



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • April 13, 2019

## THE NEWS & OBSERVER

### Canes need All-Star version of Aho to reappear in playoffs

By Chip Alexander

Carolina Hurricanes center Sebastian Aho now has gone 15 games without a goal but believes he has a solution.

"Maybe just a little bit relax," he said Friday after a team practice at Capital One Arena.

Relax? In the playoffs? There is no relaxation in the Stanley Cup playoffs, when good scoring chances can be scarce, goals precious and defenders are looking to mash your face into the glass while collecting the puck.

Aho took his share of the rough stuff Thursday as the Canes dropped Game 1 to the Washington Capitals, often facing the defensive pairing of Matt Niskanen and Dmitry Orlov and taking a few pops from Niskanen along the way. While playing 26 minutes in the 4-2 loss, Aho had a mostly quiet night with two shots on goal as the Canes' top line was kept in check, forcing coach Rod Brind'Amour to shake up his lines during the game.

The Canes need Aho being Aho, badly. They lean on the 21-year-old Finn extensively -- at even strength, on the power play, on the penalty kill. He's one of the NHL's best young players, named to the Metropolitan Division team in the NHL All Star Game this season, but now playing on the sport's biggest stage.

Washington isn't lacking scorers. Alex Ovechkin had a league-best 51 goals in the regular season and added another on the power play in the playoff opener. Six other other Caps players had more than 20, and one of those six, center Nicklas Backstrom, scored twice on Thursday.

Aho led the Canes with 30 goals but last scored March 9 in a road game against the Nashville Predators. He has since had 37 shots on net but is 0-for-37. That's a scoring slump in anyone's eyes, but Aho said he wouldn't stress too much over it -- thus, the relaxation comment.

"I've had a lot of scoring chances," Aho said. "I don't need to put so much pressure ... you know, when you get the chance put it in the net and not worry about it. I've been producing the chances the same way."

For Aho, like several of his teammates, the playoff game Thursday was his first. He was 11 years old, learning the finer points of the game in Finland, when the Canes last put in a playoff appearance in 2009, when they lost the first game in each of their first two series ,against New Jersey and Boston, before winning both in seven games.

Aho said he wasn't nervous.

"I was excited," he said. "It was definitely a different feeling before that game. There was maybe a little more emotion in the game but other than that pretty much the same as any other."

Brind'Amour liked the way most of his players handled the playoff game and the raucous setting at Capital One Arena, where Caps fans came to again celebrate the 2018 Stanley Cup run while hoping to see them take a first step toward a repeat. Brind'Amour didn't like his special teams -- the Canes allowed two power-play goals while going 0-3 on the power play -- but didn't see much in the way of playoff jitters.

"I may have overthought that myself," he said Friday. "You watch the first 10 minutes and I expected that to be different because so many guys hadn't played in this big a moment. I think it actually helped us that we don't have a lot of guys who have played on this stage because they don't know it's supposed to be different. They just went out and played their game and I was pleasantly surprised with that."

Defenseman Brett Pesce was one of those who just went out and played. It was his first playoff game, when the confines of the rink can seem smaller and the noise level higher, but it was still hockey.

"It was physical, it's a little bit faster, but all in all it was a lot of fun," Pesce said.

Pesce was on the ice when the Caps scored on their first power play in the first period, allowing Backstrom to go unchecked near the crease. Pesce also was on the ice when the Canes' Andrei Svechnikov scored the first of his two goals in the third period as the Canes made a push and made it a 3-2 game that made things a lot more tense.

The Canes trailed 3-0 after the first but Pesce said the feeling in the locker room was more upbeat than somber. It was somber after the game, he said, in that the Canes believed they were close to a comeback win.

"I thought we were on 'em in the first but they just capitalized on a few key bounces and our mistakes," he said. "We stuck to our game plan and we were confident. We knew we weren't out of it and we came back."

That's how the Canes handled the regular season, bouncing back from a dismal December when it appeared they might be out of playoff contention.

"We're used to adversity," Pesce said. "Where we came from, how we got here is pretty amazing to me. We believe in our team."



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## A (playoff) star is born, not a moment too soon for the Hurricanes

By Luke DeCock

After three years in North America, Andrei Svechnikov's grasp of conversational English is about what anyone would expect, with a decent handle on slang and a useful ability to communicate with his teammates at a colloquial level.

It's different in the spotlight, on camera, in public. That's hard on anyone in their second language. And here, Svechnikov is less comfortable. He sprints through answers, stringing together the words he wants to use without the proper pacing or conjunctions or objects, or he stumbles through longer constructions like a newborn colt trying to walk, verbally.

All of which is entirely normal and expected and fine, and it's a measure of how far Svechnikov has come in the spotlight that when he was forced to speak from the same podium Friday where Rod Brind'Amour had just addressed the media, instead of his more comfortable locker stall – the Hurricanes having closed their locker room to the press early to hold a penalty-kill meeting, just as Svechnikov was (as usual) one of the last players to exit the ice – the Russian rookie seemed to be more comfortable the longer he was on the stage.

His first answer, monotone: "Oh I feel like I'm pretty confident and got great emotion but we lost that game so it's all right we have to win next game."

But by the end, only a few questions and a minute later, he was much smoother. Asked whether his first goal gave him some confidence, his response was easy and ... confident.

"Exactly," Svechnikov said, smiling. "For sure, when you score, it always does give you a little more confidence."

Which is also kind of how his playoff debut went Thursday: somewhat lost on the ice for two periods, knocked around by Brooks Orpik, only to become the best player on the ice in the third, scoring a pair of goals in the 4-2 loss with the kind of pinpoint finishing for which the Capitals are better known than the Hurricanes.

At 19 years and 16 days, Svechnikov became the fourth-youngest player to score twice in a playoff game, behind only Pierre Turgeon (twice) and Dainius Zubrus. He bested his coach, Brind'Amour, who did it twice as a 19-year-old in 1990, a decade before Svechnikov was born. (Of the nine players to score two playoff goals in a game as teens, four are connected

in some way to the Hurricanes, with Glen Wesley and Jordan Staal also on the list.) And in his postseason debut, no less.

"I expect it. I don't know – it's not surprising to me," Brind'Amour said. "He's a real good player and he's finding his way. He hasn't even realized how good he can be. The moment, the playoffs, that doesn't even affect him."

Once Svechnikov got away from Orpik – who managed not to break anyone's neck, always a positive – he was able to carve his place in playoff history, and in one case carve up a better defenseman than Orpik, Norris Trophy candidate John Carlson.

Given the Hurricanes' skill deficit against the high-powered Capitals, goals like those could be the difference in the series, assuming Carolina's other top-line talent finishes a chance or two at some point. The matchup between the teams was well established going into Game 1 and didn't change after it, the Hurricanes' quantity against the Capitals' quality, but Svechnikov has the kind of quality to upset that balance.

His quick adjustment to playoff hockey matches his relatively quick adjustment to the NHL, even as Brind'Amour has slow-rolled Svechnikov's ice time and responsibility, giving a player used to having the puck constantly on his stick at lower levels time to adjust to playing without it more often. It hasn't been the easiest adjustment – and Svechnikov's nasty habit of taking bad offensive-zone penalties has to stop – but there's no doubting Svechnikov's commitment to that part of his game or the rest of it.

Always one of the first players on the ice for practice and the last players off, the Hurricanes aren't just blowing smoke about his work ethic to polish a young player's confidence. They genuinely respect it.

"He's not a typical 18- or 19-year-old in the league," teammate and mentor Jordan Martinook said. "He's built like a 25- or 26-year-old. He's strong. And he works extremely hard. He's not really a rookie, or at least it doesn't seem like it."

He does seem like a rookie in English, but he's working on that, too; like his defensive-zone play, it's fine when there's no pressure and getting better when there is. But Svechnikov getting put unexpectedly on the spot Friday was a good reminder that there's nowhere to hide in the playoffs, on or off the ice.



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## Canes' glaring need? Sharper special teams play in Game 2

By Chip Alexander

There seemed to be little question which team was the better five-on-five team Thursday.

The Carolina Hurricanes dropped Game 1 of their Eastern Conference playoff series to the Washington Capitals, but the Canes' play at even strength was consistently aggressive much of the night in the 4-2 loss at Capital One Arena.

But the power play? Different story. A big part of the story.

The Canes were making a third-period charge Thursday, buzzing around the Caps zone and goalie Braden Holtby, and Andrei Svechnikov scored twice, both after nice passes from Lucas Wallmark. The Caps' lead, 3-0 after the first, had shrunk to 3-2 and the Canes were coming, hard.

"We got some jump," Canes coach Rod Brind'Amour said.

Then, two power plays. With a man advantage, the Canes twice slowed themselves down. Cautious passing. Not enough movement. Far too few shots.

On the second power play, Brind'Amour pulled goalie Petr Mrazek for a sixth attacker and 6-on-4 advantage. That didn't help either, not against a team with as many snipers as the Caps have. Lars Eller's empty-net snipe with 47 seconds left in regulation clinched it for the Caps.

Teuvo Teravainen, Jaccob Slavin and Svechnikov had shots blocked on the second power play -- two by Nicklas Backstrom -- and Justin Williams missed the net with an attempt as the Caps' penalty killers hunkered down.

The Canes also had a second-period power play. That did generate shots on goal by Nino Niederreiter and Sebastian Aho.

"Obviously our power play has to be better, a little crisper and create more chances, more shots," the Canes' Jordan Staal said.

The power play has been a season-long head-scratcher. The Canes have skill players. They have playmakers. They have defensemen such as Dougie Hamilton and Justin Faulk who can get off heavy shots.

The Canes scored power-play goals in four straight games in the final stretch of the season as they secured their first playoff berth since 2009. But that came after going nine straight games without one.

Not that it was all about the Canes' power play Thursday. The Caps scored two power-play goals in the first period as Backstrom and Alex Ovechkin knocked in shots for the 3-0 lead after Backstrom had opened the scoring with an even-strength shot from the right circle that beat Mrazek.

Backstrom's power-play score came when he slipped in front of defenseman Brett Pesce near the crease and took a perfectly placed pass off the half-wall from Evgeny Kuznetsov, who has hurt the Canes this season with his playmaking ability.

"Same thing that we've done since I've been here. Moved the puck around to the open guy and tried not to force too many seam passes, tried (not) to force too many high-risk plays," Backstrom said. "When we move the puck fast, we get looks and have got good players to take care of them."

Everyone knows about Ovechkin's one-timers from the left circle. They're the definition of "high danger scoring chances." But the Caps are crafty, picked their spots and Thursday made the Canes pay.

"That's frustrating for me at this time of year, especially when we had a couple of days to talk about it," Brind'Amour said.

The Canes had 26 even-strength shots to the Caps' 13 in the game, had 17 shots blocked and another 23 attempts that missed the net -- in all, 69 shot attempts to Washington's 43.

"You're happy with a win but we can play better than that, especially five-on-five for us," Caps coach Todd Reirden said. "There's an area that we've got to do some work on and there's room for improvement in that spot, for sure. We for the most part defended it OK but we can create more off that."

"That being said, we had some good chances that missed the net sometimes and their goalie made some saves when we had a chance to make it 4-0. "

For the Caps, that's five straight wins over the Canes this season. To extend the series, the Canes will need better execution and awareness. They'll need to avoid penalties as best they can.

They won 22 road games during the regular season, so they've handled that end of it well. But beating the Caps at Capital One Arena is a different animal, as they say. And this is the playoffs.

"A positive for me was we weren't at our best and still had a chance to win," Brind'Amour said.



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## Five points for the Hurricanes going into Game 2

By Luke DeCock

1. **STICKS DOWN** The Carolina Hurricanes gifted the Washington Capitals two power plays in Game 1 with poor stick control – Justin Faulk’s high-stick and Andrei Svechnikov’s offensive-zone hook. That’s avoidable and too many against the Capitals’ prepotent power play.

2. **PAGING SAKU** Some of the Canes’ depth forwards looked a little overwhelmed at times Thursday night. While Rod Brind’Amour sounded hesitant to shake things up, the Hurricanes could use the physical presence and crease-clogging ability of Saku Manaen, who could draw into the lineup for Brock McGinn, Warren Foegele or Greg McKeeg.

3. **SEND A MESSAGE** Justin Williams was the only player to challenge Matt Niskanen after Niskanen delivered a series of tooth-level cross-checks during a second-period Hurricanes power play, knowing the referees would be loathe to hand out a two-man advantage. A playoff series is a long-running narrative; the Hurricanes missed a chance to nip that sort of thing in the bud. They should make a note of it for Game 2, should the opportunity arise.

4. **LOYALTY VS. SUBBORNNESS** It’s justified at times to criticize Rod Brind’Amour for his stubbornness as a head coach, most notably his refusal to pull goalies or change up his lines until absolutely necessary. (He has also been proven right in his steadfastness more often than not.) It’s really more about loyalty than stubbornness, especially to his veterans. His loyalty to Petr Mrazek, who he could have pulled at the first intermission, was rewarded in the third. But his insistence on going to the misfiring first power-play unit for the majority of the first of two critical but fruitless power plays in the third – instead of the red-hot Svechnikov and Dougie Hamilton – hurt the Hurricanes’ chances. (On the second, Brind’Amour gets the benefit of the doubt that he wanted Svechnikov and Hamilton out there after pulling Mrazek for an extra attacker halfway through.)

5. **YOUR BEST PLAYERS HAVE TO BE YOUR BEST PLAYERS** Sebastian Aho hasn’t scored in 15 games. Micheal Ferland hasn’t scored since February. Jordan Staal and Jaccob Slavin weren’t at their best. Things will get easier at home, when the Hurricanes can get their top two lines out against the Capitals’ weak third pairing. But the Hurricanes, already facing a skill deficit, need more from their best players.

## THE ATHLETIC

### Andrei Svechnikov’s two-goal playoff debut is a reminder that this is just the beginning

By Sara Civian

WASHINGTON — Andrei Svechnikov is learning as he goes, which is about the best one can do in the National Hockey League at 19 years and 17 days old.

He’s learning that if he goes to the Raleigh Mercedes dealership to buy a car, he should bring his passport and work visa along for the test drive. That would’ve saved him a “personal day” in the form of a trip to Washington for replacements earlier this season.

He’s learning that he is more than capable of not only addressing the media, but doing so with a sincerity that transcends the language barrier.

“Please, easy questions,” the Russia-born honey badger smiles, as if any question would qualify as easy for a teenager learning a whole new alphabet.

The questions aren’t easy. He tackles them better than fine regardless.

He’s learning, along with the rest of us, where his raw talent might take him.

“He hasn’t even realized, I don’t think, how good he can be,” head coach Rod Brind’Amour said Friday at Capital One Arena. “The moment, the playoffs, doesn’t even affect him. I don’t even think he’s aware of how big the moment is. He’s one of those game-changing-type players, or he’s gonna be. He has that in him.”

Above all else, he’s learning the extra hours he puts in with Brind’Amour count.

Those hours Svechnikov spends on the ice before and after practice are often the reason Brind’Amour is power walking into press conferences in his skate guards. It’s never a hassle to Brind’Amour, and how could it be?

He shut down any concern with his No. 2 overall protege in Edmonton, when he broke out of his rookie wall with a three-point effort in a 7-4 Hurricanes win on Jan. 20.

“He wants to learn,” Brind’Amour said. “I love the kid.”

It was emphatic.

The thing about Svechnikov, and it’s what will lead him into stardom, is the lost art of hard work: The first thing Brind’Amour recognized that night in Edmonton was how willing Svechnikov is to get over himself and put in the work.

The talent and the work combined for a two-goal playoff debut — both of Carolina’s goals in the 4-2, Game 1 loss at Washington.

To say Svechnikov was born with this talent isn’t wrong, but it seems like an unintentional omission of his drive.

“That’s the other part of it, that’s why I know he’s gonna be a good player,” Brind’Amour agreed. “He’s not just good because he’s naturally gifted, which he is, but he works at it. He’s willing to work at it. And not just the skill stuff or the fun things, he’s trying to figure out how to get on the ice more and that’s in his play away from the puck. That’s the stuff he really



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wants to learn. He's spent the time understanding it, and he's done a nice job of it all year."

It's been there in fragments almost every game in the must-win stretch that forced the Hurricanes into the playoffs. The way he drives to the net out of nowhere and almost pulls it off every time feels like the trailer of what will be a blockbuster career. So do the nifty passes intended for linemates he'll earn someday soon, but doesn't have right now.

Like his English, his NHL playoff debut wasn't perfect. He accrued an offensive zone penalty against the team you just can't do that against, in a season he's at times led the league in stick penalties. But he's learning at a trajectory that's breaking records for a reason.

His countryman of an opponent Evgeny Kuznetsov didn't beat around the bush.

"He's one of those Russian players who actually goes to those dirty areas and he plays hard," Kuznetsov said. "Not typical Russian player."

His atypical work ethic is probably more of a worldwide thing if we're being honest. It's why Jordan Martinook, a player who couldn't just coast by on talent, who has to prove his worth nightly, took Svechnikov under his wing.

It's why captain Justin Williams, respected by so many, respects Svechnikov right back.

"He's a really good player already," Williams said, "and he's got the potential to be a star."

The talent is inherent, and who knows where the work ethic comes from, but that's what could lift him to stardom.

Back when Brind'Amour's first win as head coach of the Hurricanes featured Svechnikov's first point, the message was the same.

"I'm just proud of the kid in general," Brind'Amour said. "He's a great kid. He wants to learn and he's got a lot to learn, but he's going to be a great player in this league. You gotta remember how young he is, and that's something I have to keep reminding myself. He's just a kid, and he's out there in the NHL and he doesn't look out of place. We're very fortunate to have him."

A season full of learning is coming to a head. Svechnikov — he just turned 19 on March 26 — never looked out of place. He scored two goals in his playoff debut Thursday. He knows that he still has a lot to learn.

That's the best problem the Hurricanes could imagine. Svechnikov endured enough of the playoff drought angst to understand it without growing jaded. He's ringing in the next era of Hurricanes with all the confidence of an 18-year-old foreigner walking into a Mercedes dealership. It's not perfect, but he's here.



## Canes using youth as an advantage

By Mandy Mitchell

WASHINGTON — It was the obvious storyline heading into the Canes first playoff series in 10 years. The young startup Canes against the veteran Capitals. Everyone, including the guy behind the bench, assumed it would be a factor.

"You know, I may have overthought that myself," said head coach Rod Brind'Amour. "You watch the first 10 minutes, I was expecting it to be different."

Yes, the Canes went down 3-0 in the first period, but Brind'Amour said it was more about execution and little mistakes than nerves.

"I think it's actually helped us, because they didn't know it was supposed to be different, so I was pleasantly surprised by that," he said.

"I thought we stuck to our game plan, and we didn't give them many chances," defenseman Brett Pesce said. "They just capitalized on a few."

And if there were any jitters, the third period comeback helped to wipe those away creating a confident locker room heading into Saturday's Game 2.



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## Game 2 Preview: Hurricanes at Capitals

Canes looking for a split before the series shifts to Raleigh  
by Michael Smith

WASHINGTON - The Carolina Hurricanes aim to even up their first-round series with the Washington Capitals in a Game 2 Saturday matinee.

Andrei Svechnikov scored two goals in the third period to chisel away at the Capitals' 3-0 lead, which they established in the first period with the help of two power-play goals, but the defending Stanley Cup champions staved off the Canes' late push to take Game 1.

"We came here for a split, so we're going to have to get that done," captain Justin Williams said. "We were resilient, came back and had an opportunity to win the game."

### Lessons from Game 1

There were some questions as to how the playoff inexperienced Hurricanes would respond, especially early, to the battle-tested, defending Stanley Cup champion Capitals.

The answer? They handled it in stride by playing their game. The Hurricanes, especially Micheal Ferland, matched the Capitals' early physicality, and they held the home team without a shot on goal for nearly 10 minutes.

"It's actually helped us that we don't have a lot of players who have played on this stage because they don't know it's supposed to be different," Brind'Amour said. "They just went out and played our game. I was pleasantly surprised with that."

The Canes carried 5-on-5 play throughout the contest. At 5-on-5, the Canes out-scored the Caps, 2-1, out-shot them, 26-12, and out-chanced them, 22-12, according to Natural Stat Trick.

"5-on-5, we played a pretty good game," Williams said. "I think they probably look at it and say they didn't play their best, which is what I was hearing, so they're going to come out even better, and we need to come out better, also."

"There's some confidence in the way we played, I think," Brind'Amour said. "We're confident in the fact that we have a good chance to win. We believe in ourselves and the guys. Yeah, the results suck, obviously. We wanted to win the game, but I think there's a lot of confidence in the way we played."

### The Story of Special Teams

Ay, there's the rub.

While the Canes might have been pleased with their 5-on-5 play, special teams leaved something to be desired.

"The power play was crap, and the penalty kill was crap, also," Williams said.

Fair enough.

The Capitals added to their 1-0 lead in the first period with a pair of power-play goals from Nicklas Backstrom and Alexander Ovechkin.

The Canes then had two power-play opportunities in the latter half of the third period to tie the game and came up empty-handed.

"Your best players are usually on the ice, and they need to make plays," Williams said of the man advantage.

### Changes for Game 2?

Based on the Canes' workflow in practice on Friday, there won't be any lineup alterations for Game 2. The Canes utilized the same forward lines and defensive pairs with which they opened Game 1, but those combinations could always change before puck drop.

"I like our group," Brind'Amour said. "it's just hard to pull guys out of the lineup. ... Who do you take out? Nobody really deserves to come out."

Jake Bean slotted in for Jaccob Slavin during Friday's practice. Slavin recorded three blocked shots in 25 minutes of ice time and was given a maintenance day.

"A lot of hard minutes," Brind'Amour said.

Calvin de Haan participated in practice on Friday. The defenseman has been sidelined since the end of March with an upper-body injury, but the update there is that there really isn't much update just yet - though practicing with the team is an encouraging sign.

"We're hopeful he'll get in at some point," Brind'Amour said.



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## Svechnikov Makes Presence Known in Game 1

Canes rookie tallies twice in dominant third period

by Michael Smith

WASHINGTON - In late April 2018, fortuitous bounces from four lottery balls scored the Carolina Hurricanes a momentous off-ice victory, as the team jumped from 11th in the draft order to two.

Nearly a year later, the player the Hurricanes selected with that second overall pick in the 2018 NHL Draft is rising to the occasion on the ice, nearly helping his team erase a three-goal deficit in Game 1 of the 2019 Stanley Cup Playoffs.

Andrei Svechnikov, just the fourth teenager in franchise history to play in the postseason, was admittedly somewhat nervous in the lead-up to the opening of the first round.

"Maybe, kind of," he smiled. "A little bit."

His performance, especially in the third period, was anything but.

Down 3-0 in the final frame of regulation, Svechnikov scored two goals to bring his team within a goal of the defending Stanley Cup champions.

As the stage gets bigger and the lights get brighter, Svechnikov continues to revel in the moment.

"I expect it. It's not shocking to me. He's a real good player, and he's finding his way. He hasn't even realized how good he can be," head coach Rod Brind'Amour said after practice on Friday. "The moment, the playoffs, that doesn't even affect him. I don't think he's aware of how big a moment it is. That's really helpful for a young guy. He's just going out and playing."

"There's no pressure on him. Just go do it. Go enjoy it. Go have fun. That's what this time of year is about," Justin Williams said. "We're going to need even more from him if we're going to advance."

At just 19 years and 16 days old, Svechnikov became the ninth-youngest player in NHL history to score two goals in a playoff game. On Oct. 7, 2018, he became the first player born in the 2000s to score an NHL goal. Now, he's the first player born in the 2000s to do so in the playoffs.

