



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • April 15, 2018



Checkers Announce Home Playoff Dates

The Charlotte Checkers today announced dates and times for their first-round Calder Cup Playoff home games at Bojangles' Coliseum.

The Checkers will host Game 1 and Game 2 of the best-of-five series on Friday, April 20, at 7 p.m. and Saturday, April 21, at 6 p.m., respectively. A full series schedule will be announced when the team's opponent (Lehigh Valley or Wilkes-Barre/Scranton) and seeding are determined following the last games of the AHL's regular season on Sunday.

BUY TICKETS

Individual tickets for Games 1 and 2 are on sale now via Ticketmaster (Home Game A for April 20 and Home Game B for April 21) and will be available Monday at the Bojangles' Coliseum box office. "Pay as We Play" packages requiring

no money up front and offering the best savings on tickets for the entire playoffs can also be purchased now by contacting the Checkers at (704) 342-4423 or tickets@gocheckers.com.

Both of the Checkers' first-round home games will feature food and drink specials including \$2 hot dogs, \$2 popcorn and \$2 domestic draught beer, as well as \$4 craft draught beer.

Each game also has a ticket special that is currently available online. Friday's game features a \$5.50 ticket deal for all kids aged 12 and under (maximum of two) that can be purchased at gocheckers.com/kids. For Saturday's game, a Family Pack option of 50 percent off the box office price on groups of four tickets can be purchased at gocheckers.com/family.

Charlotte, which clinched a playoff spot last weekend, is making consecutive postseason appearances for the first time in eight AHL seasons.



Checkers committed to winning this postseason

by Nicholas Niedzielski

From the outset of his tenure behind the bench for the Checkers, Mike Vellucci had a set of goals for what his team would accomplish during the regular season.

"At the beginning of the year we said that we're a playoff team," said Vellucci. "We said we're going to make sure we

make the playoffs, we're going to improve our special teams on both sides and we're going to score more goals."

With a win last Saturday over Hershey, the Checkers were able to check the big one off his list.

Charlotte has punched its ticket to the Calder Cup Playoffs for the second straight season, giving the club consecutive postseason appearances for the first time in franchise history.



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"It's great," said team captain Patrick Brown. "It shows improvement and that we're moving in the right direction. Winning is a culture and when it starts to become a habit, that's good."

Vellucci's confidence in his squad's ability to make the playoffs stems from his history behind the bench. In 13 seasons as head coach of the OHL's Plymouth Whalers, Vellucci never had a team fail to make the postseason. He wasn't about to have his streak snapped after his jump to the pros.

"My goal was always to make sure that we're on the up climb the whole way," said Vellucci. "We build and build and then we peak at the right time. We're playing with confidence and grit and heart. We want to win and to win at all costs. That's the way I've always looked at it, make sure we're peaking at the right time."

The locker room has quickly bought into Vellucci's winning pedigree.

"He's been awesome," said Brown. "He's a great players' coaches, he knows when to work us and he knows when to give us rest. That's been great all year."

None of that is to say the team's mission is accomplished. Far from it, in fact.

"Just making the playoffs isn't good enough," said Vellucci. "Now we have to find ways to win in the playoffs and grind it out and win those series. We want that winning mentality and the only way you get it is by going through the playoffs and winning in the playoffs."

A good chunk of this Checkers team got a taste of the playoffs a year ago, when they surged into the postseason but fell in a decisive Game Five in their opening-round

series. With that experience, they're now ready to push beyond that.

"Everyone says that playoff hockey is harder, it's a different animal and we learned that last year," said Brown. "We had a lot of fun, I wish we would have made a deeper run but we're planning on doing that this year."

The drive to make a deep run into the playoffs goes even beyond the desire to win a title. With the Hurricanes mired in a postseason drought, this Checkers team offers up the chance for some top prospects to learn the highly valued art of winning.

"We want winners," said Vellucci, who also serves as Carolina's assistant general manager. "We want guys who know what it takes to win in a playoff series. The regular season is one thing, the playoffs are different. We want guys who know how to win and play through that grind of playing and traveling for that extra two months. That all makes you a winner and we want to develop that down here so that when they do get the NHL they're winners and they hate to lose and they'll do whatever it takes."

For the players on the ice, a strong performance during this postseason run could be a direct lead-up to a strong showing in next year's NHL training camp.

"It'll give them a leg up because like I said, Carolina wants winners," said Vellucci. "For the players, the best thing is for them to show that they want to win and that they can go through a long playoff grind and play that kind of hockey."

With a chance to bring that winning culture to the organization, the Checkers are prepared for what they hope is a few more weeks of hockey.

"I feel that right now we're playing some of our best hockey," said Vellucci. "We're committed to winning."

TODAY'S LINKS

<http://gocheckers.com/articles/features/checkers-announce-home-playoff-dates>
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The Athletic / Duhatschek Notebook: Joe Thornton being patient with recovery, as difficult as that is

Eric Duhatschek

Apr 13, 2018 14

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."

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The Athletic / Like Pittsburgh before it, Las Vegas has fallen under the charm of Marc-André Fleury

Marc Antoine Godin

Apr 14, 2018 14

LAS VEGAS — George McPhee had a guiding principle for the Vegas Golden Knights, but he gave up on the idea just a few days into the expansion franchise's first season.



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"We'd like the logo to be the face of our franchise," the Golden Knights general manager said after three games of this inaugural season, "but it's quickly becoming Marc-André Fleury."

McPhee didn't know then how right he was; six months later, sports merchandise company Fanatics confirms that Golden Knights branded material is the best-selling in the NHL, and that they have sold Fleury's No. 29 jersey more than any other player's in the league since New Year's Day.

The goalie who had been reduced to a backup role behind Matt Murray and was exposed in the expansion draft by the Pittsburgh Penguins is bigger than ever.

