



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • April 14, 2018



SB NATION
CANES COUNTRY

About Last Season: Justin Faulk Performance Review and Grade

The Hurricanes co-captain is a veteran presence on the blue line, but has he lived up to expectations?

By Andrew Ahr

Justin Faulk: 2017-18 By The Numbers

Age: 26

NHL Seasons: 7

Games Played: 76

Scoring: 8g—23a—31 points

Ice Time: 22:16 all situations, 18:47 ES, 2:56 PP, 0:32 PK

5-on-5 Stats: 55.3% CF, 53.68% GF

Contract Status: Under contract through 2020, AAV
\$4,833,333

Making the Grade

Coming into what was expected to be a season of consequence, Justin Faulk was named the co-captain of the Carolina Hurricanes team alongside Jordan Staal. Faulk has been a longtime stalwart on the Hurricanes defense as well as a leader in the new generation of Hurricanes players. The Minnesota native has shown flashes of offensive brilliance in the past, quarterbacking the power play from the blue line. Despite his promise, Faulk largely disappointed this season.

He earned a steady 37 points with 16 and 17 goals in each of his last two seasons respectively. Faulk has been the team's most promising modern NHL defenseman since his entry into the league, showing poise in his own zone as well as an offensive instinct that can't be taught.

Despite his noteworthy career to this point, there was a clear regression this season with just eight goals and 31 points in 76 games. Faulk's game improved significantly as the season went on, but it's safe to say that he did not meet expectations regardless. It isn't fair to view this as solely his fault, as the entire team underperformed.

However, as the co-captain of the Hurricanes one has to expect more out of Justin Faulk. The 26-year-old hasn't performed to the same level since his longtime defensive partner in Ron Hainsey was let go at the 2017 trade deadline. As a co-captain, the team looked to him for leadership by example, but the Hurricanes floundered when it mattered most.

Faulk enters his second-to-last season under contract with the Hurricanes in a critical position. Whether he can sustain a leadership spot with the Hurricanes is still an open question, but he's made enough of a name for himself in the league to retain a top pairing position going into next season regardless of the coach or GM in charge. Despite his down year in Carolina, Justin Faulk has been considered an elite defenseman in the NHL over the past few years. He's shown the potential to be among the league's elite blueliners on both sides of the puck. It's time for him to start playing like it again.



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Checkers Beat Bruins For Big 5-3 Win

Written by Nicholas Niedzielski

Hitting the road for one last trip ripe with playoff implications, the Checkers powered their way past Providence, beating the Bruins 5-3 for their sixth consecutive victory.

A back and forth first didn't see either side break through until Austin Czarnik notched a power-play tally 14 minutes in, but that strike seemed to wake up the Checkers, who responded with a pair of goals less than a minute apart to snag the lead through one period.

Things bounced around from that point, with the two clubs trading tallies until the Bruins knotted the score at three early on in the third. The Checkers pushed back from then on, however, and regained the lead minutes later thanks to a far-side snipe by the pinching defenseman Trevor Carrick. The Checkers would cling to that advantage down the stretch and extend it in the final minute, with Lucas Wallmark catching a Greg McKegg feed and delivering a dagger to the back of the net to clinch the 5-3 win for Charlotte.

NOTES

The win pushes the Checkers ahead of Providence and into the third spot in the Atlantic Division ... The Checkers have now won six games in a row and earned a point in nine straight, both of which are their longest streaks of the season ... The Checkers move to 3-1-0-1 against the Bruins this season, winning the season series ... Valentin Zykov scored his 33rd goal of the season to move back into the league lead ... Lucas Wallmark led all skaters with three points ... Zykov extended his point streak to nine games ... Haydn Fleury scored his first goal at the NHL or AHL level this season tonight ... By going 2-for-5 on the man advantage tonight, the Checkers have scored seven power-play goals in their last four games ... Jake Chelios and Alex Nedeljkovic missed the game due to injury ... Clark Bishop, Nick Schilkey, Zack Stortini, Mike Ferrantino, Sergey Tolchinsky, Matt Finn and Dennis Robertson all served as healthy extras.

UP NEXT

The Checkers wrap up the regular season Sunday in Bridgeport with a 5 p.m. puck drop.

TODAY'S LINKS

<https://www.canescountry.com/2018/4/13/17232992/carolina-hurricanes-justin-faulk-performance-review-evaluation-grade-statistics>
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SportScan

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

1091443 Websites

The Athletic / Duhatschek Notebook: Joe Thornton being patient with recovery, as difficult as that is

By Eric Duhatschek Apr 13, 2018

ANAHEIM, Calif. — Everyone gathered in the Honda Center press box Thursday night had to gasp for a brief moment when San Jose Sharks centre Joe Thornton took to the ice for the pre-game skate before their playoff opener against the Anaheim Ducks. Turns out, it was just Joe being Joe — on the road with his team and wanting to get on the ice for one more skate, because that's what Thornton does and that's what he's missed the most these past three months, while convalescing from a serious knee injury he suffered during a January game against the Winnipeg Jets. Sharks' coach Peter DeBoer had ruled out Thornton earlier in the day and in a long interview with The Athletic following the morning skate, Thornton confirmed that while he was inching toward a return to the lineup, he was not ready to resume an active role on the team just yet.

"It's been three months since the surgery and I've only been skating every day for the past five or six days," Thornton said. "Obviously, I want to come in and help the guys, but I don't want to come in and be a distraction either — me coming in the lineup and then me coming out of the lineup. If I come in, I want to stay in for the full run. That's my focus — to come back healthy enough that I can play every night, and not just to be out there but to be a difference on the ice."

Throughout his 20-year NHL career, even dating back to the early years in Boston, Thornton has played through injuries in the playoffs when the wiser course of action might have been to sit out. Last year, for example, he injured his left knee near the end of the regular season in a game against the Vancouver Canucks but came back to play two weeks later for the Sharks in Game 3 of their first-round series with the Edmonton Oilers. Thornton got into four games in all, earned two assists, and then after the Oilers won in six, Thornton underwent major reconstructive surgery to repair both the ACL and MCL ligaments in his left knee. At the time, he characterized the injury as "the normal stuff that hockey players deal with." Uh huh.

Generally, showing patience with the recovery process runs against Thornton's DNA. But this time around, the rehab was far more difficult than anything he's experienced before.

"By far," acknowledged Thornton. "I enjoy working out, but this was so much different. There's so much involved in the rehab. I'd be at the rink for three hours in the morning. Then I'd go off site to another rehab person. Then I'd go home and there's so much more to do at home, with all the units they give you to do at home. So, you're constantly working at it. And it's draining some days but you've got to do it."

"Then you throw the two kids in there. They're seven and four. They don't want to sit and watch daddy ice his knee. My little guy thinks he's a race car, so I can finally run with him a little now, which is a huge thing for him."

"This week, my little girl is off for spring break, which is a lot of fun. That's the only good part — that I can finally be there on a Saturday morning so I can go to T-ball. Where I wouldn't have been able to do that when I was on the road. That's the one positive in this whole thing — and there's only one."

In all, Thornton missed the final 35 games of the regular season, which left him at 1,493 career games played. Only 18 players in NHL history have ever played 1,500 — and the most recent to achieve that milestone was his former Sharks' teammate Patrick Marleau, who did it earlier this year, playing for the Toronto Maple Leafs.

Thornton joined the Sharks for their final regular-season road game March 31 in Las Vegas, so he could be part of a team dinner they had planned for the night before the game. Of all the things Thornton missed during his absence, the chance to be on the road, around his teammates, was near the top of his list.

"Because I've been relatively healthy my whole career, you don't realize how much you miss the guys and the fellowship when they go on the road," Thornton said. "I didn't go on the road for 60 days or so because I was just focused on getting better — and that's tough. I haven't probably slept in the same bed like that since I was about 16 years old. I'm accustomed to going out on the road — and I missed that. It's nice to be back on the road again and get the camaraderie back. It makes you feel a little better."

How does Thornton feel right now?

"Much, much better," he said. "Some days I wake up and it's a little bit sore. Some days I wake up and it's great. This morning, I woke up and I had done a lot of work the day before and it felt great. Every day I'm hitting more things that I want to hit, so hopefully it will continue. Just skating with the guys again is a nice indication I'm doing good. I've still got a little ways to go, but it's coming along — coming along good."

One Thornton anecdote

On the morning we were talking, most of his Sharks' teammates had already left the Honda Center, catching the first bus back to the team hotel. Thornton and a few of the extras — Joel Ward, Joakin Ryan — stayed late to skate, all trudging into the dressing room together afterward. After we'd spoken about his rehab and his life outside of hockey during his lengthy convalescence, Thornton mentioned — to Sharks' staff hovering in the area — about the time we went out for dinner together in Davos, Switzerland during the 2004-05 NHL lockout — him, me, Rick Nash and a buddy of his, who was visiting from his hometown of St. Thomas, Ont.

To that point, I didn't really know Thornton all that well, so this was the first time I ever got a glimpse of his mischievous sense of humor. I'd arrived in time for the Davos practice, but Thornton and Nash had already made plans for that afternoon, so Joe suggested we meet later for dinner, which would give us lots of time to chat. Sounded like a plan. That night, Thornton pulled up in the car that the team had loaned him for his stay — one equipped with a standard transmission, which he'd never driven before (that was an adventure in and of itself). As we were headed to a restaurant where they'd become regulars, Thornton advised me to order the house special. Which was? 'Can't tell you,' answered Thornton, 'but you'll love it.'



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In a situation like that, where players are going out of their way to make time for you, you want to be as agreeable as possible — but that moment also had hockey-player-prank written all over it. Inside the restaurant, when the server came by with menus, Thornton pointed to me and said, 'he'll have the special.' I (reasonably) asked: 'Can you at least tell me about the special?' Turns out, it was ground horsemeat in a ragu-style sauce. Needless to say, I passed — and opted for something more conventional. Presumably, Thornton tried that gag on others who were passing through Davos. Did it ever work? Apparently not, but it didn't stop him from trying. As we wrapped up, Thornton explained to everyone within earshot: 'He didn't want to leave' — and he got that right. Of course, Thornton fell in love with Davos too, met his future wife during his time in Switzerland and they spend time there every summer. I've long believed that when Thornton's NHL career ends — he turns 39 on July 2 — that he'll eventually finish up his career by playing a year or two in Switzerland. He will be one of those players who will have a difficult time weaning himself away from the game.

Over time, I came to appreciate just how much fun there was to be had in the world of Jumbo Joe Thornton. He worked when it was time to work. He didn't take life too seriously when it was time to play. San Jose's culture is like that. Thornton and Brent Burns can play with those ZZ Top style beards and as long as they get the work done on the ice, nobody cares if they haven't run a razor across their face in years.

I was thinking about that again Thursday night, after Evander Kane celebrated his NHL playoff debut by scoring twice in a convincing 3-0 Sharks' win over the Ducks. Kane has been a good fit with the Sharks. In 17 regular season games, he scored nine goals and added five assists. Currently, he is playing on the top line with captain Joe Pavelski and Joonas Donskoi. In Thornton's absence, Pavelski has shifted back to center and hasn't missed a beat.

My fashion sense is mired in Brooks Brothers blue, but Burns emerged post-game Thursday, resplendent in a purple suit that looked as if it were part tuxedo and part smoking jacket. Burns is a charmer — though unexpectedly shy by nature. He was asked about Kane's contributions to the Sharks since joining the team from Buffalo and he made two pertinent observations, one about Kane specifically and one about the larger context of what the Sharks are all about.

Unlike some NHL teams, the Sharks don't insist on a cookie-cutter uniformity, and that allows the larger personalities — like Thornton, like Burns, like Kane — to flourish. It wouldn't work for every team, but it does seem to work for theirs.

"We've got a group, with a lot of different personalities in here," explained Burns. "It doesn't have to be the same personality every time. We enjoy that. You're all across the board with the guys in our room. We all love the game. We all love having fun at the rink. We all work and he (Kane) fits in perfect with that. I mean, he's shown nothing but great work, not only on the game days but look what he does out there.

"Great suits too," added Burns, after a short pause. "He's bringing a good suit game to the team. He's got some good style."

Since Burns brought it up, I had to ask: How does he select his wardrobe on any given night?

"I turn off the lights and pick a hanger," he replied.

Gold.

The Sharks have only missed the playoffs once in the past 14 years — that was 2014-15, at which point they made a coaching change and brought in DeBoer. DeBoer got them to the final in 2016, where they lost to the Pittsburgh Penguins, the closest most of these Sharks players have gotten to winning a Stanley Cup championship. But Burns says they take nothing for granted when it comes to qualifying for postseason play.

"People take it for granted, but it's a hard thing to do," he said. "Every year is so different. It's such a long grind. It doesn't say anything about the individual. It's hard for the team to do it. So it's awesome. You see a guy (Kane) who's grinded a lot, who plays a hard game, whose been

working a long time. He's a great player individually. That doesn't take it away from it. There's a lot of things that have to go right (to make the playoffs). That's a big goal for every team.

"I think hockey's different from a lot of other sports — where you can say 'this team is going to make it' or 'this team is going to go on a long run.' In hockey, now there are 31 teams and they all feel good about their chances at the start of the year. It's a crazy sport. It's hard — and the difference is so small. It's a fun time ... the best time of year. The energy. The crowd. The light shows. It's a great time to play."

And finally

The Ducks essentially lost the opener against the Sharks by giving up a five-on-three second-period power-play goal, which broke a scoreless tie and ended up being the game winner, after Martin Jones posted the shutout in goal for San Jose. Andrew Cogliano and Ryan Getzlaf were in the penalty box, both of them serving slashing penalties incurred 17 seconds apart. The Ducks have a reputation for being undisciplined and it caught up to them in the opener. They played a man short 274 times this past season — only Nashville, Dallas and Vancouver incurred more minor penalties — and while their success rate was high (83.2 per cent efficiency, good for fifth in the league), San Jose plays it completely different.