Svechnikov's first goal was the stuff of someone who is more physically and skillfully mature beyond his barely 19 years.

Lucas Wallmark dropped the puck off for Svechnikov just over the blue line. The Canes' rookie then put his left shoulder down on defenseman John Carlson, protected the puck with his right hand on his stick and made a power backhand-to-forehand move to beat Braden Holtby with a quick snapshot in tight.

That's composure and skill you don't quite expect to see out of a teenager competing in the Stanley Cup Playoffs.

But Svechnikov? He's special.

"He's already an impact player for us. He's a great player," Sebastian Aho said. "It's impressive, but I wasn't surprised."

Equally impressive was Svechnikov's second of the game, scored just about two-and-a-half minutes after his first. Wallmark again recorded the primary assist, this time with a gorgeous cross-ice pass to Svechnikov, who got off a one-timer from the right circle that rocketed into the net before Holtby could slide laterally across the crease.

"I've got to figure out how to get him more ice time and get him freed up a little more," Brind'Amour said. "He has that ability. He's one of those game-changing-type players. He has that in him."

That game-changing ability was on display in Game 1, as he spearheaded his team's comeback attempt against the defending champs in a hostile environment.

"I feel like I'm pretty confident," he said. "I love these games."

And to think he's just getting started.

Svech is ready, all right.

"Eventually he'll be an absolute force out there," Williams said. "He's a really good player already, but he's got potential to be a star. You can just tell by his release and competitiveness that he's going to get there."



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## 5 Keys: Hurricanes at Capitals, Game 2

Carolina needs to get Aho going; Washington wants quicker zone exits

by Tom Gulitti

HURRICANES at CAPITALS

3 p.m. ET; NBC, SN, TVAS

Washington leads best-of-7 series 1-0

The Washington Capitals will try to go up two games against the Carolina Hurricanes when they play Game 2 of the best-of-7 Eastern Conference First Round at Capital One Arena on Saturday.

Teams that win the first two games of a best-of-7 Stanley Cup Playoff series have a series record of 318-50 (.864) and are 241-30 when they come at home (.889). The Capitals are 3-3 when winning the first two games of a best-of-7 series at home.

Washington opened defense of its 2018 Stanley Cup championship with a 4-2 victory in Game 1 on Thursday. Nicklas Backstrom scored two goals, and defenseman John Carlson had three assists for the Capitals. Rookie forward Andrei Svechnikov scored twice for the Hurricanes, who played their first playoff game since 2009.

Here are 5 keys for Game 2:

### 1. Special teams

The Capitals scored on their first two power plays in Game 1 and killed off all three Hurricanes power plays. That included limiting Carolina to one shot on goal during two power plays in the final 8:46, including 57 seconds at 6-on-4 with goalie Petr Mrazek on the bench.

Conversely, the Hurricanes lost track of Backstrom at the left post on the first Washington power-play goal and left Alex Ovechkin open to score the second one on a rebound.

"They're going to get opportunities, obviously, but there's a couple little things we looked at to do the best we can to nullify that, and a couple things we looked at on the power play as well to be more impactful," Carolina captain Justin Williams said.

### 2. Quicker defensive-zone exits by Washington

The Hurricanes dictated play at 5-on-5 with their relentless pressure in the offensive zone, generating scoring chances and forcing the Capitals to spend long stretches in their end.

As a result, Carolina outshot Washington 29-18 and limited the Capitals to 13 even-strength shots on goal, one of which

was Lars Eller's empty-net goal from the defensive blue line. The Hurricanes dominated in 5-on-5 shot attempts, 59-23.

The Capitals are intentionally selective about when they shoot, seeking higher-quality chances over a high number of shots to make it more difficult for opposing goalies to get in a rhythm. But they know they must get out of their end and up ice quicker with crisper passes to spend more time in the Hurricanes zone, wear down their defensemen, and create more chances to shoot.

"Just the execution of coming out of the defensive zone with possession or getting opportunities from them being aggressive like that could be executed a little bit better," Washington coach Todd Reirden said. "That's a five-man unit. In terms of our defense, the better and the quicker we can move it to our skill players, the better."

### 3. Defensemen's ice time

With Michal Kempny out for the season with a torn left hamstring, the Capitals relied heavily in Game 1 on their top three of John Carlson (25:32 in ice time), Matt Niskanen(24:36) and Dmitry Orlov (22:18). Brooks Orpik (17:27, including 4:32 on the penalty kill) and Nick Jensen (15:53, including 15:20 at even strength) played a little less, and Christian Djoos (7:48, including 1:13 in the third period) was used sparingly.

Some of this was situational, with the Capitals trying to protect a lead in the third period, but figuring out the best way to fill Kempny's ice time remains a work in progress. Expect Reirden to look for better balance in Game 2.

The Hurricanes relied on their top four defensemen with Calvin de Haan out with an upper-body injury. Justin Faulk (26:10) led the way, followed by Jaccob Slavin (25:00), Brett Pesce (22:48) and Dougie Hamilton (19:59). The third pair of Trevor van Riemsdyk(13:30) and Haydn Fleury (7:19) saw limited action.

De Haan, who has not played since March 31, went through the full practice Friday.

### 4. Sebastian Aho

The Hurricanes' top center, Aho had a quiet Game 1, despite playing 26:10 (tying Faulk for most on either team). He had two shots on goal and no points. That came after he went the final 14 games of the regular season without a goal and with five assists over that span.

The Capitals matched the line of Carl Hagelin, Evgeny Kuznetsov and T.J. Oshie against Aho's line, even after Hurricanes coach Rod Brind'Amour changed up his combinations in the third period. Aho will need to find a way to



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battle through that and get back to being the player who set NHL career highs in goals (30), assists (53) and points (83) despite the late-season drop-off.

"I've had a lot of scoring chances, and I think it's maybe just a little bit relax and not put so much pressure," Aho said. "When you get the chance, just put it in the net and not worry about it."

## 5. Physicality

The teams combined for 72 hits in Game 1, with Carolina holding a 37-35 edge. That included 40 in the first period, when the Hurricanes out-hit the Capitals 22-18.

It was clear early that the Hurricanes wanted to establish that they won't be intimidated physically by the more experienced Capitals. Wearing down a team physically over a long playoff series was part of Washington's formula for success on its way to winning the Stanley Cup last season.

## Hurricanes projected lineup

Nino Niederreiter -- Sebastian Aho -- Justin Williams

Micheal Ferland -- Jordan Staal -- Teuvo Teravainen

Andrei Svechnikov -- Jordan Martinook -- Brock McGinn

Greg McKegg -- Lucas Wallmark -- Warren Foegele

Jacob Slavin -- Dougie Hamilton

Brett Pesce -- Justin Faulk

Haydn Fleury -- Trevor van Riemsdyk

Petr Mrazek

Curtis McElhinney

Scratched: Saku Maenalanen, Jake Bean

Injured: Calvin de Haan (upper body)

Capitals projected lineup

Alex Ovechkin -- Nicklas Backstrom -- Tom Wilson

Carl Hagelin -- Evgeny Kuznetsov -- T.J. Oshie

Jakub Vrana -- Lars Eller -- Brett Connolly

Andre Burakovsky -- Nic Dowd -- Chandler Stephenson

John Carlson -- Nick Jensen

Dmitry Orlov -- Matt Niskanen

Brooks Orpik -- Christian Djoos

Braden Holtby

Pheonix Copley

Scratched: Jonas Siegenthaler, Travis Boyd, Dmitrij Jaskin, Ilya Samsonov

Injured: Michal Kempny (torn left hamstring)

Status report

Eller sat out practice Friday because of a lingering upper-body injury, but Capitals coach Todd Reirden said he expects him to play in Game 2. ... Slavin did not practice (maintenance), but Brind'Amour said he will play.

## Svechnikov hopes to build on playoff debut with Hurricanes

19-year-old against scored twice, seeks similar results against Capitals in Game 2

by Tom Gulitti

WASHINGTON -- Maybe Andrei Svechnikov didn't know any better.

The Carolina Hurricanes rookie forward certainly didn't look like a nervous 19-year-old making his Stanley Cup Playoff debut when he scored two goals in a 4-2 loss to the Washington Capitals in Game 1 of the Eastern Conference First Round on Thursday.

Carolina coach Rod Brind'Amour said he wasn't surprised but was impressed enough that he talked Friday about trying to find more ice time for Svechnikov in Game 2 of the best-of-7 series at Capital One Arena on Saturday (3 p.m. ET; NBC, SN, TVAS).

He played 13:37 in Game 1 and, after he scored twice in the third period, Brind'Amour moved him from the third line to the top line with Sebastian Aho and Teuvo Teravainen.

"He's a real good player, and he's finding his way," Brind'Amour said. "He hasn't even realized, I think, how good he can be. The moment or the playoffs, that doesn't even affect him. I don't even think he's aware of how big a moment it is. That's really helpful, I think, for a young guy.

"He's just going out and playing."

That approach has served Svechnikov well all season. The No. 2 pick in the 2018 NHL Draft, he tied with Andreas Johnsson of the Toronto Maple Leafs for third among rookies with 20 goals during the regular season, and his 37 points tied for seventh among rookies with Dominik Kahun of the Chicago Blackhawks.

Svechnikov (19 years, 16 days) was the youngest player to score at least two goals in a playoff game since Dainius Zubrus (18 years, 329 days) of the Philadelphia Flyers scored twice in Game 5 of the Eastern Conference Semifinals against the Buffalo Sabres on May 11, 1997. Svechnikov also was the fourth teenager to score multiple goals in his playoff debut, following Pierre Turgeon (18 years, 222 days) with the Sabres in 1988, Eddie Olczyk (18 years, 237 days) with the Blackhawks in 1985, and Don Gallinger (17 years, 339 days) with the Boston Bruins in 1943.

"I feel like I'm pretty confident and I get great emotion, but we lost that game," Svechnikov said. "We have to win the next game."

One of 10 Hurricanes making his NHL playoff debut, Svechnikov didn't show it, but said he was, "kind of a little bit nervous because that's my first game in the playoffs." Although he was on the receiving end of three big hits from Washington defenseman Brooks Orpik over the first two periods, he was undeterred.



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Svechnikov (6-foot-2, 195 pounds) is well suited for the physical game.

"I expect like it was going to be hard, but it was like really hard," he said. "It was a much faster game and more physical game."

Brind'Amour said he didn't like the way Svechnikov played in the first two periods, but he wasn't the only Hurricanes player to struggle against the defending Stanley Cup champions. Then, Svechnikov gave Carolina a much-needed boost 5:07 into the third period when he made a strong move around defenseman John Carlson in the right circle and cut to the net for a shot that beat goalie Braden Holtby to the far side for his first playoff goal.

"He's done that probably 50 times this year," Hurricanes forward Jordan Martinook said. "It's fun to watch, especially against a guy like Carlson. He's probably one of the best defensemen in the League, and for him to come out and do that just shows the strength he has. He's not the typical 19-year-old, that's for sure."

## Capitals benefiting from playoff experience against Hurricanes

Nachbaur examines Washington's dominance on special teams, composure during late-game pressure

by Don Nachbaur

The Coaches Room is a column by one of four former NHL coaches and assistants who will turn their critical gaze to the game and explain it through the lens of a teacher on a regular basis throughout the Stanley Cup Playoffs. In this edition, Don Nachbaur, a former assistant with the Los Angeles Kings, breaks down Game 1 of the Eastern Conference First Round between the Washington Capitals and Carolina Hurricanes.

The Washington Capitals' 4-2 win against the Carolina Hurricanes in Game 1 of the Eastern Conference First Round on Thursday turned out to be a story of the Capitals' experience versus the Hurricanes' inexperience.

The Capitals are the defending Stanley Cup champions, and their lineup had a total of 1,282 games of NHL playoff experience heading into the best-of-7 series, which continues with Game 2 at Capital One Arena on Saturday (3 p.m. ET; NBC, SN, TVAS). The Hurricanes had a combined 342 games of playoff experience, with 10 players making their NHL postseason debuts.

The difference showed at times in Game 1, which turned out to be a roller-coaster ride with momentum swinging back and forth.

The start of the game was filled with hard-hitting physical play. The Hurricanes dominated with speed and offensive-zone time, creating the start they wanted on the road. They had Washington on its heels; the Capitals did not get a shot on goal for the first 9:33.

Give the Capitals credit; they were patient defensively and capitalized with Nicklas Backstrom's goal at 9:58 to take a 1-0 lead.

The Capitals got some key saves from goalie Braden Holtby through those first 10 minutes and used their experience to weather the storm. They showed patience while

Svechnikov struck again on a one-timer from the right circle at 7:26 to make it 3-2.

"He got free a couple times, and that's kind of what he can do," Brind'Amour said. "We've got to figure out how to get him more ice time and get him freed up a little more because he has that ability. He's one of those game-changing-type players. He's going to be, and he does have that in him."

With Aho, who led Carolina with 30 goals during the regular season, mired in a 15-game goal drought, and Micheal Ferland without a goal in his past 18 games, the Hurricanes need other forwards to step up if they're going to have a chance to defeat the Capitals. Svechnikov demonstrated in Game 1 that he is talented enough, and maybe young and naïve enough, to do it.

"We just said before the game there's no pressure on him," Hurricanes captain Justin Williams said. "Just go do it. Go enjoy it. Go have fun. That's what this time of year is about, and we're going to need even more from him if we're going to advance."

not displaying panic. They built momentum from that first goal and took off with two power-play goals to increase their lead to 3-0 by the end of the first period.

But Carolina did not fold and got stronger as the game went on. After a scoreless second period, Hurricanes coach Rod Brind'Amour made a subtle adjustment and they cut their deficit to 3-2 with two goals from rookie Andrei Svechnikov.

At this point, Washington was back on its heels.

The third period was a real momentum/confidence builder for the Hurricanes. They were one shot away from tying the game and Carolina goalie Petr Mrazek was outstanding, making five huge saves to keep his team within reach.

Carolina had a chance with 6:07 remaining when Micheal Ferland received a great look on Jordan Martinook's centering pass into the high slot. The game might have been tied had Capitals defenseman John Carlson not blocked this chance.

Had this puck gotten past Carlson, Holtby would have faced a difficult save, similar to the chance a screened Mrazek faced on the first Capitals goal by Backstrom.

This was another example of the Capitals' experience. They could have panicked when their three-goal lead was cut to one. Instead, they settled in and showed poise during two late penalty kills. Backstrom made two key shot-blocks, and the rest of the Capitals did all the little things right until Lars Eller's game-clinching empty-net goal.

I believe the Hurricanes come out of Game 1 with a very positive feeling. Their coaching staff can be encouraged by their resolve to hang in there and battle back from a huge hole. Their 5-on-5 play was outstanding, producing two 5-on-5 goals in the third period, while limiting the Capitals to 13 even-strength shots on goal.

The difference in the game turned out to be Washington's two power-play goals in the first period.



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Looking forward to Game 2, the Hurricanes will take a close look at their penalty kill and power play. Their penalty kill was exploited, and their power play came up short when the game was on the line.

From the perspective of the Capitals, they need cleaner exits from their defensive zone to avoid the Hurricanes' hard forecheck. This would result in more offense and less time defending during 5-on-5 play.

## The Washington Post

### Carolina captain Justin Williams helped turn the Capitals into Stanley Cup champions

By Samantha Pell

When Washington Capitals center Nicklas Backstrom had his day with the Stanley Cup in Sweden in early August, he started counting.

One, two, three ...

Carolina captain Justin Williams's name is etched onto the Cup in three places, and Backstrom made it a point to find each one — once from the Hurricanes' lone 2006 Cup title and twice, in 2012 and 2014, from his time with the Los Angeles Kings.

Backstrom took a picture of each and texted it to Williams. It was a simple gesture, one that implied: I see you and your accomplishments. Now my name is finally on it, too.

"Obviously when he was here, I mean, we loved him," Backstrom said.

Williams, 37, was with the Capitals from 2015 to 2017, bringing three Stanley Cups' worth of experience and a Conn Smythe Trophy with him. His leadership and championship experience added to a formidable team peppered with talent and optimism that it could finally win an elusive title, but the Capitals ultimately fell short in the second round to Pittsburgh — twice.

And while the veteran right winger signed with Carolina, where he had played from 2004 to 2009, in free agency in 2017, Capitals players agree Williams had a lasting influence on a Washington team that won the franchise's first Stanley Cup title last year.

"I would say that he definitely had an impact on that," Capitals Coach Todd Reirden said. "He has a very strong character, understanding of what it takes to win the Stanley Cup, and he tried his best to talk about it and express it and share those experiences every way he could with us. We weren't able to do it with him, but I can tell you that it made an impact on our team."

Now, as the Capitals continue their first-round series against Carolina in the Stanley Cup playoffs, after holding on for a 4-2 win against the Hurricanes on Thursday in Game 1, their history with Williams is shelved with a mere asterisk. Williams has moved on, again igniting a nontraditional hockey market and bringing the franchise back to the playoffs for the first time since 2009. And Williams got into it with his old teammates early in Game 1, displaying the grittiness and pestering style of play that have spearheaded his playoff efficiency.

"You aspire to win. That is what you want to do, and we haven't had the opportunity to do that in quite some time," said

Williams, who scored 23 goals this season. "You got to earn the right to have it, so we are obviously excited to be back in the playoffs, but that obviously isn't the end goal."

For the Capitals, Carolina's success with Williams at the helm has come as no surprise. Defenseman Brooks Orpik, who like Williams came to the Capitals with a Stanley Cup ring in hand (Pittsburgh, 2009), recognized Williams's approach to the game was something players admired and tried to emulate.

"The thing with Willie that sticks out the most is his competitiveness on the ice and off the ice," Orpik said. "It doesn't matter if you are playing golf or cards or anything; he really wants to win bad. He doesn't take it well if he doesn't win, but I mean that in the best way possible. It is infectious around the group and kind of pushes everybody to be better."

Williams, with whom the Capitals FaceTimed in the early morning hours as they partied in Las Vegas after they won the Stanley Cup, remains tight with many Washington players. The morning of Game 1, Williams told reporters he followed the Capitals' Cup run last year "very closely."

"I followed everything," Williams said. "I am a fan of the game also but last year was a fan of them."

When told by a reporter that many Capitals players credit Williams with helping them win the Cup last season, the veteran humorously started to roll his eyes.

"I'm not going to make this a kumbaya-type thing," Williams said. "Obviously I have a lot of respect for what they did last year and I have a lot of really good friends on that team and I was very happy for them, but that was last year."

While last year is last year, Capitals forward T.J. Oshie said if there was one player from whom anyone should take advice on the playoffs, it would be Williams — or Stick, as they like to call him. Williams spoke when needed, Oshie said, but it was his play that always was able to rise to the occasion. The Capitals even put one of Williams's refrains — "Own the big moments" — on team shirts during the 2017 postseason.

"That's something that we all tried to emulate, you know; last year some guys did a great job of doing that," Oshie said. "But it is something special and something not every guy can do. And he's one of those guys that can do it."

To the younger players, Williams — with his playoff experience and "Mr. Game 7" nickname — was seen as a motivator. Forward Andre Burakovsky, in only his second NHL season when Williams joined the team, said the veteran was able to help him improve. Burakovsky, who frequently was paired with a combination of Williams and center Evgeny



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Kuznetsov, scored a career-high 17 goals during the 2015-16 season, with 21 assists.

"[Williams] is a great teammate; he has the right blend of leadership, have fun, compete," Capitals General Manager Brian MacLellan said. "He really senses the tone of an organization, of a team, where they are at in the games and playoffs, and he provides — and he did provide us with that — leadership. And he is doing the same thing at Carolina now, so he's just a great guy to have on your team."

And Williams's teachings aren't done yet. While the Capitals hold a 1-0 advantage, Backstrom will head into Saturday's Game 2 with one of Williams's often-used phrases in the back of his mind.

"He always said, 'In the playoffs, momentum is dead after the win,'" Backstrom said. "... He would always reset and go start from zero again."



## Practice Day Notebook: Getting Back to Playing Their Game

The focus of practice today was working on the stuff the Canes know how to do, but need to up their execution to meet the level required of playoff hockey.

By Brian LeBlanc

WASHINGTON — Justin Williams didn't mince words when describing the Carolina Hurricanes' sputtering Game 1 special teams squads.

"The power play kill was crap and the penalty kill was crap also," the Canes captain told the media today after practice at Capital One Arena.

"They're going to get opportunities, obviously," Williams said. "But there's a couple little things we looked at to do the best we can to nullify and a couple things we looked at on the power play as well to be more impactful. We could have had a huge impact on that game and instead didn't come through."

It will certainly be a talking point heading into Game 2. Every player knows it, and how well they respond to it will go a long way in deterring whether the Canes will return home with an even series and home ice advantage, or if they'll be in a 2-0 hole.

"They've got a little skill," said Brett Pesce, underselling the point just a bit. "I thought in the second [period] we were better, for sure. The first period was a lot of jitters and emotions. The second period we settled down. I think we're going to carry that into the next game."

That ability for the Canes to get back to their game allowed for the momentum to shift in-game and not leave them trying to figure things out on their off day. Canes coach Rod Brind'Amour said that despite the challenges on special teams, there's plenty to like about how the team handled the Game 1 spotlight.

"Once we go over it, I think there's some confidence in the way we played. We have a chance. We feel good about the fact that we have a good chance to win, and we believe in ourselves and the guys," said Brind'Amour. "The results suck, obviously — we wanted to win the game. But there's a lot of confidence in the way we played."

Other Practice Notes

- Calvin de Haan was a full participant in practice, but he stayed out after practice was done for extra skating work, so it seems unlikely he will play tomorrow. Jacob Slavin missed practice on a maintenance day, but Brind'Amour expects him to be in the lineup tomorrow.
- Brind'Amour said not to read too much into the fact that the lines reverted to form today after he shook them up a bit in the third period last night. "The [lineup] sheet we had yesterday, we threw it up on the board," he said. "We were just trying to get a little sweat today and go over a couple things."
- So, do the lines change tomorrow? Based on past history, probably not, but never say never I suppose. I do think that if things start going sideways again Brind'Amour won't wait until the third period to change things up.
- One thing that won't change: Petr Mrazek was in the starter's net, and with no morning skate tomorrow, it will be his crease when Game 2 gets going tomorrow afternoon.
- Svechnikov was obviously a revelation in the third period, and Brind'Amour wasn't surprised - even if he wasn't thrilled with the start of his game. "It's not shocking to me. He's a real good player. He's finding his way. He hasn't even realized, I don't think, how good he can be. I don't even think he's aware of how big a moment it is, and that's really helpful for a young guy. I didn't like his first couple periods - wasn't bad, but just wasn't real sharp. He got free a couple times, and that's what he can do. Gotta figure out how to get him more ice time and get him freed up a little more. He has that ability. He's one of those game-changing type players."
- Trevor van Riemsdyk, who has been a postseason participant four of his five years in the league, had some good insight on his teammates, ten of whom made playoff debuts last night. "I don't think they were overwhelmed by the moment at all. I thought we all played pretty well. Obviously the result wasn't



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what we wanted. It's cool to see the guys go through it for the first time, and I thought they all did a really good job of handling it."

## Systems Analyst: What Happened to the Canes' Penalty Kill?

Against a lethal Capitals power play, the Canes' kill let them down in Game 1.

By Ford Hatchett

The Carolina Hurricanes' first playoff game in a decade resulted in a two goal loss to the defending champions, the Washington Capitals, that featured a pair of first period power-play goals from the Caps.

The easy solution is to stay out of the penalty box and avoid giving talented players the chance on the man advantage. But penalties happen and it's hard to win a game, let alone a playoff series, if the opposition is clicking at 50% with the man advantage. The penalty kill simply has to be better. So what went wrong?

