Playoffs.

"You could tell the last 3-4 games, we started to put it all together and you could tell every line was kind of buzzing a little bit and all the d-corps started feeling comfortable with each other. The moves we made, the guys that came in were definitely starting to make their presence known. You could definitely feel some momentum and then obviously, that was it," Staal said. "It's going to be a challenge for everyone obviously if we do come back and get some games in to get moving and motivated but obviously to get that feeling again of everyone involved and get everyone going if you want to make a good push to finish off."



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Canes Weighing Options, Staying Busy During Pause

BY MICHAEL SMITH

The 2020 Stanley Cup Playoffs were supposed to begin on Wednesday, April 8.

That was, of course, until the COVID-19 pandemic brought hockey, sports and the world at large to a screeching halt in mid-March.

It is the joint hope and ultimate goal of the National Hockey League and its Players' Association to offer some semblance of a conclusion to the 2019-20 season - but who that might involve, what that might look like, when that might happen, where that might happen and how that might be pulled off all remain complicated question marks.

The Carolina Hurricanes, who had accumulated a 38-25-5 record and 81 points through 68 games when the NHL paused the regular season, want to be ready for whatever, whenever, wherever.

"The importance is to finish the season in some form or fashion," head coach Rod Brind'Amour said on a video conference call on Thursday. "I'd like to see some sort of finish to the year, whether we have regular season games or not, and someone win the Stanley Cup this year."

The critical factor affecting every potential scenario is the when of it all - and it's also the factor impossible to accurately project at the moment.

"We don't have any timetable," President and General Manager Don Waddell said on Thursday's video conference call. "We're all living in a world right now where nobody can predict what's going to happen not only in a month from now, but even maybe longer than that. But, I think there's a lot of hope we can finish the regular season before we get into the playoffs."

For a number of reasons - playoff positioning, draft positioning, conditioning and revenue, just to name a few - the prevailing sentiment around the league seems to favor some sort of regular season conclusion. It makes sense theoretically, at least.

But, will it be practical? How would scheduling work? Will games have to be staged in neutral site locations, those that aren't as densely populated or boast comparably low infection rates? Will fans be allowed in buildings?

Waddell said the Canes have formed an internal task force to tackle all scenarios.

"We have multiple plans," he said. "Anything that's thrown our way, we'll be able to handle and adjust to."

If the regular season can't be salvaged, though, the Canes find themselves in a desirable position, occupying the first wild card spot in the Eastern Conference.

"I'd be happy just to start the playoffs," Brind'Amour laughed.

And, having won three games in a row, the team seemed to be hitting a stride when the pause button was pressed.

"I felt like the group was really playing well, maybe even our best. All the things seemed to be firing really well that last week," Brind'Amour said. "It was looking pretty good. The acquisitions we made at the deadline were huge additions, and they were starting to feel comfortable. You could see they were starting to fit in. Things were looking positive. I liked where our team was, for sure."

It's a guessing game for who knows how long, but the Canes are doing their best to remain busy amidst the uncertainty.

"We're treating this as our offseason," Waddell said. "We figure if and when we come back, there will be a short window before the 2020-21 season."

Waddell said the team has held conference calls with amateur scouts, noting a draft will be held at some point in time. Pro scouts have also been involved in conversations about player movement options whenever free agency opens. Brind'Amour remains in regular communication with the coaching staff to ensure they're ready for anything, too.

"We have to have some sort of idea so we're not unprepared when the time comes," he said.

And then there are the players, who are in just as much a state of limbo as everyone else. It's difficult to develop a training regimen with no set end date, such as training camp, penciled in on the calendar, but Brind'Amour and his staff want to ensure the players are taking care of themselves and looking after their physical fitness as best they can.

Strength and conditioning coach Bill Burniston, who Brind'Amour called "the best strength coach in the world," has been heavily involved in developing individualized fitness plans for the players. Some remained in Raleigh. Others are



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abroad. Some have access to weights and other equipment. Others are more limited in what's available to them.

"That was probably our No. 1 concern as far as just, how do you keep these guys in shape?" Brind'Amour said. "We're almost treating this like our offseason in how we go about it. [Burniston] is in direct communication daily, really, with our guys. He hands out workouts. He knows their situations."

Brind'Amour, of course, maintains a workout regimen, too.

"I'm big on routines. I'm lucky," he said. "I have a little gym in my house here, so that's how I start my day."

"It makes PNC Arena's weight room look very tiny, because we all know how Rod trains," Waddell joked.

Whenever hockey resumes, the Canes will have a full complement of healthy bodies, too. That includes Dougie Hamilton, who has been medically cleared by doctors to resume skating after having surgery to repair a fractured fibula in his left leg.

"His rehab has gone very well. He's done everything he's needed to do," Waddell said. "He's ready to go. It's just a matter of time before we put him on the ice and move forward from there. He'll be ready to play when we drop the puck."

Aho Answers Your Questions on Instagram

BY MICHAEL SMITH

"Moi" from Finland, where Sebastian Aho was handed the keys to the NHL Europe Instagram account for a Tuesday afternoon question and answer session with fans.

Here is a collection of Aho's answers, which he provided via short video clips on NHL Europe's Instagram story.

"Hello, everyone. It's Sebastian Aho from the Carolina Hurricanes here," Aho greeted the followers of @nhleurope Tuesday. "I'm excited to answer your questions."

What do you love about being a Hurricane?
I love my teammates. I love living in Raleigh. It feels like home. Great fans. I think the best fans in the league.

Who is the biggest troublemaker on the Canes?
The biggest troublemaker on the team is for sure Jordan Martinook. He's one of a kind.

What went through your mind when Dave Ayres took the ice?
It was kind of crazy. I didn't know what to expect. I've never been in a situation like that before.

What has been your favorite Storm Surge?
My favorite Storm Surge of all time has to be the one when

The main message Brind'Amour and his staff left with the players - in addition to staying safe, taking care of families and staying home - is to use this time to get better at something.

For Brind'Amour, that means "trying to find different avenues to continue to learn the game and be better" as a head coach. He's sifted through old game tape and also leaned on counterparts from around the league, a group of which video chats three times a week.

"It's been actually pretty good for me just hearing from other coaches about how they're dealing with this and really talking hockey, diving right into how they approach anything," he said. "It's a different topic every day we meet. That's been interesting."

Eventually, we'll achieve some sense of normalcy again. Sports will be back. Hockey will be back. The Canes will be back. Until then, everyone waits and wonders when that might be and what it might look like.

It's all guesswork and speculation until the puck drops.

"I'm as anxious as everyone else to get started and get back," Brind'Amour said.

Holyfield knocked out Martinook on the ice. That was pretty cool.

Are you a morning person or a night owl?
I'm definitely a night person. I'm not a morning person at all. I'm always pretty tired when I wake up. It doesn't matter how many hours I sleep. That's an easy one for me.

Cereal or milk first?
Cereal goes first in the bowl, then milk.

Do you miss the fans? Because we miss you.
I'm missing Canes fans as much as they're missing us playing hockey, for sure. It would be awesome to play hockey at this time of year. Playing in front of you guys, especially last year in the playoffs, it was really special. It carried over to this year. It's been nothing but love from you guys to us. We really appreciate it.

What message do you have for youngsters who want to start playing hockey?
I think good advice for a little kid who is dreaming of playing hockey professionally is to enjoy playing sports. It doesn't always have to be hockey, but just try to play any sports. Put your work in that way. You have to put a lot of work in.



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"Hey, fans. Thanks for sending me those questions," Aho signed off. "That was a lot of fun to answer those. Stay safe, and hopefully we see you soon."

Brady Skjei Chats With Train's Pat Monahan

BY MICHAEL SMITH

While we remain home in order to slow the spread of the COVID-19 virus, technology has helped bring us together.

From John Krasinski and Emily Blunt reuniting Lin-Manuel Miranda and the entirety of the original cast of "Hamilton" to surprise a young fan with a special musical performance to the cast of "Whose Line Is It Anyway?" yukking it up as a lead in to a new episode on The CW, we've been treated to some fun and unique digital encounters.

On Monday night, Carolina Hurricanes defenseman Brady Skjei joined Pat Monahan, the lead singer of Train, on his "Patcast" Instagram live show.

"I've become a hockey fan because of Brady and some other awesome people," Monahan explained, adding that he was introduced to Skjei by OAR's frontman, Marc Roberge.

Here are some highlights from Monahan's conversation with Skjei, who is currently in New York City.

On Skjei's fiancé, Gracia, who is a nurse in New York City: "She's on the frontlines right now. ... She's working mother-baby unit, postpartum. She actually hasn't had many cases on her floor right now, but the other floors in the hospital are getting pretty crazy right now."