"It's incredible, let's not kid ourselves," said forward Pierre-Édouard Bellemare. "We came to a city where no one knew who we were, where people were trying to get to know the players. But there is one player that everyone knows, and that's Marc. He came and he's delivering. He gets the job done every night, and every night he lifts the crowd out of their seats.

"It's perfectly normal, the dude's got charisma."

Fleury does not seek out the spotlight, but that didn't stop him from becoming one of the most beloved players in Penguins history. When he returned to Pittsburgh on Feb. 6, our colleague Josh Yohe of The Athletic Pittsburgh wrote that Fleury is, "universally regarded as one of the greatest teammates and people to ever wear a Penguins sweater."

The difference is that in Las Vegas, there was no Sidney Crosby or Evgeni Malkin, especially at the beginning. The focal point was clearly going to be Fleury.

"He's been a high profile player and comfortable in that space previously, and I don't think there's another player on the roster that's been previously loved by his teammates as much as Marc," Fleury's agent Allan Walsh said. "So he comes in and he's got the chops, he's got the pedigree of the Stanley Cups. His new teammates looked up to him quickly. And with the same kind of pranks and the chirping at practice, they quickly realized how much fun you could have with this guy.

"And when local media is around, Marc is the guy everybody gravitates towards and that finds its way in the consciousness of the local hockey community."

The Golden Knights knew exactly what kind of player they were bringing in and were perfectly comfortable making Fleury the centerpiece of the culture they were trying to establish.

"He's easy to like," said Pascal Dupuis, Fleury's former teammate with the Penguins. "We always see nice stories of people who have had some success, but sometimes they aren't great people and so they aren't loved as much by the public, their teammates or their team. He had success, and people watched him and loved him.

"But above all else, he's a good person."

To better understand the development of Marc-André Fleury, both on and off the ice, we need to go back 15 years.

Imagine him sitting on his bed, half-watching TV. Life in the luxury hotels of the NHL is still new to the 18-year-old Penguins rookie.

Suddenly his roommate arrives, veteran defenceman Marc Bergevin, with a book in his hands. He puts it on the night table separating their two beds and demands the remote control from the young goalie, invoking his veteran privilege. As Bergevin is flipping through the channels, Fleury realizes that the book his teammate brought with him is called *The Joys of Sex*.

Bergevin gets up to go to the bathroom, closes the door behind him and Fleury takes the bait. He grabs the book and is shocked. Literally.

Fleury lets out a big scream as he fell for his roommate's prank, getting an electric shock as soon as he opened the book.

Bergevin, who was known as the biggest prankster of his era, had his latest victim. So it is perhaps no coincidence that 15 years later, Golden Knights coach Gerard Gallant sees a similarity between his goalie and the current general manager of the Montreal Canadiens.

"A guy that I played with was actually Marc Bergevin. He had a personality like Marc-André," Gallant said. "Because Marc-André comes and enjoys every day, he smiles every day and makes guys laugh every day. For a 33-year old veteran goalie with all that Stanley Cup experience and his Stanley Cups, he just enjoys the game and he's a good person."

Over the years, it is Fleury that has become the biggest prankster of his era. How better to welcome a new teammate, for example, than to soak his clothes before practice, freeze them and hang them back up just before he needs to get dressed?

It is part of Fleury's charm, part of what makes him so loveable. But that has its roots elsewhere.

"I think it starts with his smile," said forward James Neal, his current and former teammate with the Penguins.

It is the awkward smile of a goalie who, after 13 seasons in the NHL, has never become fully comfortable in front of the camera. It is also the sly grin of a guy waiting to pounce on a teammate around a corner. And even the smile of a guy marveling at the work of the opposing goalie, as Fleury did Friday after he watched from about 180 feet away as Los Angeles Kings goalie Jonathan Quick made 54 saves in a 2-1 Golden Knights win in double overtime, giving them a 2-0 series lead heading to L.A. for Game 3.

"I was just laughing, he was making saves that were just so..." Fleury said without finishing his thought.

It takes a certain personality type to be able to act this way in the playoffs. It is the sign of a player who never wants to take himself too seriously and has always cherished every moment of his career; playing hockey, playing pranks, playing like a child at all times.

He was like this in Pittsburgh, he is like this in Las Vegas.

Last fall, before the Golden Knights even began their first training camp, Fleury was taking part in an informal skate at the team's practice facility in suburban Summerlin. Once he was done he decided to go over to the other rink, where a bunch of kids were skating, and joined in.

Just like that, for the fun of it.

"Kids love the game so much, they just want to play to have fun," Fleury said. "If I can do something that will make them want to keep playing...hockey has given me so much in my life. It's just to make them laugh, have some fun and later they can say they scored a goal against an NHL goalie."

Fleury's enthusiasm for the game is as obvious as it is contagious. You can even see it in the pregame warmup. While most goalies who are playing that night are the first ones to leave the ice, Fleury always waits for the buzzer. Sometimes, he's the last one off.

"It's much better than sitting in here doing nothing for 20 minutes," he said, laughing.

It's easy to see, therefore, that after missing two months at the start of the season with a concussion Fleury was like a kid on Christmas morning when he finally got back to practice.

There is something a bit conflicting to see an athlete who is not seeking the spotlight but who becomes a fan favorite because of a goaltending style based on agility and reflexes. It is a style tailor-made for a city where entertainment is paramount.

Amid the crazy atmosphere of the first playoff game in Golden Knights history on Wednesday, there was a little play that Fleury made in the second period that attracted a lot of attention. He stopped a shot from Adrian Kempe with his blocker and, in an attempt to force a whistle,



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batted the puck in the air twice with his stick so he could grab it with his glove. The crowd ate it up.