The Sharks were one of the least penalized teams (224 times short), one of the most effective at killing penalties (84.8 per cent) and thus surrendered a league low 34 power-play goals against (the Kings were next best, at 39; Anaheim gave up 46; and Montreal was the worst in the league at 68 power-play goals against). DeBoer noted that playing a disciplined brand of hockey was critical to their success and his Ducks' counterpart Randy Carlyle suggested it was Anaheim's inability to stay out of the penalty box that primarily cost them the opening game of the series.

According to Carlyle, "we just didn't seem to have our legs, our hands or our minds tonight. Three checks from our standpoint. We didn't execute with the puck, we didn't show any aggressiveness in our skating game and we showed we were weak mentally from the standpoint of undisciplined acts we committed."

Cogliano echoed those comments, noting how the Ducks could learn from the way the Sharks carried themselves in the game.

"They played how you're supposed to play in the playoffs. They played patient and they played the right way. When you get chances, you have to score on them. You execute the game plan. They did that. It seemed like we were stuck in the regular season, trying to make plays in the neutral zone or turning pucks over. They just executed a lot better than we did."

The Athletic LOADED: 04.14.2018

1091444 Websites

The Athletic / What I'll remember from the final season of Ken Hitchcock's grand story

By Scott Burnside Apr 13, 2018

In the end, no matter how well laid out the script may be, sometimes the story writes you, you don't write the story.

And so it is that Ken Hitchcock, a sure-fire Hall of Famer, one of the game's great talkers and raconteurs, steps away from the profession that has been his life since, well, forever.



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He does so not after returning the Dallas Stars to glory but after one disappointing season in which the team dramatically changed its identity and looked for two-thirds of the season like they were playoff bound, but then collapsed under injury and underperformance in the last month of the season.

No Hollywood ending here. Just as there was no exit in exultant glory a year ago in St. Louis where he had planned to coach one final year and then hand over the duties to Mike Yeo. Instead, the team floundered and Hitchcock was fired by his good pal St. Louis GM Doug Armstrong in February.

So plans changed and Hitchcock looked for a different way to write his final chapter and what better place than in Dallas, where he had his finest hours winning the Stanley Cup in 1999 and then returning the final the next year?

Owner Tom Gaglardi was instrumental in returning Hitchcock to that post last April and, along with key offseason moves, there was a renewed sense of optimism surrounding the team when training camp began.

I had dinner with Hitchcock near the team's practice rink not long after taking a job with the Stars last summer.

At the end of our dinner, a woman came over and asked if the large group she was with could take a picture with Hitchcock. It turned out their relative, a young man who was a huge Stars fan, had died in an accident nearby and they were celebrating his life. A picture with Hitchcock would be a special memento of their evening.

Of course, Hitchcock agreed, and it was an illustration of how important he and the 1999 Dallas team remain in the community. It was also a reminder of just how little success the franchise has enjoyed in the interim. The Stars have missed the playoffs in eight of the past 10 years and three of five since Jim Nill took over as GM.

Traveling with the team I spent a lot of time with Hitchcock. Like pretty much every single day since early September until the team held locker clean out on Monday.

When I think of Hitchcock, the one lasting image is the early mornings on the road in hotel coffee shops or lobby lounge areas. It wouldn't matter how late the game or the charter the night before, Hitchcock and his staff would invariably be gathered around tables with their computers early the next morning, game-planning, watching video, planning practice, working on line combinations.

Every morning. Without fail.

It was so when the team had off days in sunny Whistler, British Columbia, early in the season.

It was so when the team was cooking along from Games 20 to 65 as a top 10 team that looked locked into a playoff spot. And it was so on the last road trip through California, when the playoffs were already a non-starter.

Didn't matter. There were games left to play, so Hitchcock prepared for them as if it was a playoff matchup. Right to the end.

And that's where we are now. The end.

Sometimes when his staff, which included longtime associate and friend Rick Wilson, Stu Barnes, Curt Fraser, Jeff Reese and Kelly Forbes, would escape for a few moments of well-deserved sunlight, Hitchcock would beckon me to a table and we'd talk about hockey and the media (as a self-serving aside, he was always very curious about *The Athletic*, and I have suggested to him now that he's "retired" he should be a guest columnist, but I digress).

We'd talk, not for attribution or for a story, but just chatting for long periods of time about players and trends and personalities.

His ability to talk about hockey was tireless, his appetite and passion for the game limitless.

I used to joke with other reporters that I was a bit like an addict needing just a bit of Hitchcock every day because every day he could and would offer new insights into the game. Sometimes those insights might be at odds with things that he said a week or two earlier, but who can keep track of these things?

I can count the number of times Hitchcock didn't meet with the media during the season. Whatever the topic, he was happy to oblige — coach's challenges, shot blocking, Hall of Fame coach Clare Drake, passing Al Arbour in the all-time wins category. Didn't matter. If you could think it, he would answer it; his responses always filled with great insight and anecdotes and bon mots.

One day in Tampa, Fraser, the first head coach of the Atlanta Thrashers, was told he would be meeting with the media on an off-day. He thought it was a joke. In fact, somewhere is a video of him walking away from the scrum doubled over in laughter after I asked him a question because he couldn't imagine anyone but Hitchcock speaking for the team.

Just the way it unfolded, but I ended up asking most of the questions in postgame press conferences. And, certainly, I ended up asking the initial questions and, not unlike an old married couple, by the end, I would sometimes just offer up some random words and Hitchcock would pick up seamlessly providing a sound answer to what might have been only a half-uttered (or half-assed) question.

Throughout it all, through wins and losses and the disappointments that accompanied a season slipping away, Hitchcock was unfailingly generous with his time and his experience.

In a competitive business, his willingness to share ideas and strategies with other coaches is legendary. In fact, shortly after he was fired by St. Louis, he took on a role as an unofficial coach whisperer, responding to queries from coaches at all different levels, including the NHL, about what might ail a specific team or how to help a coach who had lost his confidence.

He told me that those moments — which included traveling incognito to arenas around North America to watch games and offer suggestions — reignited his passion for coaching and were a catalyst to his taking the job in Dallas.

And now it is over. Well, at least the formal part, maybe.

Technically Hitchcock remains with the team as a consultant. Not sure exactly what that means and it will be a tricky thing if Hitchcock is sitting up in the stands watching the new coach do his thing. Although it's interesting that a coach looking for an NHL gig said he'd look forward to working with Hitchcock if he ever got the chance to take on the Dallas job, so you never know.

Certainly it behooves the organization to find a meaningful role for Hitchcock if he's going to stay with the Stars. He's earned that.

At the end of the day, though, there's simply no way to separate the coach from the man. It's a DNA thing.

That it turned out this way — with management believing one thing about the Stars and how they were built and how they should play, and the coach somewhere else on the organizational continuum — is disappointing on some level. But it doesn't mean this isn't the right course of action for both Hitchcock and the team.

And that he leaves the game, at least on this formal level, after one disappointing turn (or is that return?) in Dallas doesn't diminish anything that's happened leading up to this. It doesn't diminish the greatness of one of the finest coaches of all time and his impact on the game on so many levels.

It just reminds us that sometimes we don't get to write our stories, we just play a role in them.

If you're lucky, that's enough.

Thanks, Hitch. It's been a slice.



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The Athletic LOADED: 04.14.2018

1091445 Websites

The Athletic / Projecting Team USA's roster for the World Championships

By Craig Custance Apr 13, 2018

It might be the hardest roster to build of any international tournament. Playing for the World Championships is a bit of a mixed honor. Sure, it's great to represent Team USA and the country, but if Team USA GM Bill Zito's number is showing up on your phone right now, it means you're not playing in the playoffs.

The sting of a rough regular season probably hasn't worn off.

"It's positive and negative," explained Red Wings coach and Team USA head coach Jeff Blashill. "The fact you get to coach the Worlds – one of the reasons is you're one of the coaches not in the playoffs. The positive is it's an unreal tournament. You get to stay in a real competitive environment for another month."

That's not the only challenge in building this thing. Not only are you reaching out to players who might not be in the best mood after missing the playoffs, you have to try and calculate which players might shake loose after losing in the first round and hold open a few spots for them — all without having any conversations with them because nobody wants to talk about Worlds when trying to win a playoff series.

It's not easy, but there's been an uptick of success for USA Hockey over the past couple years as a generation of younger players seems to take the tournament more seriously than previous ones. The late Jim Johansson worked tirelessly to piece together a roster and got help last year as guys like Dylan Larkin and Jack Eichel assisted to put together a team as good as any in recent years. The group finished fifth but had a record of 6-0-0-2.

The Americans have been playing in the Worlds since 1928. They last won gold in 1933. The last silver came in 1950.

But, in part to honor Johansson, and in part to end a rough run on the international stage, prominent American players are locking in spots. Patrick Kane announced he was going, as part of a group of Blackhawks that also includes the talented Alex DeBrincat. That's a start. Larkin is back. So is Johnny Gaudreau.

The roster should be another solid one for the Americans.

"We're all trying to get the best team possible," said Larkin, who has reached out to players he knows to help the cause. "Talking with Blash, it sounds like we've got a pretty good team going over. I really feel, this year, our one main goal is to win it."

So how is the roster shaping up? Let's make some projections.

Get your ticket to Denmark

FORWARDS

Patrick Kane, Blackhawks

Dylan Larkin, Red Wings

Alex DeBrincat, Blackhawks

Johnny Gaudreau, Flames

Anders Lee, Islanders

Chris Kreider, Rangers

Casey Mittelstadt, Sabres

DEFENSE

Connor Murphy, Blackhawks

Noah Hanifin, Hurricanes

Quinn Hughes, Michigan (2018 draft eligible)

GOALIE

Charlie Lindgren, Canadiens

NOTES: Gaudreau didn't commit right away because he wanted to take a few days with his dad following a health scare but according to an NHL source, he's decided to play... Kane will be the captain and is playing in the Worlds for the first time since 2008 when he was coming off his rookie season. Kane was on the fence last season and committed early this season, which helps the cause for Zito. "I can say there's not too many who were already coming who weren't a little bit juiced because of it," Zito told The Athletic's Scott Powers earlier this week. "He's a big star. He's going to have a big impact. I'm guessing, most probably, as big as his impact on the ice will be his impact in the room with his enthusiasm and love of hockey."... Casey Mittelstadt has the potential to be a breakout performer for the group after impressing those around the NHL during his brief time up this season. "I love him," said one NHL executive. "He's good. He's got speed, hockey sense, creativity, jam. He's a good hockey player"... The defense needs some work still, with Hanifin the most accomplished player right now projected to be on the roster. The wild card is Quinn Hughes, who could go as high as the top three in June's draft. "He can dart in and out of the forecheck and he does a tremendous job of getting the puck going north out of your end," one talent evaluator told The Athletic earlier this year... This tournament is a good opportunity for Murphy to put a disappointing season behind him and use the extended ice time he'll likely get to build momentum for next season.

Maybe?

Clayton Keller, Coyotes – Keller still needs a couple days to decide and is weighing his options on where he wants to put his focus this off-season to build off a strong rookie year.

Adam Fox, Harvard – A thin American defense could be a nice opportunity for the Harvard offensive defenseman. The Athletic's Corey Pronman explained what Fox brings to the table: "Highly intelligent and skilled puck moving defenseman. One of the better D prospects outside the NHL. Small and an average skater, but has a lot of potential."

Justin Faulk – We list Faulk because he's been a willing participant in the past and nothing has been ruled out yet, but it doesn't look great on this front. "He was dinged up at the end of the year there," said one source close to Faulk. "He's just not fully 100 percent."

Confirmed no

Jack Eichel, Sabres

Alex Galchenyuk, Canadiens

Jimmy Howard, Red Wings

Matthew Tkachuk, Flames

Vincent Trocheck, Panthers

NOTES: Eichel told Joe Yerdon that his health wasn't in good enough shape to play in the Worlds... Tkachuk would probably be there if it wasn't for his concussion... Howard played well for the Americans last year and would be the goalie this year if he didn't have another child on the way. "I loved it," Howard told The Athletic of his experience playing in this tournament.

Playoff series to watch



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There could be a silver lining for Zito if his Blue Jackets get knocked out in the first round. It would open up all kinds of options on defense for his building of Team USA. Seth Jones, Ian Cole, Jack Johnson and Zach Werenski are all players who would get a look. Werenski, who is close with Larkin, would have played last year after the Penguins knocked out the Blue Jackets but he took a puck to the head and the right side of his face swelled shut. Johnson is an unrestricted free agent, and veterans without contracts tend to not play in this tournament. But Johnson often answers the call for Team USA and might want to showcase his abilities before hitting the market... The Americans need serious help in goal and the Wild-Jets series could have an impact here. Depending on how things shake out, Alex Stalock could get a look and the Americans would love to have Connor Hellebuyck if the Jets are upset. Hellebuyck helped Team USA win bronze in the Worlds in 2015... If the Kings and/or the Ducks lose in the first round, that would open up a pool of goalies that includes John Gibson, Jack Campbell, Ryan Miller and Jonathan Quick.

The Athletic LOADED: 04.14.2018

1091446 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Evander Kane trade continuing to bear fruit for Cheveldayoff, Jets

Luke Fox | April 14, 2018, 12:32 AM

WINNIPEG — Kevin Cheveldayoff couldn't help but smile Friday night as he walked around the bowels of MTS Place, the building with the greatest home ice advantage in the league.

The club he'd constructed with his oft-criticized patience had just doubled its franchise playoff victory total and become the first of these playoffs to seize a 2-0 series lead.

A master of the long game, and probably not the type of man you'd like to meet in a staring contest, Cheveldayoff waited three years and seven months on the job before pulling the trigger on his first player-for-player trade of consequence.

Evander Kane, Zach Bogosian, and Jason Kasdorf to Buffalo for Tyler Myers, Drew Stafford, Joel Armia, Brendan Lemieux and the Sabres' 2015 first-round pick.

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That 2015 blockbuster puts the lie to the theory that whoever lands the best player wins the deal, and with the benefit of hindsight, is embarrassing in its lopsidedness.