On being traded from the Rangers to the Canes: "It was definitely tough. They always say it's part of the business, getting traded, but when it actually happens, it's definitely pretty eye-opening. ... The guys in Carolina - I came into the locker room not really knowing many people at all, and they're unbelievable. The hockey world is so small. Each guy I got to know on the Hurricanes, we have mutual friends on

different teams or played with guys growing up. That made it a little easier, and the guys made it extremely easy to fit in and feel a part of the team."

On resuming the season: "They're throwing around a bunch of ideas. All the players - everybody - wants to play and finish the season, but we definitely have to be careful with this virus."

On the possibility of playing without fans: "The playoff atmosphere is one of the coolest things. The fans go nuts. Obviously it'd be way better if the fans were in there. Time frame, I'm not sure how it would work out. ... The fans would make it much, much better for sure."

On playing sports, including hockey and golf: "I have much more passion for hockey than any other sports. ... Probably like golf second. ... I'm pretty good [at golf] for a guy who just plays in the summer, but you watch these pros, and I've had the chance to play with some, and they're on a different level."

On food in New York City and cooking: "Most are doing takeout, so we're trying to support the restaurants we really enjoy and like. ... I bet we cook half the nights and order in half the nights. ... I'm not the best cook. I've actually been getting a lot better at breakfast. I've been working on making omelets and breakfast quesadillas. [Kevin Hayes] knows I can make a good plate of nachos. That's about it. Gracia does most of the cooking here."

On "Tiger King": "We watched it in about two nights, I think. It's a wild story."

His message to Canes fans: "I'm pumped to be there. I'm excited for the future. We've got a ton of talent, and I think we're going to make some good runs in the playoffs."



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SportScan

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

The Athletic / LeBrun: NHL favours 2019-20 resumption format that includes regular season games

By Pierre LeBrun Apr 9, 2020

Before anyone gets too attached to any of the varied scenarios and formats being bandied about in the event the NHL does find a way to resume the 2019-20 season, understand a rather important fact: the NHL would much rather play some regular season games before heading to the playoffs, if time permits.

"We understand that with what will obviously be a lengthy break between games, players are going to want to have an ability to re-acclimatize themselves to NHL competition before having to play games that could end their seasons quickly," NHL deputy commissioner Bill Daly told The Athletic via email Thursday.

"I'm sure our managers feel the same way. We get it and we will certainly go to great lengths to accommodate those concerns."

And while I know it's a confusing time for hockey fans with all the different ideas being thrown out there, that's really the only thing to retain as far as where the NHL decision-makers are right now while the sports world remains frozen by COVID-19.

Well, that and the fact the NHL and NHL Players' Association want to play a full season next year, even if delayed.

So if we have hockey in July-August (and maybe September), some regular season games would be part of it if possible.

In fact, according to a few team sources, NHL commissioner Gary Bettman also reiterated to governors on Monday's conference call that the league's preference, above all the other scenarios and formats being discussed, is to play regular season games before the playoffs if time allows.

And if 82 games isn't possible, then 78, 76 and 74 games would all be options.

Why is it important to play regular season games?

Many players, some of whom have been quoted in media video calls over the past few weeks, are in favour of playing some regular season games in order to be able to ramp up their game shape before the playoffs, easing concerns of injuries;

It would help even out games played among bubble teams and democratically decide the 16-team playoff field in a more normal fashion rather than decide between points percentage or rolled back games played in the current frozen standings;

It would line up the draft lottery more normally without the league having to make any hotly debated decisions;

There are also some teams whose regional TV deals have financial implications and/or thresholds in which a few more regular season games could be impactful that way.

Now, there's also a downside to playing regular season games:

Players on clear, non-playoff teams coming back after a four-month layoff, playing six or so games, then shutting it down again? That's far from ideal. I mean, where's the motivation at that point? In fact, it wouldn't surprise me at all if some of those teams with nothing to play for keep some of their top players from returning. Of course, those players would have to be on board with that. But why risk injury? The focus for those teams would be to be ready and healthy for next season. (Although as someone pointed out to me, the motivation for those players is that it's their job to play).

Not ideal for players on some bubble teams, either. One NHL player who requested anonymity made an excellent point to me Thursday: "For bubble teams those small amount of (regular season) games would essentially be do-or-die, it'd be hard to just jump right back into a playoff race, all momentum you had before the break is moot. It would be easy for teams in a little more comfortable position, I would like that, too, if I was Tampa or Boston."

In other words, if the season jumped right to the playoffs, at least everyone was playing under duress right from the outset, not just the bubble teams.

And in the end, that's the tough part in all of this whether you're a coach, GM, owner or player: your team's place in the standings will probably influence your desire on playing regular season games or not.

"We're still too early in this process to speculate and make concrete assertions, and we are trying to keep an open mind to all options," NHLPA executive Mathieu Schneider said Thursday. "We are now working together with the league to come up with viable solutions to address a wide array of issues we will be dealing with. The health and safety of our players, families and fans are No. 1 on our list in any scenario we would consider."

All things being equal, it would appear the majority on both sides are in favour of playing some regular season games.

Here's another potential wrinkle: another source suggested to me Thursday that what is beginning to be brought up in his conversations is whether there's time for any exhibition games to help players ramp things up. That's a whole other debate. But you understand after four months off the ice why some players might desire that.

The idea of sprinkling in some exhibition games instead of maximizing the number of regular season games might make more sense, the source said, a blend of both, especially if the season doesn't begin until mid-July or so.

Again, who knows if there's actually hockey again this season (I'm not convinced there will be). Or for that matter if next season can start on time.

We are still in the early stages of understanding the impact of this COVID-19 nightmare.

But for now, the clear mandate from the NHL is on hopefully resuming the season and playing games before the playoffs.

The Athletic LOADED: 04.10.2020



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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The Athletic / Bourne Notebook: Misremembering games, mini-sticks vs. mini-hoops and more

By Justin Bourne Apr 9, 2020

I had an interesting experience a couple weeks back on the radio show of Andrew Walker and Satiar Shah (that being The Program on Sportsnet 650), where I was asked to recall the first NHL game I ever remember going to. I italicize "remember," cause my dad played in the NHL, and I'm sure I was at one at like, 100 hours old or whatever.

The truth is, the first game I really remember was after my dad retired from the Kings. The family retired to Kelowna, B.C., so when the Kings came to Vancouver the following year, we drove from Kelowna to Vancouver to take in the game. Needless to say, having a dad just removed from the NHL came with some unique access, which is likely why my memories are so strong.

Or at least I thought they were.

Before the game, my brother and I were allowed into the Kings room, where I was given quite a privilege.

What happens henceforth is my memory of it all: I remember talking to Luc Robitaille and getting to tape his stick before the game. I was meticulous with it, it probably took 20 minutes, and was undoubtedly awful. I remember an amazingly exciting game and Robitaille scoring a hat trick with the stick I taped (possibly winning the game in overtime). I remember meeting Wayne Gretzky after and being given his stick from the game.

It was the greatest kid-watching-hockey experience of my life.

Thing is, I'm not exactly certain what parts of it all happened.

After that radio show, their producer looked up the game to figure out when it was. After much deduction, we dialed in the answer: It was indeed in 1989 (April 2 to be precise), the year after my dad retired ... but Robitaille never scored a hat trick and the game didn't go to overtime. He had two goals and an assist, which is good, but not as I distinctly recall it. And upon immediate reflection, there's no chance he used the stick I taped as I taped it, obviously. I had just never stopped to even consider any of this, because really, why would I? (I definitely have a Gretzky stick, though I'm not even certain I acquired it that night. I kinda doubt it was that night now, actually.)

The point is, that to me – a then-7-year-old – the experience had become so much bigger in my mind than it really was. And while that particular variety of experience is uncommon, I don't think it's uncommon to experience the phenomena of the swollen childhood memory. It's probably why so many of us remember things as having been so much better than they currently are. When our memories are on-the-whole positive, they tend to become inflated.

I'm not breaking down any ground here, but it was fascinating to see just how distinct and clear my memory was of a flatly incorrect version of events.

The lesson for me is one the players should really take away more than anything else. It's so easy to slough off kids who just want some attention, maybe an autograph. It can even be hard to believe, as one of those players, that kids see them the way that they do. But those little extra things – like the effort Robitaille would've made to humour me that day – go miles and create lifetime memories. Players should prioritize being like Luc Robitaille. (It should be a lesson for teams and PR people too, even if from a cynical angle. Putting those players in positions to give kids those memories creates lifetime fans, like I am of Luc Robitaille, as you may have guessed.)