The first power-play goal stems from a poor, over aggressive decision from Brock McGinn. A bouncing puck comes to the point. Both McGinn and Jordan Staal pressure John Carlson who is able to beat both of them with one pass. The puck soon ends up in the back of Carolina's net.

On the replay it appears that Brett Pesce simply fell asleep and left Nicklas Backstrom all alone backdoor. But the normally reliable McGinn's decision to leave his position and attempt to do Staal's job leaves Pesce in the unenviable spot of trying to both cover Backstrom and respect Alex Ovechkin as an option. The corner angle makes the dilemma even more apparent.

Pesce is caught in no man's land. He desperately wants to avoid seeing the patented Ovechkinone-timer, but recognizes

how dangerous Backstrom is. In the end, he's near both, but covering neither. For his part, McGinn takes two hard strides to get back into position, but then becomes fixated on the puck and glides back into the high slot, leaving Pesce in a no-win situation.

The over-pursuit was an issue throughout, like here when all four Carolina killers pursue a puck on the wall, leaving Ovechkin with a golden opportunity. Luckily, the killers are bailed out by a misfire.

On the second goal, McGinn unfortunately is heavily featured again. Near the end of a long shift in the defensive zone, McGinn has a chance, albeit on his backhand, to clear and get a change. He fails to do so and seconds later the Caps' lead is three.

As the goal develops, McGinn's fatigue is on display. Mrazek makes the initial save and spits out a juicy rebound. As McGinn reaches for the puck with a stick, Tom Wilson skates through the battle with his body, pushing the puck to Ovechkin. Once McGinn decides to go fishing for the puck, he loses track of Ovechkin, allowing the perennial 50-goal scorer a clean look in the slot.

It's easy to understand the fatigue, given that the Canes' penalty killers had been under siege. McGinn's failed clearing attempt may appear to be a minute detail, but in the playoffs those little moments can be the difference, as it was on Thursday night.

## About Last Night: Special Teams Doom The Canes Again

It's been a narrative all season, but once again the special teams failed the Hurricanes costing them game one.

By Cody Hagan

Last night was a tough pill to swallow for the Carolina Hurricanes. Dropping game one 4-2 to the defending Stanley Cup Champions is nothing to be ashamed of, but it is how the Canes lost that is the difficult part.

Time after time throughout the regular season the Hurricanes' power play unit failed to deliver in clutch moments costing the team valuable points. There were also multiple games where the team took five to ten minutes off and that became the deciding time in the contest.

Both of those known issues from the regular season arose again last night resulting in the Capitals taking a 1-0 advantage in the series.

The Good - Svech

By far the best player on the ice for the Hurricanes last night, Andrei Svechnikov looked right at home in his first ever playoff game. The 19 year old rookie held his own against

fellow Russian Alex Ovechkin and was the sole source of life for the Canes during the third period.

Rod Brind' Amour has been cautious with Svechnikov throughout the entire year and time after time Svechnikov has proven he deserves more trust and more ice time. His first goal of the game that finally got the Canes on the scoreboard was one of pure beauty.

He burned past the Capitals defender and easily put the puck past Braden Holtby in what is an early candidate for the best goal of the entire series. We've seen flashes of this throughout the season as Svechnikov has the potential to be an elite power forward with his strength and desire to get to the net.

Strength and effort are one thing but what puts Svechnikov above so many other players is his shot. His second goal was all about his shot.

Lucas Wallmark got a fantastic pass over to #37 and he once again easily put the puck past Holtby. It's almost hard to believe this guy is only 19 years old.

The Bad - The PK



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Everyone knows how dangerous the Capitals power play unit is. It's been deadly for years. Alex Ovechkin camps out and waits for his chances to blast the puck and nobody has ever truly been able to figure out a way to stop it.

That being said, the Hurricanes faceplanted on the penalty kill in the first period. The key to success versus the Caps is to stay out of the box — which was their first mistake — but once on the PK you have to be at your very best to stop Washington.

One their first power play goal Brett Pesce and Jaccob Slavin came up short, plain and simple. Slavin failed to take away the pass and Pesce gave Nicklas Backstrom about three feet of breathing room in front of Petr Mrazek. You simply cannot do that, especially when it is your two best defensemen on the ice.

Both Pesce and Slavin have to be better in that situation. Slavin was partially to blame on the Caps first goal as well and you need those two guys to step up and be the shutdown defensemen they have been all year.

On the second power play goal the Canes broke rule number one of stopping the Capitals power play: cover Alex Ovechkin. This was a few seconds before the goal-scoring sequence, but it was indicative of the lack of attention to detail:

Left all alone Ovechkin skated in from his camping position to tap a rebound home. This time Brock McGinn is the culprit who loses his man and it came back to bite the Hurricanes hard as this eventually became the game winning goal.

The Hurricanes penalty kill unit improved drastically from the start of the season, climbing all the way up from the mid-twenties to a top ten unit. But those statistics reset in the postseason. They were able to settle down and kill off the remaining two Capitals power play chances, but giving up two goals a night on the PK will not get you anywhere against Washington.

The easiest solution to this problem is to simply stay out of the box. But penalties are inevitable in hockey and the Canes' PK unit has to be better going forward in this series.

## The Ugly - Power Play Struggles

As with many games throughout the regular season the Hurricanes were gifted a golden opportunity to tie (or win) the game late in the third on a power play and failed. The Power Play struggling narrative has been written about time and time

again yet here we are. It's still the main topic from last night, in game 83.

Rod Brind'Amour called an audible going into the third period, changing his line combinations drastically. It worked out quite well as the team pulled to within one. Yet he didn't do anything with his power play combinations. He continued to roll with his top unit of Sebastian Aho, Justin Williams, Nino Niederreiter, Teuvo Teravainen, and Justin Faulk on the point. This combination has been together essentially since the Canes acquired Niederreiter in January despite its continued inability to score.

Meanwhile, the second unit features both Svechnikov and Dougie Hamilton, two of the Canes' best players down the stretch. That second unit saw just over a minute total of the four minutes of man advantage time Carolina late in the third period. Hamilton saw only 1:24 total of power play time while Faulk saw 4:36. Svechnikov saw 1:28 and Aho saw 5:29.

One can understand wanting to go to your big guys late in the game to try and tie it up. But they have proven time after time after time they cannot get it done on the power play. The second unit was the better option last night and Brind'Amour failed to utilize them correctly. That's not to say they would have scored, but they weren't given much of a chance to try.

The Capitals will undoubtedly score more power play goals throughout this series. The question is whether the Hurricanes will join them in scoring on the man advantage. If they cannot, they will be going home sooner rather than later.

## Moral of the Story

There are a lot of positive things to take away from game one last night. The Hurricanes fought back and made the game interesting against the defending champions at their arena. But playoff hockey is about results, not positive takeaways. At the end of the day the Canes were not able to get the job done.

That being said there's hope for game two. Brind'Amour needs to find it in himself to make changes to the power play units and push the penalty killers to not lose their men. If those two things can be adjusted there's reason to believe the Canes can come back and even this series up.

In the end just remember this: the 2006 Hurricanes lost both of their first two games and the 2009 team lost their first game as well. So the world isn't over yet. There's a lot of playoff hockey still to be played.



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## Hurricanes turn focus to game two, earning split in Washington

By Andrew Schnittker

WASHINGTON-- The Carolina Hurricanes' first playoff game since 2009 has come and gone. For 10 of the players in the lineup for Thursday night's 4-2, game-one loss to the Washington Capitals at Capital One Arena, their first Stanley Cup Playoffs game has as well.

Now that the first game of the playoff return is finished, the focus can turn to the mixed-bag performance in game one, and what the team needs to do in the second game to achieve its goal of heading back to Raleigh with a split series.

"I thought five on five we played a pretty good game," said captain Justin Williams after Friday's practice. "I think they'd probably look at it and say they didn't play their best is what I was hearing. But they're going to come out and be better and we need to come out and be better also."

So, how does the team do that? A better first period, for one. The playoff newcomers were up to the task in the early going Thursday, but things unraveled after Washington drew first blood, allowing the Caps to take a 3-0 lead into the first intermission.

"If you watched the first 10 minutes, to be honest with you I was expecting it to be different just because so many guys haven't played in this big of a moment," said head coach Rod Brind'Amour. "But it's actually helped us that we have a lot of guys that haven't played in this stage, because they don't know it's supposed to be different. So they just went out and played our game."

For those players who did play their first playoff game, they now know what to expect in terms of the intensity and physicality of playoff hockey.

"First period, obviously a little nervous," said forward Jordan Martinook. "Couple plays I wish I could take back. But other than that it was just another hockey game with the little added intensity where you want to finish every check. And you know when you've got the puck, somebody's finishing on you. So you've just got to get the first one out of the way and I think we've all handled ourselves pretty good. It'll be just another game tomorrow with the same intensity."

Another area the Canes will want to focus on going into game two is special teams. Carolina surrendered two of those first-period tallies to a dangerous Capitals power play, and Washington finished the game 2 for 4 up a man.

Those goals came on two breakdowns in coverage, one that saw Washington forward Nicklas Backstrom left wide open in front of the net, and another left forward Alex Ovechkin unmarked up top, allowing him to follow up a rebound chance after three missed shots.

"There's obviously a few things we need to do better," said forward Jordan Staal. "But I think in the end, the first period

special teams, stuff like that was stuff we've got to work on and get better. Just tighten up."

The power play was a culprit as well, as the Canes finished 0 for 3 on the man advantage, including two opportunities to tie the game in the last nine minutes of the third period.

Power plays will be at a premium with tighter officiating in the playoffs, and Carolina will need to finish the chances it does get there.

"I say it every time: shots, tips, screens, rebounds," Williams said. "That's what a power play is about. Your best players are on the ice and they need to make plays. When it's not successful, you look yourself in the mirror, you look at the video, you check it out and say, 'Alright, this is what I can do better.' That's what we did today."

All that being said, there was plenty to like from the team's game-one performance. The Canes played a very strong game at even strength, outshooting Washington 29-18.

Carolina battled back from a 3-0 deficit going into the third period to make it one-goal game before Washington iced it with an empty netter. Rookie forward Andrei Svechnikov tallied twice in his playoff debut, making him the eighth-youngest player in NHL history to score two goals in a playoff game.

"It's not shocking to me," Brind'Amour said. "He's a real good player. He's finding his way. He hasn't even realized, I don't think, how good he can be. I don't even think he's aware of how big a moment it is, and that's really helpful for a young guy. ... Gotta figure out how to get him more ice time and get him freed up a little more. He has that ability. He's one of those game-changing type players."

The Canes now face a very important game two at Capital One Arena Saturday with a 3 p.m. puck drop. Although the saying goes that you aren't in trouble in a playoff series until you lose at home, winning that game would make for a much easier road.

A win would mean the Canes return to Raleigh with momentum and capture home ice advantage. A loss essentially sets up two must-win contests at PNC Arena.

Fortunately for the Canes, there's a lot they can build on from game one. If the team can replicate its even-strength performance from the first game, tighten up on special teams and get off to a better start, a split and Carolina's first win over Washington this season should be well within reach.

"We came here for a split so we're going to have to get that done," Williams said. "I take the fact that we were resilient, we came back and we had an opportunity to win the game. Which is the case with every game we played this year but we haven't done it against them. No better time than now."



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • April 13, 2019



## Hurricanes' Mistakes Serve Capitals Well in Game 1

By Mark Shiver

The Carolina Hurricanes played in their first postseason game in a decade Thursday night. They faced off against the defending Stanley Cup champion Washington Capitals. They put forth a gallant effort but shot themselves in the foot a couple of times and served the game to the defending champs.

Playoff hockey has no peer in sports. Regular season hockey does not even compare. With a roster of at least 10 players who had never played in an NHL playoff game before, Thursday night became a lesson in intensity for the Hurricanes. It is a stage where little mistakes have thin margins, as they can turn into points for the opposition.

### Mrázek Misses Bäckström's Blast

The first two of the Capitals' three first-period goals illustrate just how serious little mistakes can become in a playoff hockey game. First, Petr Mrázek whiffed on a shot. Criticizing a goaltender, especially one who has been as hot as Mrázek in recent weeks, is normally not fair game. But, this instance is an exception.

Nicklas Bäckström got loose and was coming toward the Hurricanes' zone. Jaccob Slavin was marking him but Bäckström was able to launch from way out and Mrázek simply was late with his glove hand and the result was Capitals 1, Hurricanes 0.

The reason this miss by Mrázek stands out is that there was nothing to obscure his vision, no players mixing it up in his line of sight. Yes, goalies are human and sometimes make mistakes. But, a big whiff like Mrázek had to put the Caps up 1-0 is much more glaring in Game 1 than in a game in mid-November.

Mrázek has proven he can carry the Hurricanes, and it can be argued that he played okay the rest of the way. But, if the Hurricanes are going to be more than a nuisance to the defending Stanley Cup champion Capitals, both Mrázek and Curtis McElhinney will have to stop those shots.

### Pesce Please Pay Attention

The second mistake that cost the Hurricanes dearly was made by Brett Pesce and the penalty killers. The Capitals were to Mrázek's left and Bäckström saw a completely unguarded goalmouth. He slid into position and Evgeny Kuznetsov laced the puck to him and Bäckström tapped it in for his second goal of the first period and the score was 2-0 Capitals.

Pesce might not shoulder the entirety of this mistake in positioning by himself. But, he is an outstanding defenceman who has been recognized as elite, and should never have let Bäckström skate up to the net and have unfettered access to receive the pass from Kuznetsov and score his second.

### Ovechkin Posts Up Again

There is not a soul who watches the NHL who does not know where Alexander Ovechkin is going to be when the Capitals are on the power play. He posts up to the right of the opposing goaltender and waits. Again on a power play, Ovechkin was posted up in his usual spot and the puck got loose in front of the goal. He hunted it down and sent the puck blazing by Mrázek in the five-hole.

This might not necessarily have been any one player on the Hurricanes' fault. After all, Ovechkin is one of the best scorers in the world, and he is extremely tough to stop. That being said, if it is known what he is going to be trying to do and where he is going to be trying to do it from, there might be something the 'Canes can do to disrupt his game. That is an area that head coach Rod Brind'Amour very likely will address.

### Brind'Amour Liked the First Period

After the game, Brind'Amour said, "I liked our first period. It's just unfortunate we get down three." He also acknowledged that Mrázek kept the Hurricanes in the game in the third period with some big saves. "...certainly not his fault on any of the goals."

There is room for disagreement with that statement in that the first goal of the game was one that Mrázek was simply late on with his glove hand. Mrázek is a beast, and an incredible part of the Hurricanes' success in 2019 thus far. But, there is no room for error in the Stanley Cup Playoffs.

The Hockey Writers had this recap after the game: "...Mrázek rebounded from allowing a soft opening goal to Backstrom by stopping Nic Dowd and Carl Hagelin on breakaways and turned aside Brett Connolly and Lars Eller on rapid-fire chances early in the third before Svechnikov got the Hurricanes on the board. Mrazek finished with 14 saves".

Again, Mrázek played well. Pesce played well. But, it is arguable that for two milliseconds each, there were mistakes made that weighed heavily on the outcome of the game. That's why they play the games.

### Andrei Svechnikov is Amazing

Andrei Svechnikov tried to pull the game out for the Hurricanes in the third period. He scored two goals to pull his team within one at 3-2. But in the end, he got no help as the Hurricanes' power play was powerless. Team captain Justin Williams was candid after the game:

The power play was crap and the penalty kill was crap also," Williams said. "I mean, listen, they're going to get opportunities, obviously, but there's a couple of little things we looked at to do the best we can to nullify that and a couple of things we looked at on the power play as well to be more impactful.



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Svechnikov did his best. Apparently, he is not overwhelmed with the nerves that sometimes hit young players making their first postseason appearance. But it will take more than the "Svech" alone to pull the series even and for the Hurricanes to have a chance at advancing.

Brind'Amour said one thing that is definitely bankable, "We'll be back." If there is anything on this team that he and Williams have been able to engrave is the fuel to not give up. Losing Game 1 was a heartbreaker for sure for the Hurricanes and their fans. But, the entire season has been on in which they have come back time and again. Don't count these Hurricanes out.



## Checkers top Cleveland in regular-season finale

by Paul Branecky

The Checkers will enter the postseason on a three-game win streak thanks to a 2-1 victory over the Cleveland Monsters in their regular-season finale on Friday.

Goaltender Dustin Tokarski led the way with 40 saves, the most by a Checker in any game this season, to improve to 7-0-0 since joining the team on Feb. 28. Julien Gauthier scored a goal for the fourth straight game, marking the longest such streak by a Checker this season, and Tomas Jurco had the other Charlotte tally to extend his point streak to six games as Charlotte earned the sweep in its two-game trip to Cleveland.

After Gauthier stuffed home a loose puck on the doorstep of a first-period power play and Jurco tipped in Bobby Sanguinetti's shot from the point near the midway point of the second, the Checkers, who have already secured the league's best record, hung on to secure the full two points against a team fighting for the final playoff spot in the North Division. The game's final shot total favored Cleveland by a 41-24 margin.

Having finished earlier than most other AHL teams, Charlotte will now wait to find out the identity of its first-round playoff opponent. That matchup will be determined on Saturday or Sunday.

## NOTES

The Checkers won 17 of their last 21 games of the regular season. They finished with 110 points by way of a 51-17-8 record ... In addition to his perfect 7-0-0 record as a Checker, Tokarski also sports a 1.55 goals-against average and .955 save percentage with the team. Prior to tonight, the single-game saves record for this season was 34, which had been set by Alex Nedeljkovic on three occasions ... Gauthier's four-game goal streak is the longest of his career. He has seven goals in his last eight games ... Jurco has eight points (4g, 4a) during his six-game streak ... Martin Necas had two assists to mark his fifth consecutive two-point game ... Bobby Sanguinetti had two assists for his first multi-point game of the season ... Trevor Carrick left the game with six minutes remaining in regulation after taking a hard hit to the boards and did not return ... Forwards Clark Bishop and Andrew Poturalski and defensemen Josiah Didier and Roland McKeown missed the game due to injury ... Forward Scott Davidson and goaltender Scott Darling were healthy extras.

## UP NEXT

The Checkers' first-round playoff series will begin on the road at a to-be-determined time and place. Charlotte will host the remainder of the series at home beginning with Game 3 on Wednesday, April 24.



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## SportScan

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

1140402 Carolina Hurricanes

Canes need All-Star version of Aho to reappear in playoffs

CHIP ALEXANDER

APRIL 12, 2019 04:43 PM

Carolina Hurricanes center Sebastian Aho now has gone 15 games without a goal but believes he has a solution.

"Maybe just a little bit relax," he said Friday after a team practice at Capital One Arena.

Relax? In the playoffs? There is no relaxation in the Stanley Cup playoffs, when good scoring chances can be scarce, goals precious and defenders are looking to mash your face into the glass while collecting the puck.

Aho took his share of the rough stuff Thursday as the Canes dropped Game 1 to the Washington Capitals, often facing the defensive pairing of Matt Niskanen and Dmitry Orlov and taking a few pops from Niskanen along the way. While playing 26 minutes in the 4-2 loss, Aho had a mostly quiet night with two shots on goal as the Canes' top line was kept in check, forcing coach Rod Brind'Amour to shake up his lines during the game.

Washington Capitals center Lars Eller, right, of Denmark, skates with the puck against Carolina Hurricanes center Sebastian Aho, left, of Finland, during the second period of Game 1 of an NHL hockey first-round playoff series, Thursday, April 11, 2019, in Washington. Nick Wass AP

The Canes need Aho being Aho, badly. They lean on the 21-year-old Finn extensively -- at even strength, on the power play, on the penalty kill. He's one of the NHL's best young players, named to the Metropolitan Division team in the NHL All Star Game this season, but now playing on the sport's biggest stage.

Washington isn't lacking scorers. Alex Ovechkin had a league-best 51 goals in the regular season and added another on the power play in the playoff opener. Six other other Caps players had more than 20, and one of those six, center Nicklas Backstrom, scored twice on Thursday.

Aho led the Canes with 30 goals but last scored March 9 in a road game against the Nashville Predators. He has since had 37 shots on net but is 0-for-37. That's a scoring slump in anyone's eyes, but Aho said he wouldn't stress too much over it -- thus, the relaxation comment.

"I've had a lot of scoring chances," Aho said. "I don't need to put so much pressure ... you know, when you get the chance put it in the net and not worry about it. I've been producing the chances the same way."

For Aho, like several of his teammates, the playoff game Thursday was his first. He was 11 years old, learning the finer points of the game in Finland, when the Canes last put in a playoff appearance in 2009, when they lost the first game in each of their first two series ,against New Jersey and Boston, before winning both in seven games.

Aho said he wasn't nervous.

"I was excited," he said. "It was definitely a different feeling before that game. There was maybe a little more emotion in the game but other than that pretty much the same as any other."

Brind'Amour liked the way most of his players handled the playoff game and the raucous setting at Capital One Arena, where Caps fans came to again celebrate the 2018 Stanley Cup run while hoping to see them take a first step toward a repeat. Brind'Amour didn't like his special teams -- the Canes allowed two power-play goals while going 0-3 on the power play -- but didn't see much in the way of playoff jitters.



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

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"I may have overthought that myself," he said Friday. "You watch the first 10 minutes and I expected that to be different because so many guys hadn't played in this big a moment. I think it actually helped us that we don't have a lot of guys who have played on this stage because they don't know it's supposed to be different. They just went out and played their game and I was pleasantly surprised with that."

Defenseman Brett Pesce was one of those who just went out and played. It was his first playoff game, when the confines of the rink can seem smaller and the noise level higher, but it was still hockey.

"It was physical, it's a little bit faster, but all in all it was a lot of fun," Pesce said.

Pesce was on the ice when the Caps scored on their first power play in the first period, allowing Backstrom to go unchecked near the crease. Pesce also was on the ice when the Canes' Andrei Svechnikov scored the first of his two goals in the third period as the Canes made a push and made it a 3-2 game that made things a lot more tense.

The Canes trailed 3-0 after the first but Pesce said the feeling in the locker room was more upbeat than somber. It was somber after the game, he said, in that the Canes believed they were close to a comeback win.

"I thought we were on 'em in the first but they just capitalized on a few key bounces and our mistakes," he said. "We stuck to our game plan and we were confident. We knew we weren't out of it and we came back."

That's how the Canes handled the regular season, bouncing back from a dismal December when it appeared they might be out of playoff contention.

"We're used to adversity," Pesce said. "Where we came from, how we got here is pretty amazing to me. We believe in our team."

News Observer LOADED: 04.13.2019

1140403 Carolina Hurricanes

A (playoff) star is born, not a moment too soon for the Hurricanes

LUKE DECOCK

APRIL 12, 2019 03:49 PM

After three years in North America, Andrei Svechnikov's grasp of conversational English is about what anyone would expect, with a decent handle on slang and a useful ability to communicate with his teammates at a colloquial level.

It's different in the spotlight, on camera, in public. That's hard on anyone in their second language. And here, Svechnikov is less comfortable. He sprints through answers, stringing together the words he wants to use without the proper pacing or conjunctions or objects, or he stumbles through longer constructions like a newborn colt trying to walk, verbally.

All of which is entirely normal and expected and fine, and it's a measure of how far Svechnikov has come in the spotlight that when he was forced to speak from the same podium Friday where Rod Brind'Amour had just addressed the media, instead of his more comfortable locker stall – the Hurricanes having closed their locker room to the press early to hold a penalty-kill meeting, just as Svechnikov was (as usual) one of the last players to exit the ice – the Russian rookie seemed to be more comfortable the longer he was on the stage.