The other willing participant in the pillage, Tim Murray, was the quickest Sabres GM to be fired. Kane—viewed in these parts as cultural addition by subtraction—scored two playoff goals Thursday, but for San Jose. Bogosian would be a great buyout candidate were he not stuck on the injured reserve. And goalie prospect Kasdorf had a respectable .903 save percentage this season... in the ECHL.

Cheveldayoff's haul that day? Well, three of them contributed to Friday's 4-1 stomping of the Wild. Stafford gave Winnipeg two good years before becoming a sixth-rounder in the upcoming draft, and 22-year-old Lemieux was nearly a point per game for the mighty Manitoba Moose this season.

It's a trade tree keeps bearing delicious fruit and may well define the GM's legacy.

When Myers, hockey's lankiest man not named Zdeno Chara, controlled the puck at the point in the second period of a scoreless Game 2 and decided to take a risk, Jets coach Paul Maurice held his breath so long, he'd later quip, "I'm pretty sure I can't be drowned."

From a standstill and with no safety net behind him, Myers dangled a defending Jason Zucker, held off an ineffective Eric Staal and sniped a gorgeous opening goal far side on a dialed-in Devan Dubnyk.

"Tyler played really well away from the puck and then he has that ability," Maurice said. "He's such a big man that when you're checking him, you think you can shut him down. There's too much of him to have him get it all by you. He's pretty gifted."

Also gifted: speedy Jack Roslovic, whose control on the cycle led to him assisting on the Myers strike as well as orchestrating Andrew Copp's goal the following period. Two assists—not bad for a rookie's emergency NHL playoff debut.

Roslovic, drawing in seamlessly for the injured Mathieu Perreault (upper body), was selected by Cheveldayoff with that first-round pick the Sabres surrendered in their package for Kane.

"When Jack had played well for us, it said that [Moose coach] Pascal Vincent earned his award [as the AHL's most outstanding coach] this year. He does a marvelous job taking those young players so when they come to play for us there isn't a lot that's said about where he needs to be on the ice, positionally," said Maurice, adding that Roslovic has rapidly earned the respect of veteran linemates Bryan Little and Copp.

So much praise has been showered on the reborn Jets for their draft-and-develop approach, and justly so.

But with Myers and Roslovic both hanging multi-point games Friday—and, looky here, trade deadline swipe Paul Stastny scored his first playoff goal, too—it sure felt like a night to celebrate Cheveldayoff's success rate on those rare occasions where he does dabble in the market.

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Sportsnet.ca / Nothing seems impossible for miraculous Golden Knights

Iain MacIntyre | April 14, 2018, 2:56 AM

LAS VEGAS – The corner of Las Vegas Boulevard and Tropicana Avenue is dominated by the Statue of Liberty, her incongruous existence in the Sonoran Desert made only slightly less surreal by the Empire State and Chrysler buildings behind her, part of the spectacularly kitschy New York-New York Hotel and Casino.

Above all the tourists and Elvises – or are they Elvi? – on Friday, the replica Lady Liberty wore a giant Vegas Golden Knights' jersey.

Considering the current state of the America, the statue's famous inscribed offer to "give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free" is cruelly ironic. Yet it perfectly suits the hockey team that plays in the big arena behind the New York-New York.

The Golden Knights accepted the tired and poor, the unwanted and overpriced, the unappreciated and unaccomplished from the National Hockey League's teeming shores in order to build their expansion team.

And they constructed a sporting version of the American Dream, imagining big, working hard and, above all else, believing in themselves when no one else would. They won 51 regular-season games to become, by far, the most successful first-year team in NHL history. In a desert.



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Nothing seems impossible for the Knights because they've already done what seemed impossible.

Erik Haula, a 27-year-old former seventh-round draft pick who never had more than 15 goals in an NHL season until he scored 29 this year in Las Vegas, slipped a forehand under goalie Jonathan Quick at 15:23 of double overtime Friday as the Knights beat the Los Angeles Kings 2-1 to seize a 2-0 lead in their first-round playoff series.

This miraculous expansion team is now two wins away from advancing against the Kings, the two-time Stanley Cup winners who have been outplayed in both games so far. Put another way, the Golden Knights are 10 wins away from playing for the Stanley Cup.

Don't scoff. Down the street from the Statue of Liberty is the Eiffel Tower and the great pyramid of Luxor. Anything is possible here. Anything is possible for the Knights.

James Neal, who actually played for the Stanley Cup last spring with the Nashville Predators before the Knights claimed him in the expansion draft, beautifully set up Haula's winner in a game in which Vegas outshot Los Angeles 56-30.

Halfway through regulation time, the Kings were close to the Knights only on the scoreboard.

Vegas was outshooting Los Angeles 19-7, leading 1-0 and dominating territorially. On the rare instances the Kings possessed the puck in the offensive zone, their shots were one-and-done. All the longest shifts, the sustained pressure, seemed to be in the Los Angeles zone where the Kings struggled to match the Knights' speed.

But from a faceoff in the Kings' end, Golden Knights defenceman Brayden McNabb pinched down the boards, got his stick between the skates of former teammate Dustin Brown, and tripped the Los Angeles winger at 14:19 of the second period.

That power play was like a rescue mission for the Kings, who tied it 1-1 with the man-advantage at 15:55 when defenceman Paul Ladue's long-range shot caromed off the pants of defenceman Deryk Engelland and past Vegas goalie Marc-Andre Fleury.

In a game the Kings could have trailed by two or three goals, suddenly they were tied.

It was the first playoff goal surrendered by the Knights, who won Game 1 1-0 on Wednesday and took the lead in Game 2 when Alex Tuch reacted fastest to a lively rebound off the end boards after Jonathan Marchessault's point shot missed the net but stranded Quick.

Quick, narrowly outplayed by Fleury on Wednesday, was brilliant in Game 2.

With superstar defenceman Drew Doughty suspended one game for his hit to the head Wednesday on William Carrier, and the Kings still missing No. 2 blue-liner Jake Muzzin with an undisclosed injury, the best L.A. defender was Quick.

He stopped 34 of 35 shots in regulation time and then the first 20 he faced in overtime, and several times had to make saves in bunches due to the Knights' sustained pressure.

Game 3 of the best-of-seven first-round series is Sunday night in Los Angeles.

Back in December, after the Knights beat the Kings 3-2, Doughty declared: "There's no way they're going to be a better team than us by the end of the season."

But the Knights are a better team than the Kings at the end of the season.

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1091448 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Jets appear to be too big, too fast and too much for Wild

Mark Spector | April 14, 2018, 12:25 AM

WINNIPEG — "Listen, we're tryin'."

Minnesota Wild head coach Bruce Boudreau stood in that unenviable, impossible spot behind the podium after a 4-1 loss in Winnipeg, trying to explain a game that saw his team's shot totals descend from nine in the first period, to five in the second, to three in the final stanza.

The Winnipeg Jets had just kicked Minnesota's hind ends to Portage and Main and back, and there was Boudreau, fielding the questions about what plan he had to turn the battleship around in time for Game 3 on Sunday.

The problem is, there's no real answer.

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"You guys are trying to make it sound like we're not tryin'," he said to the Minnesota press, grilling poor Boudreau like a summer rib eye. "They played really good, and they beat us tonight. We'll be ready on Sunday. We've got a lot of pride in that room."

Media: "What happened after the first period?"

Boudreau: "Well, they were playing pretty good. Give the other team credit tonight. They played really good. They won the battles, and consequently they had the puck and it was in our zone."

Media: "What about getting into the middle more?"

Boudreau: "It's not like we're not trying to get there. We're trying to get there and the other team is not allowing us to get there. I don't think it's for a lack of effort. We will try harder the next game and we'll have a different little strategy and we'll see if it works."

Media: "What did you think of your matchups, coach?"

Boudreau: "I think all the matchups were hurting us tonight."

And so it went, the media chasing the magical, elusive elixir, the way the Wild had chased Winnipeg around the Minnesota zone for most of 60 minutes in Game 2.

Too big. Too fast. Too deep, and just too much, these Jets appear to be for the boys from Minny.

They've played six periods of hockey in this Round 1 series, and Minnesota's leading scorer — 42-goal man Eric Staal — has three shots on goal and less points (zero) than Jack Roslovic (two) and Joe Morrow (one).

From the blazing fast Nikolaj Ehlers, to that Finnish rifleman Patrik Laine, to a six-foot-five set-up man in Blake Wheeler who spins away from checks like he's Patrick Kane, this was a clinic on what the Winnipeg Jets can do to you when they have all hands on deck.

Dustin Byfuglien was an absolute terror, a reminder of the value of big, physical players when the game shifts into playoff mode. Small speedsters may be fine all season long, but come springtime guys like



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Byfuglien can change a game, as his mighty hits and thunderous presence did in Game 2.

"He's just a wild card. There are very few players like him," marvelled Jets centre Paul Stastny. "Brent Burns maybe? ... But (Byfuglien) is always moving around, too, so that's what makes him tough to defend. He might give up a chance here and there, but he creates more chances than he gives up."

There is something solid, something genuine about this Winnipeg team, a quality that Canadians may just be beginning to realize as they tune in to Jets hockey in earnest for the first time. Winnipeg has a way of owning the puck, like the big kid at the outdoor rink who could steal your puck and keep it for as long as he wanted to.

The Jets control the play in the opponent's zone for an entire shift, and when the other team finally gets the puck on its stick they are gassed. So they dump it out, the Jets get it again. It's the old rinse and repeat, and now the Wild have to find a way out of the spin cycle.

They've had momentum for about five minutes so far in this series.

"We've got to find it now," said Mikko Koivu, of the famous hockey family from Turku, Finland. "We've been strong all year long at home and for sure now it changes — you go home and you got your home crowd going. But that's not an automatic thing. We've got to regroup here."

No one is quitting, of course, in a Wild room full of professionals. But being a pro also means you've traveled this road before, seen a similar movie somewhere down the line, and you know what it means to be without defenceman Ryan Suter and the 26:46 of quality defensive ice time each night.

You look across at these Jets and see four solid lines, a defence that moves the puck north as swiftly and accurately as any, and a goalie who... Well, we don't know much about Connor Hellebuyck in the playoffs yet.

The Wild managed just 37 shots through six periods here, while the Jets have enjoyed back to back 40-shot nights.

"They're a pretty good defensive team this year," observed Boudreau. "You can tell they're playing hard. They're playing well."

"They're going to be tough."

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Sportsnet.ca / Why Leo Komarov, of all people, could be the Leafs' answer in Game 2

Chris Johnston April 13, 2018, 6:43 PM

BOSTON — "He needs to be a factor," Mike Babcock asserted as the Toronto Maple Leafs began picking up the pieces, and the "he" in question wasn't Auston Matthews.

Or William Nylander. Or Mitch Marner. Or Morgan Rielly, Frederik Andersen or Patrick Marleau.

After falling on their faces in a dispiriting playoff opener against the Boston Bruins, the veteran coach identified Leo Komarov as a potential difference-maker in Game 2. This was not what we expected to hear. But Babcock had already gilded Komarov with a spot alongside Matthews and Nylander as part of the shakeup brought on by Nazem Kadri's anticipated suspension, and he made it clear that the Finn was tabbed to be more than a passenger on a high-powered jet.

"I think the biggest thing for him is he was competitive last night and we're trying to get the most competitive people involved as much as we possibly can," said Babcock.

The decision raises some interesting questions given how little time Komarov has spent playing with Matthews—slightly more than 60 minutes total at 5-on-5—and how ineffective those forays have been.

For starters, they've each produced better possession numbers apart than together. Komarov is a meat-and-potatoes winger, not particularly fleet of foot, who is coming off a season where his shooting percentage dropped to 6.1 per cent while he scored just seven goals. He's not a natural fit for the team's most dangerous marksman.

But context is important. Babcock is trying to assemble the puzzle pieces for a lineup that can win a playoff game on the road—a scenario where coaches value players who are hard on the puck and not prone to turnovers that end up in the back of the net.

Komarov is a trusted soldier in this regard, having won Gagarin Cups in the KHL and a bronze medal at the Sochi Olympics. He's well-schooled in the safe play.

The Leafs are also mindful of the fact he has Brad Marchand's attention. There's a belief that he may be able to pester the Bruins puck hound into straying from the task at hand—something the Leafs failed to do Thursday when Marchand, Patrice Bergeron and David Pastrnak forced the Matthews line to skate around their own zone for large chunks of the night.

It's a strategy endorsed by the Bruins themselves.

"I think they probably watched the last five games of our season and saw if Marchy is thinking about stuff other than hockey he's not as good of a hockey player," said veteran Boston forward David Backes. "I kind of told him if I was playing against him that's what I would do."

Babcock has spread the skill and safety throughout his new lineup—dropping forechecking workhorse Zach Hyman to the left side of Marleau and Marner while bringing Andreas Johnsson down from the press box to play alongside Tomas Plekanec and Kasperii Kapanen. Depending on how Saturday's game unfolds, the speedy Johnsson could be swapped out with Komarov on the Matthews line if the Leafs need a goal.

This setup shifts even more responsibility to Matthews to exert his will on the game. It's a far cry from last year's playoffs when he went head-to-head with Washington's second line and scored in four of the six games.

Here he not only has to contend with the dominant Marchand-Bergeron-Pastrnak trio, but also Zdeno Chara's reach in the defensive zone and Charles McAvoy's elite transition skills. Komarov is being asked to disrupt that balance—be it through a hit, or perhaps a well-timed kiss returned to Marchand.

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Ideally, Toronto will find a little more room for Nylander and Matthews to use their talent after seeing them get stuck in a swamp of black and gold sweaters in the neutral zone on Thursday.

"When we had the puck we were dangerous, but you definitely want [it] a little bit more," said Matthews. "Not too many plays to be made out there."

Wherever possible, Komarov plans to station himself in front of Tuukka Rask's net. That should cause some disruption, but also give the visitors a chance to break up the tightly-packed Boston defenders.

"I think just getting the puck in and bumping it over and creating that space, spreading the zone out a little bit more," said Matthews. "They're good at clogging it up in small areas in their 'D' zone. So when you spread them out you get more opportunities, get to hang on to the puck more."