Like many parents, I find myself in isolation with a 3-and-a-half year old and looking for ways to pass chunks of time, and that means a lot of time

just ... playing. Playing with every piece of junk we've bought or been given for 3.5 years, and assessing what's worthwhile and what's a waste of time. (Of course, a big portion of the answers is some combination of your imagination crossed with your interests.)

My interests have never been in question – I'm a sports guy – but lord have they become obvious during all this playtime. That brings me to some conclusions, which I'd like to get your takes on.

Below are the top three children's sports items for adults, ranked (with notes on those that missed the cut). And I expect your votes in the comments, with an important caveat – these votes aren't just for parents. Even those without kids have been to someone's house and seen/played with most of these things. So without further ado:

First place: Fisher-Price basketball hoop

Second place: Mini-sticks set

Third place: Hard plastic T-ball set

The hoop is the winner over the mini-sticks net for a couple reasons. One is that it doesn't require you to be on your knees, which for someone like me (37 with knees of peanut brittle), is a huge factor at play. The hoop is also better for solo play (which is important, because kids are terrible at sports), as there's increased mobility and degree of difficulty. My one complaint is that the rim shape today is wide against the backboard. I'm almost certain it wasn't that way when I was a kid, BUT we did just discuss the failed memory of children, so maybe it wasn't?

RIM SHAPE IS GENEROUS. FG% IS INSANE SO FAR
PIC.TWITTER.COM/EUWO8SZOMM

— JUSTIN BOURNE (@JTBOURNE) MAY 30, 2018

Mini-sticks are a true joy, but again, I think you need your opponent to be a certain age. My kid is still too young to provide enough of a challenge for it to be fun, but I should note that I'm the single best mini-sticks player in the world, so he may never get there. But I will acknowledge that a great mini-sticks game is better than any game on the basketball hoop could ever be. It just requires better circumstances in terms of space, the opponent, the right ball, etc. A mini-sticks game is more of an event than simply "playing."

The T-ball set is also a delight for the obvious dinger-smacking glory.

The other contenders are almost universally less fun than they present to be. The plastic golf club set that's been around for decades? Almost exclusively a decoration. I've never seen any person maintain play with them for more than 90 seconds. They're great in theory, not practice. Bowling sets have a terrible effort-to-fun ratio. Way too much setup. Those velcro catch-pads ("sticky-catch" at my house) are decent enough, but aren't any good till the kid is old enough to peel the balls off the velcro easily, which happens roughly about the same time you can just get a glove and start playing catch.

We're in strange times here people, so I brought you a strange topic. I have a feeling in the midst of the hockey section we'll get lots of mini-sticks votes, but I know most hockey people are sports people too. So what say you? The best kids sports things for adults are ...?

Finally, I just wanted to note that four days ago my wife gave birth to a beautiful baby girl, Molly Annabelle. It was a strange time to welcome an addition to the family, for sure, but it was also a ray of sunshine in the midst of a dark time.

.@JTBOURNE AND I MADE ANOTHER CUTE LITTLE NUGGET... SAY HI TO MOLLY 🍷 PIC.TWITTER.COM/KPV6KNSLYM

— BRIANNA BOURNE (@BRIANNA_BOURNE) APRIL 9, 2020

I'll keep this to the very narrow sense of hockey, our shared topic here: I'm grateful that she's coming into the world at the time she is. I know that the women's professional level is going through turmoil, but they're making the tough decisions they are for girls like Molly who'll get the



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chance to play, and if she likes it and happens to be good enough, will have a fair avenue of pursuit to make a living at it the way I've been able to.

I know there's always reason to worry, and believe me, I have my worries. But I do feel like she's come along at a time that by the time she grows up, she'll have every opportunity to achieve great things, whether she gives a damn about hockey or not.

The Athletic / NHL Mock Draft: Beat writers preview the 2020 draft lottery

By Corey Pronman Apr 9, 2020

The NHL Draft lottery was supposed to be held on April 9, and while that is no longer the case, that won't stop the staff at The Athletic from looking ahead to the draft. We are awarding the top three picks to the clubs with the best chances to get them, and having the beat writer for each team make a pick for their respective club.

We based the lottery teams on points percentage at the time of the pause and the standard rules for the draft lottery, with the caveat that what is a "lottery team" this year is still up in the air as the NHL mulls potential significant changes in these unique times.

1. Detroit Red Wings: Alexis Lafreniere, LW, Rimouski-QMJHL

Max Bultman: Not too much suspense here. The Red Wings need help at every position on the ice, so they'll take the consensus No. 1 player in the draft and be on their way. Adding a talent of Lafreniere's caliber is a massive building block for the Red Wings' rebuild, which is far from over, but gets one of the hardest-to-attain pieces in a potential star.

Pronman's take: I applaud Bultman for his courage and his analysis is on point. Lafreniere provides one of the hardest pieces to acquire in a rebuild: a projected young star. But this rebuild is not near the end as Detroit needs a lot of great players before this starts to turn around. He would slot right into the top half of its lineup right away.

2. Ottawa Senators: Quinton Byfield, C, Sudbury-OHL

Hailey Salvian: Byfield has the potential to become a No. 1 center in the NHL and adding him to the fold could help the Senators truly become a contender. They have a number of center prospects, but nobody with the without-a-doubt skill to be a top-line centerman. He'd look pretty good with Brady Tkachuk.

Pronman's take: A No. 1 center is arguably the hardest thing to find and Byfield has all the potential to become that. He is exactly what Ottawa needs to complement everything else it has acquired during its rebuild and becomes a foundational part of its rebuild. Byfield should contend for a roster spot out of camp.

3. Ottawa Senators: Tim Stutzle, LW, Mannheim-DEL

Salvian: I was really tempted to go off the cuff here and select Jamie Drysdale third overall. The Senators really need more depth on right defense, but GM Pierre Dorion has said the team would select the best players on the board rather than drafting by position, and Stutzle would probably be that player in the third slot. The Senators have lacked high-end skill, and Stutzle would bring that to the table at forward.

Pronman's take: Stutzle excelled versus men this season and at the world juniors. Within the industry he is solidifying his position in the top three. He can play center or wing, so it gives Ottawa options on how it wants to use him, and like Byfield, he could contend for a roster spot out of camp, giving Ottawa one of the most exciting draft classes by any team in recent memory.

4. Los Angeles Kings: Jamie Drysdale, D, Erie-OHL

Lisa Dillman: Much like the Senators, the Kings could use some high-end talent on right defense in support of Drew Doughty. They've done an excellent job of restocking the pipeline up front, so it's time to turn attention to this particular area. You'll remember last year that defenseman Bowen Byram was my mock draft pick for the Kings on several occasions, so the choice to go with the top-rated defenseman shouldn't come as a surprise.

Pronman's take: After the top three, the draft starts to open up and a wide range of players become reasonable. Drysdale is in that group, and as the consensus top defenseman (although Jake Sanderson was beginning to challenge that assertion late into the season), he should go early to an organization such as L.A., which needs a top young defenseman. Drysdale might only need one more year of junior and then he could contend for a roster spot, where he would be an upper half of the lineup player for a while.

5. Anaheim Ducks: Marco Rossi, C, Ottawa-OHL

Eric Stephens: Since my good friend and teammate, Dillman, snapped up the consensus best defenseman in the draft – a young RHD power-play performer that fills a critical need within the Anaheim organization – it makes sense to grab the top scorer in all of Canadian major junior hockey, especially with Lafreniere, Byfield and Stutzle off the board. You can never be too deep at center and Rossi, who had 120 points in 56 games for the Ottawa 67s, offers dynamic puckhandling, playmaking and vision; while also possessing an accurate NHL-level shot that can beat goalies. Just imagine Rossi and the imaginative Trevor Zegras as linemates or possibly slotted as Anaheim's top two centers. Rossi's small size doesn't scare me, especially when you need more pure talent.

Pronman's take: I concur with a lot of the points Stephens made. I would add that, while Rossi has great skill, like Zegras albeit not as much, Rossi's game has a bit more bite and is more well-rounded, giving the Ducks two great options down the middle who can play different roles.

6. New Jersey Devils: Alexander Holtz, RW, Djurgarden-SHL

Corey Masisak: The Devils need more impact talent at nearly every position. Drysdale would have been tempting, and it's hard to imagine any team other than the Senators having a better read on Rossi considering New Jersey has four prospects on the Ottawa 67s. But taking those two off the board makes this a little easier. It comes down to Holtz or his world juniors teammate Lucas Raymond. That's a tough call (I said easier, not easy). I'm going with Holtz because he profiles as more of a goal scorer and is a little bit bigger. He seems like a natural fit next to Jack Hughes or Nico Hischier in the very near future.

Pronman's take: I like the logic that Masisak went with of taking a goal-scorer to go with the play driving first-overall picks. Hughes had a lot of success with Cole Caufield, and Holtz's shot is arguably as good. Given Holtz's success already versus men, it's very possible he only needs one or two years before he's ready to make the Devils.