“He knows how to put on a show and the fans like that,” said forward David Perron, another Golden Knights teammate who also played with Fleury in Pittsburgh. “He juggled the puck a little bit with his stick on a routine save and it got him an ovation. But there are other times he makes an incredible save look easy and people don’t even notice.”

Fleury had some excellent teams in front of him in Pittsburgh, teams that made his life easier. But, at 33 years of age, it is in Las Vegas that he had his best career season, both statistically and in terms of the consistency of his excellent play.

Pascal Dupuis is not the least bit surprised.

“He has things to prove to himself, to the NHL and even to the Penguins, who might have let the better goalie go,” he said. “Matt Murray is an excellent goalie, no doubt, but Marc-André has the experience. And he has an organization that has an enormous amount of faith in him and fans who look at him as their star. He has everything in place to succeed.”

The people in Las Vegas believed in Fleury as soon as he was selected in the expansion draft, immediately recognizing his authenticity and the quality of his play.

The most grandiose manifestation of that – the most typically Vegas – is currently on display at the Bellagio Hotel, where the house patisserie built a sculpture in Fleury’s image made primarily of chocolate and Rice Krispies. Fleury joked that he hoped, in the interest of realism, that the sculpture would have big teeth. He went by to check it out on Thursday.

“At the Bellagio patisserie we have always wanted to do some type of presentation and I was talking to our pastry chef at the Bellagio and our team and I said we should really do something to celebrate the success of the Vegas Golden Knights, their season,” said Randy Morton, president and chief operating officer of the hotel. “We wanted to find something really fun but iconic, and I said, well, we should really celebrate the success of Marc-André Fleury – over 400 wins, sort of the face of the team – and this would be a great way to create a Marc-André Fleury in chocolate. And I said it had to be some kind of life size.”

The result is not necessarily appetizing, but it is impressive.

Morton is a passionate hockey fan who grew up in Peterborough, Ont., and played some of his minor hockey with former Chicago Blackhawks great Steve Larmer. Among the 50-odd Las Vegas business people mandated by Golden Knights owner Bill Foley to help sell season tickets before the team was awarded, it was Morton that brought in the most buyers.

In his eyes, it made perfect sense that Fleury be celebrated this way. But it is every part of the marriage between Fleury and the Golden Knights that makes perfect sense. The quality of the players available in the expansion draft has been cited as a reason for the team’s success, but in Fleury’s case it goes further than that.

More than the perfect player, he was the perfect person to serve as a cornerstone of the franchise.

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The Athletic / Burnside: Player Safety head George Parros has held strong in difficult start to playoffs

Scott Burnside

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NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE – At various times over the years, the head of the NHL’s Department of Player Safety has been a favorite personal whipping boy and I have repeatedly opined that, if we were in charge (oh, wouldn’t that be a glorious day?) that we’d be like Judge Roy Bean, hardest law west of the Pecos.

Didn’t matter if it was Colin Campbell or Brendan Shanahan or Stephane Quintal. The often whimsical sometimes haphazard manner in which supplemental discipline was meted out often enraged us until, sadly, we became injured to it.

Shot to the head? Cross-check to the back into the boards? Maybe a fine, maybe a game, maybe more, maybe not. No rhyme nor reason to any of it, so the energy expended in being enraged just seemed so ill-spent.

But I have to admit, I had very high hopes when longtime tough guy George Parros assumed the role as the Lord of Discipline this season.

Cerebral and firm, Parros didn’t necessarily set the discipline world on its ear, but he did deliver meaningful punishment to the most egregious actions.

And even if he did whiff a couple of times – how Brad Marchand escaped punishment for a late-season cross-check to the head of Philadelphia’s Andrew MacDonald is a red mark on Parros’ record given Marchand’s shocking inability to learn from his mistakes – Parros is suddenly front and center in the opening hours of the 2018 Stanley Cup playoffs.

And lo and behold, we are seeing a little Judge Roy Bean in the Princeton University attendee, which warms our hearts.

It’s not where Parros wants to be and certainly not where the league wants the focus given the compelling storylines that exist from coast to coast. But given a plethora of miscreant behavior through the opening days of the 2018 playoff season, the spotlight is once again on the DOP.

It’s important work and it’s wildly complicated with layers of texture that sometimes make finding the right answer difficult.

And it hasn’t been perfect. But with word late Friday that Toronto forward Nazem Kadri was suspended for three games for a nasty hit on a defenseless Tommy Wingels in the opening game of the Boston-Toronto series, Parros and his group have set a lofty standard.

The Kadri suspension came after Parros began the postseason in strong fashion, suspending Los Angeles defenseman Drew Doughty for a game for an uncalled hit to the head of Las Vegas forward William Carrier midway through the third period of a game the Golden Knights would go on to win 1-0 on the opening night of the playoffs.

The challenge of finding an appropriate level of discipline during the postseason is in accepting that the games are exponentially more meaningful. And frankly, it’s easier to fine players at this stage of the season than to suspend them because missing even one game, as Doughty did for the Kings’ overtime loss in Game 2, can have significant implications.

Doughty is an all-world player, but he let his emotions get the better of him on the hit, which saw Carrier left the game and was listed as day-to-day, but played Friday night as Vegas took a 2-0 series lead.

Had there been a call on the ice against Doughty, perhaps Parros doesn’t have to step in. But step in he did.

He did so again in an even more emphatic manner with the Kadri suspension.

The agitating Toronto forward was ejected from the Leafs-Bruins game midway through the third period with Boston holding a 4-1 lead. Kadri leaped into the boards and caught Wingels in the head with his hip and body after Wingels had made a questionable hit moments before on Mitch Marner.



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If the potential to go down 0-2 was daunting for the Kings without Doughty, imagine now the hole that Kadri has put his team in with his reckless play? Suspended three previous times for head-hunting incidents, this is a severe but just punishment for a top player who had 32 goals during the regular season and 19 power play points.