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The Matthews line is being challenged by Bruins coach Bruce Cassidy with a steady matchup against Bergeron.

Now they're also being pushed by Babcock, who said "their three guys were more competitive than ours, and in the end that's why they had success" in Game 1.

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1091450 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / How it feels to be stuck in a Winnipeg Whiteout

Luke Fox April 13, 2018, 9:00 AM

WINNIPEG – When I ran into Canada's Minister of International Trade in the elevator of an old Winnipeg hotel — y'know, as one does — the Honourable Francois-Philippe Champagne said he was concerned all day Wednesday.

He'd been informed a Whiteout was invading the Prairie city at the same time as his business trip. The politician's safety worries were relieved when the details of this particular brand of Whiteout were explained to him. Once he saw what all of Canada witnessed Wednesday night, he bought in to the fervour.

Champagne may not be a hockey fanatic, but the power of happy people flooding the street and filling the arena with a shared hope, a loud voice and silly costumes, well, it's contagious. Enough that he wanted to chat with a stranger in an elevator about the wonderful spectacle he'd witnessed.

Head-to-toe white jumpsuits, ZZ Top-style beards, chalky wigs, 15,321 whipping towels stamped with the claim "We Are Winnipeg," road-white replica jerseys galore, makeshift fighter jet pilot helmets, white Christmas lights worn as body necklaces, more expended tubes of clown-white face paint than a mime convention ... Jets fans don't just show their pride, they dunk themselves in it and then mosh in your face and make merry.

"I was trying to find a word for it. Electrifying? I dunno," said Jets defenceman Joe Morrow, who only scored the first playoff game-winner in franchise history.

"People filled both bowls for the warmup of a game. You never see that. Every chance you get, they're cheering as loud as they can, pouring their hearts and souls into the ice. All that funnels down to us and that really does make a huge difference. My first Whiteout experience will be one I'll never forget."

Winnipeg's Whiteout harkens back to 1987, when supporters of the original Jets were encouraged to wear white to home playoff games to build an intimidating backdrop for the visiting Flames — a colourless response to Calgary's C of Red. The Jets won that series in six, and a tradition was born.

When the franchise relocated to Glendale, Ariz., the Whiteout migrated west. Former Jets AHL affiliate, the St. John's IceCaps, brought it east. Current farm team, the Manitoba Moose, have dabbled with it too. And when Canada faced off for gold against Russia at the 1999 world juniors, host Winnipeg turned out looking whiter than Jerry Seinfeld's sneakers.

The success of the Whiteout, however, is debatable. The former Jets franchise never won anything more prestigious than an Avco Cup. This edition got swept by the Ducks in its first trip to the dance, back in 2015. And red machine Russia won that '99 gold medal.

Now that the NHL has done away with home whites and the Jets actually wear blue at MTS Place — petition pending — the Whiteout doesn't quite sync up aesthetically the way it did in Dave Ellett's glory days.

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Seeing this crowd's effects on a team that's Cup-contender good, however, may turn you into a believer. The Jets came into the post-season with the best home record in hockey (32-7-2), they start better than any other team (30-2 when leading after one period), and they feed off their seventh man — who just won't shut up.

Goalie Connor Hellebuyck says just thinking about the crowd gives him butterflies. Jacob Trouba says he has to try hard to not get caught up and keep his focus on the play. Blake Wheeler says he loves feeding off their energy.

On Wednesday, close icings in the first period were booed with lust; officials were reminded how much they suck at not-so-subtle volume; each key save or crushing Byfuglien body check was celebrated to touchdown-esque levels; and goals for the good guys were punctuated by plumes of dry ice puking from underneath the Jumbotron and culminated in unadulterated frenzy. The Wave happened, sans irony.

Walls can't contain all that joy, so it spills outside — where it's cheaper. The open, free-of-charge party on Donald Street is costing True North Sports & Entertainment an estimated \$20,000 each evening to produce, but the costs are figured to be recouped in merchandise, food and beverage sales and corporate activations.

Spreading further, elementary schools have held their own mini Whiteouts.

"This is a special place," Jets coach Paul Maurice says. "We've got a camera, and when the doors opened at clearly at 5 o'clock [for a 6 p.m. puck drop], they got the memo wrong. Thought the game was starting. That's the best warmup crowd we've ever had, and they were wired from the start."

Later, when Patrik Laine wristed a rocket over Devan Dubnyk's glove for the first playoff goal of his NHL career, tying Game 1 and cueing the comeback, the decibel level inside the barn exceeded 108, which is akin to putting your head beside a riveting machine. The average human pain threshold is 110.

From the nosebleeders, it became impossible to hear yourself think, unless your thought was, Boy, sure is loud, eh?

"The atmosphere was just like the place exploded," Laine says. "I was saving my goals and celebrations for the playoffs. Now you can celly a little harder."

Despite Winnipeg's proximity to Minnesota, only one Wild fan could be spotted, like a green Waldo, in Wednesday's sea of white. A repugnant sliver of spinach stuck in a Colgate smile, the in-arena camera operator focused on the fan in green and plastered a virtual white shirt on him. At first he tried to squirm but eventually relented.

"We know the crowd. That's one advantage that I've been able to tell the players, playing against them three years ago [with Anaheim], with the crowd and what the expectations are going to be like when you get to the arena," says Wild coach Bruce Boudreau. This is his first playoff series as the underdog, and he sarcastically played that card.

"We're glad we're invited to play, so we'll give it our best shot."

As for Maurice, whose knack for dry humour matches Boudreau's, he was asked post-game what he thought of the opening night crowd.

Maurice paused before coming up with the perfect answer.

"We should invite them all back."

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1091451 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / How Ken Hitchcock reinvented himself in the final years of his career

Ryan Dixon | April 13, 2018, 3:00 PM

Despite what just about anybody who's worked with or against him would say, it is possible to catch Ken Hitchcock off guard. Dennis Coates still has the hard evidence and, one day, he plans to return to 'Hitch' the handwritten — in pencil no less — resumé Coates and other members of the Kamloops Blazers board got in 1984.

While every other candidate found the time to do some typing, Hitchcock's presentation was less than perfect for a couple reasons. First off, he didn't even really want the job, having carved out a niche for himself working at a sporting goods store in Edmonton and coaching a powerhouse AAA midget squad in nearby Sherwood Park. Additionally, Hitchcock didn't even know he was supposed to bring a resumé until he had one final conversation with Kamloops brass just before his flight departed.

"I grabbed a bunch of lined paper at the airport and wrote out my resumé and the only thing they had on the airplane was a pencil," he recalled when I spoke to him for a Sportsnet magazine story back in 2012. "I wrote it out on the airplane from Edmonton to Kamloops and I'd never written a resumé before.

"Pretty tough to have a resumé when all you've done is coach midget hockey."

This morning, Hitchcock retired after a 22-year coaching in the NHL. And at this point, should he ever feel the need or change his mind, Hitchcock could probably scratch out his resumé in crayon while riding a Segway and still get a job coaching in the world's best hockey league. In the final act of his career in St. Louis and Dallas, the 66-year-old found success with many of his tried and true methods — the same ones that helped him claim a Cup with Dallas in 1999 and win more games than everyone but Scotty Bowman and Joel Quenneville. But a man long known for being an ultra-demanding coach also implemented lessons gleaned during his final out-of-work stint.

Any talk of Hitchcock's late-career adjustments must first be placed in the context of what he always possessed, namely an incredibly absorbent, layered hockey mind. Gary Agnew's first contact with Hitchcock came after the former had spent roughly 20 years coaching the game at very high levels.

"You kind of think that, over that time period, you have a pretty good handle on X's and O's and preparation, work ethic and how the game should be played," said Agnew. "And then you meet a guy like Hitch and you say, 'It's not fair he knows that much more than I do.'"

Hitchcock grew up playing hockey, but quit in his late teens to pursue another sporting passion, golf.

"Believe it or not, even in Edmonton, the two seasons overlapped," Hitchcock said.

He ventured east to explore the possibility of NCAA golf at the University of Michigan, but said the decision to get in the car and drive home was an easy one once he found out how much that endeavor would cost.

He began a successful run coaching in Sherwood Park and had actually already turned down other offers to get behind the bench of a junior club when the Blazers came calling.

"I liked my life at that time, I have no idea why I got on that plane and I have no idea why they picked me," he said.

Coates, a lawyer in the Kamloops area who was involved with the team for over 40 years, shed some light on the decision.

"You just get instincts about people who can win and not win, and people you can work with and not work with," he said.

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The themes that would come to define Hitchcock as a coach surfaced quickly. He's an information junkie, a relentless worker who demands the same detail-oriented devotion from his players as he gives to his craft. In fact, as Kamloops GM Bob Brown soon found out, everybody in the organization is expected to be as engaged as the coach.

"Brownie would get calls from Hitch at 2 o'clock in the morning talking about a line combination," Coates recalled.

Another Hitchcock hallmark took root early on, though this one developed out of necessity. As a major junior rookie, Hitchcock had moments where he felt he was in over his head. He had no choice but to trust the leaders on his team, players like future NHLers Daryl Reaugh and Greg Hawgood.

"I turned the room over to them because I didn't have a clue," he said. "I didn't even know where to point the damn bus."

In doing so, Hitchcock stumbled upon a formula he used throughout his career. Rather than preach to 23 players, he hammers his message home through a core of capable leaders.

"He's the harshest on them," said former NHLer and current Vancouver Canucks assistant coach Manny Malhotra, who became one of the league's premier defensive players under Hitchcock in Columbus. "There's no free rides for anybody in the room, but he's the harshest on the guys he knows can pull other guys into the battle."

That process wasn't always pretty. There isn't a professional sports coach alive who hasn't, on numerous occasions, asked some spit-laced questions of a player from close range. But Jeremy Roenick said while he's played for coaches who yelled and screamed far more than Hitchcock, he stressed you did not want to be the player who hurt a team by doing something that ran counter to Hitchcock's game plan.

"He would talk to you in the room as if you were committing some kind of capital crime," said Roenick, who played for Hitchcock as a member of the Philadelphia Flyers. "He would definitely make you feel inferior in terms of the knowledge. He would hover himself over you — and not that that's bad thing — but Ken is very intimidating."

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It's not as if Hitchcock started handing out hugs and candy late in his professional life, but he tweaked his approach after a reflective period beginning in 2010 when he lost his job behind the Blue Jackets bench. Agnew, who worked beside him on the Columbus coaching staff, was let go, too, but the pair, while still collecting paycheques from the Jackets, continued to see a lot of each other living in Central Ohio.

"We would meet at least five days a week for coffee," Hitchcock says.

At the time, Agnew — now associate coach of the American Hockey League's Utica Comets — had two teenage children involved in sport, son Brett being a hockey player and daughter Lindsay playing soccer. The veteran coaches talked a lot about the needs of young athletes and Hitchcock attended seminars on the subject, which is no surprise given the Civil War buff's all-around love of learning.

"All the guy does is read books," Roenick says in a tone that hints at where that activity falls on his fun hierarchy.

One of the takeaways for Hitchcock was that athletes today are much, much harder on themselves than their predecessors. Every aspect of



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their existence is so heavily regimented — from diet and their physical conditioning to video sessions and practices—that it can all become a bit much. On a given day during that latter portion of his career, Hitchcock could wander into work and find a handful of his guys glued to screens watching their shifts from the night before. Players are almost all students of the game now and the best way to reach them is through detailed explanations, not enhanced decibel levels. Hitchcock tried to make his points direct and concise, believing brevity would help players turn the page on miscues, rather than letting mistakes become a mental drain.

"This is a (generation) that needs to move on quickly," he said.

That's why humour is another element Hitchcock incorporated in his teachings.

"It becomes, 'It's not as bad as you think'," he said of injecting the odd chuckle into coaching. "You bring that aspect into it and I think it increases the learning curve."

Creating laughs is no problem for Hitchcock, who is universally acknowledged as a people person.

"Get him outside the rink and he's a hoot," said Roenick, who admitted his own flamboyant personality caused some clashes with Hitchcock, but added the two always shared a mutual respect. "You get him on a golf course and he'll hold court. He'll have people enthralled, laughing, just totally engaged in what he's talking about. That's a very hard trait to master."

The trepidation Hitchcock originally felt about the move that ultimately launched his career dissipated fast. He said it took just one day on the job in Kamloops to know he'd made the right decision and his instincts were as accurate as Coates's when he met the guy with the pencil resume that's still floating around the Kamloops offices.

"We're going to frame it and give it to him one day," Coates said.

No better time than now.

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Sportsnet.ca / Vegas' Carrier on Doughty hit: 'It was kind of lucky it was me'

Iain MacIntyre | April 13, 2018, 4:44 PM

LAS VEGAS — William Carrier is glad Drew Doughty hit him in the head.

Doughty, not so much.

"I think it's BS, it's awful," the Los Angeles Kings defenceman said Friday morning about the one-game suspension he received for his glancing head-shot two nights earlier on the Vegas Golden Knights forward. "Watching the games last night, I guess (the National Hockey League) has four or five more to give."

Doughty was referring to the league's disciplinary hearing with Toronto Maple Leafs' Nazem Kadri for his atrocious hit Thursday night on Boston Bruins forward Tommy Wingels.

Kadri should be suspended for multiple games after purposefully driving Wingels' head into the boards while the Bruin was already on his knees. And most people in hockey outside of Los Angeles would agree Doughty deserved a game for shouldering Carrier in the head during the third period of the Kings' 1-0 loss to the Vegas Golden Knights in Game 1 on Wednesday.

"I think most of the people who have seen the hit thought it was a one-game suspension," Knights coach Gerard Gallant said. "I'd be surprised if people were really upset that he got suspended one game. It's early in the playoffs, it's a suspendable hit and one game is fair."

Carrier will play Game 2 Friday night at T-Mobile Arena, and Doughty won't.

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But that's not why Carrier was glad Doughty drilled him. The Knights fourth-liner was relieved the victim wasn't a player from higher up the Vegas lineup.