7. Buffalo Sabres: Lucas Raymond, LW, Frolunda-SHL

Joe Yerdon: It's probably easy to say the Sabres will default to taking Swedes at this point, but there aren't a lot of players that can do what Raymond does. He finds teammates with ease, he's able to find areas in the offensive zone left unguarded, and he uses that time to create chances and score goals. Holtz would've been an ideal fit as a winger with size and a shot to match, but size can go both ways. Small and skilled works well with players that have Raymond's ability. Buffalo needs offense in the system in the worst way and he can provide it.

Pronman's take: Buffalo has a lot of very good young players in the organization, and Raymond would be yet another addition to a potentially elite young core group of players. He will need time to develop speed and strength before he gets to the NHL. It remains to be seen when all these young pieces in Buffalo will move the organization forward, but it's a lot of talent, especially when you add a player like Raymond with his elite skill and hockey sense.

8. Montreal Canadiens: Cole Perfetti, LW, Saginaw-OHL



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Marc Antoine Godin: Le Canadien d'Athlétique Montréal est fier de sélectionner – we are proud to select – Cole Perfetti. Unlike Paul Simon, it won't take Perfetti four days to hitchhike from Saginaw. I think that within a year or two, he will provide more of the finishing ability this team has been lacking for years. Yes, he's another undersized forward – and we can expect some pushback from the fanbase – but this pick, in a way, doubles down on the Cole Caufield selection last year. Between the two Coles, chances are at least one will become an impact player who can put pucks in the net. Perfetti was once considered one of the better goal scorers in this class; his significant increase in assists this season is a testament to his playmaking ability. Montreal is all in on players who process the game fast and that's what Perfetti does, even if he's not necessarily the best skater.

Pronman's take: Adding Perfetti is bringing in an exceptionally skilled and intelligent player and one of the best passers in junior who had full-season 40-goal paces the past two seasons. I understand if some Habs fans are hesitant to pick a small winger at this pick given their depth chart, especially since he's not all that quick, but the talent is too much value at No. 8 to pass up.

9. Chicago Blackhawks: Anton Lundell, C, HIFK-Liiga

Scott Powers: Lundell is one of the more NHL-ready players in this draft. He may not make the jump next season, but he certainly fits in the time frame if the Blackhawks are looking to add another high-end, responsible forward to play around Jonathan Toews and Patrick Kane in the near future. If you add Lundell to Kane, Toews, Kirby Dach, Alex DeBrincat, Dylan Strome, Dominik Kubalik and Brandon Saad, the Blackhawks have to like how their top nine would be shaping up in the short- and long-term. Lundell's skating is a bit of a concern, but what he's done in Liiga at his age is undeniably impressive. Only Jesse Puljujarvi was a better possession player this past season in Finland. Lundell plays the type of two-way game the Blackhawks can use more of in their lineup.

Pronman's take: I hate to do this to my longtime friend, but I am not a big fan of going after Lundell at No. 9. He's a good player, but the upside is not that of a top-line caliber player. Powers is right about his NHL projectability given what he's shown versus men already, but I think you can get more talent at this spot. I am aware that my opinion is not the opinion of a good chunk of the industry, although the more NHL scouts I've talked to in the second half, the more pessimistic I get Lundell is going to be a top 10 pick.

10. New Jersey Devils: Yaroslav Askarov, G, SKA St. Petersburg-VHL

Masisak: This is all about the board. I'm sure the Devils will hope that one of the other top-nine guys slips to them at this spot to pair with Holtz. If not, Askarov has been one of the best players in this draft class for two years. Mackenzie Blackwood has established himself as the No. 1 guy this season, but few goalies can match Askarov's upside. It feels like taking one of the defensemen would be a reach here, so maybe a trade back is an option. If not, take the best player available and figure it out later. Having three picks in the top 17 mitigates some of the risk of taking a goaltender this high.

Pronman's take: I like Blackwood, but I'm not convinced he's a no-doubt, long-term, top-10 goalie in the NHL to justify not taking Askarov. If you think Askarov is a projected high-end talent at the position, as Masisak says, you have to get him if he's available at this slot. I did think that way about Askarov in January, but the last few months of his season didn't inspire as much confidence, so I continue to evaluate where I stand on him.

11. Minnesota Wild: Jack Quinn, RW, Ottawa-OHL

Michael Russo: The Wild suddenly have a number of forwards coming down the pipeline like Kirill Kaprizov, Alex Khovanov, Adam Beckman and Matt Boldy. They are probably weakest up the middle and on the blue line when it comes to prospects, and there are some intriguing names still on the board. But it drives me crazy how historically the Wild pass over goal scorers in the first round, and Quinn is a pure one at the junior level. The 5-foot-11¼ right wing (he's 6-foot on a good day)

finished second in the OHL with 52 goals. The Ottawa 67 is just the 10th Canadian Hockey Leaguer in the past 20 years to hit the 50-goal mark during his NHL draft year. Some others: Sidney Crosby, Kane, Steven Stamkos, John Tavares, Jeff Skinner, Anthony Mantha and DeBrincat. Enough said.

Pronman's take: Quinn was on fire in the second half of the season. I wouldn't be surprised if he's gone before No. 11 based on discussions I'm having with teams. Given how much Minnesota needs goal-scoring in its organization, this seems like an appropriate fit as Russo has mentioned. I don't view Quinn as an elite sniper, but someone who scored a lot through his skill and sense – traits that scouts think will translate to the higher levels.

12. Winnipeg Jets: Jake Sanderson, D, USNTDP-USHL

Murat Ates: There are highly touted centers like Connor Zary and Dawson Mercer still on the board, and Winnipeg's prospect pool is puddle deep up front. So why choose Jake Sanderson, a 17-year-old defenseman committed to UND this fall? He's a great skater (like his dad Geoff, a 1,104 game NHLer), gaps well, and knows when to break up a play with his stick and when to lay the body. His wheels and intelligence make him a great player in transition, and his coaches rave about his leadership and work ethic. Put this all together, add a stand-out performance at USA Hockey's BioSteel All-American Game, and the 6-foot-2 USNDTP D-man has become one of the 2020 draft's fastest rising commodities.

Pronman's take: Sanderson came on very well in the second half, emerging as the likely second defenseman off the board, and it is not a lock he will even be available at the No. 12 spot for Winnipeg. That would be back-to-back defenseman picks in the top round for the Jets, helping create depth at a position the organization lacks with hope that Sanderson, Ville Heinola and Dylan Samberg all become quality NHL players.

13. New York Rangers: Dylan Holloway, C, Wisconsin-Big 10

Rick Carpinello: The Rangers have stocked up on goalies and defensemen, and are still in need of forwards (even with recent first-rounders Kaapo Kakko, Filip Chytil and Vitali Kravtsov) in the system. Holloway, a 6-foot-01, 203-pound center, would be a pick for the future, having just completed his freshman year at Wisconsin, where he was teammates with 2018 Rangers first-rounder K'Andre Miller (who turned pro last month). A lefty shot with good hands and compete level, per Central Scouting, Holloway was 8-9-17 in 35 games this season.

Pronman's take: After using a top 10 pick on Lias Andersson as a highly competitive player with skill that hasn't worked out, Holloway would be a similar kind of bet – although he's a far superior skater to Andersson with more size and a lot of skill too. The Rangers have had a lot of high picks recently, but center is a spot the organization could use more depth at, especially if Andersson is on the trade block.

14. Florida Panthers: Braden Schneider, D, Brandon-WHL

George Richards: The Panthers have added defensive depth throughout their system through trades and signing college free agents. Since taking Aaron Ekblad first overall in 2014, Florida has not taken a D-man in the first round. Brandon's Braden Schneider, a solid two-way defenseman with a little offensive touch, would add more depth. In the past three seasons with the Wheat Kings, he has played in at least 58 games, so he has been durable as well as productive.

Pronman's take: I agree with Richards that, if there was a position Florida needs to add to in their organization, it's a top young defenseman after going heavy after forwards and goaltender Spencer Knight in recent drafts. Schneider would be fine value at this slot, as a great two-way defenseman all season and a first team All-Star in the WHL this week.

15. Columbus Blue Jackets: Connor Zary, C, Kamloops-WHL

Aaron Portzline: The Jackets have a sure-fire top-six center in Pierre-Luc Dubois, and they expect Alexandre Texier to move to the middle when



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he's no longer wet behind the ears. So this is very much a "best player available" pick, not a need pick. They'd love to be able to take a defenseman at this spot – the pipeline is pretty thin – but the two they'd consider at this spot (Drysdale, Schneider) are already off the board. Zary has tons of skill and an impressive motor; Kekalainen values the latter almost as much as the former. After years of patching center ice together, a depth chart of Dubois – Texier – Zary (in some order) by 2022 is quite appealing.