If the Leafs lose this series, they'll point to the Kadri suspension, but the focus should be on the play that led to the suspension. That's on the player not on those who handed down the suspension. Subtle but important distinction.

The feeling has always been that top players get more leeway for their behavior than the rank and file or lower class citizen, but kudos to Parros for judging the act and the player's history, and not the potential impact of the suspension of both Doughty and Kadri, whose boss happens to be Shanahan, who at one point held the same post.

The past three days have presented a handful of incidents that required scrutiny from Parros and his staff, similar to the opening days of the 2012 playoffs when there were multiple questionable hits and incidents, including the infamous image of Shea Weber ramming Henrik Zetterberg's head off the end glass at the end of a Nashville-Detroit game. Weber escaped with a minor penalty and a \$2,500 fine.

Similar dynamics this week as the Blue Jackets' Josh Anderson was ejected from Thursday's game against Washington for ramming Michal Kempny into the end boards. Kempny is questionable for Sunday's Game 2 but there was no further discipline.

In the same game, the Capitals' Tom Wilson, suspended for the start of the regular season for a boarding incident, sent Alexander Wennberg from the game with a hard hit, which the otherwise occupied Wennberg never saw coming.

In my eyes, it should have been a suspension without question. The league did not agree.

And in Nashville late in the second period of Game 1, Ryan Johansen, a player with no history of supplemental discipline, caught Colorado defenseman Tyson Barrie with an elbow to the head in the Predators' zone that went uncalled. Barrie wasn't injured, but he offered the same kinds of questions Friday that fans and players often ask: What's acceptable? Where is the line?

"I didn't like the hit for sure," Barrie said. "I didn't see him at all coming and I thought he maybe got the head a little bit, but the league's obviously decided to take no action. That's their call."

Asked about the Doughty hit, Barrie said, "I don't see a whole lot of difference, but I'm not the one making the call, so it's kind of irrelevant."

Frustrating?

"If those are the hits you're allowed to take, then maybe you maybe take one or two runs at guys that you might get away with, but I think you just got to move on," Barrie said.

In short, these are important moments for Parros who took on the role as head of the Department of Player Safety in September.

It was a move that immediately drew derision from some observers given that Parros was one of the toughest players in the NHL and accumulated 1,092 penalty minutes in 474 regular season games, scoring 18 times and adding 18 assists over that period of time.

You know what? I couldn't care less about how he conducted himself on the ice as a player (he was never suspended) if he does this job properly.

Now we're about to find out if he has the stomach to do just that. So far, the answer is yes. Reckless play that endangers other players should always be greeted with a relentless reaction from the league. Spare the rod and all that.

But the challenge, similar to being a player, is not what you did today but what you do tomorrow. And that's always been the challenge for the men who have had the temerity to accept the role Parros now occupies.

We would offer only this: Stay strong and keep bringing the law west of the Pecos.

The Athletic LOADED: 04.15.2018

1091664 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Leafs shoot selves in foot in redemption shot against Bruins

Chris Johnston

April 14, 2018, 11:14 PM

BOSTON – A couple minutes before the hats came flying down, Jake Gardiner smashed his stick over the crossbar. "The whole game was frustrating and it kind of just built-up at the end there," he said. David Pastrnak and the Boston Bruins still had more pain to inflict.

Along with Nikita Zaitsev, he'd been handed the dossier to the toughest assignment in hockey right now: Trying to do something, anything, to neutralize Pastrnak's flash while dealing with the relentless puck pursuit of linemates Brad Marchand and Patrice Bergeron.

It didn't go well. In fact, this was an outright disaster for a Toronto Maple Leafs team that went from the high of a 105-point season to staring down the barrel of an early spring exit inside 72 hours.

Zaitsev was on the ice for four goals inside a 10-minute stretch during the first period. One banked off his left skate, another saw him lose positioning during a penalty kill and a third came when he shaded Marchand so closely that he skated right out of the picture.

He was given six shifts inside that window and four ended with the foghorn blaring through TD Garden.

"They scored four quick goals. The game was over," said Zaitsev.

It wasn't all on him. The Leafs showed some early push in the second period, and Mitch Marner planted some seeds for an unlikely comeback by getting it back to 4-1, and then Ron Hainsey tossed the puck into a cluster of three Bruins in the neutral zone.

He was attempting to find Auston Matthews with a home run, but it landed on David Krejci's blade instead. The Czech danced towards the Toronto zone and expertly spread the defenders, feeding Bergeron with a 10-foot pass before he drove towards the slot while Bergeron went cross-seam to Pastrnak, who found him for an easy tip-in.

"That's kind of the definition of forcing something that's not there," Hainsey said of his decision-making on the breakout. "There was nobody on the wing there so I tried to squeeze one in to Matty. Probably not a play you'd make in a tie game in overtime. I could have iced it or I could have tried to get it to our best player – didn't work."

Gardiner was skating through the neutral zone in the third period when Marchand got just enough of a stick on him to disrupt his control of the puck. Pastrnak poked it forward and wound up scoring after Marchand shot wide on a breakaway but Bergeron beat two Leafs backcheckers with a quick dish to his tape.

That's when Gardiner smashed his CCM composite into two pieces.

Toronto was detailed to death over the opening two games here. We can talk all we want about what kind of matchups Babcock might concoct to slow down Bergeron's buzzsaws with the last line change at Air Canada Centre, but it won't matter a lick if the players in blue and white don't protect the puck.



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The Bruins top line has combined for 20 points. In two games! Toronto could barely execute a zone exit with them on the ice in Game 1 – prompting Babcock to switch from Hainsey and Morgan Rielly to the Gardiner-Zaitsev pairing to start Game 2 – and then they inflicted most of their considerable damage in transition while spending less time on the cycle.