"It was kind of lucky it was me, to be honest with you," Carrier, who averaged 8:50 of ice time this season on Vegas' fourth line, said after the Knights' morning skate. "We don't want one of our top scorers to get one of those kinds of hits. It was just a fast play; not a dirty play at all."

"He gets me in the head and you get a little sore. But that's it. You get back up and get back to it."

Carrier said Doughty's hit could have been on anyone, but we're not so sure.

The Knights' fourth line — Carrier with Tomas Nosek and Pierre-Edouard Bellmare — was probably Vegas' best trio in Game 1.

Carrier was credited with 10 hits in the game, although that figure was surely inflated by off-ice officials who somehow saw 127 official "hits" in a game that was no more physical than your average playoff contest. Perhaps the guy tracking hits was a pacifist.

But Carrier's line did play a physical game, and it was his big hit on L.A. defenceman Christian Folin that created the turnover that led to Shea Theodore's goal. Bellemare appeared to deflect the defenceman's shot but was not awarded the goal. Presumably, he was credited with a hit.

The Knights also targeted Doughty, just like every team targets the opponent's top defenceman.

"I think our line will try to bring the same thing tonight," Carrier said. "Anyone they put back in their lineup will be fabulous. Obviously, (Doughty) plays 30 minutes a game, so they'll adjust for that. But it's going to be the same game out there."

Gallant liked his fourth line so much on Wednesday that he played Bellmare 14:05, and Nosek 13:22. Carrier, who did not kill penalties and left the game after Doughty's unpenalized hit halfway through the third period, finished with 8:49 of ice time.

"A lot of times, I'll put them on the ice against the other team's No. 1 line," Gallant said. "So I trust them. They compete and they battle. Last game, I think they played an exceptional game. They're really important to me."

Vegas winger David Perron took the morning skate but still hasn't been cleared to play after a suffering an undisclosed injury on March 26.

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Sportsnet.ca / Avalanche upset Johansen not suspended: 'There's got to be some consistency'

Sportsnet Staff t April 13, 2018, 3:10 PM



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • April 14, 2018

If the one-game suspension given to Drew Doughty after Game 1 of the LA-Vegas series was to set a precedent, then there were a few players who should've been under review for supplementary discipline after the second night of the Stanley Cup Playoffs.

Tom Wilson escaped punishment for his check on Alexander Wennberg, which he said cost the Capitals the game. Nazem Kadri is having a hearing and Leafs Nation is bracing to be without him for at least Game 2 and possibly more.

Nashville's Ryan Johansen also threw a borderline suspendable hit on Colorado defenceman Tyson Barrie, though he too escaped being disciplined by the league, as it was ruled to be a "full body hit."

Jared Bednar on the Johansen hit to Barrie: "It looks like he got some of his head there, coming across, for sure,"

— Adrian Dater (@adater) April 13, 2018

"You saw what happened to Doughty. There's got to be some consistency," Avalanche GM Joe Sakic told the Denver Post on Friday.

Barrie was asked about the hit after Thursday's game and declined to comment further because he hadn't seen it on replay yet. After Friday's skate, the defenceman was asked again about the hit following news that Johansen had escaped punishment.

"If those are the hits you're allowed to make, then maybe you take one or two runs at guys that you might get away with," he told BSN Denver's Adrian Dater.

Johansen was not penalized on the play.

"I think it was a little bit late and high," Avalanche forward Mikko Rantanen said. "But the league makes the decisions and I don't have anything to say about that."

Barrie and Sakic both agreed they didn't see much of a difference between Johansen's hit and the one that earned Doughty a one-game sitdown.

"I was shooting and I didn't see him coming at all," Barrie told the Post. "I kind of came from the side and he definitely caught my head. I'm not sure if they determined that he hit my shoulder or whatever it was first. But it's part of the game and that's in the league's hands so you can't really control it."

According to Dater, Avalanche head coach Jared Bednar won't make any lineup changes ahead of Game 2.

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TSN.CA / Statistically Speaking: Flyers bounce back in Game Two

Scott Cullen

Couturier picks up the Flyers in Game Two; Laine, Myers, Haula, Elliott and more in Scott Cullen's Statistically Speaking.

HEROES

Sean Couturier – Philadelphia's top centre put up a goal and two assists in a 5-1 Game Two win at Pittsburgh. He has 16 points (3 G, 13 A) in the past 15 games and had managed four points (3 G, 1 A) in his 20 previous playoff games.

Patrik Laine – Winnipeg's sophomore sniper notched a goal and an assist in a 4-1 Game Two victory against Minnesota. He has three points (2 G, 1 A) and 10 shots on goal through the first two games of the series.

Tyler Myers – The towering Jets blueliner produced a goal and an assist in Game Two against Minnesota; he had just two assists in his previous 19 games.

Erik Haula – The Golden Knights centre scored the double-overtime winner in a 2-1 Game Two victory against Los Angeles, giving Vegas a 2-0 series lead. Going back to the regular-season, he had gone four consecutive games without a point, matching his longest scoring drought of the year, before scoring that huge goal.

Brian Elliott – After getting pulled from Game One of the series, the Flyers goaltender bounced back and stopped 34 of 35 shots in a 5-1 Game Two win at Pittsburgh.

ZEROES

Charlie Coyle – The Wild winger was on the wrong side of the puck (2 for, 12 against, 14.3 CF%, 0-6 scoring chances) in a 4-1 loss at Winnipeg.

Nick Seeler – Same goes for the rookie Wild defenceman (4 for, 22 against, 15.4 CF%, 0-11 scoring chances).

Trevor Lewis – The Kings veteran spent most of the five periods at Vegas in his own end (8 for, 34 against, 19.1 CF%) in a 2-1 overtime loss in Game Two at Vegas.

Matt Murray – After posting a shutout in Game One, the Penguins netminder gave up four goals on 19 shots in a 5-1 Game Two loss to Philadelphia.

STANLEY CUP HALF FULL/HALF EMPTY

Nolan Patrick – The Flyers rookie recorded his first career playoff goal, on a nifty power-play setup from Couturier, but was otherwise buried in his own end (2 for, 13 against, 13.3 CF%, 1-6 scoring chances) in a 5-1 Game Two win at Pittsburgh.

VITAL SIGNS

Jack Roslovic – Inserted into the Jets' Game Two lineup to replace an injured Mathieu Perreault, the Winnipeg rookie contributed a pair of assists in a 4-1 win over Minnesota.

Oscar Fantenberg – On a Kings blueline missing Drew Doughty, Jake Muzzin and Derek Forbort, the rookie blueliner logged 41:03 of ice time in Game Two at Vegas, second-highest on the team behind Alec Martinez (44:51).

SHORT SHIFTS

Flyers D Ivan Provorov picked up a pair of assists in Game Two at Pittsburgh, and has nine points (3 G, 6 A) in the past eight games...Fresh off scoring the game-winning goal in Game One, Jets D Joe Morrow had a stellar possession game (20 for, 3 against, 87.0 CF%, 10-0 scoring chances) in a 4-1 Game Two victory...Kings G Jonathan Quick stopped 54 of 56 shots in a 2-1 double-overtime loss in Game Two at Vegas. He has stopped 81 of 84 shots in two games and the Kings are still down 2-0 in the series...Golden Knights G Marc-Andre Fleury turned away 29 of 30 shots for the win in Game Two; he's stopped 59 of 60 shots to take the 2-0 series lead.

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TSN.CA / Statistically Speaking: Panarin pulls through in OT

Scott Cullen



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • April 14, 2018

Artemi Panarin plays the hero for Columbus; Pastrnak, Palat, Kane and Forsberg also off to strong starts in the postseason Statistically Speaking.

HEROES

Artemi Panarin – Columbus' Bread Man baked up the overtime winner in addition to two assists in a 4-3 Game One victory at Washington. He finished the regular season with 29 points (9 G, 20 A) in the last 16 games and now has 11 points (3 G, 8 A) in 12 career playoff games.

David Pastrnak – Boston's playmaking winger put up a goal and two helpers in a 5-1 Game One win vs. Toronto. Pastrnak finished the regular season with 16 points (11 G, 5 A) in the last 15 games, and now has seven points (3 G, 4 A) in seven career playoff games.

Ondrej Palat – The Lightning winger produced a goal and two assists in a 5-2 Game One win against New Jersey. Although he finished with a career-low 35 points this season, limited by injuries to just 56 games, Palat has six points (3 G, 3 A) in his past five games.

Evander Kane – The Sharks winger scored twice in a 3-0 Game One win at Anaheim, giving him 10 goals in the past 11 games.

Filip Forsberg – Nashville's talented winger scored a pair of goals in a 5-2 Game one win vs. Colorado. He had 15 points (8 G, 7 A) in the last 11 games of the regular season.

ZEROES

Morgan Rielly – Toronto's star blueliner was overrun (3 for, 29 against, 9.4 CF%, 2-16 scoring chances) and was on the ice for two goals against in a 5-1 Game One loss at Boston.

Miles Wood – The Devils speedster spent most of the night in his own end of the rink (4 for, 19 against, 17.4 CF%, 0-9 scoring chances) in a 5-2 Game One loss at Tampa Bay.

Adam Henrique – The Ducks centre had a hard time (5 for, 16 against, 23.8 CF%, 2-9 scoring chances) in a 3-0 Game One loss to San Jose.

Mattias Ekholm and P.K. Subban – Nashville's star defence tandem struggled (11 for, 13 against, 45.8 CF%, 1-7 scoring chances) and were on the ice for both goals against in a 5-2 Game One win against Colorado.

STANLEY CUP HALF FULL/HALF EMPTY

Brad Marchand – The Bruins winger scored a goal and added an assist in a 5-1 Game One win against Toronto, but he also did this:

"That was very weird to me...it's certainly uncomfortable to watch."

Nazem Kadri on Boston's Brad Marchand kissing Leo Komarov.

Again. <https://t.co/jtQ3Djm45o> #TSNHockey #StanleyCup pic.twitter.com/fiiTca3SEJ

— TSN Hockey (@TSNHockey) April 13, 2018

VITAL SIGNS

Alexander Wennberg – The Blue Jackets centre suffered an upper-body injury after taking a head hit from Capitals RW Tom Wilson and was forced to leave Game One at Washington. Wilson, who received a two-minute charging penalty, may be in line for supplemental discipline.

Nazem Kadri – The Maple Leafs centre could be facing supplemental discipline for a nasty hit on Bruins winger Tommy Wingels.

Josh Anderson – Columbus' physical winger crossed the line against Washington and received a major for boarding and a game misconduct for his hit on Capitals defenceman Michal Kempny, who didn't return after taking the hit.

SHORT SHIFTS

Yanni Gourde is a major contributor for the Lightning.

Devils LW Taylor Hall recorded a goal and an assist in a 5-2 Game One loss at Tampa Bay. He finished the regular season with 17 points (8 G, 9 A) in the last 10 games...Lightning RW Tyler Johnson and LW Yanni Gourde both had a goal and an assist against New Jersey. Johnson had finished the regular season with two points (1 G, 1 A) in the last 13 games while Gourde, playing in his first NHL playoff game, had 10 points (1 G, 9 A) in the last 10 games of the regular season...Bruins C David Krejci and LW Brad Marchand both had a goal and an assist in a 5-1 Game One win over Toronto. Bruins D Torey Krug added a pair of assists. While Krejci has twice led the playoffs in scoring, he had four assists in his past 15 playoff games, Marchand finished the regular season in a slump, with one assist in the last six games; Krug produced 11 points (1 G, 10 A) in the last 11 regular-season games...Blue Jackets RW Thomas Vanek contributed a goal and an assist, while rookie C Pierre-Luc Dubois added a couple of assists in a 4-3 OT Game One win at Washington. Vanek had 15 points (7 G, 8 A) in the last 15 games of the regular season, and Dubois had 11 points (5 G, 6 A) in the last eight games of the season...Capitals C Evgeny Kuznetsov scored a pair of goals in a 4-3 overtime loss in Game One against Columbus. He had 28 points (11 G, 17 A) in 18 games to finish the regular season...Capitals D John Carlson earned three assists against Columbus; he had 18 points (4 G, 14 A) in 18 games to wrap up the regular season...Capitals C Nicklas Backstrom added a pair of assists; he had 26 points (6 G, 20 A) in the last 19 games of the regular season...Predators C Colton Sissons and RW Austin Watson both had a goal and an assist in a 5-2 Game One win against Colorado. Sissons had zero points in his last 10 regular-season games, while Watson produced eight points (5 G, 3 A) in 14 games down the stretch...Predators C Ryan Johansen added a pair of assists, giving him 10 points (3 G, 7 A) in his past 10 games...Sharks C Joe Pavelski picked up two assists in a 3-0 Game One win at Anaheim. He had 20 points (7 G, 13 A) in the last 19 games of the regular season.

Bruins C Patrice Bergeron had stellar possession stats (23 for, 5 against, 82.1 CF%, 12-2 scoring chances) and got the better of (13 for, 5 against, 72.2 CF%, 7-2 scoring chances) his head-to-head match-up with Maple Leafs C Auston Matthews...Sharks D Brent Burns launched 13 shot attempts (9 SOG) and scored on goal in a 3-0 Game One win at Anaheim.

Sharks G Martin Jones posted a 25-save shutout in a 3-0 Game One win at Anaheim. He had a .880 save percentage in his last six starts of the regular season, but has a .928 save percentage in 33 career playoff games...Bruins G Tuukka Rask turned away 26 of 27 shots in a 5-1 Game One win against Toronto. He has a .929 save percentage in 67 career playoff games.

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TSN.CA / Statistically Speaking: Crosby, Fleury star as playoffs open

Scott Cullen

Crosby's hat trick and Fleury's shutout make the opening night of the playoffs feel like old times, Statistically Speaking.

HEROES

Sidney Crosby – Pittsburgh's captain tallied three goals to bury the Flyers 7-0 in Game One. Crosby has nine goals in his past 10 games and it was his first playoff hat trick since May, 2013, when he recorded a hat trick against Ottawa.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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Jake Guentzel – The sophomore Penguins winger, who led the playoffs with 13 goals last year, produced a goal and three assists in Game One against Philadelphia. He had one goal during the last five games of the regular season.