Pronman's take: I really like Zary's game and think he would be fine value at No. 15. He's got the potential to become a top two line center, and I think he's talented enough to pass Texier on the depth chart if he gets a little quicker and hits his high side.

The Athletic / Lucas Raymond and Alexander Holtz are Sweden's next generation of hockey stars

By Scott Wheeler Apr 9, 2020

It's early August and two 17-year-olds have just wrapped up one of their first real tests in the biggest year of their lives when they emerge from their dressing room inside USA Hockey Arena.

For some time now, Lucas Raymond and Alexander Holtz have been the brightest hopes of Swedish hockey's next generation.

It's been a long week. The pair were asked to play leading roles despite being the youngest players on Team Sweden's roster at the annual World Junior Summer Showcase, a tournament normally exclusive to the top 18- and 19-year-old players in the world.

Asked about his linemate, Holtz looks over his shoulder and smirks.

"He's not bad. He's more like a passer and I'm more like a shooter." Holtz says. "He can get me the puck."

Raymond, the more reserved of the two, is more willing to give his counterpart some love.

"He's great. When he gets an opportunity he will put it in the net nine out of 10 times. If you can get the puck to him he can create. He's an amazing shooter. He gets open and I try to find him. It makes my job easy," Raymond says.

"It comes naturally, us playing together. We don't think about the other or his status. We don't fight each other. He's a funny guy, he likes to joke. We have fun together."

Over the next year, the pair will navigate life under an even brighter spotlight than the one they already know. Both are on their way to having their names called early at the 2020 NHL Draft. Success at the game's highest level will likely follow.

For now, they're the young faces of their sport in one of the world's top hockey-playing countries.

Raymond was born in Gothenburg, home of the Frolunda hockey club, Sweden's top hockey factory.

But he wasn't born into the sport. His dad, Jean, was raised in France and moved to Sweden at 15. In his 20s, Jean met Raymond's mother, Cecilia, who now works as a personal trainer and nutrition coach.

Raymond took up the sport because of his older brother Hugo, who is now a forward for Goteborgs IK, the local third-tier pro team.

When a 6-year-old Hugo began playing with Frolunda, a 3-year-old Raymond asked if he could jump on the ice with the team. He quickly realized he could keep up with kids twice his age.

In the years that followed, not only did he play up three age groups with his big brother but he became the team's best player. Always the smallest player on his team, Raymond learned to play differently than his peers did. Knowing he couldn't rely on his size (he has always been a little small even for his age), other skills blossomed.

Raymond has never been the biggest kid on the ice. These days, the right-shot winger is listed at 5-foot-10 and 160 pounds. (Tommy Holl / Frolunda HC)

Raymond was one of two young players selected by Frolunda's professional parent club to fast track to the country's highest levels. The other was Rasmus Dahlin.

He made his debut in SuperElit, Sweden's top under-20 junior league, when he was 15-years old.

A year later, in 2018-2019, Raymond led Frolunda's SuperElit team with 1.3 points per game – and earned a 10-game call-up to the SHL, the country's top professional level.

By the time he arrived in Plymouth to audition for Team Sweden's under-20 team last August, Raymond had already made a pitstop in Val Gardena in northern Italy to train with Frolunda's under-20 head coach, Pierre Johnsson.

Johnsson runs a camp there and Raymond asked if he could help out – and if his coach could set up some private ice time for them before he flew to the United States. The camp was slotted during a pause from training with Frolunda's pro club during what should have been his only two weeks off during the summer. But Raymond didn't want to stop training.

Between Johnsson's camp and their one-on-one skills work, Raymond spent his week in Italy doing four to five sessions a day on the ice.

"I wanted to prepare for (the summer showcase) to be as prepared as I could," Raymond said.

According to Johnsson, that's just Raymond. He's the one who gets his teammates going in practice because he's so good that if they're playing against him they all want to beat him and if they're playing with him they know "we've got to win because we have Lucas, or else."

"I've had both Rasmus (Dahlin) and Lucas and they both have something special as people. Lucas is really competitive. He always wants to win and that's really what stands out in him," Johnsson said.

Just as he had done with Dahlin and his parents before the defenceman was selected first overall in the 2018 draft, Frolunda general manager Fredrik Sjostrom sat down with Raymond and his family before the release of rankings for the 2020 class, to make sure everyone understood the process.

"You're trying to get him to understand what it's going to be like. He's a good kid and he just wants to focus on hockey. Obviously, with today's media and social media, it's not quite like when I got drafted. It's a different ballgame," Sjostrom said, who was the 11th overall pick in the 2001 NHL draft.

"It will be an intense season. He has to try to not think about hockey and just be a normal 17-year-old, but he's going to get thrown into this crazy (life)."

Sjostrom believes he is well-equipped to handle it all, though.

"With these kinds of players, everything revolves around hockey whether you like it or not. He is an exceptional talent. He's very special. I don't think we've had a forward like him for years," Sjostrom said.

"He has been paying the price this summer and we're really happy with his progress."

It's Raymond's work ethic, as much as his skill, that those around him say has turned him into a budding star. Johnsson knows Raymond as the



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funny, joyful kid he shares a lot of laughs with. To others, though, he recognizes how Raymond can be seen as quiet and serious.

That maturity brings him to places like Val Gardena, where he can hone his craft in solitude. Together, Johnsson and Raymond spent the week working to improve his shot. Johnsson knows better than anyone how dynamic Raymond is, but thinks he can be even better.

"He has a good shot but he could shoot more. I think he's going to be a sniper with some sick skills in the neutral zone bring up the puck. He's obviously a huge threat on the PP. But he's an overall good player with sick moves. Holding the puck and setting up guys, he's amazing," Johnsson said.

After Val Gardena and Plymouth, Raymond knew he wasn't going to get a break. He'd mapped out what came next in his head.

Frolunda's training camp. Exhibition games. The Champions Hockey League tournament. His first full season in the SHL. The world juniors. SHL playoffs. Under-18 worlds. The scouting combine. And then the draft.

His plan for each of those checkmarks was the same as it has always been.

"I think you have to compensate for not being the biggest guy with skating and smartness," Raymond said. "I always have to be a step ahead of the play."

Like Raymond, Holtz started playing hockey because his big brother did.

Everything else about their entry into the sport was different, though. Holtz was born into a hockey family. His dad, Magnus, coached the local team. But he wasn't born in the city that developed names like Dahlin, Karlsson or Alfredsson.

Holtz was born in Boo, a small town on the island of Varmdo, just outside of Stockholm that has never produced an NHL player ... yet.

He played his minor hockey in nearby Nacka for U16 and U18 programs that feed into a local pro team in the country's third professional tier.

By 15, he'd outgrown Nacka and was recruited to play for Djurgårdens IF in Stockholm – the team that developed top Swedish NHLers like Niklas Kronwall and Mika Zibanejad.

There, he grabbed attention for different reasons than Raymond.

Holtz was always the big, broad one with the boyish innocence and the wide smile that comes with it. If Raymond's confidence was the quiet kind, Holtz's swagger was louder.

Due to his size and strength, Holtz's game became one of power and pop.

In his first season with Djurgårdens, Holtz scored 70 goals in 52 games while playing across four different levels. A year later, in 2018-2019, Holtz did the same after racking up another 30 goals in 38 games with Djurgårdens' under-20 team.

By then, they'd also become frequent linemates on the international stage. In November 2018, when Raymond put up seven points in six games at under-17 worlds, Holtz captained the team and did him one better with eight points of his own en route to a bronze medal.

The following April, when the Swedes defeated Team Canada in the U18 World semis and Team Russia in the finals, it was Holtz and Raymond who led the way to Sweden's first gold medal at the event with a combined 15 points across seven games. While playing as underagers on the team's top line, Holtz assisted Raymond's first two goals of the gold medal game before Raymond capped off the hat trick in overtime to secure the championship.

When Holtz arrived in Plymouth, he oozed confidence. He compares himself to Alexander Ovechkin, Steven Stamkos and Leon Draisaitl, though he said Mats Sundin was always his favourite player. He says he

hopes to challenge for first overall in the draft to follow in Sundin's footsteps.

Asked about the draft and the pressure that come with the year ahead, he laughed and answered quickly.

"I think it's going to be a fun year," Holtz said. "I'm really excited. I think the attention is great. I like to be in the spotlight so I have nothing to be mad about. I think it's fun to get so many eyes on me."

Though he knows it can look like scoring comes easy to him, Holtz is quick to insist his ascension is one of hard work.