“They’re confident, they’re making plays, they’re putting it in the net,” said Hainsey. “We’ve got to keep them out of our zone and when they do get there we’ve got to outnumber them. They’re making plays in tight and getting chances close in front of the net.”

No wonder Babcock, when asked if he’s worried about the psyche of his team, replied: “Absolutely, 100 per cent.”

He’s maintained that his defence corps is much stouter this season than given credit by outsiders, but that notion has been stretched to its limit here. There is no graver concern for the Leafs as they try to regroup before Monday, and that’s saying something given that they’ve surrendered five goals on the penalty kill and saw starting goalie Frederik Andersen pulled after five shots on Saturday and still don’t have a goal in this series from the Matthews line.

Oh, and they’ll also be without suspended shutdown centre Nazem Kadri for Games 3 and 4 and lost Leo Komarov with a lower-body injury in the second period of Game 2. The depth is being test.

“We can get ourselves on track,” Babcock insisted.

While they managed some much better offensive pushes on Saturday, they at times looked like someone trying to plug 12 holes in a bucket with 10 fingers. It got pretty messy.

“We were outplayed for two games,” said Hainsey. “Certainly I think if you add it up, 12-4 or whatever it is over six periods, we deserve every bit of criticism far and wide. The good news is the story’s not totally written yet. We can try to change the story come Monday night.”

How’s this for a story? The Leafs played 82 games this season without losing one of them by four goals. The scores here in Boston were 5-1 and 7-3.

They’ve dug an awfully deep hole.

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 04.15.2018

1091665 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Big, physical hockey as important as ever in Stanley Cup Playoffs

Mark Spector

April 14, 2018, 4:34 PM

ST. PAUL, Minnesota — “Big and good beats small and good,” the old hockey scout said. “Every time.”

We all have these maxims in the back of our heads, whatever our vocation. The bricks and mortar of a career collected over the years, one piece of advice at a time.

Measure twice, cut once. If you’re not five minutes early you’re five minutes late. Or this old gem from one of our favourites, former Winnipeg Jets coach Tommy McVie:

“There are two places you never make a drop pass,” McVie will tell you. “At home, and on the road.”

Livestream every single game of the 2018 Stanley Cup Playoffs—blackout free—plus the Toronto Blue Jays, key Raptors & NBA Playoffs matchups and the 100th Mastercard Memorial Cup, all in one subscription.

Of course, some of these are time sensitive. Today, we like drop passes more than Toe Blake did back in the Original Six.

Others, as the big, good Winnipeg Jets pound their way through this first round series against Minnesota, appear to withstand the test of time.

Does big and good still beat small and good? Even in today’s National Hockey League?

“I’ve always had big teams and we’ve always made the playoffs,” said Minnesota coach Bruce Boudreau. “I think it’s a good thing to have a big team.”

The game has reached an awkward place, and we’re seeing it played out in Round 1 across the NHL, where hits totals after each game come in at double the number we see in the regular season. Regular season hockey is becoming less physical by the season, as the “blow-up hit” becomes a thing of the past for a myriad of reasons: the increasing speed of the game; concussions; today’s salaries, and the role of the Player Safety Department.

Yet when the games really count in April, May and June, the physical ante gets raised. At this time of year, it’s good to be big again.

“Well, fast is still primary,” began Jets head coach Paul Maurice. “We’d all prefer six-foot-five and could skate like Nik Ehlers, but you can be five-foot-11, 170 pounds (now), and if you can skate you can play. So, it’s speed first. (but) if you can get a big man that can move, there’s only one or two more pieces left before he’s an All Star.”

A year ago the Edmonton Oilers beefed up with players like Pat Maroon, Milan Lucic and Zack Kassian, and went two rounds deep. This season things went wrong, and the Oilers are deemed too big and slow. They didn’t make it through the regular season to the playoffs, where they could use that size.

Winnipeg, meanwhile is every bit as big or bigger than Edmonton was, and they are a terror with their mix of speed and size. Big, strong players like 260-pound Dustin Byfuglien and 6-foot-5 Blake Wheeler, a giant of a man who spins on a dime coming out of the corner like a guy half his size.

Puck protection is in vogue, and there isn’t a theory alive that would understate size and strength in that game. And watching the Jets dominate a team like Minnesota — which is by no means small — it’s a combination of size and speed that the Wild just can not handle thus far.

“Whether you’re small or big, you have to be on the puck. Force their team to make plays they don’t want to make,” said young Jets centreman Adam Lowry, an absolute stud at six-foot-5, 210 pounds, who has checked Eric Staal into oblivion through two games. “It certainly helps to have a captain (Wheeler) who is 6-5 and can really fly, and your No. 1 centreman (Mark Scheifele) is 6-3. Guys with size, but who can play.”

The question becomes, as the changing game open its doors to smaller, faster players like Jared Spurgeon or the lightning fast Ehlers, will players the size of Staal, Wheeler, Byfuglien and Charlie Coyle be able to skate fast enough to keep pace?

It’s great to be built for the playoffs. But not if you don’t get there.

“There’s a lot more board work in the playoffs,” said Boudreau. “It’s not rush against rush, so a big man and a strong man has to be good along the boards.”

We’ll give the last word to Maurice, whose team has poured 40 shots per game at Minnesota, while the Wild have just 37 shots on goal in the series.



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In 2018, is my old scout still correct? Does big and good beat small and good?

"I don't think you have a whole team of one," Maurice surmised. "We don't talk about hitting in our room. We don't talk about playing a physical game. We have men that finish their checks.

"They're big and that's part of who they are."

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 04.15.2018

1091666 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Donato on playoff debut: 'These are the types of games you dream about'

Sonny Sachdeva

April 14, 2018, 7:29 PM

It would be tough to draw up an NHL debut sweeter than the one enjoyed by Boston Bruins rookie Ryan Donato. After dominating in the NCAA to the tune of the fourth-best points-per-game pace in the country, Donato made the jump to the big leagues on March 19, finishing the night with a game-leading three points and his first NHL tally.