His first answer, monotone: "Oh I feel like I'm pretty confident and got great emotion but we lost that game so it's all right we have to win next game."

But by the end, only a few questions and a minute later, he was much smoother. Asked whether his first goal gave him some confidence, his response was easy and ... confident.

"Exactly," Svechnikov said, smiling. "For sure, when you score, it always does give you a little more confidence."

Which is also kind of how his playoff debut went Thursday: somewhat lost on the ice for two periods, knocked around by Brooks Orpik, only to become the best player on the ice in the third, scoring a pair of goals in the 4-2 loss with the kind of pinpoint finishing for which the Capitals are better known than the Hurricanes.

At 19 years and 16 days, Svechnikov became the fourth-youngest player to score twice in a playoff game, behind only Pierre Turgeon (twice) and Dainius Zubrus. He bested his coach, Brind'Amour, who did it twice as a 19-year-old in 1990, a decade before Svechnikov was born. (Of the nine players to score two playoff goals in a game as teens, four are connected in some way to the Hurricanes, with Glen Wesley and Jordan Staal also on the list.) And in his postseason debut, no less.

"I expect it. I don't know – it's not surprising to me," Brind'Amour said. "He's a real good player and he's finding his way. He hasn't even realized how good he can be. The moment, the playoffs, that doesn't even affect him."

Once Svechnikov got away from Orpik – who managed not to break anyone's neck, always a positive – he was able to carve his place in playoff history, and in one case carve up a better defenseman than Orpik, Norris Trophy candidate John Carlson.

Given the Hurricanes' skill deficit against the high-powered Capitals, goals like those could be the difference in the series, assuming Carolina's other top-line talent finishes a chance or two at some point. The matchup between the teams was well established going into Game 1 and didn't change after it, the Hurricanes' quantity against the Capitals' quality, but Svechnikov has the kind of quality to upset that balance.

His quick adjustment to playoff hockey matches his relatively quick adjustment to the NHL, even as Brind'Amour has slow-rolled Svechnikov's ice time and responsibility, giving a player used to having the puck constantly on his stick at lower levels time to adjust – and Svechnikov's nasty habit of taking bad offensive-zone penalties has to stop – but there's no doubting Svechnikov's commitment to that part of his game or the rest of it.

Always one of the first players on the ice for practice and the last players off, the Hurricanes aren't just blowing smoke about his work ethic to polish a young player's confidence. They genuinely respect it.

"He's not a typical 18- or 19-year-old in the league," teammate and mentor Jordan Martinook said. "He's built like a 25- or 26-year-old. He's strong. And he works extremely hard. He's not really a rookie, or at least it doesn't seem like it."

He does seem like a rookie in English, but he's working on that, too; like his defensive-zone play, it's fine when there's no pressure and getting better when there is. But Svechnikov getting put unexpectedly on the spot Friday was a good reminder that there's nowhere to hide in the playoffs, on or off the ice.

News Observer LOADED: 04.13.2019

1140404 Carolina Hurricanes

Five points for the Hurricanes going into Game 2

LUKE DECOCK

APRIL 12, 2019 02:51 PM



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

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## WASHINGTON

- 1. STICKS DOWN** The Carolina Hurricanes gifted the Washington Capitals two power plays in Game 1 with poor stick control – Justin Faulk's high-stick and Andrei Svechnikov's offensive-zone hook. That's avoidable and two too many against the Capitals' prepotent power play.
- 2. PAGING SAKU** Some of the Canes' depth forwards looked a little overwhelmed at times Thursday night. While Rod Brind'Amour sounded hesitant to shake things up, the Hurricanes could use the physical presence and crease-clogging ability of Saku Manaalanen, who could draw into the lineup for Brock McGinn, Warren Foegele or Greg McKegg.
- 3. SEND A MESSAGE** Justin Williams was the only player to challenge Matt Niskanen after Niskanen delivered a series of tooth-level cross-checks during a second-period Hurricanes power play, knowing the referees would be loathe to hand out a two-man advantage. A playoff series is a long-running narrative; the Hurricanes missed a chance to nip that sort of thing in the bud. They should make a note of it for Game 2, should the opportunity arise.
- 4. LOYALTY VS. SUBBORNNESS** It's justified at times to criticize Rod Brind'Amour for his stubbornness as a head coach, most notably his refusal to pull goalies or change up his lines until absolutely necessary. (He has also been proven right in his steadfastness more often than not.) It's really more about loyalty than stubbornness, especially to his veterans. His loyalty to Petr Mrazek, who he could have pulled at the first intermission, was rewarded in the third. But his insistence on going to the misfiring first power-play unit for the majority of the first of two critical but fruitless power plays in the third – instead of the red-hot Svechnikov and Dougie Hamilton – hurt the Hurricanes' chances. (On the second, Brind'Amour gets the benefit of the doubt that he wanted Svechnikov and Hamilton out there after pulling Mrazek for an extra attacker halfway through.)
- 5. YOUR BEST PLAYERS HAVE TO BE YOUR BEST PLAYERS** Sebastian Aho hasn't scored in 15 games. Micheal Ferland hasn't scored since February. Jordan Staal and Jaccob Slavin weren't at their best. Things will get easier at home, when the Hurricanes can get their top two lines out against the Capitals' weak third pairing. But the Hurricanes, already facing a skill deficit, need more from their best players.

News Observer LOADED: 04.13.2019

1140405 Carolina Hurricanes

Canes' glaring need? Sharper special teams play in Game 2

CHIP ALEXANDER

APRIL 12, 2019 10:57 AM

There seemed to be little question which team was the better five-on-five team Thursday.

The Carolina Hurricanes dropped Game 1 of their Eastern Conference playoff series to the Washington Capitals, but the Canes' play at even strength was consistently aggressive much of the night in the 4-2 loss at Capital One Arena.

But the power play? Different story. A big part of the story.

The Canes were making a third-period charge Thursday, buzzing around the Caps zone and goalie Braden Holtby, and Andrei Svechnikov scored twice, both after nice passes from Lucas Wallmark. The Caps' lead, 3-0 after the first, had shrunk to 3-2 and the Canes were coming, hard.

"We got some jump," Canes coach Rod Brind'Amour said.

Then, two power plays. With a man advantage, the Canes twice slowed themselves down. Cautious passing. Not enough movement. Far too few shots.

On the second power play, Brind'Amour pulled goalie Petr Mrazek for a sixth attacker and 6-on-4 advantage. That didn't help either, not against a team with as many snipers as the Caps have. Lars Eller's empty-net snipe with 47 seconds left in regulation clinched it for the Caps.

Teuvo Teravainen, Jaccob Slavin and Svechnikov had shots blocked on the second power play -- two by Nicklas Backstrom -- and Justin Williams missed the net with an attempt as the Caps' penalty killers hunkered down.

The Canes also had a second-period power play. That did generate shots on goal by Nino Niederreiter and Sebastian Aho.

"Obviously our power play has to be better, a little crisper and create more chances, more shots," the Canes' Jordan Staal said.

The power play has been a season-long head-scratcher. The Canes have skill players. They have playmakers. They have defensemen such as Dougie Hamilton and Justin Faulk who can get off heavy shots.

The Canes scored power-play goals in four straight games in the final stretch of the season as they secured their first playoff berth since 2009. But that came after going nine straight games without one.

Not that it was all about the Canes' power play Thursday. The Caps scored two power-play goals in the first period as Backstrom and Alex Ovechkin knocked in shots for the 3-0 lead after Backstrom had opened the scoring with an even-strength shot from the right circle that beat Mrazek.

Backstrom's power-play score came when he slipped in front of defenseman Brett Pesce near the crease and took a perfectly placed pass off the half-wall from Evgeny Kuznetsov, who has hurt the Canes this season with his playmaking ability.

"Same thing that we've done since I've been here. Moved the puck around to the open guy and tried not to force too many seam passes, tried (not) to force too many high-risk plays," Backstrom said. "When we move the puck fast, we get looks and have got good players to take care of them."

Everyone knows about Ovechkin's one-timers from the left circle. They're the definition of "high danger scoring chances." But the Caps are crafty, picked their spots and Thursday made the Canes pay.

"That's frustrating for me at this time of year, especially when we had a couple of days to talk about it," Brind'Amour said.

The Canes had 26 even-strength shots to the Caps' 13 in the game, had 17 shots blocked and another 23 attempts that missed the net -- in all, 69 shot attempts to Washington's 43.

"You're happy with a win but we can play better than that, especially five-on-five for us," Caps coach Todd Reirden said "There's an area that we've got to do some work on and there's room for improvement in that spot, for sure. We for the most part defended it OK but we can create more off that.

"That being said, we had some good chances that missed the net sometimes and their goalie made some saves when we had a chance to make it 4-0. "

For the Caps, that's five straight wins over the Canes this season. To extend the series, the Canes will need better execution and awareness. They'll need to avoid penalties as best they can.

They won 22 road games during the regular season, so they've handled that end of it well. But beating the Caps at Capital One Arena is a different animal, as they say. And this is the playoffs.

"A positive for me was we weren't at our best and still had a chance to win," Brind'Amour said.



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News Observer LOADED: 04.13.2019

1140406 Carolina Hurricanes

Andrei Svechnikov's two-goal playoff debut is a reminder that this is just the beginning

Sara Civian

Apr 12, 2019

WASHINGTON — Andrei Svechnikov is learning as he goes, which is about the best one can do in the National Hockey League at 19 years and 17 days old.

He's learning that if he goes to the Raleigh Mercedes dealership to buy a car, he should bring his passport and work visa along for the test drive. That would've saved him a "personal day" in the form of a trip to Washington for replacements earlier this season.

He's learning that he is more than capable of not only addressing the media, but doing so with a sincerity that transcends the language barrier.

"Please, easy questions," the Russia-born honey badger smiles, as if any question would qualify as easy for a teenager learning a whole new alphabet.

The questions aren't easy. He tackles them better than fine regardless.

He's learning, along with the rest of us, where his raw talent might take him.

"He hasn't even realized, I don't think, how good he can be," head coach Rod Brind'Amour said Friday at Capital One Arena. "The moment, the playoffs, doesn't even affect him. I don't even think he's aware of how big the moment is. He's one of those game-changing-type players, or he's gonna be. He has that in him."

Above all else, he's learning the extra hours he puts in with Brind'Amour count.

Those hours Svechnikov spends on the ice before and after practice are often the reason Brind'Amour is power walking into press conferences in his skate guards. It's never a hassle to Brind'Amour, and how could it be?

He shut down any concern with his No. 2 overall protege in Edmonton, when he broke out of his rookie wall with a three-point effort in a 7-4 Hurricanes win on Jan. 20.

"He wants to learn," Brind'Amour said. "I love the kid."

It was emphatic.

The thing about Svechnikov, and it's what will lead him into stardom, is the lost art of hard work: The first thing Brind'Amour recognized that night in Edmonton was how willing Svechnikov is to get over himself and put in the work.

The talent and the work combined for a two-goal playoff debut — both of Carolina's goals in the 4-2, Game 1 loss at Washington.

To say Svechnikov was born with this talent isn't wrong, but it seems like an unintentional omission of his drive.

"That's the other part of it, that's why I know he's gonna be a good player," Brind'Amour agreed. "He's not just good because he's naturally gifted, which he is, but he works at it. He's willing to work at it. And not just the skill stuff or the fun things, he's trying to figure out how to get on the ice more and that's in his play away from the puck. That's the stuff he

really wants to learn. He's spent the time understanding it, and he's done a nice job of it all year."

It's been there in fragments almost every game in the must-win stretch that forced the Hurricanes into the playoffs. The way he drives to the net out of nowhere and almost pulls it off every time feels like the trailer of what will be a blockbuster career. So do the nifty passes intended for linemates he'll earn someday soon, but doesn't have right now.

Like his English, his NHL playoff debut wasn't perfect. He accrued an offensive zone penalty against the team you just can't do that against, in a season he's at times led the league in stick penalties. But he's learning at a trajectory that's breaking records for a reason.

His countryman of an opponent Evgeny Kuznetsov didn't beat around the bush.

"He's one of those Russian players who actually goes to those dirty areas and he plays hard," Kuznetsov said. "Not typical Russian player."

His atypical work ethic is probably more of a worldwide thing if we're being honest. It's why Jordan Martinook, a player who couldn't just coast by on talent, who has to prove his worth nightly, took Svechnikov under his wing.

It's why captain Justin Williams, respected by so many, respects Svechnikov right back.

"He's a really good player already," Williams said, "and he's got the potential to be a star."

The talent is inherent, and who knows where the work ethic comes from, but that's what could lift him to stardom.

Back when Brind'Amour's first win as head coach of the Hurricanes featured Svechnikov's first point, the message was the same.

"I'm just proud of the kid in general," Brind'Amour said. "He's a great kid. He wants to learn and he's got a lot to learn, but he's going to be a great player in this league. You gotta remember how young he is, and that's something I have to keep reminding myself. He's just a kid, and he's out there in the NHL and he doesn't look out of place. We're very fortunate to have him."

A season full of learning is coming to a head. Svechnikov — he just turned 19 on March 26 — never looked out of place. He scored two goals in his playoff debut Thursday. He knows that he still has a lot to learn.

That's the best problem the Hurricanes could imagine. Svechnikov endured enough of the playoff drought angst to understand it without growing jaded. He's ringing in the next era of Hurricanes with all the confidence of an 18-year-old foreigner walking into a Mercedes dealership. It's not perfect, but he's here.

The Athletic LOADED: 04.13.2019

1140551 Washington Capitals

Carolina captain Justin Williams helped turn the Capitals into Stanley Cup champions

By Samantha Pell

April 12 at 10:23 AM

When Washington Capitals center Nicklas Backstrom had his day with the Stanley Cup in Sweden in early August, he started counting.

One, two, three ...



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Carolina captain Justin Williams's name is etched onto the Cup in three places, and Backstrom made it a point to find each one — once from the Hurricanes' lone 2006 Cup title and twice, in 2012 and 2014, from his time with the Los Angeles Kings.

Backstrom took a picture of each and texted it to Williams. It was a simple gesture, one that implied: I see you and your accomplishments. Now my name is finally on it, too.

"Obviously when he was here, I mean, we loved him," Backstrom said.

Williams, 37, was with the Capitals from 2015 to 2017, bringing three Stanley Cups' worth of experience and a Conn Smythe Trophy with him. His leadership and championship experience added to a formidable team peppered with talent and optimism that it could finally win an elusive title, but the Capitals ultimately fell short in the second round to Pittsburgh — twice.

And while the veteran right winger signed with Carolina, where he had played from 2004 to 2009, in free agency in 2017, Capitals players agree Williams had a lasting influence on a Washington team that won the franchise's first Stanley Cup title last year.

"I would say that he definitely had an impact on that," Capitals Coach Todd Reirden said. "He has a very strong character, understanding of what it takes to win the Stanley Cup, and he tried his best to talk about it and express it and share those experiences every way he could with us. We weren't able to do it with him, but I can tell you that it made an impact on our team."

Now, as the Capitals continue their first-round series against Carolina in the Stanley Cup playoffs, after holding on for a 4-2 win against the Hurricanes on Thursday in Game 1, their history with Williams is shelved with a mere asterisk. Williams has moved on, again igniting a nontraditional hockey market and bringing the franchise back to the playoffs for the first time since 2009. And Williams got into it with his old teammates early in Game 1, displaying the grittiness and pestering style of play that have spearheaded his playoff efficiency.

"You aspire to win. That is what you want to do, and we haven't had the opportunity to do that in quite some time," said Williams, who scored 23 goals this season. "You got to earn the right to have it, so we are obviously excited to be back in the playoffs, but that obviously isn't the end goal."

For the Capitals, Carolina's success with Williams at the helm has come as no surprise. Defenseman Brooks Orpik, who like Williams came to the Capitals with a Stanley Cup ring in hand (Pittsburgh, 2009), recognized Williams's approach to the game was something players admired and tried to emulate.

"The thing with Willie that sticks out the most is his competitiveness on the ice and off the ice," Orpik said. "It doesn't matter if you are playing golf or cards or anything; he really wants to win bad. He doesn't take it well if he doesn't win, but I mean that in the best way possible. It is infectious around the group and kind of pushes everybody to be better."

Williams, with whom the Capitals FaceTimed in the early morning hours as they partied in Las Vegas after they won the Stanley Cup, remains tight with many Washington players. The morning of Game 1, Williams told reporters he followed the Capitals' Cup run last year "very closely."

"I followed everything," Williams said. "I am a fan of the game also but last year was a fan of them."

When told by a reporter that many Capitals players credit Williams with helping them win the Cup last season, the veteran humorously started to roll his eyes.

"I'm not going to make this a kumbaya-type thing," Williams said. "Obviously I have a lot of respect for what they did last year and I have a lot of really good friends on that team and I was very happy for them, but that was last year."

While last year is last year, Capitals forward T.J. Oshie said if there was one player from whom anyone should take advice on the playoffs, it

would be Williams — or Stick, as they like to call him. Williams spoke when needed, Oshie said, but it was his play that always was able to rise to the occasion. The Capitals even put one of Williams's refrains — "Own the big moments" — on team shirts during the 2017 postseason.

"That's something that we all tried to emulate, you know; last year some guys did a great job of doing that," Oshie said. "But it is something special and something not every guy can do. And he's one of those guys that can do it."

To the younger players, Williams — with his playoff experience and "Mr. Game 7" nickname — was seen as a motivator. Forward Andre Burakovsky, in only his second NHL season when Williams joined the team, said the veteran was able to help him improve. Burakovsky, who frequently was paired with a combination of Williams and center Evgeny Kuznetsov, scored a career-high 17 goals during the 2015-16 season, with 21 assists.

"[Williams] is a great teammate; he has the right blend of leadership, have fun, compete," Capitals General Manager Brian MacLellan said. "He really senses the tone of an organization, of a team, where they are at in the games and playoffs, and he provides — and he did provide us with that — leadership. And he is doing the same thing at Carolina now, so he's just a great guy to have on your team."

And Williams's teachings aren't done yet. While the Capitals hold a 1-0 advantage, Backstrom will head into Saturday's Game 2 with one of Williams's often-used phrases in the back of his mind.

"He always said, 'In the playoffs, momentum is dead after the win,'" Backstrom said. "... He would always reset and go start from zero again."

Washington Post LOADED: 04.13.2019

1140552 Washington Capitals

By emphasizing quality over quantity, the Capitals made their shots count in a Game 1 victory

By Isabelle Khurshudyan

April 12 at 7:30 AM

In every measure but the final score, the Washington Capitals were the lesser team in Thursday night's opening game of their Eastern Conference playoff series against the Carolina Hurricanes. They were outshot and dominated in even-strength scoring chances, and if the expected-goals metric had proved accurate, the Capitals would have finished with one tally instead of four.

But they were the team that left the Capital One Arena ice celebrating, deemed as lucky by most analytics but also quite good in their 4-2 win over the Hurricanes in Game 1.

"I don't think we've ever really been worried about how many shots we get on net," Washington defenseman John Carlson said. "If we're working the puck around and we have a couple bread-and-butter plays that have proven to work, we're really not interested in the number as much as how we're moving it and where the shots are coming from."

This first-round series won't get the attention as some others around the NHL — the scrappy newcomers enjoying their first postseason berth in a decade against the defending Stanley Cup champions. But perhaps more intriguing is the contrast in the teams' offensive philosophies and what it reveals about shot metrics. The combination of shot-attempt location, quantity and other variables is often used as a way to gauge a team's puck possession and offensive ability. In recent years especially, that



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measure has reflected poorly on the Capitals, who delight in overperforming vs. the underlying metrics. Washington's expected even-strength goal output, as determined by Natural Stat Trick, was 173 this season, but the team finished with 220.

Enter the Hurricanes, the ultimate analytics darlings who boasted the most shots on goal per game, the most unblocked shot attempts per game, the most expected goals for and most high-danger scoring chances during the regular season, according to Natural Stat Trick. With those counts, Carolina should be the best offensive team in the league, yet it ranked 15th in the NHL with 191 even-strength goals while Washington had 29 more with roughly 300 fewer shots this season. What gives?

"I don't want to give away our secrets here, but we have confidence in our game and we have confidence in our style," Capitals forward Tom Wilson said. "We've seen what it takes to have success, and we don't want to stray away from that. I think we could've done a little bit better managing the game, but at the end of the day, we scored enough goals to win the game."

Selective shooting has worked for Washington. The Capitals ranked 22nd in even-strength shots on goal this season, and that was an improvement after they finished last in that category a year ago. But over the two seasons combined, Washington has a league-best 10.4 shooting percentage, reflective of the team's skill and ability to finish. An inflated shooting percentage is often discounted as unsustainable, or "puck luck," but the Capitals have so consistently overachieved their expected-goals numbers that it's become the norm for them. The opposite can be said for the Hurricanes, who steadily underperform in that category.

While shot metrics can account for the degree of danger based on location — the closer to the net, the better — they don't factor in the variations in an individual player's ability. Essentially, a one-timer from Alex Ovechkin from the left faceoff circle counts the same as a one-timer from Brooks Orpik in the left faceoff circle, but practically, one is much more likely to score than the other. In the context of this series, the Capitals have more skill throughout their lineup than the Hurricanes, and while that doesn't necessarily decide playoff series, it matters when debating the analytical disparities between the two.

Considering the shot volume Carolina tends to generate, holding the Hurricanes to 29 for the game is a victory in itself. The Capitals managed just 18 pucks on net, and at even-strength, Natural Stat Trick tallied 12 scoring chances for Washington compared with 22 for Carolina. The Capitals took nearly 10 minutes to record their first shot of the game, then they scored on the second one and ended up with three goals on their first eight shots. The aim of most high shot-volume teams is to create chaos in front of the net with rebounds and second-chance opportunities, and while Washington wished it had done more of that in Carolina's end on Thursday, the Capitals expertly limited the Hurricanes' offense in front of goaltender Braden Holtby.

"I think if you talk to Holts and other goalies, if guys are going to throw pucks at them from all over the ice, they may have 35 or 40 shots, but if he's seeing all of them and he's making saves, he's probably feeling pretty good about himself," center Nic Dowd said. "There's definitely a differential in quality vs. quantity, and I think we're definitely on the quality side."

The Capitals felt their five-on-five play was lacking Thursday night, especially the amount of offensive-zone time they logged, but they were still credited with more shots from the slot and more rush scoring chances. Based on how Natural Stat Trick judges high-danger scoring chances, the Hurricanes had a slight edge there.

"I think we did a good job in some instances of keeping the shot quality low," Carlson said. "But we didn't execute well enough to break it out and get the puck out of the zone. They'd have a couple meaningless plays, and we fumble with it, and we're tired, and then they're starting to get good looks. . . . If we're going to make plays and be able to execute plays behind them, then we're going to get odd-man rushes all night."

It's a lot like what the Pittsburgh Penguins did to the Capitals two years ago, the second-round series that seemed to shift the organization's mind-set away from volume and toward quality — and what kind of quality leads to goals. Washington clearly had the puck more that series and significantly outshot Pittsburgh, but the Penguins capitalized on their counterattack. Earlier this season, then-Florida Panthers Coach Bob Boughner observed that Washington was the league's top team at generating offense off the rush, and that stems from a focus on creating lateral plays, which have the best chance of going in because of the degree of difficulty for the opposing goaltender. The Capitals excelled in that regard Thursday night, even if the shot ticker otherwise favored the Hurricanes.

"We were able to generate some high quality against them, particularly when it came to executing some play versus their pressure," Capitals Coach Todd Reirden said. "A few times, we were able to execute and get some opportunities, but I'd like to see us get to the offensive zone more and force them to defend a little longer. Some of our offense came off chances that were generated rush-wise, more so than forecheck opportunities that turned into long, extended offensive zone shifts, which is where you can really force some of their really offensive defensemen to be not so active in the rush. So that's an area that we'll be looking at and making some adjustments to so we can be better in Game 2."