Marc-Andre Fleury – The Vegas netminder stopped all 30 shots that he faced in a 1-0 win over Los Angeles, a nice recovery after getting shelled for six goals on 18 shots in the regular-season finale against Calgary. It was Fleury's 11th career postseason shutout.

ZEROES

Claude Giroux, Sean Couturier and Shayne Gostisbehere – Two of Philadelphia's top forwards and one of their top-pair defencemen were each on the ice for four goals against in a 7-0 Game One loss at Pittsburgh.

Carson Soucy and Jared Spurgeon – The Wild defence pairing, a rookie and a veteran playing for the first time in nearly a month, struggled (6 for, 22 against, 21.4 CF%, 2-11 scoring chances) and were on the ice for a goal against in a 3-2 loss at Winnipeg.

Alex Iafallo – Los Angeles' rookie winger had a tough night (3 for, 13 against, 18.8 CF%, 1-5 scoring chances) in his first NHL playoff game, a 1-0 Game One loss at Vegas.

Brian Elliott – The Flyers netminder surrendered five goals on 19 shots before getting replaced by Petr Mrazek in a 7-0 Game One loss at Pittsburgh.

STANLEY CUP HALF FULL/HALF EMPTY

Joe Morrow – The Jets defenceman was victimized on Minnesota's second goal, as Zach Parise's pass across to Mikael Granlund eluded Morrow's stick, but that was long forgotten after Morrow notched the game-winning goal in the third period.

VITAL SIGNS

Mathieu Perreault – Winnipeg's skilled winger was knocked out of the game with an upper-body injury after a run-in with Wild rookie D Nick Seeler.

Jake Muzzin – An upper-body injury prevented the Kings defenceman from playing Game One at Vegas. His absence has potential to really hurt Los Angeles.

David Perron – The Golden Knights winger didn't dress for Game One against Los Angeles, as he's still dealing with an undisclosed injury.

SHORT SHIFTS

Penguins LW Carl Hagelin contributed a goal and an assist in a 7-0 Game One win over Philadelphia. He had three points (1 G, 2 A) in the last eight games of the regular season...Penguins D Brian Dumoulin added a pair of assists against the Flyers, matching his production from the last six games of the regular season...Penguins G Matt Murray cruised to a 24-save shutout in a 7-0 Game One win against Philadelphia. He had struggled last in the year, with a .896 save percentage in his past nine games, but it was also his third consecutive playoff shutout...Kings G Jonathan Quick turned away 27 of 28 shots in a 1-0 Game One loss at Vegas. He was solid over the past month, posting a .926 save percentage in his past 11 starts...Vegas' fourth line of Tomas Nosek, Pierre-Edouard Bellemare, and William Carrier controlled play (12 for, 3 against, 80.0 CF%, 6-3 scoring chances) in a 1-0 Game One win over Los Angeles.

FIRSTS

Vegas – In the Golden Knights' first ever playoff game, they earned their ever playoff win.

Winnipeg – The Jets earned their first playoff victory in franchise history.

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TSN.CA / Komarov, Marchand about to get up close and personal

Mark Masters

TSN Toronto reporter Mark Masters checks in daily with news and notes from Maple Leafs practices and game-day skates. The Leafs practised at TD Garden in Boston on Friday.

Leo Komarov will see a lot more of Brad Marchand and Boston's top line on Saturday night. The gritty Maple Leafs winger was promoted to Toronto's top line at Friday's practice skating alongside Auston Matthews and William Nylander.

"He was competitive last night and we're trying to get the most competitive people involved as much as we possibly can," Leafs head coach Mike Babcock explained. "It looks to me like they're matching (Patrice) Bergeron against (Matthews) so it gives Leo a good job and (he'll be) a net-front presence."

Komarov did his best to get in the face of Marchand during Thursday's Game 1. The Boston left winger responded, at one point, by getting really close to Komarov. Like, really close. Whatever he did – Kiss? Nuzzle? Lick? – Komarov insists Marchand's rather strange tactics are not getting to him.

"It doesn't bother me," he said. "It seems you keep asking me the question. I play hockey, he plays hockey. I think he's a good player and we keep competing ... He kissed me earlier this season (in a game on Nov. 11), but it is what it is. I'm playing hockey and that's it."

Komarov clearly has the attention of Marchand and perhaps that could help the Leafs down the road.

"Obviously, him and Marchand like to go against each other so I think that kind of fuels (Leo)," Matthews noted.

As for the kissing?

"Very surprising," Matthews said, "but you do whatever you gotta do, I guess, in the playoffs."

"I don't know about any of his antics," said Babcock when asked about Marchand. "That's not what I just saw. I just saw a real good player working real hard. That's what I saw. The rest of that stuff, to me, is not what makes him good. What makes him good is he's competitive. Their three guys were more competitive than ours. And, in the end, that's why they had success."

Matthews calls Marchand's kissing tactic: 'Very surprising'

Brad Marchand was up to his old antics in Game 1 against the Maple Leafs getting up close and personal with Leo Komarov for the second time this year using a tactic that even Patrick Marleau admits he's never seen before.

Matthews calls Marchand's kissing tactic: 'Very surprising'

Brad Marchand was up to his old antics in Game 1 against the Maple Leafs getting up close and personal with Leo Komarov for the second time this year using a tactic that even Patrick Marleau admits he's never seen before.

Matthews plans adjustments after quiet Game 1

Marchand scored the opening goal on the power play and then combined with linemates Bergeron and David Pastrnak to neutralize the Matthews line for most of Game 1. Shot attempts were 19-9 in favour of Boston when Matthews was on the ice. But Matthews, who fired three shots on net, tried to put a positive spin on things.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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"It was fine," Matthews said in assessing his Game 1 effort. "I thought the first period, the first 10 minutes, they're going to come out and you've got to weather the storm a bit. I thought the second and third we got into their zone a little bit more and when we had the puck we were dangerous. You definitely want a little bit more. Not too many plays to be made out there."

So, how do you find space against what may be hockey's most dominant line right now?

"Just getting the puck in and bumping it over and creating that space, spreading the zone out a little bit more," Matthews said. "They're good at clogging it up in small areas in their D zone so when you spread them out you kind of get more opportunities and you can hang onto the puck more."

That's easier said than done.

"They were good in the neutral zone and they break out well and they always seem to have guys available in their D zone," Matthews observed. "Their D can see the ice and move the puck well and they play pretty fast. It's also a strength of our team."

Button tags every player not named Hyman with an F grade

Leafs Lunch host Andi Petrillo with Mark Roe and Craig Button give their Grades of the Game brought to you by Borrowell.com for the Leafs' ugly 5-1 loss in Game 1 of their series against the Bruins, and Button doesn't hold back on his assessment.

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No regrets over Plekanec-Bergeron matchup

Babcock has no regrets about putting his fourth line on the ice for a defensive-zone faceoff late in the second period last night. Initially, the trio of Tomas Plekanec, Kasper Kapanen and Komarov were able to get the puck up the ice, but not far enough to create an opportunity to change and later on in that shift Pastrnak scored to make it 3-1.

"I did that on purpose, because that's their job – to win that draw and get it out and get it in," the coach explained. "They did that, but never got off the ice. You get paid to do certain things. That's your job. So, it wasn't like I was avoiding that at all. I thought that was a real good situation for us. They're supposed to be able to start in the D zone, get us in the O zone and get off the ice. That's their job."

Plekanec, the closest forward to Pastrnak when he scored, has struggled since being acquired from the Canadiens before the trade deadline. He has just one primary point – an assist against Buffalo on April 2 – in 18 games in a Toronto uniform. But that one primary assist came on a goal by Andreas Johnsson, who skated on his left wing at practice on Friday and is expected to make his NHL playoff debut in Game 2.

Marchand appeared to be offside on Boston's first goal, but the Leafs didn't challenge it.

"We didn't have that replay," Babcock said. "So, then when the puck was being dropped, we had the replay. That's disappointing. That's also on the coaching staff, not on the players, that's on us. Obviously, it's offside, that part's disappointing. It's disappointing we don't have the replays on time to make a decision and usually when you know it's coming you can delay more. On the three or four that our guys had it wasn't there. As soon as it was, it was too late ... Two extra seconds and we might have been able to get that right and it's a big deal in the game, obviously."

This isn't the first time the issue has come up.

"I don't know how it works either, but I know our guy knows how it works and he says this has been going on for a while and they've talked a lot about it," Babcock said. "I imagine there will be more feeds over time. That's the feeds they had last night."

Babcock on Boston's offside goal: "It's disappointing that we don't have replays on time"

After a close call on Brad Marchand's series-opening goal for the Bruins that saw Patrice Bergeron just manage to keep his foot on the line, Leafs head coach Mike Babcock admits he may have challenged the call if he had the adequate replays.

Babcock on Boston's offside goal: "It's disappointing that we don't have replays on time"

After a close call on Brad Marchand's series-opening goal for the Bruins that saw Patrice Bergeron just manage to keep his foot on the line, Leafs head coach Mike Babcock admits he may have challenged the call if he had the adequate replays.

Marleau moves to the middle with Hyman, Marner

The Leafs are blessed with great forward depth at the moment, but not particularly at the centre position. So, with Nazem Kadri absent from practice and on Friday night suspended for three games for his hit on Tommy Wingels in Game 1, Babcock shifted veteran Patrick Marleau to the centre spot. The 38-year-old skated between Zach Hyman and Mitch Marner.

"He's a big body, he knows how to play," Babcock said. "I don't like him there long term, but for the short term he's done pretty well for us. I just think that he's a guy who is comfortable being in the playoffs, being in the middle, he's done it before and it shouldn't be an issue."

Marleau, who filled in at centre for several games this season when Matthews was out, downplayed any concerns about making the transition at this stage of the season.

"It should be all right," he said with a smile. "I've been going back and forth throughout my whole career so it's just a matter of being detailed and ready to go right from the drop of the puck."

"What we tried to do is give ourselves good balance," Babcock said. "We thought Hyman played real well last night (Thursday), we thought Hyman could help those two guys be a real good line."

In the past, Babcock noted that Marleau's speed on the forecheck is minimized when he has to play centre. But Hyman can certainly play that role on this new-look line.

"He'll definitely be flying and going to the net," said Marleau. "It might allow Mitch and myself to play with the puck a little bit more and make those plays toward the net."

McKenzie: Interesting Hyman is off top line; he was most the impactful player in Game 1

Leafs Lunch host Andi Petrillo with Mark Roe and Craig Button are joined by TSN Hockey Insider Bob McKenzie to discuss the adjusted Leafs lines in preparation for Nazem Kadri's suspension.

McKenzie: Interesting Hyman is off top line; was most the impactful player in Game 1

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Losing your No. 2 centre and being forced to make a series of lineup changes just one game into a playoff series is far from an ideal scenario, but Babcock suggested it might just spark his group.

"It's probably good for us," the coach said. "If you played like we did last night, you deserve a little adversity and then how are we going to handle it? We're a better team than we played last night. As much as we prepared and talked about it, they competed harder than we did and, in the end, if you don't compete harder than the other team, you can't win. We got what we deserved in the end. So, we have a day here to get regrouped and look forward to the challenge."



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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The setback in Game 1 was the first time all season that Toronto has lost by more than three goals.

"We had some trouble in the season, too, and then we bounced back from that," Komarov noted. "Playoffs is different, you know. It doesn't really matter what happens, you just need to move forward and be ready for the next time."

Lines at Friday's practice:

Forwards

Komarov-Matthews-Nylander

Hyman-Marleau-Marner

van Riemsdyk-Bozak-Brown

Johnsson-Plekanec-Kapanen

Martin, Moore

Defencemen

Rielly-Hainsey

Gardiner-Zaitsev

Dermott-Polak

Leivo-Carrick

Goaltenders

Andersen

McElhinney

Power-play units at Friday's practice:

Rielly

Bozak-Johnsson-Marner

van Riemsdyk

Gardiner

Matthews-Komarov-Nylander

Marleau

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TSN.CA / Statistically Speaking: Panarin pulls through in OT

Scott Cullen

Artemi Panarin plays the hero for Columbus; Pastrnak, Palat, Kane and Forsberg also off to strong starts in the postseason Statistically Speaking.

HEROES

Artemi Panarin – Columbus' Bread Man baked up the overtime winner in addition to two assists in a 4-3 Game One victory at Washington. He finished the regular season with 29 points (9 G, 20 A) in the last 16 games and now has 11 points (3 G, 8 A) in 12 career playoff games.

David Pastrnak – Boston's playmaking winger put up a goal and two helpers in a 5-1 Game One win vs. Toronto. Pastrnak finished the regular

season with 16 points (11 G, 5 A) in the last 15 games, and now has seven points (3 G, 4 A) in seven career playoff games.

Ondrej Palat – The Lightning winger produced a goal and two assists in a 5-2 Game One win against New Jersey. Although he finished with a career-low 35 points this season, limited by injuries to just 56 games, Palat has six points (3 G, 3 A) in his past five games.

Evander Kane – The Sharks winger scored twice in a 3-0 Game One win at Anaheim, giving him 10 goals in the past 11 games.

Filip Forsberg – Nashville's talented winger scored a pair of goals in a 5-2 Game one win vs. Colorado. He had 15 points (8 G, 7 A) in the last 11 games of the regular season.

Unreal moves by Forsberg. We are not worthy.
pic.twitter.com/7T1n3I8o6M

— NHL GIFs (@NHLGIFs) April 13, 2018

ZEROES

Morgan Rielly – Toronto's star blueliner was overrun (3 for, 29 against, 9.4 CF%, 2-16 scoring chances) and was on the ice for two goals against in a 5-1 Game One loss at Boston.

Miles Wood – The Devils speedster spent most of the night in his own end of the rink (4 for, 19 against, 17.4 CF%, 0-9 scoring chances) in a 5-2 Game One loss at Tampa Bay.

Adam Henrique – The Ducks centre had a hard time (5 for, 16 against, 23.8 CF%, 2-9 scoring chances) in a 3-0 Game One loss to San Jose.