Now, after a closing stretch that saw him put up five goals and nine points through his only 12 games in the NHL, Donato appears close to getting his first taste of playoff hockey.

The 22-year-old will draw into Game 2 on Saturday night if it's determined Tommy Wingels isn't able to go—Wingels was knocked out of Game 1 by a controversial hit from Nazem Kadri, earning the latter a three-game suspension.

It's safe to say the young gun is excited for the chance.

"Super excited," he told reporters Saturday. "I mean, growing up as a kid in Boston, these are the types of games that you dream about playing in. The Stanley Cup Playoffs. I'm just blessed to potentially have the opportunity to do so."

"Super excited. Growing up as a kid in Boston these are the types of games you dream about playing in."

Ryan Donato on the possibility of making his postseason debut tonight: pic.twitter.com/nlBd16WMMnr

— Boston Bruins (@NHLBruins) April 14, 2018

Donato said he got some advice from veteran teammate David Backes—who's got 56 career post-season tilts under his belt—about what to expect should he get the call.

"He talked to me today," Donato said. "He said, 'If you can go in, there's a lot of things about the game that you're going to have to learn and take yourself, but here are some lessons that I learned in my experiences, and hopefully you can use those to have a positive impact on the team and our game.'"

Watching from the press box as a healthy scratch during Game 1, he got as good a look as one can get of the ramped-up speed and physicality that the post-season brings. But that might not go too far when it comes to actually taking the ice.

"I mean, there's a lot of speed, there's a lot of intensity," Donato said. "There's not much going on other than smart plays and staying consistent, so I think for me, if I have the chance to go in, it's just going to be a consistent game and hopefully I can contribute offensively."

Boston took the Leafs to task in the first installment of the two clubs' first-round series, emerging with a 5-1 win. With Donato having ranked as the Bruins' second-highest goal-scorer and third-highest scorer overall during his time in the lineup, a return to the lineup for the Boston native won't make things any easier for Toronto in Game 2.

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1091667 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Vegas' James Neal feels at his best for playoffs: 'It's perfect timing'

Iain MacIntyre

April 14, 2018, 3:35 PM

LAS VEGAS – It is an exaggeration to say James Neal waited seven years to make the pass that helped the Vegas Golden Knights win their first overtime playoff game very late on Friday night. It took him only seven months.

The 30-year-old winger spent all of this season recovering, while playing, from surgery last summer to repair his right hand, which was broken in last year's playoffs with the Nashville Predators.

Selected by Vegas in the expansion draft just 10 days after the Predators lost the Stanley Cup Final to the Pittsburgh Penguins, Neal spent all of September on the injured list and was unable to play a pre-season game.

Despite not being expected to be ready for the Golden Knights' first game in the NHL, Neal not only forced his way into the lineup last Oct. 6 but scored the first two goals in franchise history as Vegas beat the Dallas Stars 2-1 in an historic debut.

Neal then scored game-winners in the Golden Knights' next two games, too. After one week, he had six goals in four games and looked like he'd win the Rocket Richard Trophy.

But Neal, who didn't even handle the puck in practice until the final week of the pre-season, said it took all season for him to fully regain strength in his right hand, which suffered a setback when he fell on it in February and missed eight games.

"So right now," he said Friday morning when asked when his hand finally felt right. "It's perfect timing."

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Yes, it is. Ninety-five minutes into Friday's double-overtime game against the Los Angeles Kings, Neal carried the puck across the blue line, veered left to draw defenceman Kevin Gravel a step out of position, then feathered a pass back to his right and into the path of streaking linemate Erik Haula.

Haula beat Kings goalie Jonathan Quick with a forehand move between the pads, then leapt into Neal's arms as a record, overflow crowd of 18,588 at T-Mobile Arena went wild.

It was the first point of the playoffs for Neal, who scored only once in his final 12 regular-season games after returning to the Vegas lineup on March 16. But he had 11 shots on goal on Friday. In 95:23, the entire Kings team had 30.



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A couple of his shots were weak changeups, perhaps an indication Neal's top hand still betrays him at times. But he was a force, especially in overtime.

Goalie Marc-Andre Fleury became the first face of the Knights franchise on expansion draft day last June, but Neal, a warrior who has made the playoffs the last seven years, is a big part of Vegas' heart.

"I feel like I suit the playoffs," Neal said before the Knights, up 2-0 on the Kings in their first-round series, travelled to Los Angeles for Sunday night's Game 3. "I can play physical, I can score, you can play on the edge a little bit more. You're going to play heavy teams, going to play fast teams. You have to be able to play all kinds of games.

"For us, we need to stay in the moment. It's easy to get overwhelmed with what's going on and how this city has taken over our club."

Neal said before the series began that this season was his most fun in hockey, which is not what he expected when, wounded physically and exhausted emotionally, the Predators left him unprotected last June and the former second-round pick from Whitby, Ont., went to an expansion team from a Stanley Cup finalist.

"I just put everything into Nashville," he said. "I was there for three years and felt I was a part of building something. Finally, we were there. We get to the Cup finals and play Pittsburgh, my old team. It was really hard losing to them. A lot of emotions. And then a few days later, I'm going to Vegas.

"It's really hard to explain the emotions and the life changes and everything that goes on. But everything happens for a reason. You have to look at the positives. You do yourself no good if you're looking at the past and being mad at people and asking: 'Why did they do that?' You just go and prove yourself. It happened and you have a chance to go and do something great in Vegas. And, man, has it been unbelievable."

In 71 games this season, Neal had 25 goals and 44 points, eclipsing the 20-goal mark for the 10th time in 10 NHL seasons. On an expiring contract, Neal's potential trade value as a rental was part of the reason the Golden Knights claimed him.