Washington Post LOADED: 04.13.2019

1140553 Washington Capitals

This Capitals' playoff hype video is guaranteed to give you chills

By Sammi Silber

April 12, 2019 6:05 PM

As the Washington Capitals started their quest for back-to-back, the memories from last spring still lingered in the minds of fans who finally got to see Washington win their first Cup championship after 44 years.

It's hard to move forward and put those moments in the past, especially given the circumstances, but the Capitals managed to do so this season. And their playoff hype video shows just how far the team has come since last year — and of course, gives us chills.

The video highlights the Cup championship and the parade, and then goes into the many accomplishments the Capitals saw this season, including the banner-raising ceremony, Nicklas Backstrom hitting 600 career assists, Ovechkin hitting the 50-goal mark for the eighth time in his career and more.

Comcast SportsNet.com LOADED: 04.13.2019

1140554 Washington Capitals

The Capitals are finally reversing their most frustrating trend and that's very good news

By Brian McNally

April 12, 2019 4:46 PM



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • April 13, 2019

The Capitals won a Stanley Cup despite falling behind at some point in every playoff series last spring and losing Game 1 three separate times. That is not exactly a sound plan.

Washington rallying from 2-0 down against the Columbus Blue Jackets and shaking off Game 1 losses to the Pittsburgh Penguins and Vegas Golden Knights was admirable. It was also dangerous and yet another reason why Thursday's Game 1 win against the Carolina Hurricanes meant so much. It's the rare occasion that Washington is not chasing a series from the jump.

"It's always important to have a good start," captain Alex Ovechkin said. "But again, series goes for four wins and we got one right now to get this game and move forward."

Ovechkin has reason to be wary given that the Capitals shook off those deficits to Columbus (0-2), Pittsburgh (0-1) and Vegas (0-1) and that even up 2-0 themselves on Tampa Bay in the Eastern Conference Final, the Lightning won the next three games to push them to the brink of elimination.

Washington has actually fallen behind at some point in seven of its last eight postseason series dating to 2016. That even includes series where they won Game 1, including Tampa Bay last year (2-3), Toronto in 2017 (1-2) and Pittsburgh in 2016 (1-3). They rallied again to beat the Lightning and Maple Leafs, but lost that year to the Penguins.

This is nothing new. NHL teams face adversity in almost any series. The Capitals remember having a Blue Jackets shot go off the post in overtime of Game 3 that would have left them down 0-3. That would have pretty much spelled the end of what became a championship season. The Hurricanes are taking that same approach after the 4-2 loss in Game 1.

"We came here for a split, so we're going to have to get that done," Carolina forward Justin Williams said. "I take the fact that we were resilient, we came back and we had an opportunity to win the game [Thursday], which is the case with every game we've played this year, but we haven't done it against them, yet. So no better time than [Saturday]."

If you only include the first game of a playoff series, the Capitals have lost four of their past five openers, which leaves them quickly scrambling to catch up. Not to mention sitting around for an off day wondering what went wrong and how to fix it.

This season, the coaching staff made some tweaks to the schedule to try to reverse the trend. They tried to hold shorter practices in the four days between the end of the regular season and the start of the Carolina series to keep players fresher. They changed how they watched video. They emphasized how important a good first period in Game 1 would be and ended up scoring three times before intermission. The plan worked. For now.

"But, again, we didn't play our best," Capitals coach Todd Reirden said. "There's definitely room to grow and the fortunate part is we left with a win. That allows us to build some confidence here initially. Take a good start to the series and build on that starting [Saturday]."

Comcast SportsNet.com LOADED: 04.13.2019

1140555 Washington Capitals

NHL Playoffs 2019 Roundup: Backstrom surges, Leafs rewriting storyline, Flames off to hot start

By Sammi Silber

April 12, 2019 2:19 PM

Although the Washington Capitals won the Stanley Cup 10 months ago, it feels as if it was just yesterday that the 2018 postseason came to a close, and now, it's already the 2019 playoffs.

Last night, the Capitals and Carolina Hurricanes, as well as the Toronto Maple Leafs, Boston Bruins, Calgary Flames and Colorado Avalanche, started their respective playoff series, and there was no lack of action. Here's how Thursday's games played out.

Capitals top Hurricanes, 4-2

Although the Capitals were struggling to get scoring chances halfway through the first period, two goals from Nicklas Backstrom and a power-play goal from Alex Ovechkin put Washington up 3-0 over Carolina after the opening frame, and the score would hold through the second period.

However, Andrei Svechnikov had two goals in the third to bring the Hurricanes within one as they ignited a late rally. However, the comeback was stopped short thanks to blocks and strong defense from Backstrom and company, and Lars Eller was able to score on the empty net to secure the victory.

The Caps have a 1-0 series lead over Carolina in their first playoff series against the Hurricanes, and will look to carry that success over into Game 2. However, the Hurricanes proved to be dangerous Thursday, and are ready to compete and tie things up.

Maple Leafs dominate Bruins, 4-1

Heading into Thursday's Game 1, the Maple Leafs were reminded of their previous playoff demons against Boston, but they a glimpse that perhaps things would be different this season with an impressive Game 1 victory Thursday.

Patrice Bergeron gave the Bruins an early 1-0 lead with a power-play tally, but Mitch Marner followed up with two consecutive goals, scoring one shorthanded on a penalty shot, and William Nylander also scored on a breakaway to put the Leafs up 3-1 heading into the third. John Tavares added another goal in the final frame, and also recored an assist in the win.

Toronto now holds a 1-0 series lead over Boston and will look to continue capitalizing on their offense in order to finally overcome the Bruins and advance to the second round.

Flames blank Avalanche, 4-0

Calgary proved their worth as the top team in the Western Conference to close out the season, and the Flames' success carried into the playoffs as they defeated the Avalanche, a team that has had its fair share of struggles this year.

Andrew Mangiapane opened the scoring for the Flames late in the first, and from there, Calgary continued to dominate. Matthew Tkachuk had two goals, and Mikael Backlund also added a tally in the victory. But the first star of the night was 37-year-old goaltender Mike Smith, who made 26 saves to shut out Colorado and also had an assist on Tkachuk's second goal of the game in the third period.

Having qualified for the playoffs just three times over the last 10 years, the Flames made a statement with their Game 1 performance and established themselves as early favorites with their victory. They now have a 1-0 series lead.

Comcast SportsNet.com LOADED: 04.13.2019

1140556 Washington Capitals

What we learned: Caps-Hurricanes game 1



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • April 13, 2019

By Brian McNally

April 12, 2019 2:54 PM

The Capitals left Capital One Arena on Thursday with a 4-2 win and in the end that was the most important thing. A 3-0 lead against the Carolina Hurricanes in Game 1 of a Stanley Cup playoff first-round series threatened to melt away. Washington held on down the stretch. It leads the series 1-0. That's new! Last season the Capitals lost Game 1 to Columbus, Pittsburgh and Vegas, but won the Stanley Cup anyway. It's tough to always crawl out of a hole and just because they did it then doesn't mean they want a repeat.

There were plenty of nuggets to take from Game 1. Many positive, but not all. Here are a few observations.

The Capitals blueline remains a work-in-progress

Last year, The Capitals had 20 games to get trade deadline pickup Michal Kempny plenty of time with defensive partner John Carlson. But Kempny is gone now, lost for the season with a hamstring injury. And the effort to find some stability there has a ways to go during 5-on-5 play.

Carlson started the game with Nick Jensen (10:10), spent time with Christian Djoos (:46) – that led to a goal in the third period, which appeared to be on Carlson - and also Brooks Orpik (5:45). Only the Dmitry Orlov-Matt Niskanen pairing stayed intact. They played 18:12 together. Capitals coach Todd Reirden wasn't messing with that duo.

But there are complications. Players downplay it, but Carlson has to shift to the left side when he's with Jensen and back to his natural right side when with Orpik. That affects all kinds of things from the angle you take to your footwork to how you make an outlet pass. Jensen took shifts with Orpik (2:06) and Djoos (2:24) and that latter duo was scored upon, too.

Capitals played a hard, physical game. Now they need to do it smarter

There were plenty of big hits in the first period from forwards Tom Wilson and Alex Ovechkin and defenseman Brooks Orpik. That's been Washington's calling card the past few seasons. It is a big, heavy team that can wear down an opponent. We saw it in the Eastern Conference Final against Tampa Bay last spring. But they didn't have the puck enough in Game 1 and they didn't get it into positions where the Carolina defensemen would pay the price to retrieve the puck near their own net.

"When we're playing our best hockey, we're able to get in and forecheck with a physical presence and a physical element," Reirden said after practice on Friday. "That's all players. Not just certain guys."

That means T.J. Oshie, whose relentless play helped fuel last year's championship run. Even Andre Burakovsky laid low a couple of Hurricanes players on Thursday. Reirden really does mean everyone. You will know the Caps are playing well in Game 2 on Saturday if they're more committed to putting pucks in places where the Hurricanes will feel the heat.

Carolina goalie Petr Mrazek is boom-or-bust

The Hurricanes goalie has had big games against the Capitals before, especially when he played for the Detroit Red Wings. The Caps did what they had to do early in the game, which is crucial to tweak Mrazek's confidence. As he gains steam, he can make some impossible saves look easy. Nick Backstrom used a tricky move to set up Mrazek's own defenseman as a screen on his goal in the first period. It looked like a shot he should have stopped from the top of the right faceoff circle. But Mrazek isn't a big man. He couldn't see the puck. He didn't even react. You can argue that one is on him. The result is the same. An early, deflating goal for Carolina to allow. The Caps power play went to work after that and it was 3-0.

But it never got to four until the net was empty and nerves were tight. That's because he stayed calm on a Nic Dowd breakaway at 2:29 of the

third period with the score still 3-0. Dowd was angry at himself. "Oh, you mean the one I shot right into his chest?" But he also spoiled Carl Hagelin at 3:31 of the third. Again, it was a breakaway. Hagelin's shriek of frustration could be heard in the press box at the top of the arena. His backhand move didn't work. Then at 4:55 of the third, Jakub Vrana finds Brett Connolly all alone in front.

Game over, right? Nope. Mrazek holds his ground, makes a pad save and calmly sticks with it as Lars Eller slams a rebound at him. The Capitals paid for that sequence. Instead a 4-0 lead, the Hurricanes quickly pushed the puck up ice and Andrei Svechnikov bull rushed around John Carlson and scored. Just like that Mrazek had some confidence despite the loss. Now – does it carry over to Game 2?

Special teams might spell the difference in this series

The Capitals best players played with an intensity on the power we haven't seen in a long time. They seemed to glide through stretches of the regular season certain their talent would lead to goals. It doesn't work that way, though. You have to go after pucks, you have to make quick decisions. They did that on goals by Backstrom – the Hurricanes were too preoccupied with Ovechkin to notice him all alone at the left post – and Ovechkin, who was so hungry for a loose puck he knocked Tom Wilson to the ice getting there.

The Hurricanes need to get better in a hurry here. They had a power-play advantage late in the game down 3-2 and couldn't convert. They managed just three shots on three power-play chances. That last one, hurt, though. Let's let Hurricanes forward Justin Williams explain in his own inimitable way:

"The power play was crap and the penalty kill was crap also," Williams said. "I mean, listen, they're going to get opportunities, obviously, but there's a couple little things we looked at to do the best we can to nullify that and a couple things we looked at on the power play as well to be more impactful."

Williams added: "I say it every time: shots, tips, screens, rebounds. That's what a power play is about. Your best players are usually on the ice and they need to make plays for us. So, when it's not successful, you look at yourself in the mirror, you look at video, you check it out and say, 'All right, this is what I can do better.' And that's what we did today."

The Hurricanes don't mess around

No surprise that the team with the most shots on goal in the NHL has an aggressive philosophy. Carolina will shoot the puck from anywhere and everywhere on the ice. They had 59 shot attempts at even strength to just 23 for the Capitals. That margin seems absurd. But it's a function of how they play. The Capitals have to be opportunistic. They had multiple breakaways they didn't finish. They have to produce on special teams. Only one of those things happened on Thursday.

And when Carolina's defensemen pinch deep into the offensive zone, Washington has to be able to skate it out of trouble and execute those breakaways when they get the chance. It's a counter-punch mentality similar to the way the Penguins beat the Capitals two years in a row in the playoffs in 2016 and 2017. Washington often left those games thinking it had the better of the play. Pittsburgh often left with wins because it's high-end talent was able to counter and score.

Comcast SportsNet.com LOADED: 04.13.2019

1140557 Washington Capitals

Busy Saturday in D.C. could create traffic problems for Caps fans

By Ryan Homler



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • April 13, 2019

April 12, 2019 12:44 PM

After an exciting Game 1 win over the Carolina Hurricanes that featured an electric crowd at Capital One Arena, much of the same atmosphere can be expected for Game 2 on Saturday at 3:00 p.m.

But Caps fans should leave extra time - and take public transportation if possible - to make their way to the arena.

Besides playing host to the Stanley Cup Playoffs, April 13 will be a busy day in D.C. with both the Cherry Blossom Parade and Emancipation Day celebration scheduled.

A complete list of street closures is available here and includes E St., NW from 13th St., NW to 14th St., NW, Pennsylvania Ave., NW from 12th St., NW to 14th St., NW and 13th St., NW from E St., NW to Pennsylvania Ave., NW from 7 am to midnight on Saturday.

An additional bonus to taking public transportation? You never know when you may run into TJ Oshie and Matt Niskanen.

Comcast SportsNet.com LOADED: 04.13.2019

1140558 Washington Capitals

Capitals survive third-period scare, ride early surge to Game 1 victory over Carolina

By J.J. Regan

April 11, 2019 10:14 PM

WASHINGTON – Just one night after the Tampa Bay Lightning yielded a 3-0 lead to the Columbus Blue Jackets in a stunning loss, the Capitals managed to avoid a similar fate, but just barely. Washington took a 3-0 lead in the first period and held on for the 4-2 win in Game 1 on Thursday against the Carolina Hurricanes.

Nicklas Backstrom scored the first two goals of the game while Alex Ovechkin netted what would prove to be the game-winner. After going up 3-0, it looked like the Caps would cruise to the easy win over their inexperienced opponents, but Carolina had other ideas.

Rookie Andrei Svechnikov scored twice in the final frame to pull the Hurricanes to within one, but that would be as close as they would come as Washington held on for the narrow win.

Here are five reasons the Caps won to take a 1-0 series lead.

### 1. Inexperience

Carolina had a plucky start to the game and fired the first six shots on goal. It did not take long, however, for the Hurricanes' inexperience to show. Offensively, Carolina seemed to rush a lot of shots instead of letting plays develop. Jordan Matrinoock got the puck in the high-slot early in the first period with the score still tied at 0. With no pressure on him, he could have taken aim and fired a dangerous shot or set up an open teammate on the wing. Instead, he immediately fired an awkward looking shot that was clearly rushed.

In the second period, Andrei Svechnikov chased a puck into the offensive zone. His eyes never left the puck, however, and he had no sense of Brooks Orpik closing in on him. Orpik knocked the rookie to the ice and skated away with the puck.

Those type of plays were evident in the first two periods and the Caps took advantage. When Carolina finally settled down in the third period, it was a completely different game.

### 2. Physical play

The physical prowess of Washington was a big talking point heading into the series. Early in Game 1 it was very clear that Carolina wanted to show the Caps that they were not intimidated and they began throwing their bodies around.

The Hurricanes, however, are not an overly physical team. That's not who they are or how they play. Trying to force that into their game at the start of the playoffs just felt awkward.

When a team plays physically, it doesn't mean they hit and fight a lot. The Caps use physical play to wear down opponents. They play a physical, grinding cycle in the offensive zone that helps wear down defenses. On defense, they challenge teams at the blue line and forced forwards to the outside. They don't just hit.

Carolina was just hitting at the start of the game, but they were not physical when it mattered. Midway through the first period, Backstrom skated the puck into the offensive zone and was barely challenged at all. The Hurricanes made his entry into the zone far too easy and he made them pay with the first goal of the game.

### 3. Superstar talent

The stars came out to play in this one. Backstrom scored the first two goals of the game, his third career multi-goal game in the playoffs. Alex Ovechkin scored what proved to be the game-winning goal later in the third period. John Carlson assisted on all three of Washington's first period goals which matched an NHL playoff record for most in a period, per the NHL.

Backstrom also came up big late in the game with two huge shot blocks in the third period as Carolina pushed for the game-tying goal.

### 4. Cheating to Ovechkin on the power play

Washington's power play did not look good heading into the playoffs, but they scored on both of their first opportunities on the night.

On the first power play, Carolina played Ovechkin very closely. That's understandable given he is the best goal-scorer in the world, but you can't leave Backstrom wide-open on the backdoor. Kuznetsov had the puck on the half-wall and Jaccob Slavin skated out to challenge him. Brett Pesce, however, did not come down to cover Backstrom, but instead stayed up high, cheating to where Ovechkin was. With a wide-open passing lane and no one on Backstrom, Kuznetsov hit Backstrom for the easy goal.

### 5. Not covering Ovechkin on the power play

On the next power play, the Hurricanes' new penalty kill strategy was evidently to not cover Ovechkin at all. He had all sorts of room and fired three shot attempts towards goalie Petr Mrazek before his fourth finally found the back of the net. That gave Washington the 3-0 lead.

Comcast SportsNet.com LOADED: 04.13.2019

1140559 Washington Capitals

Capitals veteran T.J. Oshie 'exemplifies what a playoff player should look like'

By Chris Kuc

Apr 12, 2019



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

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T.J. Oshie was up before his alarm sounded Thursday morning, too excited for the start of the postseason to let sleep get in the way. Had he made it to his alarm, he wouldn't have remained in bed long anyway.

"It's not a day you reach for the snooze button," Oshie said following the Capitals' morning skate in preparation for Game 1 against the Hurricanes at Capital One Arena.

The postseason is Oshie's time to shine and to say the veteran winger is pumped for it would be an understatement.

"Playoffs are so much adrenaline," Oshie said. "And you get adrenaline off of making good plays or making big hits or making the big block and it kind of keeps propelling you. Each round gets more and more exciting."

As successful as the 32-year-old was during the regular season with 25 goals and 29 assists in 69 games, the style of play in the playoffs — from the pace to the physical aspect — suits Oshie's game perfectly.

"I like hard-checking games and I like when every forecheck means a lot," Oshie said. "Typically, a lot of that kind of back-and-forth game and extremely high-skilled game kind of goes away just a little bit and I think that suits me. But I still have to go out there and get the job done whether it is my style or not."

While Nicklas Backstrom was scoring two goals and John Carlson was adding three assists in the Capitals' 4-2 victory in Game 1, Oshie was busy winning puck battles and doing the little things that often go unnoticed. He was engaged early and got into a post-whistle skirmish with Nino Niederreiter before 8 minutes was gone to help set the tone.

Late in the third with the Capitals clinging to a 3-2 lead, Oshie took an ill-advised and very un-Oshie-like high-sticking penalty. After it was killed, coach Todd Reirden went right back to his game-changer and sent Oshie back onto the ice to protect the lead. That was where he was when Lars Eller capped the scoring with an empty-netter.

The Game 1 effort — aside from the penalty — established that Oshie could again be the force he was during the Capitals' run to the Stanley Cup in 2018. In the four series in '18, Oshie combined for eight goals and 13 assists with 31 penalty minutes, six power-play goals and two game-winners in 24 games.

"He was a catalyst and an X-factor for us every single night last year," winger Tom Wilson said. "He kind of goes about his business very modestly and he's a very humble guy so you don't necessarily see it, but within this room we see all the little things he does, like taking on the toughest guy on their team or the most skilled guy on their team. He can play so many different ways and styles. He's just a versatile guy that we're extremely lucky to have."

Game 1 on Thursday night was the 80th postseason game of Oshie's career, and he now has 23 goals, 29 assists, 60 penalty minutes, 11 power-play goals and five game-winners.

The first 30 postseason games Oshie appeared in were with the Blues, who made it out of the first round once during that span. In Oshie's previous three postseasons with the Capitals, they reached the second round twice and then won it all in '18.

"T.J. is an extremely consistent player in terms of the intangibles he brings to the table, the work ethic, the passion (and) the enthusiasm," Reirden said. "He loves the game of hockey. That's consistent whether it is Game 38 or 74 or 104. This guy is such a big part of our leadership group and what the culture that we have here now. It gets obviously ramped up to another level with the playoffs."

While being able to reach a level few players on the ice can match, Oshie said, "I'm not going to do anything crazy. We don't really need any heroes on our team, but those times where I've elevated my game in the regular season I have to do that more often and more consistently here in the postseason."

But if a hero is, in fact, needed, is Oshie up for that?

"Well, I mean, I think everyone tries to give it their best and our success last year and our success this year comes from just everybody contributing," he said. "We don't need really anything more. Everyone just has to do their job. If it comes down to that last goal and you're the guy, that's great. But whoever it is just has to get the job done."

Now that the Capitals have officially begun their quest to repeat as Cup champions, Oshie is back in his element.

"He's everything playoff hockey is," Reirden said. "It's energy, it's passion, it's commitment, it's ultimate sacrifice. You see his physical contact, blocking shots, taking hits to make plays and being able to still execute high-end, skill plays when they're there and then understanding that there are times to manage pucks and put pucks behind the defense."

"He's a phenomenal example of how you can bring all of that into one. For us, he definitely exemplifies what a playoff player should look like."

Close call

The Capitals scored on three of their first eight shots and appeared headed to an easy victory before the Hurricanes stormed back with two third-period goals by rookie Andrei Svechnikov. Despite some tense moments, the Capitals hung on to take a 1-0 lead in the best-of-seven series that will continue with Game 2 on Saturday afternoon at Capital One Arena.

"We were up 3-0 and obviously we want to shut them down and we don't want to give them those goals, but at the same time, that's going to happen," Backstrom said. "They're a good team, too. I think the biggest thing was when they scored two goals in the third and they got a little momentum, we stopped that and we didn't allow them anything else."

Said Hurricanes coach Rod Brind'Amour: "Guys are pretty disappointed. We played hard, certainly don't fault that. The execution on some things wasn't great. We had a couple guys that need to be better, for sure, if we're going to beat the best team. But at the same time, that's a positive for me, that we weren't at our best and still kind of had a chance to win."

Ovi power

Alex Ovechkin scored his 62nd career postseason goal in the first period to give the Capitals a 3-0 lead. That moved Ovechkin into a tie with Blackhawks legend Bobby Hull for 27th on the NHL's all-time list. On the night, the Capitals were 2-for-4 on the power play.

"It is that time of year (when) everybody is going to have to take a step forward and play differently," Ovechkin said. "You know we have to use our chances. I think we had too many chances on the power play and we scored two and I think we can score three or four."

Dowd in the fold

The Capitals made two moves before the game, including inking fourth-line center Nic Dowd to a three-year, \$2.25 million contract extension. The deal, which will carry an average annual value of \$750,000, helps solidify the center position for next season and beyond.

With Backstrom signed through the 2019-20 season, Evgeny Kuznetsov through '24-25 and Lars Eller through '22-23, the Capitals won't have to address the center position heading into next season.

"It's good to feel wanted, right?" Dowd said. "It's good to feel like you're locked in and they want you for a role. That's what every player wants, they want to feel needed and they want to feel like they have a job to do. So my family and I are super excited."

The 28-year-old Dowd had a career-high eight goals and tied his single-season high with 22 points this season while also ranking first on the Capitals in faceoff percentage with a 51.9 percent success rate. Dowd also logged an average of 1 minute, 39 seconds of ice time on the penalty kill.