Mattias Ekholm and P.K. Subban – Nashville's star defence tandem struggled (11 for, 13 against, 45.8 CF%, 1-7 scoring chances) and were on the ice for both goals against in a 5-2 Game One win against Colorado.

STANLEY CUP HALF FULL/HALF EMPTY

Brad Marchand – The Bruins winger scored a goal and added an assist in a 5-1 Game One win against Toronto, but he also did this:

"That was very weird to me...it's certainly uncomfortable to watch."

Nazem Kadri on Boston's Brad Marchand kissing Leo Komarov.

Again. <https://t.co/jtQ3Djm45o> #TSNHockey #StanleyCup
pic.twitter.com/fiiTca3SEJ

— TSN Hockey (@TSNHockey) April 13, 2018

VITAL SIGNS

Alexander Wennberg – The Blue Jackets centre suffered an upper-body injury after taking a head hit from Capitals RW Tom Wilson and was forced to leave Game One at Washington. Wilson, who received a two-minute charging penalty, may be in line for supplemental discipline.

Nazem Kadri – The Maple Leafs centre could be facing supplemental discipline for a nasty hit on Bruins winger Tommy Wingels.

Josh Anderson – Columbus' physical winger crossed the line against Washington and received a major for boarding and a game misconduct for his hit on Capitals defenceman Michal Kempny, who didn't return after taking the hit.

SHORT SHIFTS

Yanni Gourde is a major contributor for the Lightning.

Devils LW Taylor Hall recorded a goal and an assist in a 5-2 Game One loss at Tampa Bay. He finished the regular season with 17 points (8 G, 9 A) in the last 10 games...Lightning RW Tyler Johnson and LW Yanni Gourde both had a goal and an assist against New Jersey. Johnson had finished the regular season with two points (1 G, 1 A) in the last 13 games while Gourde, playing in his first NHL playoff game, had 10 points (1 G, 9 A) in the last 10 games of the regular season...Bruins C David



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Krejci and LW Brad Marchand both had a goal and an assist in a 5-1 Game One win over Toronto. Bruins D Torey Krug added a pair of assists. While Krejci has twice led the playoffs in scoring, he had four assists in his past 15 playoff games, Marchand finished the regular season in a slump, with one assist in the last six games; Krug produced 11 points (1 G, 10 A) in the last 11 regular-season games...Blue Jackets RW Thomas Vanek contributed a goal and an assist, while rookie C Pierre-Luc Dubois added a couple of assists in a 4-3 OT Game One win at Washington. Vanek had 15 points (7 G, 8 A) in the last 15 games of the regular season, and Dubois had 11 points (5 G, 6 A) in the last eight games of the season...Capitals C Evgeny Kuznetsov scored a pair of goals in a 4-3 overtime loss in Game One against Columbus. He had 28 points (11 G, 17 A) in 18 games to finish the regular season...Capitals D John Carlson earned three assists against Columbus; he had 18 points (4 G, 14 A) in 18 games to wrap up the regular season...Capitals C Nicklas Backstrom added a pair of assists; he had 26 points (6 G, 20 A) in the last 19 games of the regular season...Predators C Colton Sissons and RW Austin Watson both had a goal and an assist in a 5-2 Game One win against Colorado. Sissons had zero points in his last 10 regular-season games, while Watson produced eight points (5 G, 3 A) in 14 games down the stretch...Predators C Ryan Johansen added a pair of assists, giving him 10 points (3 G, 7 A) in his past 10 games...Sharks C Joe Pavelski picked up two assists in a 3-0 Game One win at Anaheim. He had 20 points (7 G, 13 A) in the last 19 games of the regular season.

Bruins C Patrice Bergeron had stellar possession stats (23 for, 5 against, 82.1 CF%, 12-2 scoring chances) and got the better of (13 for, 5 against, 72.2 CF%, 7-2 scoring chances) his head-to-head match-up with Maple Leafs C Auston Matthews...Sharks D Brent Burns launched 13 shot attempts (9 SOG) and scored on goal in a 3-0 Game One win at Anaheim.

Sharks G Martin Jones posted a 25-save shutout in a 3-0 Game One win at Anaheim. He had a .880 save percentage in his last six starts of the regular season, but has a .928 save percentage in 33 career playoff games...Bruins G Tuukka Rask turned away 26 of 27 shots in a 5-1 Game One win against Toronto. He has a .929 save percentage in 67 career playoff games.

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1091459 Websites

TSN.CA / Statistically Speaking: Crosby, Fleury star as playoffs open

Scott Cullen

Crosby's hat trick and Fleury's shutout make the opening night of the playoffs feel like old times, Statistically Speaking.

HEROES

Sidney Crosby – Pittsburgh's captain tallied three goals to bury the Flyers 7-0 in Game One. Crosby has nine goals in his past 10 games and it was his first playoff hat trick since May, 2013, when he recorded a hat trick against Ottawa.

Jake Guentzel – The sophomore Penguins winger, who led the playoffs with 13 goals last year, produced a goal and three assists in Game One against Philadelphia. He had one goal during the last five games of the regular season.

Marc-Andre Fleury – The Vegas netminder stopped all 30 shots that he faced in a 1-0 win over Los Angeles, a nice recovery after getting shelled for six goals on 18 shots in the regular-season finale against Calgary. It was Fleury's 11th career postseason shutout.

ZEROES

Claude Giroux, Sean Couturier and Shayne Gostisbehere – Two of Philadelphia's top forwards and one of their top-pair defencemen were each on the ice for four goals against in a 7-0 Game One loss at Pittsburgh.

Carson Soucy and Jared Spurgeon – The Wild defence pairing, a rookie and a veteran playing for the first time in nearly a month, struggled (6 for, 22 against, 21.4 CF%, 2-11 scoring chances) and were on the ice for a goal against in a 3-2 loss at Winnipeg.

Alex Iafallo – Los Angeles' rookie winger had a tough night (3 for, 13 against, 18.8 CF%, 1-5 scoring chances) in his first NHL playoff game, a 1-0 Game One loss at Vegas.

Brian Elliott – The Flyers netminder surrendered five goals on 19 shots before getting replaced by Petr Mrazek in a 7-0 Game One loss at Pittsburgh.

STANLEY CUP HALF FULL/HALF EMPTY

Joe Morrow – The Jets defenceman was victimized on Minnesota's second goal, as Zach Parise's pass across to Mikael Granlund eluded Morrow's stick, but that was long forgotten after Morrow notched the game-winning goal in the third period.

VITAL SIGNS

Mathieu Perreault – Winnipeg's skilled winger was knocked out of the game with an upper-body injury after a run-in with Wild rookie D Nick Seeler.

Jake Muzzin – An upper-body injury prevented the Kings defenceman from playing Game One at Vegas. His absence has potential to really hurt Los Angeles.

David Perron – The Golden Knights winger didn't dress for Game One against Los Angeles, as he's still dealing with an undisclosed injury.

SHORT SHIFTS

Penguins LW Carl Hagelin contributed a goal and an assist in a 7-0 Game One win over Philadelphia. He had three points (1 G, 2 A) in the last eight games of the regular season...Penguins D Brian Dumoulin added a pair of assists against the Flyers, matching his production from the last six games of the regular season...Penguins G Matt Murray cruised to a 24-save shutout in a 7-0 Game One win against Philadelphia. He had struggled last in the year, with a .896 save percentage in his past nine games, but it was also his third consecutive playoff shutout...Kings G Jonathan Quick turned away 27 of 28 shots in a 1-0 Game One loss at Vegas. He was solid over the past month, posting a .926 save percentage in his past 11 starts...Vegas' fourth line of Tomas Nosek, Pierre-Edouard Bellemare, and William Carrier controlled play (12 for, 3 against, 80.0 CF%, 6-3 scoring chances) in a 1-0 Game One win over Los Angeles.

FIRSTS

Vegas – In the Golden Knights' first ever playoff game, they earned their ever playoff win.

Winnipeg – The Jets earned their first playoff victory in franchise history.

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TSN.CA / Statistically Speaking: 64 points before the playoffs start

Scott Cullen



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • April 14, 2018

Scott Cullen has some points to make before the puck is dropped on this year's playoffs, 64 of them, in fact.

1. The best shot suppression defence pairing in the playoffs is Anaheim's Hampus Lindholm and Josh Manson, who allowed 9.4 fewer shot attempts per 60 than their fellow Ducks defenders. Next best: Enstrom-Byfuglien (-7.3 Rel CA/60), Provorov-Gostisbehere (-7.0 Rel CA/60), Orlov-Niskanen (-5.9 Rel CA/60)

2. Boston's top defence pairing of Zdeno Chara and Charlie McAvoy has allowed the fewest shot attempts/60 (47.17) among playoff pairs that were together for at least 500 5-on-5 minutes during the season.

3. The defence pair with the second-best rate of shots against? Boston's Matt Grzelcyk and Kevan Miller (47.95 CA/60).

4. After finishing with 58 points last season, Flyers winger Claude Giroux led the league with 68 assists and had a career-high 102 points. He had a career-low 1.0 points/60 at 5-on-5 a year ago then had 2.9 points/60 this season.

5. The Devils power play runs through Taylor Hall, who has a league-best 7.1 primary points/60 during 5-on-4 play.

6. The next four? Blake Wheeler (6.66), Mitch Marner (6.26), Nazem Kadri (6.00), and Steven Stamkos (5.70).

7. The Kings got incredible bounce-back seasons from Anze Kopitar and Dustin Brown. Kopitar had a career-high 92 points and his 2.3 points/60 was his best since 2010-2011. Brown is 33, and had gone four straight seasons with fewer than 40 points before getting a career-high 61 points this season.

8. Even though he had great possession stats (55.8 CF%, +5.3 CFRel%), Sidney Crosby was still outscored 55-48 at 5-on-5.

Nashville's second line has been quietly outstanding.

9. The lines on playoff teams with the best goal differential/60 this season (min. 500 minutes):

Fiala-Turris-Smith +2.09

Marchessault-Karlsson-Smith +2.00

Hyman-Matthews-Nylander +1.97

Forsberg-Johansen-Arvidsson +1.92

Landeskog-MacKinnon-Rantanen +1.62

10. The playoff forwards with the best relative Corsi (minimum 500 5-on-5 minutes):

Craig Smith, Nashville (+7.68)

Artemi Panarin, Columbus (+7.38)

Nino Niederreiter, Minnesota (+6.92)

Pierre-Luc Dubois, Columbus (+6.22)

Bryan Rust, Pittsburgh (+6.07)

11. The playoff defencemen with the best relative Corsi (minimum 500 5-on-5 minutes):

Colin Miller, Vegas (+6.66)

Travis Dermott, Toronto (+6.49)

Will Butcher, New Jersey (+6.08)

Brent Burns, San Jose (+5.73)

Travis Sanheim, Philadelphia (+5.65)

12. The playoff players with the best primary points (goals + first assists)/60:

Auston Matthews (2.60)

Nathan MacKinnon (2.45)

Brad Marchand (2.19)

Nikita Kucherov (2.16)

David Pastrnak (2.15)

13. The next five? Evgeni Malkin, Jonathan Marchessault, Ondrej Kase, Thomas Vanek, and Filip Forsberg.

14. Have you heard about Ondrej Kase? The second-year Ducks winger scored 20 goals and led Anaheim with 9.6 shots/60 during 5-on-5 play.

15. Everyone recognizes what an awful tragedy happened in Humboldt, Saskatchewan. Across this country, there are countless buses filled with hockey teams going from town to town, and that accident was a nightmare. It hits home for a lot of people across the country, but for the people that are intimately involved, I don't know how they can possibly recover. It's impossibly devastating.

Tom Cochrane doing an acoustic version of "Big League" in tribute to the Humboldt Broncos. <https://t.co/luO18KUXW9>

— Scott Cullen (@tsnscottcullen) April 11, 2018

16. In the first 23 games of the season, Maple Leafs D Ron Hainsey had a 51.7 CF%. In 59 games since, he sits at 46.3 CF%.

17. He struggled in terms of shot differentials early in the season, but Jets captain Blake Wheeler started to level out with a late-season possession improvement. He's at 57.9 CF% in the last 14 games, after he was at 48.3% in his previous 67 games.

18. Sean Couturier took a quantum leap forward this season. He had typically strong possession (53.3 CF%, +5.2 CFRel%) even though he started 43.2% of his shifts in the offensive zone, but his ice time went up more than three minutes per game and a player who had never finished with more than 39 points suddenly ends up with 76 points.

19. Couturier also has just four points in 19 career playoff games.

20. The Columbus Blue Jackets are dangerous with Artemi Panarin on the ice.

21. The Jets rely on high percentage shooters. Mark Scheifele (18.4%), Patrik Laine (18.3%) and Kyle Connor (16.1%) are all sitting on lofty numbers this season.

22. In 94 regular season and playoff games in the first two seasons, Matt Murray had a .926 save percentage. This season, he had a .907 save percentage in 49 games, so that's why goaltending is the big question mark about the team trying for a three-peat.

23. Hip surgery caused Ducks C Ryan Kesler to miss nearly half of the season, and he's had a tough season, with his worst possession stats (48.3 CF%, -2.7 CFRel%) along with a career-low 1.0 points/60 during 5-on-5 play.

24. 32-year-old Ducks RW Corey Perry finished the regular season with 17 goals and 49 points, his lowest full-season totals since 2006-07, and had the worst possession stats (47.4 CF%, -1.3 CFRel%) of his career.

25. On the other hand, Ducks C Ryan Getzlaf produced 61 points in 56 games, his first season averaging a point-per-game since 2013-14.

26. Rookie Devils C Nico Hischier had a strong finish, putting up 11 points (7 G, 4 A) in the past 15 games.

27. He struggled to earn regular playing time in Boston, but Golden Knights D Colin Miller had 41 points in 82 games this season to go with his typically great shot differentials.

Colin Miller made the most of his opportunity in Vegas.