But when the team smashed all expansion records on its way to a 51-win season and helped unite and heal Las Vegas in the wake of the Oct. 1 mass murder of 58 concert-goers, Golden Knights general manager George McPhee changed his playbook and kept Neal and David Perron, another impending unrestricted free agent, at the trade deadline.

"Everyone was writing us off, like we wouldn't win a game," Neal said. "I knew that wasn't going to be the case, especially when you have a goalie like (Fleury). I think everyone was here to start a new chapter. Everyone was playing for each other and the coaching staff was a perfect fit for our group.

"I try to bring my game wherever I go and try to make that team better. I want to win. The first thing I said to (Golden Knights owner) Bill Foley when I got here was: 'We're going to be competitive and I expect us to be in the playoffs.'"

They expect a lot more now.

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 04.15.2018

1091668 Websites

TSN.CA / Statistically Speaking: Bruins' top line punishes the Leafs

Scott Cullen

HEROES

David Pastrnak – Boston's 21-year-old winger enjoyed a sensational night, putting up six points (3 G, 3 A) and tying a Bruins playoff record held by Rick Middleton and Phil Esposito. That gives Pastrnak 13 points (6 G, 7 A) in eight career playoff games and he's the early leader this year with nine points (4 G, 5 A) in two games.

Patrice Bergeron and Brad Marchand – Pastrnak's linemates on the best line in hockey both had four assists in Game Two. Bergeron has five assists through two games and Marchand has six points (1 G, 5 A).

Through two games, when Bergeron, Marchand and Pastrnak are on the ice, the Bruins are getting 73% of the shots, and 81% of the scoring chances. Oh, and 100% of the goals.

Nikita Kucherov – The Lightning sniper scored a goal and added two assists in a 5-3 Game Two win against New Jersey. He has four points (2 G, 2 A) in the series.

Logan Couture – San Jose's scoring centre had a goal and an assist in a 3-2 Game Two victory at Anaheim; he had four points (3 G, 1 A) in his previous eight games.

ZEROES

Nikita Zaitsev – The Toronto blueliner was on the ice for four goals against (two at evens, two shorthanded) in a 7-3 Game Two loss at Boston.

Matt Nieto – The Avalanche winger was on the wrong side of the puck (3 for, 13 against, 18.8 CF%, 1-5 scoring chances) in a 5-4 loss at Nashville.

Frederik Andersen – Toronto's netminder was pulled after allowing three goals on five shots in a 7-3 Game Two loss at Boston. Since the beginning on March, he has a .888 save percentage in 14 games.

Keith Kinkaid – The Devils goaltender allowed five goals on 15 shots before getting pulled in a 5-3 Game Two loss at Tampa Bay. Cory Schneider stopped all 10 shots that he faced in relief, and could get a chance to start as the series returns to New Jersey for Game Three.

STANLEY CUP HALF FULL/HALF EMPTY

Hampus Lindholm – It came in a losing effort, but the Ducks blueliner had a strong showing in a 3-2 Game Two loss to San Jose. He had a goal and an assist to go with team-best possession stats (18 for, 8 against, 69.2 CF%).

VITAL SIGNS

Samuel Girard – Colorado's rookie blueliner didn't play in Game Two due to an upper-body injury, opening the door for Duncan Siemens to get into the lineup.

Ryan Donato - With Tommy Wingels still hurting, the Bruins inserted rookie winger Donato into the lineup for Game Two.

Leo Komarov - The veteran Leafs winger suffered a lower-body injury and was forced to leave Game Two at Boston early.

SHORT SHIFTS

Embedded Image

Alex Killorn has three goals through two games against New Jersey.

Bruins D Torey Krug produced three assists in a 7-3 Game Two win against Toronto. He has 26 points (4 G, 22 A) in his past 22 games...Lightning LW Alex Killorn scored two goals in a 5-3 Game Two win over New Jersey, giving him eight points (4 G, 4 A) in the past seven games...Lightning C Brayden Point added a goal and an assist, and has 11 points (6 G, 5 A) in the past 11 games...Lightning D Ryan McDonagh had a pair of assists against the Devils. He had three assists in two playoff games, after producing three points (1 G, 2 A) in 14 games with the Lightning after he was acquired from the Rangers...Predators LW Kevin Fiala contributed a goal and an assist in a 5-4 Game Two win vs. Colorado. He had gone five games without a point...Predators



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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defencemen P.K. Subban and Mattias Ekholm both added a pair of assists against the Avalanche. Subban has seven points (1 G, 6 A) in the past eight games and Ekholm had two assists in his previous eight games...Avalanche LW Gabriel Landeskog and C Nathan MacKinnon both had a goal and an assist in a 5-4 Game Two loss at Nashville. Landeskog has seven points (2 G, 5 A) in the past seven games and MacKinnon has eight points (2 G, 6 A) in the past seven games...Avalanche D Tyson Barrie added a couple of assists; he has seven points (2 G, 5 A) in the past seven games.

Lightning RW Ryan Callahan put up solid possession stats (12 for, 2 against, 85.7 CF%, 7-1 scoring chances) in a 5-3 Game Two win vs. New Jersey...He didn't play a ton, but Predators C Kyle Turris dominated played (11 for, 1 against, 91.7 CF%) in a 5-4 win against Colorado...Sharks G Martin Jones turned away 28 of 30 shots in Game Two, and has stopped 53 of 55 shots through the first two games of the series.

TSN.CA LOADED: 04.15.2018

1091669 Websites

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

Scott Cullen

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.