"I think the best way it was put to me was just, 'Think of it as your season this year allowed you to get a three-year deal,'" Dowd continued. "That



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was the best way it was put to me and I think I'm not going to over-think it from that standpoint. I'm really excited to be a part of this organization."

Against the Hurricanes, Dowd had one shot on goal — a breakaway chance that would have helped seal the victory but was stopped by goaltender Petr Mrazek — in 6:40 of ice time.

"If you count shooting it right into him almost a goal, yeah, it was close," Dowd said.

New face

The Capitals also recalled Ilya Samsonov from AHL Hershey to serve as the team's third goaltender.

"It's just standard practice for us to make sure we have a third goalie in these situations," Reirden said. "(Samsonov) will be here through Games 1 and 2 and we'll go from there."

Samsonov is 19-14-5 with a 2.74 goals-against average and .896 save percentage in 36 games with the Bears this season. The 22-year-old has three shutouts and went 10-0-1 record from Jan. 12-Feb. 27.

The Athletic LOADED: 04.13.2019

1140468 NHL

Youth is being served early in Stanley Cup playoffs

April 12, 2019 at 2:53 pm Updated April 12, 2019 at 4:32 PM

By STEPHEN WHYNO

For all the value of postseason experience, youth is off to a nice start in the Stanley Cup playoffs.

Teenage defenseman Miro Heiskanen built on his stellar rookie season in his playoff debut with Dallas, 19-year-old Andrei Svechnikov tried to carry Carolina back from a big deficit, early 20-somethings Mitch Marner and William Nylander continue to be among Toronto's best players and young Matthew Tkachuk did his part to finally win a playoff game with the Calgary Flames.

The NHL is getting younger and more skilled, and youth is being served in a big way early in the Stanley Cup playoffs. They may not get the attention like Winnipeg's Patrik Laine or Toronto's Auston Matthews, but Heiskanen and Svechnikov turned in two of the more impressive playoff performances in recent history for players before their 20th birthdays.

"Some people, it's hard and some people it's pretty easy, and those are the people it looks like it's pretty easy," Hurricanes forward Teuvo Teravainen said of Svechnikov and fellow Finn Heiskanen. "They don't stress too much. They just go out and play and have some fun."

Svechnikov became the youngest player in 22 years to score twice in a playoff game and the third teen to put up two goals in NHL postseason history after Pierre Turgeon in 1988, Eddie Olczyk in 1985 and Don Gallinger in 1943. The 2018 second overall pick will try to help Carolina even its first-round series against Washington in Game 2 Saturday (3 p.m. ET, NBC).

"There's not pressure on him," Hurricanes captain Justin Williams said. "Just go do it. Go enjoy it. Go have fun. That's what this time of year is about, and we're going to need even more from him if we're going to advance."

The Stars won in Nashville thanks in large part to Heiskanen's goal and assist in Game 1. At 19 years, 266 days old, he became the youngest

defenseman in franchise history to score in the playoffs and the fifth teenage rookie defenseman with two points in his postseason debut.

"My 19-year-old year, when it was April, I was drinking beers in my frat basement," Dallas defenseman Ben Lovejoy said. "What he is doing is just incredible. It's so special. He is so good, it is just such a pleasure to watch him play and to be on his team. He's such an asset. He's going to do this for 20 years and I can't wait to watch him."

Coach Jim Montgomery would love to see Heiskanen and 22-year-old rookie Roope Hintz play like this for several more weeks. Game 2 in Nashville is Saturday (6 p.m. ET, CNBC).

In Boston, the Bruins have to be better in Game 2 (8 p.m. ET, NBC) on Saturday after losing the series opener on home ice. Marner was a big part of that with his two-goal game, including being just the fifth player to score a shorthanded goal on a penalty shot in the playoffs.

"He's an elite player in the league at a young age," Bruins coach Bruce Cassidy said. "Years ago I remember (people saying about Wayne) Gretzky, 'Why doesn't anybody hit that guy?' Well, it's not that easy."

It's not easy to hit or stop Nylander, either. The 22-year-old Swede scored for the second consecutive game and appears to have solved his late-season dry spell.

"It's good for me," Nylander said. "I've been thinking just to hit the net and get it on it."

In Calgary, Tkachuk's two goals a series-opening victory against the Colorado Avalanche snapped his six-game goal drought, though the 21-year-old's agitating ways stuck as much as his scoring. Teammate Andrew Mangiapane, 23, also scored in his playoff debut and the West's top seed is off and running with Game 2 Saturday night in Calgary (10:30 p.m. ET, NBCSN).

"Now all of those guys have got their first game out of the way, they should get some confidence," coach Bill Peters said. "We'll get better as the series goes along."

INJURY WATCH

Even in the hockey-speak of upper- and lower-body injuries, playoff time brings an extra cloud of secrecy. Seemingly everyone is day-to-day or a game-time decision.

That's the case for Carolina defenseman Calvin de Haan, who practiced Friday after missing the past six games with an upper-body injury. Coach Rod Brind'Amour said he hopes de Haan can play "at some point" and added defenseman Jaccob Slavin was fine after getting a day off for playing a lot of minutes Thursday night.

Boston forward Jake DeBrusk is questionable with the injury that knocked him out of Game 1 against the Maple Leafs. Cassidy said if DeBrusk can't play, veteran David Backes will go into the lineup.

Seattle Times LOADED: 04.13.2019

1140570 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Jets' goaltending fails them just as offence shows up to play

Mark Spector | @sportsnetspec

April 13, 2019, 12:39 AM

WINNIPEG — "I really don't like that question."



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • April 13, 2019

Jets goalie Connor Hellebuyck was taking on the media on a night when his team lost 4-3. He had been undoubtedly the second-best goalie in the game, and wasn't going to go 0-2 against a bunch of guys with digital recorders in their hands.

The whiff of the game-winning goal, however, still lingered after a 4-3 loss. It was a semi-distant wrist shot from Ryan O'Reilly that had eluded Hellebuyck to the far side, eliciting the old hockey cliché from Paul Maurice:

"Yeah, he's going to want that back," winced the Jets coach.

Earlier, in fact, a scribe had asked Hellebuyck if there were "one or two" goals that he may have "wanted back." Combative to the end — which we like about Hellebuyck — the goalie fired back.

"I would like every single goal I ever let in back," he reasoned. "That's kind of a loaded question."

The Jets are down 0-2 and heading out on the road to St. Louis, their playoff lives hanging by a thread, and suddenly the goalie is a giving a master class in journalism instead of stopping pucks. Nice.

Beaten by three clean wristers — two by Oskar Sundqvist — we're not saying that Hellebuyck can't let in a puck or two over the course of a game. But an NHL team needs saves on two of those three shots — any two, pick 'em — if they're going to win in April or May.

Harumph!

After blowing a 1-0 lead after 40 minutes in the series opener, the Jets and Blues were tied 3-3 heading into the most important third period of Winnipeg's season on Friday night. Once again, St. Louis pulled away from Winnipeg in the Jets' own barn, as Jordan Binnington stopped all 15 Jets shots in the third period, while Hellebuyck let one of nine volleys elude him.

"If your recipe is your goaltender is going to have to be the best player on your team," said a protective Maurice, "it won't be a long playoffs. You've got to have some nights where you either give him run support, or block enough shots, or play tight enough that on maybe an off night, it (stops at) two and not four."

The fact is, the Jets gave Hellebuyck plenty of run support, sifting three past the hottest goalie in the world of late, young Binnington. The tandem of Mark Scheifele and Blake Wheeler arrived for work, with a goal and assist apiece, and Patrik Laine scored his second of the series on a signature one-timer on the power play.

Then Game 2 was, alas, a metaphor for a Jets season that has seemingly rumbled along on six of eight cylinders since October. Needing the big boys to show up and produce offensively, Scheifele, Wheeler and Laine obliged — but then the goaltending goes south on them. And their five-on-five play also dips, outscored 4-1 by St. Louis during even-strength play.

The Jets are 0-2, a deficit from which 87 per cent of NHL teams do not survive, and if you think all of those numbers look bleak, these next few digits won't make you feel any better:

- Six: the number of consecutive playoff games the Jets have lost at home.
- Five: the running number of consecutive losses at home this season.
- And nine losses in 11 games, the skid the Jets are currently riding since a season-ending dive right into this fruitless playoff season.

"It's not just breaks. They've been playing well," said Adam Lowry of the Blues. "They've made some great plays behind the net, off the rush. They've defended extremely hard. They're a hard team to play against. They don't give you a lot. They deserve a lot of credit there, too."

The Blues, as we've chronicled, spent the first three months of the season searching for their game. But they've found it, and they're confident that the game they can lay down is going to be better than the other guy's almost every night.

The Jets are confident their game can win, too. If only they could find it. Or find all of the elements on the same night.

After a trip to the Western Conference Final last season, 2018-19 was supposed to be a coronation for the NHL's most patient build, a franchise that drafted and developed its way to being one step away from a Stanley Cup a year ago.

Now, this.

They're 0-2 against the West's hottest team since Jan. 1, and every element of the Blues game is just that much better than Winnipeg's. Especially the goaltending.

Now we go to St. Louis. The two teams, and even the damned journalists.

"They haven't won," said a staunch Hellebuyck. "We've got a lot of heart in here, and we're gonna fight. Every inch, every battle."

"Nothing's over. Two-oh is not the end of the world."

No, it's not the end of the world. But the Winnipeg Jets can probably see it from here, if they squint real hard.

It's right over there. On the other side of that big, silver arch.

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 04.13.2019

1140571 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Maple Leafs' speed, elusiveness key to overwhelming Chara once again

Chris Johnston | @reporterchris

April 12, 2019, 6:10 PM

BOSTON — They planned to chip away at the Boston Bruins foundation the old fashioned way, by skating through Zdeno Chara and getting behind him for stretch passes and hitting him at every opportunity.

But never did the Toronto Maple Leafs expect to have so much success so quickly against the big man, who looked more like someone trying to direct traffic than halt it in Game 1 of this first-round series.

That Chara, at age 42, is still considered a top shutdown option for Bruce Cassidy is a miracle of sports science. The left-shot defender finds himself under particular duress when lining up across from the Leafs, who are built on speed and elusiveness and tilted heavily towards their right side.

There's crafty Mitch Marner, whom Cassidy compared to Wayne Gretzky after Thursday's two-goal performance. Then Kasperii Kapanen, a straight lines speed demon like his father Sami. Then William Nylander, who expertly uses his edges and doesn't break stride while constantly scanning the options around him, and Connor Brown, a dogged worker who blew past Chara in the third period of Toronto's 4-1 victory.

All told, they are a group that respects the Bruins captain but are not intimidated by him. They see an opportunity to use his six-foot-nine, 250-pound frame against him and become a handful in the Boston zone.

"Just be heavy on him. Just a heavy game," Kapanen said Friday of the approach to Big Zee. "Try to hit everybody as much as you can, especially him. Try to wear him down, he's a big man."

"He's played in the league a long time, but he's getting older."



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A couple Leafs players delighted in the video clip that worked its way around social media showing Trevor Moore knock Chara to the ice. Moore gave up 70 pounds and roughly 11 inches in that exchange, and gushed about getting to line up across from him in his Stanley Cup playoff debut: "He's the guy that I have tremendous respect for and a guy who I watched growing up. It's surreal to be on the same ice as him."

While it's only one game in a NHL career that's featured 1,645 of them, Cassidy will have his hands full if Chara doesn't bounce back on Saturday night. The coach's most pressing concern is neutralizing Marner's line, and he switched away from Torey Krug and Brandon Carlo in that matchup early in Game 1.

The Chara-Charlie McAvoy pairing didn't fare particularly well in their place — seeing Marner and his linemates control 62.5 per cent of attempts against them, while scoring a goal in the first period.

Chara, in particular, struggled with Toronto's speed. He was beaten clean on a couple long stretch passes through the neutral zone and took Boston's only minor penalty of the game when he held up a racing Nylander in the waning minutes.

"He couldn't really do much," said Nylander. "It would have been maybe a breakaway. So he kind of had to."

Because of his size, Chara has a special dispensation from the league to use a longer stick than any other player. He usually gets his 65-inch Warrior on an opposing attacker with a full head of steam, making it tougher to drive towards the net.

But the Leafs still see an open path, one that often means taking the puck directly towards his feet and working through his wingspan. Auston Matthews rang a shot off the post in Game 1 by doing a curl-and-drag inside that space.

"[His stick] creates a lot of gaps," said Kapanen. "Pass it through the triangle. Try to shoot it through the triangle."

Chara chalked the performance up to not having enough "awareness" of what the Leafs were trying to do, presumably on the stretch passes out of their own zone. He won't be caught surprised again in Game 2.

Still, he'll be shouldering a big load as the Bruins try to find a way to slow Marner down and salvage a split at TD Garden. Toronto plans to keep blazing a trail towards his side of the ice with the pedal down.

"If you stutter or you're flat-footed at any point, he's going to pin you and eliminate you," said Brown.

"It's just making sure we're trying to work the ice behind him, trying to get behind him and trying to just keep our feet moving on the cycle," said Marner.

They're betting he won't be able to keep up.

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 04.13.2019

1140572 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Rival WATCH: What they're saying about Leafs', Flames' Game 1 wins

Rory Boylen | @RoryBoylen

April 12, 2019, 3:27 PM

The Toronto Maple Leafs weren't trending in the right direction heading into the playoffs, with questions about their goaltending and defensive play. But despite falling behind 1-0 to the Boston Bruins in the first

period, it was Toronto that looked like the more experienced team, better prepared to start the playoffs on the right foot.

Boston gave up a few breakaways and odd-man rushes, exposing Tuukka Rask to a variety of high-danger chances. Meanwhile, Zdeno Chara didn't look like his usual self and the Bruins as a whole often didn't look like the polished team that was able to string together a 19-game point streak this season.

Out West, there was some consternation in Calgary over Bill Peters's decision to start Mike Smith in Game 1 following his 23-16-2 season with a 2.72 GAA and .898 save percentage. But Smith looked much closer to his 2012 self and was the difference in Game 1.

Now optimism abounds in Leafs Nation and among the C of Red. But what are they saying about the start in these series elsewhere? Here's your out-of-market look:

Enter now for your chance to win big! \$50,000 in cash prizes up for grabs. Grand prize includes: A new 2019 Ram Power Wagon.

Kevin Paul-Dupont wrote about the opening game of the series, focusing on how out of character their mistakes were, which opened the door for a quick, opportunistic Leafs team to take advantage of:

After finishing the regular season with 49 wins, their game most nights characterized by deft puck management and smart play in all three zones of the ice, the Bruins suddenly, and uncharacteristically, summoned their late-1960s California Golden Seals from within.

...Silver lining for the Black-and-Gold? Only the probability, a high one, that they can't play worse.

It was not like the Tampa series last year in which they folded in four straight after taking a 1-0 series lead. In all four losses, they didn't aid and abet the Bolts by beating themselves. Tampa simply was the better team, winning the series with better scores and greater grind.

It's possible the Leafs, too, are the better team in this series. They certainly are faster and they also have the trickiest player on the dance card in the gifted Marner.

Adam Denhard wrote about how the style of play in Game 1 favoured the Maple Leafs and that when Boston, desperately, tried to match the Leafs in that regard it exacerbated their issues. When the Bruins were getting chances, he writes, they did so playing a type of game they want around the net:

Toronto, meanwhile, had no ill effects of the long change. Over and over again, the Leafs found skating and passing seams, and capitalized thoroughly on Boston's turnovers at their attacking blue line. Marner and Tavares both had golden breakaway chances, and Marner's conversion to a penalty shot goal was the backbreaker.

...As play wound down, the Bruins tried to compensate by playing Toronto's game, turning their east-west passing into longer and longer attempts at breakouts/breakaways. The passes were off-target or were called for icing. The 'identity' chances for Boston were where the better scoring chances came, as Charlie Coyle was a man possessed near the Toronto net. His flurry of shots and good forecheck were unfortunately paired with less backcheck in the third period — and let's hope that it was a coaching instruction that's correctable, and not a habit for the forward.

The main area of concern coming into the series for Toronto was that Frederik Andersen, for the second year in a row, posted a save percentage under .900 over his last 12 regular season starts. The fact he looked so good in Game 1 was worthy of recognition from Emily Kaplan:

Yes, Marner got two goals and should be recognized. But if the Maple Leafs are going to advance, they'll need more nights like this from Andersen. He looked confident. He weathered bursts of pressure. He did it all in a hostile environment. By turning away 37 of 38 shots, Andersen was a huge boost for Toronto.

Steve Conroy wrote about a contrast in the start to this year's Bruins-Maple Leafs series to last year:



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

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This time around, the Bruins were the ones who looked like playoff neophytes.

They looked jittery at times, especially some young players. They turned the puck over in high danger areas. They allowed breakaway after breakaway in a disastrous second period. They passed when they should have shot much of the night. And, no, the Bruins did not get the timely save when they needed it, but they also allowed far more Grade A chances than any team who thinks of itself as elite ever should.

All of that led to a total flip of the script from last year's first round series against these same Toronto Maple Leafs and a 4-1 loss in Game 1. Now, after the B's battled through a brutal, injury-filled 82-game season to somehow win home-ice advantage against these Leafs once more, they handed it right back to them in one game.

Avalanche stoned by the 37-year-old goalie to open the first-round playoff series — Denver Post

Mike Chambers wrote that the difference in Game 1 was in net. While many in Calgary were unsure of the decision to start veteran Mike Smith over David Rittich, the 37-year-old came through with a shutout:

Game 1 was won by Mike Smith, the Calgary Flames' 37-year-old goalie.

His teammates obviously played a role in defeating the Avalanche 4-0 late Thursday at the Scotiabank Saddledome, but Smith and the penalty killers in front of him were the clear-cut difference before Calgary scored two late goals in the final minutes of the third period.

...Smith "only" made 26 saves, but the Avalanche generated numerous grade-A opportunities that Smith turned aside. "Smitty, Smitty, Smitty" was the popular chant all evening.

Chris Micieli saw a closer game than the 4-0 score would indicate. With the crowd becoming less of a factor before Andrew Mangiapane opened the scoring 14:25 into the second period, the story of the game could have been much different had Colorado found a way to score first on one of their early power plays:

That goal really woke up Calgary and their crowd who had been pretty lethargic once the first period high wore down. The sea of red (branded "C" of Red by Calgary) started to become a factor again, and when the Avs went a man down it didn't take long for Calgary to score again and rile up the home crowd again. This time a tip in by Matthew Tkachuk on the power play to give the Flames two goals a little over four minutes apart.

...For 55 out of 60 minutes the Avalanche were every bit as good as the Flames and while some will look at the final score and think 'blowout', those who watched saw what a goalie on his game can do to tip the scales in his teams favor.

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 04.13.2019

1140573 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Flames' Mike Smith earns redemption with heroic effort in Game 1 win

Eric Francis | @EricFrancis

April 12, 2019, 1:27 AM

CALGARY — Amidst ear-splitting chants of his name he certainly hadn't heard all year long, Mike Smith skated off the Saddledome ice Saturday night being feted as the game's first star.

He'd just made 26 saves in 4-0 win to stake the Flames to a 1-0 series lead over Colorado that marked his first playoff win in seven years.

The irony was rich as many of the folks screaming his name were singing a radically different tune earlier in the year when Smith was the recipient of Bronx cheers and even boos.

"It felt a lot better than the other," smiled Smith of the chants that will forever dot memories of his magical night.

"Honestly, I haven't quite heard anything like that before in my career and it kind of gives you some confidence, obviously, when you're hearing your name getting chanted. I haven't quite experienced what I experienced tonight throughout my 13 years in this league. I've been through a lot, but tonight was something I'll add to the list."

It was Calgary's first post-season win in four years, and the largely inexperienced group did it on the power of its depth players, a possessed Matthew Tkachuk and, of course, the 37-year-old netminder.

In a fast-paced, hard-hitting game of tremendous playoff hockey, Smith first drew sporadic chants of "Smit-ty, Smit-ty" midway through the first period before penalty-killing glove saves on Gabe Landeskog and Derick Brassard prompted a raucous C of Red crowd to chant it in unison.

By night's end, he'd had a half-dozen significant trapper snares including another on Landeskog and a show-stopper on Nathan MacKinnon in the final 10 minutes that brought the crowd to its feet.

The accolades came mere hours after he was named the starter following Thursday morning's pre-game skate.

Coach Bill Peters said the highly-anticipated yet unpopular decision had plenty to do with Smith's solid play the last few months and the fact he had experience as the man chiefly responsible for carrying Phoenix to the west final in 2012.

It paid off.

"I'm at my best when I'm playing with a little bit of an edge and a little swagger," said Smith, who split time with David Rittich this season.

"It's important especially for a goalie to have that confidence and once you have it you want to make sure you don't get too high. It feels good. It was special — something I'll probably never forget. That's a big win for our team — a big confidence booster. But we understand there's a long ways to go."

Feeding off a crowd unsure how the Flames would react to entering the playoffs as west champions and heavy favourites over the Avalanche, the Flames opened the night hitting everything that moved, which was a stirring sight given the club finished last in the league in hits this season.

Leading the charge was Tkachuk before penalty trouble shifted the early momentum and required Smith to be at his best.

It was wasn't until mid-game the Flames started pressuring Philipp Grubauer before Andrew Mangiapane scored in his first NHL playoff game — the sixth Flames rookie to do so in franchise lore. Showing tremendous patience as he skated in front of the net, Mangiapane fell to one knee with a defenceman draped all over him before sending a backhand along the ice past a sprawling Grubauer with five minutes left in the second.

Minutes later Mangiapane's fellow fourth-liner, Garnet Hathaway, was tackled as he sent a rebound off the crossbar, setting up a power play Tkachuk cashed in on seconds later.

With 62 seconds left in the frame Tkachuk's redirection of a Mark Giordano point blast beat Grubauer, who argued his ability to re-set for the shot was impeded moments earlier when his stick was caught briefly in Tkachuk's jersey. It was a weak argument and the goal was allowed to stand, setting up a tense third in which Smith shone repeatedly before Mikael Backlund's power-play goal in the final three minutes sealed the deal.



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Tkachuk's empty netter 14 seconds later set a team playoff record and capped a monster evening from the third-year pro who had two goals, four hits and drew a penalty in his first NHL playoff win.

Smith's popularity hit new heights when he assisted on Tkachuk's second goal — a delicious twist given how hard fans have been on Smith all year for his rough start and penchant for playing the puck.

"They've probably been a little upset at me for a couple mistakes I've made back there," laughed Smith, who had never fully gained the confidence of most locals following a shaky start to the year — until Thursday night.

"That was a cool moment. Chucky made a great play. I'm not back there to get assists by any means, but it's nice to make good plays."

For what it's worth, teams that win Game 1 via shutout have won nine consecutive playoff series.

Game 2 goes Saturday night in Calgary at 8:30 p.m. MT.

Smith, um, is the likely starter.

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 04.13.2019

1140574 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / How Leafs' Babcock used defence to 'out-coach' Cassidy

Luke Fox | @lukefoxjukebox

April 12, 2019, 4:12 PM

BOSTON — Ostensibly, Mike Babcock was talking about puck battles and net-front boxouts when he said that playoff time boils down to one thing: "You get to look at the guy across from you and you say, 'I've got to beat him.'"

But that same one-on-one test of smarts and wills and execution applies to coaches as well.

So, after losing his past four Round 1 chess matches and having his decision-making publicly questioned the past couple months with a scrutiny not yet reached in his Toronto Maple Leafs tenure, it is no small thing that Babcock swatted the first significant piece off Bruce Cassidy's board.