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28. Over the past three seasons, these are the playoff defencemen with the best relative Corsi (minimum 1500 5-on-5 minutes):

Hampus Lindholm (+6.41)

Colin Miller (+5.73)

Josh Manson (+4.56)

Zach Werenski (+4.32)

Brent Burns (+4.22)

29. Was it ever determined why the Penguins couldn't tolerate Ian Cole's presence on their blueline? He's been solid (52.6 CF%, +2.2 CFRel, 7 PTS in 20 GP) since joining the Blue Jackets.

30. Blue Jackets RW Thomas Vanek finished with 56 points, his most since 2013-14, even though he had just one power-play point in 19 games with Columbus.

31. If Jake Muzzin is out of the lineup for the Kings for all of Round 1, that will be a huge hole. There are problems on the Los Angeles blueline behind Drew Doughty, and injuries to Muzzin and Derek Forbort leave them vulnerable.

32. Doughty was great this season, probably better than when he won the Norris in 2015-16. He has better relative possession stats (52.8 CF%, +4.6 CFRel%) and has a career-high 1.1 points/60 at 5-on-5.

33. The move to Los Angeles hasn't had a positive effect on Dion Phaneuf. He's still getting caved in (45.7 CF%, -5.0 CFRel%), just a little bit less than Ottawa, while starting more shifts in the offensive zone. Either way, it has not been good.

34. The Kings' score-adjusted Corsi this season was 49.8%, the first time that they've been on the wrong side of break-even since 2007-08.

35. He struggled initially when trying to re-join the lineup midway through the season, but Wild LW Zach Parise is producing after a slow start. He scored three points (2 G, 1 A) in his first 13 games, but has 21 points (13 G, 8 A) in 29 games since.

36. Since 2015-2016, Wild RW Nino Niederreiter has been an underrated two-way force. He could score more, but the only forward (minimum 1,500 5-on-5 minutes) with a better relative Corsi is Patrice Bergeron.

37. Rookie Wild D Nick Seeler has been a solid contributor. Not flashy, but steady on the third pair.

38. New Jersey's third defence pairing of Will Butcher and Ben Lovejoy has been thriving (55.3 CF%, 59.4 SCF%).

39. New Jersey's Stefan Noesen has been an underrated two-way winger. He had positive (+3.3 CFRel%) possession stats while starting just 39.3% of shifts in the offensive zone.

40. Since Dec. 20, second-year Blue Jackets D Markus Nutivaara has a 53.7 CF%, best among Columbus defencemen, and the Blue Jackets are outscoring the opposition 23-15 with him on the ice.

41. Capitals RW Tom Wilson had a career-high 14 goals and 35 points this season. When playing with Alex Ovechkin, they had a 51.9 CF% and outscored the opposition 35-29.

Can Tom Wilson make a difference for the Capitals in the playoffs?

42. The players on playoff teams with the most fights this season:

Tom Wilson, Washington (13)

Jamie Oleksiak, Pittsburgh (7)

Austin Watson, Nashville (7)

Andy Andreoff, Los Angeles (6)

Matt Martin, Toronto (6)

Adam McQuaid, Boston (6)

Ryan Reaves, Vegas (6)

43. He's not great, but after getting crushed early in the year with Dallas, Jamie Oleksiak has been a useful addition in Pittsburgh.

44. The Devils benched defenceman Damon Severson late in the season. Even with positive relative possession stats, he had been surrendering too many high quality chances.

45. That's resulted in Mirco Mueller getting a chance to play, and the 2013 first-rounder has been solid.

46. Flyers rookie LW Oskar Lindblom doesn't score much – two goals in 24 games – but has really good numbers otherwise (54.1 CF%, +5.1 CFRel%).

47. Travis Sanheim looks like he's going to be a stud on Philly blueline.

48. Does it make sense for the Maple Leafs to keep rookie winger Andreas Johnsson out of the lineup? In his nine NHL games, he has three points (2 G, 1 A) and stellar possession stats (57.1 CF%, +5.2 CFRel%).

49. Small sample and all, but Johnsson's 11.5 shots/60 during 5-on-5 play is best on the Maple Leafs.

50. He played more AHL games than NHL games this season, but veteran Sharks D Paul Martin has had solid late-season numbers (55.5 CF%, +7.2 CFRel%) in limited playing time

51. J.T. Miller has been a nice addition in Tampa Bay, with 18 points (10 G, 8 A) in 19 games. Getting a chance to play with Stamkos is nice, too.

52. Golden Knights winger Tomas Tatar has struggled (4 G, 2 A) in 20 games since arriving in a trade from Detroit.

53. Playoff lines with the best expected goals percentage (xGF%, minimum 200 minutes) :

Zucker-Koivu-Granlund (64.5%)

Ehlers-Little-Perreault (64.0%)

Copp-Lowry-Tanev (62.7%)

Guentzel-Crosby-Rust (61.3%)

Fiala-Turris-Smith (61.3%)

54. Playoff lines generating the most shot attempts/60 (minimum 200 minutes) :

Ehlers-Little-Perreault (80.7)

Panarin-Dubois-Anderson (74.8)

Fiala-Turris-Smith (73.1)

Hagelin-Malkin-Hornqvist (69.5)

Hertl-Couture-Labanc (69.4)

55. Minnesota's blueline was rocked by the late-season injury to Ryan Suter. With Jared Spurgeon nearing a return from injury, he will have to play a huge role against Winnipeg. Spurgeon is great, but that's asking a lot from a player who hasn't played in the past four weeks.

56. He missed a bunch of time this season, but Jets C Adam Lowry was excellent for the Jets, putting up 21 points in 45 games and locking it down defensively.

57. Maple Leafs D Roman Polak has been outscored 32-30 during 5-on-5 play, but it looks like he's been rather fortunate given the shot distribution when he's on the ice.

58. The top power-play shooters on playoff teams this season (minimum 20 5-on-4 shots) :



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Erik Haula (41.7%)

J.T. Miller (38.5%)

Jake Guentzel (30.4%)

Kyle Turris (29.2%)

Craig Smith (29.0%)

59. Early indications are the Boston Bruins are going to start the playoffs with rookie Ryan Donato on the outside looking in at the opening night lineup. His production (5 G, 4 A, 12 GP) and possession stats (54.3 CF%, +1.3 CFRel%) suggest that he shouldn't even be close the lineup bubble, let alone on the wrong side of it.

60. The Avalanche are going to have their hands full with Nashville in the first round, and may not be sticking around the postseason for long, but there are still some players to watch. Mark Barberio remains underrated. He missed a bunch of time with injuries, and he's not a star, but the waiver pickup from Montreal is a solid NHL defenceman.

61. It's one thing for T.J. Oshie to see his shooting percentage regress, from 23.1% last season to 14.2% this year, but another reason for dropping from 33 goals to 18 is that he generated a career-low 1.72 shots per game.

62. The San Jose Sharks waived Ryan Carpenter this season and the 27-year-old caught on in Vegas, scoring nine goals in 36 games. Nice pick-up.

63. Will Vegas play Ryan Reaves in the playoffs? He went from 6:45 per game in Pittsburgh to 9:55 per game with the Golden Knights, and with a few injuries up front, he could be part of the regular lineup.

64. The Ovechkin Spot. The Laine Spot.

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1091461 Websites

USA TODAY / In rebounding from Game 1 embarrassment, Flyers show why they can win series with Penguins

Kevin Allen, USA TODAY Sports Published 10:59 p.m. ET April 13, 2018 | Updated 12:00 a.m. ET April 14, 2018

Veteran goalie Brian Elliott's 34 saves, including a breakaway stop against Sidney Crosby, helped the Philadelphia Flyers post a 5-1 win against the Pittsburgh Penguins to even their best-of-seven Eastern Conference quarterfinal series.

Here are five reasons why you can't rule out the Flyers winning this series:

Elliott delivered: He played far more confidently than he did in Game 1 when he was pulled after giving up five goals in a 7-0 loss. Elliott has a poor playoff history (15-23, .905 save percentage) and was coming off a sub-par performance in Game 1. It has to give the Flyers an emotional lift to see Elliott rising up when needed most. Give coach Dave Hakstol credit for sticking with Elliott in Game 2. He made that call right after Game 1.

Home-ice advantage: The Flyers secured the one win they needed in Pittsburgh and now they return to Philadelphia where they were 22-13-6 on the season. Also, the Penguins struggled too often on the road this season, finishing with a 17-20-4 away record. The Penguins did win in Philadelphia twice in the regular-season, however.

Underrated talent: Don't forget that Claude Giroux finished with more points (102) than Sidney Crosby and Evgeni Malkin this season.

Philadelphia's Jakob Voracek was ranked in the top five in assists (65). Sean Couturier had 31 goals and 75 points. Philadelphia defenseman Ivan Provorov and Shayne Gostisbehere combined for 30 goals this season. Gostisbehere had 65 points. This Philadelphia group is almost as dangerous as Pittsburgh's.

Murray worry? Pittsburgh goalie Matt Murray has a pair of Stanley Cup rings to prove his playoff pedigree, but the truth is he hasn't played as sharply this season. His goals-against average (2.92) was up this season and his save percentage (.907) was down. Last season, he was at 2.41 and .923. The Penguins didn't lose Game 2 because of their goaltending, but Murray wasn't at his best in this game. Elliott outplayed him.

Flyers will test Pittsburgh's defense: The Penguins had to revamp their defense this season, and no one could be sure how they would measure up to playoff pressure. If the Penguins have an Achilles' heel, it's probably their blue line. In Game 2, it looked as if the Flyers' game plan was to pressure Pittsburgh's defense as much as possible.

USA TODAY LOADED: 04.14.2018

1091462 Websites

USA TODAY / Nazem Kadri only person to blame for suspension that puts Maple Leafs in tough spot

Kevin Allen, USA TODAY Sports Published 9:21 p.m. ET April 13, 2018

Toronto Maple Leafs fans will want to blame the NHL for Nazem Kadri's three-game suspension for boarding, but this one is on him.

Kadri would argue that he was standing up for a teammate, but what he ended up doing was letting down his team. Kadri is a valuable player, a 32-goal scorer with an edge to his game. He matches up well against top offensive players.

Now he is gone for three games of a seven-game series because he allowed his emotions get away from him.

On Thursday, the NHL Department of Player Safety suspended Los Angeles Kings defenseman Drew Doughty for a well-intentioned check that evolved into an illegal hit to the head. It was a rule that could have gone either way. I thought it was deserving of a one-game suspension, and maybe you didn't. Doughty said Thursday: "I don't think for one second that was suspension-worthy."

It was either no suspension or one game. No one was thinking more than that. It was a judgment.

Kadri's hit was two stops past acceptable. With his team trailing 4-1 to the Boston Bruins, Kadri went after Tommy Wingels after Wingels came up high with a hit against Kadri teammate Mitch Marner. Wingels was vulnerable, with his back turned, when Kadri drove into him. Wingels' head slams into the boards. Anyone who watched that hit would say Kadri was seeking retribution and trying to inflict pain. He could have easily avoided that hit.

This is the kind of hit that the NHL has aggressively tried to eradicate. The mandate has been to protect defenseless players. Wingels was defenseless. Kadri knew that. He skated a few strides before making contact.

In the video explanation of the suspension, player safety stated: "It's important to note that Kadri is in control of this hit at all times."

Even old school hockey guys would have a difficult time defending this hit. You like when teammates stand up for each other, but there were ways to do that without earning a suspension. Kadri sought to inflict pain on Wingels, but ended up hurting his team in an important playoff series.



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He has no one to blame but himself.

USA TODAY LOADED: 04.14.2018

1091463 Websites

USA TODAY / The NHL lost a little bit of personality with Ken Hitchcock's retirement as Dallas Stars coach

Kevin Allen, USA TODAY Sports Published 1:19 p.m. ET April 13, 2018 | Updated 3:18 p.m. ET April 13, 2018

The NHL lost some of its personality when Ken Hitchcock announced he is retiring as coach of the Dallas Stars Friday.

Hitchcock's legacy will be that he has been one of the NHL's most accomplished coaches, ranking third on the all-time list with 823 regular-season wins. Only Scotty Bowman (1244) and Joel Quenneville (884) have more. Hitchcock coached the Dallas Stars to the 1999 Stanley Cup championship.

But Hitchcock's voice has been as important as his coaching ability. He is one of the game's most colorful characters. He is insightful, glib and blessed with an encyclopedic knowledge of hockey's history and details.

Players would grow weary of Hitchcock because he has a demanding, tough-love coaching style that makes some players uncomfortable. But the media never tires of Hitchcock because he can speak on any topic, anywhere, any time.

Want to talk about Chicago's Patrick Kane? Hitchcock will tell you he has always been impressed how hard Kane competes. Want to talk about how to win in international hockey? Hitchcock has stories and theories. Want to talk about what to do with your life? Hitchcock can be as inspirational as a high school guidance counselor. Want to talk about the Civil War? Hitchcock can tell stories about being a reenactor. Hitchcock's mastery of storytelling is as pronounced as his coaching ability.

Hitchcock, 66, has always been cast as a defensive-minded coach. But he never sees himself like that. He just wanted to see consistency in a player's effort in all aspects of the game. He demands devotion to the details of the game. When his team didn't have the puck, he wanted maximum effort to get it back.

He wanted his team to be wickedly difficult to play against, and it usually was.

Hitchcock was hired by Dallas general manager Jim Nill before last season with a mandate to clean up the team's defensive game. Although the Stars didn't make the playoffs, Hitchcock did dramatically alter the team's goals-against average. The Stars ranked 29th in the NHL in goals-against in 2016-17 and seventh last season. The acquisition of goalie Ben Bishop played a significant role in that, but Hitchcock also tightened the screws on the team's defensive coverage.

Even though Hitchcock won only one Cup, history will likely judge him to be among hockey's all-time best behind the best. He's probably in the top 15 right now. His teams reached 100 or more points 11 times, and his teams accumulated more than 60% of possible points when he was behind the bench. Clearly, he had an impact everywhere he coached.

Glad Hitchcock is staying with the Dallas Stars as an adviser. The NHL needs more storytellers in the game, not fewer of them.

USA TODAY LOADED: 04.14.2018