Stars aren't just given their skill, they cultivate it, according to Holtz. He said he learned that from his dad, who now works for a computer company, and his mom, Camilla, who owns a dinnerware retail store.

"I have always been a little bit ahead of my age group because I like to work, I like to compete, I always shoot pucks at home and train for myself. I think it's because of that. I don't even know how much practice I have put into my shot but it's a lot," Holtz said.

Jörgen Bemström, Djurgårdens' under-20 head coach, has seen that first hand. He was quick to point to the way Holtz worked on everything from his shot to his interval sprinting.

"My expectations for Alex are great. He sits on too many good tools to fail. Good skating, passing, shooting. He competes at all times. He will be an NHL player. Much lies on himself to cope with the press," Bemström said. "Alex is a talent but one of his greatest talents is that he is training hard and always wants to win at whatever he sets his mind to."

Still, Holtz's tone differs from his counterpart's. While Raymond said he had to earn his spot on the SHL team, Holtz believed he was going to make his.

Those expectations mirrored that of Djurgårdens general manager Joakim Eriksson. It wasn't going to be easy, though.

"The challenge for a player like Alexander, who will go top five in the draft, is that so early in life they get so much advice. That's the most challenging thing for the players to sort out: 'What do I need to focus on right now, right here in terms of practice and development?'" Eriksson said.

Eriksson felt Holtz could handle what was to come, believing he wasn't the type of kid to look too far ahead.

"The players that handle it the best, like Elias Pettersson or Rasmus Dahlin, they somehow have the talent to handle the pressure. But there are so many prospects at the same time that don't handle the situation that have been drafted in the first round or were big-time talents. Those guys don't develop the way they should have. Alexander has shown maturity so young, he listens to our advice and he excels," Eriksson said. "I think he's on a very, very good path."

By the time Holtz and Raymond were reunited as roommates in Trinec for the world juniors, their two seasons had begun to play out in different ways.

Holtz never really ran into that adversity Bemstrom wondered about. Before the season began he added nearly 10 pounds to his 6-foot frame, bulked up and made the team. He insists the added weight didn't slow him down, either.

"I felt confident right away," Holtz said of the adjustment to the pro level. "My 200-foot game has been so much better this year. I want to focus on my shot but my stickhandling and my passing ability have been so much better this year also."

It did prove challenging for Raymond to make – and stick – with Frolunda, though.

Before the season began, Sjostrom said Frolunda planned on using Raymond in a prominent role on one of the team's top lines and power-play units.



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"It makes no sense to put him on a fourth line with his skill. That's not his game. We know what his game is," Sjostrom said at the time.

But once the season began, things went a different direction. After playing limited minutes early on, Raymond bounced in and out of the top team's lineup for most of the year, spending time as a healthy scratch and nine games down with the junior team.

Meanwhile, after what Djurgardens assistant coach Mikael Hakanson called an excellent offseason of training, Holtz got off to a strong start.

"He started really well. He got to play with our best players," Hakanson said. "There were a couple of games where he made a big impact on me."

So when they landed in the Czech Republic and they were placed once more on a line together with Rangers second-round pick Karl Henriksson, their usual Team Sweden centre, the tournament meant something different for both players.

When Dahlin played for Sweden at the world juniors, he had Elias Pettersson and Alex Nylander to insulate him. This year, Sweden lacked firepower up front and Holtz and Raymond knew they had to play big roles.

But there was more pressure on Raymond than on Holtz. Holtz looked – and acted – comfortable from the start, picking up five points in seven games en route to a bronze medal victory over the rival Finns.

They both performed, though, and Swedish head coach Tomas Montén wasn't surprised by their strong underage showings.

Raymond and Holtz could mark 2020 as just the sixth time two Swedes have been taken inside the top 10 of the same NHL draft class. (Tommy Holl / Frolunda HC)

Montén compared Raymond to Zibanejad, Mitch Marner and Rickard Rakell.

"Good things come from his stick. But I think still he's really competitive. He's not afraid of sticking his head into situations," Montén said.

Asked to evaluate Holtz's self-proclaimed comparisons to Stamkos, Ovechkin and Sundin, Montén didn't flinch there, either.

"The comparison is fair," Montén said. "He wants to shoot the puck, he wants to be the last guy on the puck."

Whenever they struggled, or questions arose about breaking them up, Montén deflected those too.

"They're still creating, they're still playing good, we know we have the chemistry," Montén said.

"It's a lot of hype and they've never played on this kind of level before. It's a different game when you get to the world juniors. It's fast. They're creative players that your opponent has to keep an eye on and they have to work hard to shut them down. One day they score and the other day they create."

Throughout the world juniors, Montén said he paid particularly close attention to his two youngest players.

"We went through it with Dahlin. We talk to them and ask if they feel that they need extra help or need some extra time off. They've been really good at it," Montén said.

"They're really competitive. They want to score more than we want. Those two are two players that can do that for us and they're put in those situations so I think they feel some pressure. But it's something you learn from."

When the year was over and the outbreak of COVID-19 had cancelled their seasons, their journeys both led to the same, predictable location: the top of the 2020 draft.

And though Holtz said he didn't spend any time checking the rankings, Raymond admitted he did.

After averaging just 9:48 in ice time, Raymond finished the season with 13 points across 39 games with Frolunda in the SHL and CHL.

Holtz, after a brief dip in his play following the world juniors, finished where he started, according to Hakanson. He wrapped up his season with 19 points across 45 games in all competitions at the pro level and averaged 12:53 in ice time.

"It's all about the big picture," Hakanson said of Holtz. "By the end of the season, he was ready and engaged in battles and protecting the puck. He can be even stronger on the puck than he already is too. When he has time to handle the puck, he's going to score. He's up there."

In Frolunda, though the season didn't play out like Raymond or the team intended, Sjostrom says he is partially to blame for that.

"I don't think he ever showed any frustration. He has been working all along and motivated. I think he has handled the process exceptionally well. Being that age, it's definitely not easy. For next season, we've made sure we have more room and he's going to have a much bigger role on the team. I think he's mentally and physically ready for that," Sjostrom said.

"My belief (in Raymond) has absolutely not changed. His ceiling is super high. I mean, the skills that he has, the vision, I think he can be a real special player."

Sjostrom insists, too, that Frolunda has never had a single issue with Raymond off the ice. In fact, both Sjostrom and Raymond joked that living at home and having a mother who is a nutritional coach means that he's always prepared.

Together, Raymond and Holtz hope to lead Swedish hockey's next era.

They both admit to watching their fair share of Pettersson and William Nylander highlights. Holtz met Nylander once, he'll excitedly tell you.

"There are so many Swedish stars. They're so fantastic," Holtz said. "It's really exciting to watch Nylander and Pettersson and Dahlin and think that might be me."

Both Frolunda and Djurgardens hope their two young stars will return for one more season before jumping to North America.

Sjostrom believes the added time off due to the season's cancellation may be perfect for Raymond.

"We've talked about him using this time to really take advantage. This time of the year there's normally playoffs, combines, development camp, three or four trips to North America and he gets to focus on training instead," Sjostrom said.

"The skill he has with the puck, we know that. It's learning how to protect the puck and be stronger on pucks and that's not just about gaining pounds. It's more about technique and learning to play against bigger players and get to the net to use those skills. He just turned 18 and it takes time to develop into a man. It's not something you can rush."

Hakanson thinks there are little things that Holtz can work on, including his puck control and his one-timer, but his message to his youngest forward Holtz was simple.

"Just be a little better every day," Hakanson said. "He had eyes on him at all times. But he's street smart. He can take advantage of any situation. He's a tough guy mentally. He always listens and he wants to learn and he understands that it's going to take a little more time but that he's going to be really good. He's going to play in the NHL for many years so his preparation has to be great. And it is."

While Holtz said he doesn't spend much time thinking about the draft, he admitted he can't stop thinking about the NHL.

Asked how he'll make that jump, Holtz answered plainly.



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"My scoring ability and my shot," he said.

Asked the same question, Raymond answered differently.

"I just want to create," Raymond said. "That's what I do. I create."

But no matter where they go next, or how they go about doing it, Sweden will be watching.

"Dahlin brought a wave here to Swedish hockey and the next one is Lucas and Alexander," Johnsson said. "We can't wait to see what they do with it."

The Athletic LOADED: 04.10.2020

Sportsnet.ca / NHL Power Rankings: 6 best cap-era teams to not win a Stanley Cup

Luke Fox | April 9, 2020, 8:34 AM

The primary focus of the NHL these days is plotting a course around these moving goalposts that will allow the league to crown a 2020 Stanley Cup champion. Somehow, some way, some time.

The nonexistent 2004-05 campaign — a blank line in the history books due to a labour dispute and a lockout — remains a sore point. It deprived some team we'll never know of a champagne shower and a parade.