The Leafs' 4-1 defeat of the Bruins Thursday — Toronto's first series-opening victory in 16 years — was a puzzle comprised of a billion tiny decisions and one big, juicy one.

Babcock tasked Jake Muzzin and Nikita Zaitsev — and not Morgan Rielly and Ron Hainsey — as the primary defensive shutdown pair against Cassidy's stacked super line of 79-plus point-producers Brad Marchand, Patrice Bergeron and David Pastrnak.

"They need special care, there's no doubt about it. There's lines in this league where you need everyone aware when they're on the ice, else they'll bite ya," Muzzin said. "I thought we did a good job tracking them. I didn't find there was a lot of rush chances with them. The best way to do it is keep the puck and make 'em play in their zone, really."

"It's a good challenge. We're excited for it. We wanna shut 'em down."

Moreover, and more interesting, the man who doesn't do anything by accident, didn't inform Muzzin and Zaitsev of their burden until minutes before game time.

"I think they did a good job that they didn't tell that for a long time, so we wouldn't overthink about it or something," Zaitsev said Friday, after the club's off-day meeting.

Helping limit the Bergeron group's zone time and shielding them from the scoreboard at even-strength, no defenceman posted better possession metrics than Muzzin (56.25% Corsi) in Game 1.

The oft-criticized Zaitsev, dangled as trade bait earlier this season, wasn't far behind, and the Russian made a tremendous, diving, second-effort play to bust up the odd-man rush he and Muzzin did get caught on.

"I'm lucky to be able to play with him," Muzzin said. "He's a competitor. He's feisty. He hates being scored on."

No one may be more appreciative of the low-risk duo than goalie Frederik Andersen.

"They've helped me out a lot," Andersen explained. "Muzz, he's been great at talking. He's been in the league for a long time now. He's very mature and very confident out there. I think that helps out everyone, especially Z. It's great to see them develop some chemistry especially on the defensive side of the puck."

Credit an assist to GM Kyle Dubas for that.

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By acquiring the Cup champion, nearly a full month ahead of the trade deadline, Babcock was granted valuable extra games to find a six-man configuration that works.

"It wasn't just about Muzz. It was about our group and doing the best for them," said Babcock, who axed ice time for Jake Gardiner (16:32) and Travis Dermott (12:51) as they ease back from injury. "We think that pair can get you better."

In Muzzin's brief Toronto tenure, he's bounced from Morgan Rielly to Zaitsev to Dermott and back to Zaitsev, whom he says plays a similar game to former L.A. mate Alec Martinez — save the language barrier and the stick curve. He might not have been afforded so many iron-out-the-wrinkles games were he not obtained in January.

"Being able to play with [Zaitsev] for a few weeks now has helped for sure with certain reads," Muzzin said.

"Especially when the game gets hectic and you get tired and you're running around, sometimes you rely on knowing where he's going to be. There's a comfort level there that we've got to grow together with here."

The ripple effect of Muzzin-Zaitsev tackling the Bergeron triumvirate looks bright.

Norris conversation piece Rielly says this configuration frees up his offensive flair, and Hainsey's plodding feet are less likely to get exposed by a trio that whips the biscuit around like they've got eyeballs popping out every screw hole in their helmets.

"They've improved a lot," Rielly said of the other top pair. "When a guy joins a team halfway through a season, there's an adjustment period, whether it's the team, the system or your partner. They were outstanding in Game 1."

The same could be said for nearly everyone in a light sweater Thursday, and the calculating man in the suit pushing their buttons.

"We went through our lineup. They probably outplayed us in every position, outcoached us obviously, so they deserved to win," Cassidy conceded Friday. "I don't think we executed our game plan very well. That's on the staff to get that message through."

Babcock, whose respect for Bergeron might rank only a half-step below his opinion of Crosby and Lidstrom, has been careful not to isolate the Tavares line and the Muzzin-Zaitsev pair as the only five in charge of wrapping yellow tape around the Bruins' Danger Line.



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"You don't win by accident over and over and over again. You figure out the formula," Babcock said. "[Bergeron] figured out the formula early. Now we have to."

Babcock reserves the right to tinker with the ingredients as this thing comes to a boil, but without question, it's Cassidy's move now.

"There will be adjustments as the series goes on," Babcock assured. "He's got to look at his team and play the roster he thinks is the best, and we're going to do the same here."

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 04.13.2019

1140575 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Lightning coach Jon Cooper: 'This is a five-alarm fire'

Emily Sadler | @EmmySadler

April 13, 2019, 1:39 AM

Hear that? That's the sound of alarm bells going off in Tampa Bay.

Down 2-0 in their first-round series against the Columbus Blue Jackets after Friday's 5-1 loss, the powerhouse Lightning are looking like mere mortals. It's a look we're not used to seeing with this team, whose 62-16-4 record this year matched a league record for most victories in a single season and saw them finish a whopping 21 points ahead of the second-place club.

As we know, though, things can change very quickly in the post-season.

"Things just happen so fast [in the playoffs]. It's 0-0 and there's a lot of excitement going into Game 1 and then all of a sudden you're down 2-0 at home and alarms are going off," head coach Jon Cooper told reporters after Friday's Game 2. "Have we faced a ton of adversity this year? We haven't. I've been in the league six years and it probably hasn't gone any easier than it has this year."

After the first 20 minutes of Wednesday's Game 1, it looked like the Lightning would make easy work of the Blue Jackets. But it's been the exact opposite ever since, with Columbus proving on Friday that their rallying effort two nights prior was no fluke. Since the Lightning's dominant first period, the Blue Jackets have outshot Tampa Bay 48-41, outscored them 9-1 (including seven unanswered goals to finish Game 1 and start Game 2), and have clearly gotten under their opponent's skin.

The loss marked the first time the Lightning have lost back-to-back games since Feb. 7. For a team that faced little to no adversity through 82 regular season games, they've certainly found some now.

"So now we've got some adversity, and teams face this all the time. You face it in little pieces. This is a five-alarm fire," Cooper said.

"Sometimes you have to go through stuff like this. We'll see how we respond," he continued. "The one thing I do know about being with this group is, they find a way. They find a way. I'm sitting here and we're going to be in Columbus 48 hours from now and there's no other bench in the league I want to be behind but ours. That's how much faith I have in this group."

While the outcomes of these first two games are indeed alarming for the Lightning and their fans, this one is still far from over. In fact, as Blue Jackets fans will (painfully) recall, it was just last year that Columbus was up 2-0 in their first-round series against the Washington Capitals. And, well, we all know how that one turned out.

And if you've blocked it from memory, Victor Hedman will be happy to remind you.

As entertaining and full of surprises as this series has been, it's about to get even better as the stakes get higher. On that note, here are four of the biggest takeaways from Games 1 and 2.

Playoff Bobrovsky is a good thing

He's great in the regular season, but Bobrovsky hasn't exactly built a strong post-season reputation during his time in Columbus and was one of the biggest question marks on the team heading into the playoffs. After a nightmare start in Game 1, head coach John Tortorella's decision to keep him in the crease has paid off big time in helping the netminder rewrite that negative narrative. Since that porous first period Wednesday night, Bobrovsky went four periods with a clean sheet and has let in just a single marker on 41 shots. In his 18 playoff games with Columbus before Friday's matchup, the 30-year-old had never let in fewer than three goals, making Friday's 5-1 victory his best Blue Jackets performance yet. Is this the new "Playoff Bobrovsky"?

Tampa Bay's stars aren't shining

Not to take anything away from the Blue Jackets' excellent play, but the Lightning haven't been looking like their usual selves. Their pace is still strong, winning lots of battles — but not the battles that really count.

Their biggest goal-scorers, Nikita Kucherov and Steven Stamkos, have yet to register a single point. Their top rearguard, Victor Hedman, hasn't looked like himself. Goaltender Andrei Vasilevski's stat line (4.58 goals against average, .830 save percentage) is a far cry from his Vezina-worthy regular season numbers.

And, to make matters worse...

Kucherov could be in hot water

The biggest numbers beside Kucherov's name right now are his penalty minutes. The forward was issued a five-minute major and a 10-minute game misconduct for boarding Columbus's Markus Nutivaara during Game 2, and will have a hearing with the Player Safety Department on Saturday and risks suspension.

Duchene makes history

The Columbus Blue Jackets bulked up at the NHL Trade Deadline, but it took a little while for some of those new additions to make their mark. Matt Duchene certainly made his presence known Friday night when he scored his first ever playoff goal.

Just let that sink in for a minute.

The rental forward, one of three pickups from the Ottawa Senators, was the best playmaker on the ice in Tampa Bay in Game 2 and even wrote his name into the Blue Jackets' history books.

Looks like those deadline deals are paying off for Columbus, who just barely squeaked into the playoffs thanks to a crunch-time surge. Momentum can be a powerful thing, and we're about to find out how far they can take it.

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 04.13.2019

1140576 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Jets' Brandon Tanev buzzing ahead of return to playoff hockey

Mark Spector | @sportsnetspec

April 12, 2019, 4:37 PM



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

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WINNIPEG — Do you think Brandon Tanev is jacked to get back into the Winnipeg Jets lineup for Game 2 tonight? He reminded reporters no less than four times that "it's playoff hockey" during his media scrum, just in case any of the scribes were not aware.

"Feeling good! It's the most exciting time of the year. It's playoff hockey," said Tanev, who missed the last two games of the regular season and Game 1 after being slashed on the hand by Minnesota's Eric Staal. You never know during the playoffs how fully healed an injury like this one could be, but Tanev insists that the Jets medical team leaves him ready to contribute.

"I leave that up to the training staff. It's their job to get me ready when I can be and they do a great job of that here. It's playoff hockey, like I said. You reiterate that." He certainly does.

We're not sure where the speedy Tanev will be deployed by head coach Paul Maurice, but to our eye he is an elite fourth-line checker who kills penalties very well, chipping in 14 goals and 29 points this season. Now, he may get priced out of that role with his contract up after the season, but Tanev is that depth guy who is better than most other team's depth guys — another reason why the Jets have built an elite team here, with 213 points in the past two seasons.

"Just his energy. He brings it every night," said fellow depth player Adam Lowry. "He's a heart-and-soul player — so invaluable on our P.K., so valuable on our forecheck. When he comes into the lineup generally we form the checking line. He's vital to our success. He's in on the body. He would have even added to the physicality in Game 1.

"He's going to be revved up. He's going to be buzzing tonight."

Since arriving in a Feb. 25 trade for Nik Petan, Par Lindholm has found a place on head coach Paul Maurice's trust tree here in Winnipeg. The 27-year-old played 61 games for Toronto, and prefers the North American game ahead of the European style he played during seven seasons in Sweden.

"Some of the puzzle pieces are different but it's still hockey," Lindholm said. "There's less room, you have to be faster in your mind. That was a big part of my game back home in Sweden, being fast with decisions and I think that's good to have here, too."

When the trade was made, did he wonder if there was room for him on the Jets roster?

"First of all, I was happy it was Winnipeg. When (Toronto GM Kyle) Dubas called me I figured the season was going to be over in a month, but then I heard it was the Jets and I was excited," he said. "I looked at the lineup and Winnipeg has at least as good forwards as Toronto. Depth-wise, I wasn't sure if I was going to play. I was scratched for 15 games and I don't see that as a bad thing. The doc here, Craig (Slaunwhite) is so good working with you off ice with strength and conditioning, and I feel in way better shape now."

Livestream every game of the Stanley Cup Playoffs, blackout-free. Plus stream the Blue Jays & MLB, Raptors and NBA Playoffs matchups and more.

Roslovic Out?

Young Jack Roslovic could become the odd man out with Tanev coming in. He's had some trouble becoming a mainstay in this lineup since being drafted 25th overall in the 2015 draft.

How does he stake a claim to a permanent spot in the Top 12?

"You'd have to take someone else's job, is what you'd have to do," said Maurice. "Be better at whatever else that they do. He's playing the right wing right now, so he's either got to be better than Blake Wheeler, Patrik Laine. If Tanev is available, it'd be (Tanev) right now. I've got Nik Ehlers on the right, so he's got to be better than one of those guys. And if not, you build and work until you are."

Roslovic skated late after the regulars had come off of the practice ice Friday morning, a sure sign he won't be dressing for Game 2.

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 04.13.2019

1140577 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Flames' fourth liners take centre stage when needed most in Game 1 win

Eric Francis | @EricFrancis

April 12, 2019, 6:19 PM

CALGARY — The patience was sublime. The timing, impeccable.

Late in the second period of a scoreless, series-opening battle with Colorado, Andrew Mangiapane scooped the puck from the half wall, kicked it to his stick, scooted across the front of the net with a couple dangles and out-waited Philipp Grubauer before backhanding the puck in on one knee.

The rookie who waited 26 games for his first NHL goal had scored his first post-season marker on his very first try.

Cue the type of deafening roar none of the five Flames skaters on the ice had ever heard before.

The turnover that started the play was prompted by a Garnet Hathaway hit on Erik Johnson and aided by a net-front pick play by Derek Ryan on Nikita Zadorov.

Just as they've done consistently the last month, the Calgary Flames' fourth liners were massive difference-makers in a game that saw all three making their playoff debut.

"I think him and Doc (Ryan) were probably having a conversation when I wasn't there — that's where he learned it," smiled Hathaway when asked how long it took to teach Mangiapane to finish that way.

"He's a great player and that's not going to be the only goals he'll have like that. I expect a lot more."

Few others had many expectations at all when the trio was first introduced in December following Mangiapane's call-up from Stockton where the former OHL star became a point-per-game player at age 23.

Yet, there was the 5-foot-10, 180-pound winger taking centre stage when the team needed it most.

Indeed, the Flames' depth was what many people figured would be the difference in this series. And if the highlight-reel goal wasn't convincing enough, the Flames have difference-making skill on every line, perhaps the three penalty kills before it better illustrated the impact of guys like Ryan and Hathaway.

Or maybe it was the play three minutes after Mangiapane's goal that saw Hathaway draw a penalty on the doorstep of the Avalanche net where he fired a shot off the crossbar.

On the ensuing power play Matthew Tkachuk put the Flames up 2-0 just before the second intermission.

"That was huge for sure," said Ryan.

"Everyone is talking about the goal but then we drew that penalty too and if that goal goes in it's obviously huge but then we end up scoring on the power play."

Mike Smith's monster night would close the door from there.



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

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On a night in which Johnny Gaudreau, Sean Monahan and Elias Lindholm were pedestrian, the fourth line picked up the slack by continuing their month-long surge. Yes, Mikael Backlund, Michael Frolik and Tkachuk shut down Colorado's big guns while scoring three goals of their own in a 4-0 win. Clutch.

But it was young Hathaway combining with undersized Mangiapane and Ryan that broke the game open.

"The game has changed over the years – the lockout and the rules changed on obstruction and so you're always looking for competitive players more so than anything," said coach Bill Peters of a line he refuses to call his "fourth" line.

"I'd rather have a 5-foot-11 guy who is in the trenches every night than a 6-foot-4 guy who is on the perimeter.

We just worry about who is in the heart of the game and those guys are in the heart of the game and do the heavy lifting."

Ryan, who spent four years at the University of Alberta and four years in Europe before making his NHL debut at age 29, entered the playoffs with six goals and 13 points in his last 13 games.

Mangiapane and Hathaway have now combined for nine goals in that span, making them the team's most prolific line the last month despite playing in the neighbourhood of just ten minutes a night.

"It's just the way the game has changed and it speaks to what fans want to see – they want to see offence and speed and skill," said Ryan, 31, when asked about diminutive speedsters like himself flourishing on fourth lines.

"That's just the way hockey has changed. I couldn't get into the league 10-12 years ago because it was the exact opposite – it was meat and potatoes and bigger, slower bottom-six guys, but luckily the game has changed, allowing smaller and skilled players to have an impact."

On nights like Thursday when Calgary's big guns were eerily silent once again, Ryan's DAG Line came through again, keeping Colorado on its heels.

"It was our first playoff game for all three of us and once we settled in and remembered it's just a hockey game we were able to take over five-on-five," said Hathaway, who killed more than three minutes of penalties alongside Ryan.

"We don't spend a lot of time in our own zone, so when we wear the other team down in their zone it helps our whole team. You see with successful teams in the playoffs special teams are huge and that is a big part of our mindset going in as well."

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1140578 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Canadiens season-end grades: Domi put together a year to remember

Eric Engels

April 12, 2019, 2:01 PM

With a 96-point season in the books, and after a 25-point improvement in the standings, it was as positive of a campaign as the Montreal Canadiens could've put together without making the playoffs.

As a team, they finished with 44 wins and the 14th-best record in the National Hockey League. They ran the sixth-best 5-on-5 offence, ranked

12th in goals against and finished 13th on the penalty kill. And along the way, a dozen players set new career-highs in either goals, assists, or points, and a couple more tied their best in one or more of the categories.

With a closer look at those individual performances, here are our player grades for the 2018-19 Canadiens.

Carey Price: GP: 66 | Record: 35-24-6 | SV% .918 | GAA 2.49

Our grade: A

Justification: A big bounce back from what was statistically the worst season of his career in 2017-18. Broke the record for franchise wins along the way, and put up the second-most wins in the NHL and a .925 save percentage from Dec. 1 onward.

One thing to improve on: Start to the season. With the Canadiens jumping out to a 6-2-2 start, Price was steady but not the difference in any of their wins. His 3-5-2 November, with a .886 save percentage and 3.81 goals-against average, was the one blemish keeping him from an A+ grade.

Antti Niemi: GP: 17 | Record: 8-6-2 | SV% .887 | GAA 3.78

Our grade: F

Justification: The one player told by Bergevin he won't be back next season, and it's no surprise since he was pulled from two of his last four starts and closed out the year with four straight losses, allowing 14 goals in the process.

One thing to improve on: Consistency. Niemi's play was unpredictable this season. He had a career night, with a 53-save win over the Florida Panthers on Jan. 15, and he followed it up with those last four games.

Max Domi: GP: 82 | G: 28 | A: 44 | P: 72

Our grade: A+

Justification: He scored 10 more goals, eight more assists and 20 more points than in any one of his previous three seasons, and he managed to do it while exclusively playing centre at this level for the first time in his career.

One thing to improve: Faceoffs. He won just 447 of the 996 draws he took, finishing off with a 44.9% efficiency rating.

Tomas Tatar: GP: 80 | G: 25 | A: 33 | P: 58

Our grade: A

Justification: He put up six more assists and two more points than he had in any of his previous eight seasons, and he was equally effective on the defensive side of the puck—posting a team-high plus-21.

One thing to improve: Power play scoring. Had he just hit his career-average of nine power play goals, he'd have notched the first 30-goal season of his career. Instead he finished with his lowest total (four) since his rookie season.

Jonathan Drouin: GP: 81 | G: 18 | A: 35 | P: 53

Our grade: D

Justification: Despite setting a new career-high in assists and tying his previous high in points, he fell three goals short of his best and failed to produce when it mattered most—managing just one goal and two assists over the final 18 games while the Canadiens were fighting for a playoff spot. This was supposed to be a breakout season for Drouin, but he got stuck in neutral for too much of it.

One thing to improve: Consistency. As captain Shea Weber put it on Tuesday, "I think if he's consistently at that level, and he's playing his best game, I think even he knows he wants to be more consistent and contributing the way he knows he can every night."

Phillip Danault: GP: 81 | G: 12 | A: 41 | P: 53

Our grade: A+



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**Justification:** Danault shattered previous highs in assists and points while establishing himself as an elite shutdown centre, one who worked his way into the Selke Trophy conversation.

**One thing to improve:** Needs to shoot more. Danault finished with just 132 shots on net, or less than any other Canadiens forward to have played at least 50 games.

Brendan Gallagher, GP: 82 | G: 33 | A: 19 | P: 52

**Our grade:** A

**Justification:** After scoring 31 goals a year ago, the beating heart of the Canadiens found the net 33 times. He also led the NHL's forwards in 5-on-5 shot attempts (420) and finished sixth in shots on net (302).

**One thing to improve:** Play on the power play. He registered 26 shots less on the power play than he did a year ago and as a result finished with half as many goals (4) in the category.

Andrew Shaw, GP: 63 | G: 19 | A: 28 | P: 47

**Our grade:** A+

**Justification:** Beat his career-high in points by eight and did it in 17 less games. Not bad for a player who missed all of training camp after coming back from knee surgery a full month sooner than expected. Not even a mid-season neck injury that induced concussion symptoms slowed this guy down, with 45 of his 47 points coming over his last 52 games. Simply put, an outstanding season.

**One thing to improve:** That temper. He just can't help himself sometimes.

Jeff Petry, GP: 82 | G: 13 | A: 33 | P: 46

**Our grade:** A+

**Justification:** What else are you supposed to give a guy who notched career-highs in goals, assists and points and finished 15th among defencemen in scoring? Without the work Petry did in Shea Weber's absence through to late November, the Canadiens wouldn't have been in the playoff race—and certainly not in it all the way until the penultimate night of the regular season.

**One thing to improve:** Hit the net. Of the 408 shots Petry attempted, only 172 were on net.

Jesper Kotkaniemi, GP: 79 | G: 11 | A: 23 | P: 34

**Our grade:** B

**Justification:** All in all, a solid season for the NHL's youngest player, but no goals on the road, and the wall hit full force with about 15 games remaining, making it less than perfect. Still, the potential is clear; he's going to be an A-level player for years to come.

**One thing to improve:** That skating stride. It's unconventional at best and choppy at worst. Some muscle added in the summer should make it more explosive, but it can use some refining.

Shea Weber, GP: 58 | G: 14 | A: 19 | P: 33

**Our grade:** B+

**Justification:** A 33-year-old player jumps into the season 24 games in, coming off major surgery on both legs and a near year-long break from hockey, and manages to score the eighth-most goals among defencemen in the league? Tremendous. If not for a lull in late-February/early March, where his ice-time needed to be reduced, it was a near perfect season for the captain of the Canadiens.

**One thing to improve:** Less giveaways. Weber had 12 more than his career average, but in 24 less games than usual.

Paul Byron, GP: 56 | G: 15 | A: 16 | P: 31

**Our grade:** A

**Justification:** If not for injuries, Byron was on pace to beat career highs in every relevant category. He still came close to tying his bests but in 36 less games.

**One thing to improve:** Sorry, we don't have a single suggestion. We'd say shoot more, but he's a career 17 per-cent shooter because he only really elects to shoot from in close.

Artturi Lehkonen, GP: 82 | G: 11 | A: 20 | P: 31

**Our grade:** C

**Justification:** He's better than what he showed this year, in almost every way. Granted he does all the important little things, but 11 goals with that shot? Not good enough. Not even close. If his responsible play continues to earn him top-six minutes, he's going to have to produce much more.

**One thing to improve:** Poise. A guy who misses this many high-danger chances (he had 73 high-danger shot attempts according to [naturalstatstrick.com](http://naturalstatstrick.com)) is a little too jittery in the crunch. Meditate, Artturi. Visualize the puck going in, and get back to doing what you know how to do, what got you to the NHL in the first place.

Joel Armia, GP: 57 | G: 13 | A: 10 | P: 23

**Our grade:** C-

**Justification:** Technically, Armia set a new career-high in goals and did so in 22 less games. But a guy with his remarkable puck-protection skills, his heavy shot, his quick release, his puck-stealing stick and his instincts should be scoring double. A knee injury knocked him out of 25 games, and he deserves some slack for how he looked for the first couple of weeks post-return, but this guy has more to give in almost every department.

**One thing to improve:** That one-timer. Unofficial statistic, but he surely led the team in fanned shots on one-timers.