Since 2005-06 and the dawn of hockey's salary-cap era, fans have seen their share of mini dynasties in Chicago and Los Angeles and Pittsburgh. There have also been a number of frequent contenders that did find a way to lift that silver jewel once in recent times but came agonizingly close to making it a trend (St. Louis, Boston, Washington, Anaheim, Detroit).

And then there is a third group of powers that stands out over the past 15 years: the best teams not to win a Cup in the salary-cap era.

Here's a look back at the most competitive organizations since 2005 who have consistently been in the mix but have (so far) had their cap-era Cup dreams dashed.

6. Ottawa Senators

While the current Senators are embracing the rebuild like a favourite teddy bear, Ottawa has frequently been able to claim status as Last Canadian Club Standing since the 2004 lockout.

Before all the stars scattered, the Sens came excruciatingly close — one overtime goal away — from eliminating the eventual champion Penguins in the thrilling, seven-game 2017 Eastern Conference Final.

In all, they've played in 15 post-season rounds in the cap era and came within three wins of glory in 2007. Those Sens dropped just three games total as they eliminated Pittsburgh, New Jersey and Buffalo before running headfirst into the juggernaut Ducks.

"To have a team where you know you have a chance to win, it just makes you that much more focused as a player," Jason Spezza reflected last week on Hockey Central at Noon. "It still kind of haunts me to this day."

"It was a five-game series, but the games were a lot closer. We had two 5-on-3s in Games 1 and 2 and didn't capitalize, and it ended up haunting us to lose both games [by scores of 3-2 and 1-0, respectively] in Anaheim to start. Still to this day I think about how we could've approached things maybe a little differently. Those are the things as a player that you never forget."

5. Nashville Predators

This 20-year-old franchise loves to hang a good banner but has so far been denied the proudest one.

Incredibly consistent and committed to icing a contender in the cap era, Nashville has missed the dance but thrice in the past 15 post-seasons after missing out in its first five years as an expansion team.

From 2016 to 2018, the Preds won at least one playoff round three springs in a row, captured the organization's first Presidents' Trophy (2018) and posted a 14-8 record in the 2017 post-season, coming up two painful games shy of hockey's ultimate prize.

Nashville's 2-0 loss to Pittsburgh in that infamous, decisive Game 6 was fraught with controversy. Referee Kevin Pollock's premature whistle on a loose puck in Matt Murray's crease prevented a Nashville scoring opportunity that almost certainly would have resulted in a goal. Later, Patric Hornqvist's Cup-winning goal was made good with just 95 seconds left in regulation despite Nashville's challenge of goaltender interference. (Carl Hagelin added an empty-netter.)

At the time of the 2020 pause, the up-and-down Predators had won three straight and rallied into another playoff position, based on points percentage.

4. Vancouver Canucks

The locked-out 2004-05 season snuffed out a four-year run of qualifying for the playoffs in Vancouver, but it also acted as a starting point for another solid run from 2007 to 2015, in which the Canucks made the dance seven times and won six series.

A stellar core, led by the Sedin twins up front and Roberto Luongo in the crease, was the winningest outfit in hockey in 2011 and 2012. Over two wonderful/horrible seasons, Vancouver amassed 105 regular-season victories, captured back-to-back Presidents' trophies, and watched it all end in Game 7 misery as the city burned.

While Father Time and inevitable decline broke up the band, the Canucks of the early 2010s will go down as one of the most dominant compositions of hockey players to come up just a wee bit short. For our money, the 2010-11 Canucks were the best single roster not to go all the way in this era.

3. New York Rangers

Recency bias has us framing the Rangers as a group in reset, but from 2006 through 2017 New York qualified for the playoffs in 11 of 12 seasons, winning 11 series in the process.

Backstopped by future first-ballot Hall of Famer Henrik Lundqvist, the 2012 to 2015 Blueshirts averaged a third-round appearance four years running.

The 2014 edition lost the final to the Los Angeles Kings, and the 2015 outfit snagged the Presidents' Trophy with a 53-22-7 record before succumbing to the young, electric Lightning in a seven-game Eastern Conference Final.

While King Henrik, 38, has just one more season on his contract, a new wave of Rangers led by Artemi Panarin, Mika Zibanejad and Igor Shesterkin has given hope New York might be able to party like Messi in the not-so-distant future.

2. Tampa Bay Lightning

On a recent Zoom call with reporters, Blackhawks captain Jonathan Toews said it was during the 2015 Cup Final that he first saw where the sport was headed — and it was a blue streak in the blueprint of the Lightning.

Fast to grasp the fast, Jon Cooper's brand of Tampa Bay hockey (aided by former GM Steve Yzerman's brand of cap management, with a secondary assist to no state tax) has made the sport soar through the South.

The Lightning were the last team to hoist the chalice before the salary cap and have long been pegged by critics as a smart bet to lift the next one.



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Since 2011, the Bolts have reached the Eastern Conference Final four times, thrice losing in Game 7 to the eventual Cup champs (Boston, 2011; Pittsburgh, 2016; Washington, 2018). In '15, underdog Tampa had the savvy Blackhawks on the ropes, leading the final 2-1, before Chicago battled back with three straight, narrow-margin victories.

That pain was matched by the shock of 2018-19, when the record-breaking, Presidents' Trophy-winning favourite posted a silly 62-16-4 regular-season record only to get swept by the Blue Jackets in Round 1.

Cooper believes that disappointment has steeled his group, preparing them well for another contending run in 2020 — if COVID-19 permits.

1. San Jose Sharks

If disappointment had a colour, it would be teal.

Think about all the greatness and all those playoff beards wheeling around the Silicon Valley ice over the past decade and a half.

Since the 2004-05 lockout, Jumbo Joe and the Sharks have qualified for the playoffs an incredible 13 out of 14 times. That bar-setting run of consistency features eight 100-point regular seasons, 14 post-season series victories, four trips to the Western Conference Final, one Presidents' Trophy (2009), and one trip to the Stanley Cup Final (2016).

No wonder Doug Wilson is the second-longest-tenured GM in the league.

In the spirit of twisting the knife, nine times in the cap era the Sharks have been eliminated in a Game 6 or Game 7. On seven occasions, they've been eliminated by an eventual Cup finalist — four times by the champion, as was the case last spring in a nail-biter versus the St. Louis Blues.

"All you gotta do is get in" has become a popular axiom when speaking of Cup chances. Just don't say that to Sharks fans.

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 04.10.2020

Sportsnet.ca / Oilers' Connor McDavid asks fans to keep Colby Cave 'in their thoughts'

Mark Spector | April 9, 2020, 7:38 PM

EDMONTON — It's what a 23-year-old Connor McDavid unwittingly signed up for, when his immense hockey skills led to him being captain of an NHL team.

But that doesn't mean it's easy, when they ask you to articulate your feelings on young Colby Cave, McDavid's teammate who lies in a coma at a Toronto hospital.

"This is devastating news," said McDavid, as eloquently as could be expected. "Colby is such a strong guy — a good Saskatchewan boy. He's as tough as they come, and if anyone is going to get through this it's going to be Colby Cave."

What a time this is.

As Canadians, we can get our heads around missing our National Hockey League playoffs, given the circumstances. It stings when you've supported an Oilers club that has missed the playoffs 12 of the past 13 seasons, and now they're good and there are no playoffs. But fans get it. Social distancing saves lives, while watching a playoff game on a sunny spring deck only enhances our existence.

Then suddenly, in the midst of it all, notice comes from the local team that one of its players — Cave, a fringe guy who has come up and down from the minors over the past couple of seasons — is sick. Real sick.

"Edmonton Oilers player Colby Cave has been placed in a medically induced coma and admitted to the Critical Care Unit at Sunnybrook

Hospital after suffering a brain bleed over night. We ask that you keep Colby and his wife Emily in your thoughts and prayers during this time."

The press release landed with a thud on Tuesday.

If hockey is not going to give us any games, then it shouldn't be allowed to lay news like this on us either.

He'd had headaches early in the week, but if Cave was like anyone else in these weird times, the last place a guy would want to go is a hospital. Hockey people deal with pain in their own way anyhow, and though I won't say I am a close friend of this player, I have gotten to know the young man relatively well over the past few years. He'd likely not be one to rush to emergency, at a time when it was needed by so many others.

In a time when the NHL is stocked with the sons of dentists and accountants who can afford the skyrocketing costs of academy schools and spring hockey, Cave was that rare son of a rancher, a Boxing Day baby who skated off of Al and Jennifer's farm near Battleford, Sask., to become the MVP for two straight years in Swift Current, and the captain of the Western League team for one season.