Jordie Benn, GP: 81 | G: 5 | A: 17 | P: 22

**Our grade:** B+

**Justification:** He matched his career-high in assists and beat his personal bests in goals and points, and we're talking about a player who's known strictly for his defence. Benn finished plus-15, had a 53.4 per cent corsi for and blocked more shots than any other player on the team. That's as good as it gets for a third-pairing defenceman.

**One thing to improve:** Playing the left side. He's far more effective on the right, and because the Canadiens are thin on the left he's forced to play there more often. It's a problem he might not have to worry as much about if he ends up signing elsewhere this summer.

Brett Kulak, GP: 57 | G: 6 | A: 11 | P: 17

**Our grade:** B

**Justification:** Kulak took a giant step forward and established himself as an NHL regular after playing 70 games in Calgary last season and starting off this one in Laval. He put up career-highs in every category and played steadily in a role that's well above his paygrade (a \$900,000 top-four defenceman).

**One thing to improve:** Needs to be stronger on the puck. Was knocked off of it too easily at times.

Victor Mete, GP: 71 | G: 0 | A: 13 | P: 13

**Our grade:** A-

**Justification:** Emerged as a legitimate top-four defenceman, played against top opposition every night and was over 50 per cent in corsi. At 20-years-old, the party is just getting started for this 5-foot-9 speedster.

**One thing to improve:** His shot. If it was better, he'd not own the NHL's longest goal drought (120 games and counting).

Mike Reilly, GP: 57 | G: 3 | A: 8 | P: 11



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Our grade: D-

Justification: Reilly has the speed, the passing ability and the shot to be a legitimate offensive defenceman. But if he doesn't provide offence—he didn't provide enough of it in the 57 games he played—he doesn't do enough to justify his place in the lineup. His inconsistency put him out of favour with coach Claude Julien, and Christian Folin's acquisition at the trade deadline put him out of a job.

One thing to improve on: Decision making. He showed flashes of brilliance playing as simply as he possibly could. It was when he was thinking about what to do that he complicated matters beyond repair.

Jordan Weal, GP: 16 | G: 4 | A: 6 | P: 10

Our grade: A

Justification: In a limited sample size, after he was acquired from the Arizona Coyotes for Michael Chaput at the trade deadline, Weal proved worthy of a new contract with the Canadiens. He got his opportunity and took advantage of it, and he gave the lifeless power play a boost.

One thing to improve on: His shot can use some work, but we're nitpicking.

Matthew Peca, GP: 39 | G: 3 | A: 7 | P: 10

Our grade: F

Justification: Peca got the opportunity of his career when he signed a one-way, two-year, \$2.6-million contract with the Canadiens following just 20 games played at this level. The fourth-line centre position was his to lose, and lost it, he did. Just like he quickly lost his job as a fourth-line winger. In the end, he was scratched for all but a couple of the 43 games he missed.

One thing to improve on: Anything. If he's not going to be a secondary scorer, he has to be an elite penalty killer. If he's not going to be counted on to play in an offensive role, he can't be a minus-11 from the fourth line. Peca needs to find a specialty fast or he'll be playing in another league by this time next year.

Nate Thompson, GP: 25 | G: 1 | A: 6 | P: 7

Our grade: B

Justification: He did exactly what was expected of him after he was acquired from the Los Angeles Kings in February. A steady faceoff man who helped the penalty kill tremendously and brought experience to one of the youngest teams in the league.

One thing to improve on: At age 34, he might just be done with the improvement process. But if he remains in as good shape as he appeared to be in with Montreal, he should get a contract somewhere this summer.

Charles Hudon, GP: 32 | G: 3 | A: 2 | P: 5

Our grade: F

Justification: After working so hard to finally break through with the Canadiens a year ago—notching 30 points in 70 games as a rookie—Hudon took his foot off the gas. Playing seven more games than Thompson and registering two fewer points says everything about his play. We felt as bad as anyone seeing him choke back tears as he discussed his murky future in Montreal when he met reporters earlier this week, but he was his own worst enemy this season. Bad offensive-zone penalties, bad puck management, and a lack of speed put him in Julien's doghouse.

One thing to improve: Be the hungriest player at training camp next fall. Canadiens general manager Marc Bergevin said on Tuesday that he hasn't thrown in the towel on you, Charles. Show him what kind of player you can be.

Nicolas Deslauriers, GP: 48 | G: 2 | A: 3 | P: 5

Our grade: D-

Justification: A strong showing in a couple of important games down the stretch saved Deslauriers from a failing grade, but his production was a quarter of what it was a year ago. A facial injury hurt his game out of the gate and he never really found his best self at any point. He was slow in all facets and lacking in the type of energy that made him effective in his debut season with the Canadiens.

One thing to improve on: Execution. It's as simple as getting pucks out and getting pucks in, being hard on the forecheck and responsible on the backcheck. If it doesn't improve, his place in the NHL—even as a depth option—belongs to someone else.

Christian Folin, GP: 19 | G: 0 | A: 4 | P: 4

Our grade: C+

Justification: Half his games since coming over from the Philadelphia Flyers in February made it hard to justify his presence in the lineup. In the other half, the 6-foot-3, 204-pounder threw his weight around and played quite steadily at both ends on the third pair with Benn.

One thing to improve on: Playing on his toes. Without an explosive skating stride, he needs to be in perpetual motion, trying to be the aggressor as much as possible.

Dale Weise, GP: 9 | G: 0 | A: 0 | P: 0

Our grade: F

Justification: He came to Montreal from Philadelphia with a real desire to show his best self, to get back to the player he was before he was traded away from the Canadiens in 2016, but nothing happened with him on the ice. No goals, no assists, no points. Weise had just five shots in nine games.

One thing to improve on: Get that edge back. If he really wants it bad enough, he can get back to being an effective, irritating player to play against. He has a chance to prove he can be that player, with one year remaining on his contract.

Ryan Poehling, GP: 1 | G: 3 | A: 0 | P: 3

Our grade: A+

Justification: He played just one game after leaving St. Cloud State University, but it might go down as the best game he ever plays. The Canadiens are certainly hoping that doesn't prove to be the case.

One thing to improve on: Pace. Not that he looked a step slow in his magical game against Toronto, but we'd imagine it'll be a focal point of his summer training to do everything a little faster before showing up to camp next fall.

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1140579 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Brad Marchand thought Game 1 'was going to be a little bit easier'

Sportsnet Staff | @Sportsnet

April 12, 2019, 10:38 AM

This time — at least for now — 4-1 was a good score for the Toronto Maple Leafs in Boston.

In an impressive Game 1 showing for the road side, the Leafs did something they hadn't been able to do in either of their series against



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Boston in 2018 or 2013 and won the first game. According to Natural Stat Trick, Toronto out-chanced the Bruins 27-24 at 5-on-5 and the Bruins' defence gave up a few uncharacteristic opportunities — including a shorthanded breakaway to Mitch Marner, which turned into a converted penalty shot.

Zdeno Chara looked outclassed, while Frederik Andersen looked fresh and in prime condition. Things couldn't have gone much better for the Maple Leafs.

"I think maybe we thought it was going to be a little bit easier than it was out there," Boston's Brad Marchand said after the game. "We were trying to play too much of a controlled style, where that's not really our game. So we've just got to play a little faster."

Early on, this game looked like it may play out similarly to other playoff matches between the two. Boston got on the board first less than halfway through the opening period on a Patrice Bergeron goal. But something was off for the Bruins.

Their usual strength in the puck management department was lacking as Toronto earned 19 takeaways — six more than any other team recorded in their opening game of the playoffs. This led to the Leafs dominating in transition and getting a few high quality chances off the rush and a couple clear breakaways on Tuukka Rask.

"Obviously a lot of stuff we didn't do tonight," Patrice Bergeron said. "It was nothing we didn't expect, I guess. They're a team that works hard and gets their chances by putting the puck on net and converging. I think we didn't take care of the blue lines, that's where we got caught many times, and against a team like them, they're going to capitalize and get some momentum out of it."

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Added Bruins coach Bruce Cassidy: "Our puck management issues today cost us in a lot of different areas in the game, and whether it was us or them or a combination of both — you can dissect it any way you want — it really had an effect on giving them a lot of energy both with their legs and physicality."

We should expect a better Bruins effort when Game 2 goes Saturday night at 8:00 p.m. ET. Boston hadn't lost two regular season home games in a row since Jan. 10 and 14 against Washington and Montreal.

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1140580 Websites

TSN.CA / Nylander feels like he's 'getting the full mojo back'

Mark Masters

TSN Toronto reporter Mark Masters checks in daily with news and notes on the Maple Leafs, who held an optional practice at TD Garden on Friday.

The Toronto Maple Leafs have held two optional practices this week and William Nylander has been on the ice both times, one of only a handful of regulars putting in extra time on the ice.

What's he focused on?

"Just handling the puck and stuff like that, keeping it 100 per cent," he said.

Nylander will often use a weighted stick before practice in order to improve his touch. At Tuesday's optional workout he was repeatedly working on plays in tight to the net. He says that feel for the puck is what eluded him at times during a rocky regular season.

"That's what was missing and, I mean, just getting the full mojo back and the confidence so that was a big factor," he explained. "Feel and feeling like you can make plays and stuff like that. That was growing and growing throughout the season."

Nylander never seemed to sustain his top level of play during 54 regular season starts finishing with just seven goals and 20 assists. The contract stalemate that cost him training camp and the first two months of the year left him out of sorts. But as he plodded through the worst scoring drought of his life, Nylander was always anticipating this moment.

"That was my goal throughout the entire season ... to get ready for the post-season and get ready for when it starts," he said.

The playoffs give Nylander a chance to dramatically change the narrative about his season.

"It'd be huge," he said when asked what a big playoff push would mean for him.

Right now, it feels like the slate has been wiped clean and Nylander has a fresh start.

"It's a little different," he said of what he's feeling these days. "I mean, postseason, everything means so much so just been looking forward to that and now we're here."

It feels different and in Game 1 it looked different.

Last year, Nylander struggled to break through against Bruins captain Zdeno Chara, but on Thursday he used his speed to draw an interference penalty on the big defenceman in the third period.

"He couldn't really do much, it would've been maybe a breakaway so he kind of had to," Nylander said.

Nylander currently skates on Toronto's third line meaning easier matchups and fewer shifts against Chara. On Thursday, he took advantage of that freedom. Late in the second period, Nylander was sprung on a breakaway and beat Tuukka Rask to make it 3-1. Why did he go five-hole?

"Didn't really see that much so just tried to get him when he wasn't ready for a five-hole shot," the 22-year-old said.

Nylander also scored in Toronto's last regular season game, meaning he's now potted goals in consecutive outings for the first time all season. It's a huge confidence boost for the Swede, who only had one goal in last year's playoffs.

The key lesson from that bitter seven-game setback against the Bruins?

"It just shows you how important every game is," Nylander said. "We didn't come out ready for the series last year, we were down 2-0 off the bat and then we battled back for Game 7 so everything is so important in the playoffs."

Based on Game 1 this year, it appears Nylander and his teammates have made the necessary adjustments.

Nylander feels like he's 'getting the full mojo back'

After missing the first 28 games of the season due to his contract dispute, William Nylander struggled to 27 points in 54 regular season games. Trending in the right direction to end the season and armed with a clean slate for the playoffs, Nylander feels he's getting his 'full mojo back.'

Left winger Trevor Moore logged just 6:40 of ice time in his NHL playoff debut on Thursday but certainly made an impression on Chara, rocking the Bruins captain with a huge bodycheck.



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"He's a guy that I have tremendous respect for and a guy that I watched growing up," said the 24-year-old California native. "It's kind of surreal to be on the same ice with him, but you can see he's still a good player out there and a guy we have to be physical on and try to shut down and be hard on."

Moore stands five-foot-10, 182 pounds so was he surprised to be able to knock over the six-foot-nine, 252-pound Chara so forcefully?

"I didn't think I was going to be able to hit him as hard as I did, honestly," Moore admitted.

Any reaction from friends and family?

"My cousin sent me a video of it this morning," he said with a smile. "They had a good time with it, for sure."

Playoff rookie Moore surprised he was able to hit Chara so hard

Playing in his first career NHL playoff game, Leafs rookie Trevor Moore used his skating ability to pressure the Bruins defence, and even got a hard hit on towering defender Zdeno Chara, which surprised the 24-year old.

The Leafs succeeded in not only containing Boston's dynamic top line at even strength, but actually outscoring the trio of Brad Marchand, Patrice Bergeron and David Pastrnak. That line had terrorized Toronto in last year's playoffs, but on Thursday the Bruins were outshot when each of those players were on the ice in five-on-five action, per Natural Stat Trick.

"We did a good job tracking them," explained Jake Muzzin, who led Leafs defencemen in ice time against the Boston top line. "I didn't find there was a lot of rush chances from them."

The John Tavares unit with Mitch Marner and Zach Hyman did a lot of the heavy lifting against the Bergeron brigade and Bruins coach Bruce Cassidy started to use his last-change advantage to get his most potent weapons away from Toronto's top line in the third period. So, it could be Auston Matthews who sees more of that matchup in Game 2 on Saturday night.

Leafs coach Mike Babcock anticipated this possibility and in the final few home regular season games hard matched Matthews and not Tavares against top lines to help ready the 21-year-old for the challenge.

"We set Auston's line against (Aleksander) Barkov when Florida came in," the coach reminded reporters. "We did that down the stretch to prepare for these opportunities. The bottom line is you got to stay patient. Lots of times when you're a good player you don't score right away in the playoffs. It doesn't look like it's going good, people are evaluating you. Don't worry about what everyone thinks, just do your job and in the end it will go your way. Be patient with what you're doing and grind. Work."

The Leafs outscored the Panthers (1-0) and had more scoring chances (7-5) when Barkov and Matthews shared the ice at even strength during that late-season clash. But that test against a Florida team playing out the stretch likely won't come close to the challenge presented by Boston's best.

"They're extremely skilled and Bergeron's really good in his own end, defensively," Matthews observed, "it kind of allows them to take chances offensively and go on odd-man rushes. And all three of them have extremely good skill, all three of them can make plays, they're always looking for each other, so you've really got to key in and make sure you're not giving them those odd-man rushes all the time. They're going to make you pay."

Watching his teammates keep Boston's top line in check proves it can be done.

"It gives you confidence, but you also know they're going to come out tomorrow and they're going to be fired up," Matthews said. "They're the No. 1 line in the league this year so you can't take that for granted, because they've got veteran guys on that team and they're going to come out tomorrow night and they'll be ready to play, and we've got to be ready as well."

Matthews calls Bergeron line best in the NHL: 'They're going to be fired up'

Patrice Bergeron found the back of the net on the power play in Game 1, but overall the Leafs feel confident in the job they did slowing down 'the number one line in the league' and are looking for the same effort in Game 2.

After taking some big hits in Game 1, Bruins winger Jake DeBrusk sat out Friday's practice.

"Jake was given a maintenance day," Cassidy told reporters at the team's practice facility, "and he'll be back with us, we assume, tomorrow morning. If he's not feeling well, we'll have to put (David) Backes in and juggle the lines around, but right now, we anticipate he'll play."

It's possible that the 34-year-old Backes could make his series debut even if DeBrusk is in.

"I thought about going with Backes in Game 1, but we made the decision that we have to check fast against Toronto," Cassidy said. "There are two ways to slow them down ... They're a fast team, and you can physically slow them down, or you can skate with them to slow them down. I thought we'd do a better job checking with our legs skating than we did last night. What I mean by that is them getting behind us and them coming through the neutral zone with speed. There were times where we did a real good job of it and our legs were good on the forecheck. Other times, they weren't."

"Obviously, David adds a physicality piece. We will have an internal discussion as to whether that is a better plan of action."

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1140581 Websites

TSN.CA / NHLPA warns player agents after conflict-of-interest complaints

Rick Westhead

The NHL Players' Association has warned player agents that it will sanction any agent who breaks union rules by representing NHL coaches and general managers at the same time as they're working for players.

The NHLPA considers simultaneously representing management and players a conflict of interest and has had a rule banning the practice since 1995.

The issue was highlighted on Apr. 2 when NHLPA lawyer Roman Stoykewych raised the subject while addressing a group of player agents in Toronto.

Stoykewych announced at that meeting that the union would begin sanctioning agents on May 1, 2020, for such conflicts. His comments created an outcry in the agent community. Some agents said Stoykewych's comments suggested the NHLPA has been selective in choosing which rules to enforce.

On Apr. 11, Stoykewych sent an email to agents advising them there would be no grace period until May of 2020. He wrote that any agents who were found to have such a conflict would be disciplined immediately.

The NHLPA wouldn't say why Stoykewych brought up the issue. The union also declined to say how many complaints it has received or whether it is investigating any of those claims.



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"Following our recent agent meeting, the NHLPA has issued a clarification to the certified agents regarding this area of our agent regulations," NHLPA spokesman Jonathan Weatherdon wrote in an email to TSN. "The provision remains in effect and will be enforced."

According to three people familiar with the matter, the NHLPA has been informed about multiple instances of agents allegedly breaking the union's rules on representing NHL team management in recent months. It's unclear how much effort the union will make to investigate those claims.

"There have been agents literally bragging to young players they are recruiting that they also happen to represent coaches and general managers and the NHLPA knows the who, where and when of this," one agent told TSN. "The reason that the union is gun-shy about going after these guys is that [NHL executive director] Don Fehr has been under attack for the past two years. Everyone at the union is afraid to go and do or say anything for fear that Don will lose more support."

The NHLPA has been accused of a lack of transparency by several player agents in recent years and has been forced to expend significant time and resources trying to convince players and agents to support the union's current leadership.

The union has several options for sanctioning agents. It can issue an informal order of reprimand, issue a formal letter of reprimand that can be made public or assess a fine that would be payable to a charity selected by the NHLPA. The union can also temporarily or permanently decertify agents.

According to the NHLPA's agent regulations, which were last amended in September 2008, agents can be decertified for engaging in any conduct "that impacts on his credibility, integrity or competence to serve in a fiduciary capacity on behalf of players."

The regulations state that agents are prohibited from representing or providing services, either directly or indirectly, to "any officer, employee, [or] independent contractor of an NHL Club, other professional hockey club or Canadian major junior hockey club..."

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1140582 Websites

USA TODAY / Blue Jackets rout Lightning for shocking 2-0 series lead; Nikita Kucherov faces hearing

Mike Brehm, USA TODAY

Published 9:55 p.m. ET April 12, 2019 | Updated 11:47 p.m. ET April 12, 2019

John Tortorella led the Tampa Bay Lightning to their lone Stanley Cup title in 2004.

And now the coach's current team is trying to make sure the overwhelming favorite doesn't win a second one.

The Columbus Blue Jackets built a 3-0 lead on the way to a stunning 5-1 rout Friday night that gave them a 2-0 series lead against the record-tying, 62-win Lightning.

And the Lightning could be without their best player as they try to get back in the series because Nikita Kucherov faces a hearing for a questionable hit.

"This is a five-alarm fire," Lightning coach Jon Cooper, whose team didn't face much adversity through the regular season, told reporters after the

game. "But it's adversity, and sometimes that's good because you have to go through stuff like this. We'll see how we respond."

The Blue Jackets were outscored 17-3 in losing all three meetings to Tampa Bay during the regular season. But that was before they acted boldly at the trade deadline.

Rather than trying to get assets for pending free agents Artemi Panarin and Sergei Bobrovsky, they held on to them and went after unrestricted free agents-to-be Matt Duchene and Ryan Dzingel.

And Duchene was the star of Game 2, scoring a goal and adding three assists. Panarin had a goal and assist. Bobrovsky made 23 saves and has been solid in the series since a shaky first period in Game 1.

The Blue Jackets fought back from a 3-0 deficit to win Game 1. They dominated throughout Game 2.

And once they had the lead, they played solid defense, keeping the Lightning from pressing the attack. Steven Stamkos, Kucherov and Brayden Point, all 40-goal scorers, have no points in the series and are a combined -7.

Kucherov, who scored 128 points this season, was kicked out of the game for boarding Markus Nutivaara, and NHL Player Safety said a hearing is scheduled for Saturday.

The Lightning do have a glimmer of hope. The Blue Jackets have never won a playoff series, and last year, they blew a 2-0 series lead against the eventual champion Washington Capitals.

But the Capitals kept that series close, losing Games 1 and 2 at home in overtime. The Lightning will need to figure out how to get back to their regular-season success, starting Sunday night in Columbus, if they are to avoid one of the NHL's biggest upsets.

USA TODAY LOADED: 04.13.2019

1140583 Websites

USA TODAY / A 37-year-old goalie tops list of NHL playoffs' early winners and losers as quest for Stanley Cup hits full gear

Kevin Allen, USA TODAY

Published 9:18 a.m. ET April 12, 2019 | Updated 9:20 a.m. ET April 12, 2019

Veteran goalie Mike Smith entered Game 1 of the NHL playoffs with the Calgary Flames' fan base wondering if he was the right man to be the team's No. 1 goalie.

He is 37 and hadn't played a playoff game in seven seasons. His save percentage this season was .898, well below the NHL average. He heard too many boos this season in Calgary.

But everyone in Calgary turned into a Smith admirer Thursday night when he posted a 26-save shutout to power the Flames to a 4-0 win against the Colorado Avalanche in Game 1 of their best-of-seven Western Conference quarterfinal.

Fans chanted "Smitty, Smitty, Smitty" as the big saves piled up. "I haven't heard anything like that in my career," Smith said.

Smith was a major winner in his Game 1. Here are other winners and losers after the NHL's opening games of the playoffs:

► Winner: Columbus Blue Jackets coach John Tortorella: The video of Tortorella's pre-game speech and the Blue Jackets' comeback in Game 1



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

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is a reminder that historically Tortorella's teams overachieve in the postseason.

► **Loser: Tampa Bay Lightning stars:** Steven Stamkos, Nikita Kucherov and Brayden Point didn't register a point in the opening game against Columbus.

► **Winner: Nassau Coliseum:** The old barn was rockin' in Game 1 and the Islanders seemed to feed off the energy in the building. It's as if the clock had been turned back to the early 1980s when the Islanders ruled the NHL. Having this smaller, but charming, older arena back in the game is fun.

► **Loser: Nashville Predators forwards:** The biggest concern about the Predators coming into the playoffs was whether forwards would score enough. The Preds did nothing to allay fans' worries in Game 1. No forward scored a goal.

► **Winner: Toronto Maple Leafs defensemen:** How long have we heard that the Maple Leafs' defensive group wasn't good enough? The Leafs played well enough on the back end in the Maple Leafs' 4-1 win in Game 1.

► **Loser: Boston Bruins:** Brad Marchand said after losing Game 1 that the Bruins may have underestimated the Maple Leafs. He was right. The Bruins were not close to being at their best in this game.

► **Winner: Washington Capitals center Nicklas Backstrom:** The two goals were crucial, but the two shot blocks he made in the closing minutes against Carolina were more memorable. They were symbolic of how hard the Capitals worked to hang on when the Hurricanes mounted a charge.

► **Loser: Vegas Golden Knights:** Last season, the Golden Knights gave up five goals only once in 20 playoff games. This season, they surrendered five goals in their playoff opener against the San Jose Sharks. Golden Knights don't quite have the same magic this season.

► **Winner: Dallas Stars defenseman Miro Heiskanen:** The rookie defenseman scored two goals in his first NHL playoff game. The Stars believe that he may have as much impact on their franchise as Rasmus Dahlin will have on the Sabres franchise.

► **Loser: Winnipeg Jets' offense:** Winnipeg's top two lines didn't produce a goal. Kyle Connor and Mark Scheifele only had one shot on goal each. Kevin Hayes didn't have any shots on net. The Jets just haven't been the team we thought they would be this season.

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