The news was furthered on Wednesday: Doctors remove a colloid cyst that was causing pressure on his brain. He would remain in a medically induced coma, cruel isolation at a time when it is difficult even for his wife Emily to remain at his bedside.

On Instagram, Emily has asked that we "Please pray for my husband and best friend."

"All the fans out there, everyone just needs to keep Colby, his wife Emily, and the entire family in their thoughts and prayers," McDavid said. "Just sending out good vibes for them. It's all we can do, we're all stuck inside. We can just think and pray that he comes out of this, and pray that the family can get through it as well. I can't imagine how hard it is on them."

It is heartbreaking to read Emily's Instagram posts, and really, it shouldn't matter how good a husband or respectful a person this happens to. It shouldn't happen to anyone at age 25, let alone a polite, respectful and handsome young man who has dutifully gone up and down from Bakersfield to Edmonton and back to Bakersfield again, without complaint.

A young man who always remembered people's names, and took time to catch up when he arrived back in the Oilers dressing room. It's a fading art, that relationship between player and newscaster, where you kibitz about all things not hockey. Like his Dad's cattle farm, and how being gone for hockey annually relieved him of some of the dirty work.

"You got kids?" he'd ask.

Richard Deitsch and Donovan Bennett host a podcast about how COVID-19 is impacting sports around the world. They talk to experts, athletes and personalities, offering a window into the lives of people we normally root for in entirely different ways.

"When we had to tell him to go down to the American League, he was disappointed but he was never down. He took it like a pro, went down there, played hard, and we called him back up a few times," Ken Holland told me on Tuesday.

It's cliché, and it's the kind of thing that hockey people say to you when we really don't have much else: Maybe the kind of player Cave is will help him to beat this thing. Maybe, somewhere inside the soul of this young, fit player who never quit on an NHL career — despite playing the vast majority of his pro games in the AHL thus far — that same attitude wins this battle too.

"They're all good kids," an NHL executive once said, when personalities were getting in the way of talent assessment. And it's true.

But this one, he's a really, really good kid.

You can't work this hard for your dream and have it end like this, can you?



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"It's devastating," McDavid repeated. "Colby is a guy who is so well liked in our dressing room. I'm sure he's been well liked in any room he's been in, he's such a good guy. There's no real way to express how I'm feeling about it. It's devastating.

"You just pray that he wakes up, that the family is OK."

Sportsnet.ca / Canadiens' Timmins on how draft prep has been impacted by COVID-19

Eric Engels | April 9, 2020, 4:30 PM

MONTREAL— Under normal circumstances, Trevor Timmins and his staff of Montreal Canadiens scouts would be just hours away from knowing where they'd be slotted in the first round of a draft that was scheduled to take place in their backyard this June.

They'd take that key piece of information away from the NHL Draft Lottery and plug it into their draft board, and they'd continue to add various other pieces as they watched the CHL, NCAA, and European leagues dive into their respective playoffs. Then all parties would be preparing themselves to attend the World Under-18 Championship that was scheduled from April 16-26 in Plymouth, Mich., and from there it would be onto the NHL Combine in early June, which would be followed by a private combine the Canadiens hold every year for players not invited or in attendance at the NHL's event.

Under normal circumstances, we'd be with Timmins and Canadiens general manager Marc Bergevin in Toronto on this day, having a conversation with either one of them about all those things.

But these are anything but normal circumstances. The COVID-19 pandemic has taken many lives and upended most (if not all) of them. And the working world has not only been profoundly affected by social distancing measures universally adopted; it will continue to be so for an indefinite period.

So, even though Timmins touched on a variety of subjects over the duration of a 50-minute conference call he participated in from his home in Ontario on Thursday—from how he feels about prospects currently in Montreal's system to how he sees the top-10 of the 2020 draft shaping up—we thought it was imperative to immediately focus on how he and his staff members are approaching their task without assurances there will be a combine of any kind, with amateur-level (and some pro-level) playoffs being outright cancelled, and with the bulk of their operations that would generally be carried out in person now having to be done electronically.

And this is particularly pertinent because the Canadiens are now two seasons into a reset of their roster and they've made the draft the highest priority of business in order to successfully achieve that reset.

Armed with 14 picks this year—and after having collected several assets over the last two summers that have them ranked by consensus as having one of the deepest prospect pools in hockey—the Canadiens have an opportunity they can't afford to squander if they wish to soon break the cycle of repeated Stanley Cup Playoff misses.

One of the first things the Canadiens assistant GM said Thursday was that, even though the pandemic has altered everyone's process, nothing has gotten in the way of him and his scouts conducting the vital business that needs to be done before any draft.

"We have a structured process that we apply at every draft year, and this hasn't changed for us," Timmins said. "I have our staff adhering to the process, which works towards developing our organizational draft board. With no draft date in sight, obviously there's no end-point for us to work towards. So what I've done (is) I've kept our amateur scouting staff very busy—somewhat like a university professor—with assignments which

have due dates. And the assignments come in an orderly fashion working towards developing our area lists and ultimately towards developing our organizational draft board, which my target date (to complete) is approximately mid-May—the same (date) as we would usually work towards.

"Luckily we have an online video database that all my scouts have access to, and we have a game library of almost every game that a draft prospect or player anywhere throughout the world has played, and it's already broken down these games into shifts, goals, assists, breakout passes etc., along with some analytics. So there's a lot of work, a lot of information available to our scouts online."

Timmins estimated that he's spent upwards of six hours a day pouring over the footage and that his scouts have been doing the same for reports they're filing through their Rinknet technology system, and he explained why that's an acceptable method at this stage of the game.

"We're able to do that because we have the bulk of our live coverage done," Timmins said. "If you went blind and never (had) seen a player live and expect to get a good projection, that would be very difficult to do if you just went on video."

That's one hurdle we'd expect most (if not all) teams have successfully jumped over.

Another hurdle circumvented, as Timmins explained, is that interviews that have always happened face-to-face with prospects and their coaches have been converted to FaceTime and phone meetings.

Other hurdles are unavoidable.

It seems obvious enough that various leagues having their playoffs cancelled eliminates an opportunity for every team to evaluate draft prospects and unsigned players under the most pressure-packed circumstances and at a time when they might learn most about those players. And the World U-18 tournament is a key part of year-long evaluations being buttoned up but, with it being canceled, teams are now going to have to finalize their opinions based on the last impression they got at the U-18 Five Nations Tournament that was held in the Czech Republic in February.

And it's not just that the U-18s represented a chance for the scouts to shore up their opinions; it's also that, because they were scheduled to take place in Michigan, several general managers were getting an opportunity to be in attendance for games they might have a harder time getting to if they were being held elsewhere.

"They're not going to be able to see those players live and maybe to have the same voice that they might have in scouting meetings," Timmins said.

"What it also hurts is that we won't be able to see some of these prospects—and mostly the top prospects—play within their own age group... (For) example, guys like, in Sweden, (Alexander) Holtz and (Lucas) Raymond who play in the SHL. Although we did see them in the world juniors, that's Under-20. It's not Under-18. And another example is (Tim) Stutzle; we saw him at the world junior Under-20 but we haven't been able to see him play with his own age group this year... It's a more difficult projection when you see young players having to play with and against men than it is within their own age group.

"And another aspect, too, by not having the Under-18 Championship in Plymouth specifically, is that we won't get a chance to see a lot of these European players play on the North American ice surface."

Timmins wouldn't put a weight on those factors in how the final draft decisions get made, but he did say it was a considerable part of the evaluation process.

The combines are huge parts of it as well.

"I'm still hoping that maybe we will have time to have some sort of a combine, whether it's a team combine or NHL combine to be able to get some information. Maybe that's out of the question," Timmins said. "If it is



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out of the question and we're not able to get any info from an NHL or our own team combines, then I've heard that the NHL will be reaching out to try to secure medical information from as many prospects that would usually be at the NHL combine and making that available to each NHL club's medical staff. So we would have some information, (but) obviously not near what we'd have by holding our own or having NHL combines...there'd be more risk. You wouldn't have complete information on medical history or growth potential or fitness testing and things like that. It does hurt."

Perhaps the biggest challenge for all teams is going to be wrapping their heads around how the draft will unfold if it's done in a virtual setting.

"Having the draft on the draft floor with all 31 teams present and the staff and the GM, it allows for a lot of communication during the draft—a lot of deals thrown out there, a lot of deals falling through or getting made," Timmins said. "There's a lot of talking on the draft floor, and I think that would impede that."

Without wanting to speculate on how the NHL Draft would unfold, Timmins added that he and other NHL-types will keep a keen eye on the NFL Draft scheduled for later this month.

"They can't even get their staff together in a war room at their facility, so that will all be taking place from their homes," said Timmins. "So that's going to be interesting to see how that unfolds."

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