TSN.CA LOADED: 04.15.2018

1091670 Websites

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

Scott Cullen

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/7T1n3l8o6M

— NHL GIFs (@NHLGIFs) April 13, 2018

ZEROES



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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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 / Leafs struggle in every facet of Game 2 against Bruins

Kristen Shilton

The Maple Leafs entered their first-round Stanley Cup playoff series against the Boston Bruins as underdogs. Two games in, that premonition is proving truer than ever. Without suspended centre Nazem Kadri, the Leafs fell 7-3 to the Bruins in Game 2 on Saturday, dropping into a 2-0 series deficit.

With the series now shifting to Toronto, the Leafs have given up 12 goals over these first two games (including a hat trick to David Pasternak on Saturday), while scoring only four in response.

Takeaways

Filling Nazem Kadri's void, Part I

The Leafs' task of trying to defeat the Bruins became exponentially harder when shutdown centre Nazem Kadri was suspended three games for charging/boarding Tommy Wingels in Game 1. That forced Mike Babcock to juggle his lines for the start of Game 2, moving Patrick Marleau to the middle with Zach Hyman and Mitch Marner, promoting Leo Komarov to flank Auston Matthews and William Nylander and inserting Andreas Johnsson onto the fourth line.

Babcock kept his bench short out of the gate on Saturday, seemingly to give Matthews' blended line a chance to play against a trio other than Patrice Bergeron, Brad Marchand and David Pasternak and potentially get some offence going.

It didn't do much good, though. Despite the Leafs flipping the script from Game 1 and dominating the Bruins possession-wise (the Leafs' were at 65 per cent in the first period and finished at 60 per cent on the night), Boston's top line was on the ice for all four of the first period goals that gave Boston a 4-0 lead going into the second - Pasternak had one goal and two assists, Bergeron had two helpers and Marchand had one. It wasn't for lack of trying on the Leafs part, but they were burned repeatedly by Boston's transition game and simply looked like boys amongst men when the Bruins did gain their zone.

When the middle frame began, Matthews was flanked by Marleau and Kasperii Kapanen as Babcock desperately looked to get something going offensively against the Bergeron group. However, no amount of changes



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slowed the Bruins' best down, nor helped Matthews find the back of the net.

While Babcock kept blending his lines and tried different wingers with Matthews - including Johnsson - it was to no avail points-wise. Matthews skated to far more zone time (73 per cent possession) than Bergeron's line (48 per cent), which is the first time in three matchups Matthews has gotten the better of Bergeron in that department. That improved stat is of little comfort for stars that can't score when it matters, and were once again pummeled by the Bergeron trio (Matthews finished minus-two, second-worst among Leafs after Marleau at minus-three). Pasternak finished the game with three goals and three assists, and Marchand and Bergeron each chipped in four assists.

Leafs depth put to the test, Part II

While the changes to Matthews' line didn't produce the intended outcome, Babcock's changes did sort of work initially. A reconstructed line of Hyman, Nylander and Marner finally got things going for Toronto less than 90 seconds into the second period, when Marner played a quick game of give-and-go with Hyman in front of Rask and finished with his first goal of the series. It gave the Leafs some life - which they quickly lost - but for a brief moment showed what these young players can do when they're allowed to just play, and go with the flow of the game.

The only other even strength goal Toronto got came from the one offensive unit that has never been severed - Tyler Bozak's line with James van Riemsdyk and Connor Brown. Brown teed up Bozak's first of the playoffs with a nifty spin move off Adam McQuaid, perhaps one of the only true "woah" moments for the Leafs so far in this series.

But just as there was a modicum of hope for the Leafs offence coming together without Kadri, it was ripped further apart. An already difficult night became even harder for Toronto when Komarov took a heavy hit from Kevan Miller along the boards and seemed to injure his knee in the second period.

Komarov had already missed seven games late in the season with a knee injury, and the hit possibly aggravated what he had already been dealing with. Komarov left the game and then tried to return, but took his last shift with 14:23 remaining in the frame and did not come back with what the Leafs' called a "lower-body injury."

Fortunately for the Leafs, they have a stable of extra wingers - Dominic Moore, Matt Martin and Josh Leivo all remain ready for duty - but each has been passed over by Babcock so many times, his confidence in their ability to help the Leafs is debatable.

A change in goal?

No one would deny Frederik Andersen's status as the Leafs' regular season MVP. That's what made his departure from Game 2, after allowing three goals on five shots, so surprising.

It was an important bounce back situation for the Leafs, without one of their best forwards, and while Andersen didn't get much help from the players in front of him, he didn't make the saves Toronto needed either.

By the 12:13 mark of the first period, Andersen had allowed two even strength and one power play goal, quite literally scoring the third one on himself when he inadvertently banked the puck in off Nikita Zaitsev. That was the nail in Andersen's coffin, opening the door for Curtis McElhinney to step in as his replacement.

It was just the second playoff game of McElhinney's career, with the first also a relief appearance back on April 25, 2009 with the Calgary Flames. It was an auspicious beginning for McElhinney as well - he gave up a power play goal to Rick Nash less than three minutes after he took over - but as he's done all season, McElhinney found his groove in a hurry.

He was solid for the Leafs down the stretch, but it's hard to gauge how much of the Bruins' A-game he was seeing after they had such comfortable lead when he entered the game.

After the Nash power play score, McElhinney gave up three more - one to Krejci and two to Pasternak, one of which came off an egregious Jake Gardiner turnover in the neutral zone - en-route to making 19 saves on 23 shots (.826 save percentage).

What Babcock opts to do now is tough to say. McElhinney wasn't so good that he's the clear choice for Game 3, but the backup was superior to Andersen in the final month of the regular season (.940 save percentage, 1.99 goals-against average vs. .911 save percentage, 2.99 goals-against average for Andersen), which may hold some sway given the predicament Toronto now finds itself in.

Defensive doldrums

Defence hadn't often been a great strength of the Leafs' during the regular season, and so far against Boston that hasn't been the case either. Game 2 was a particularly poor outing for Toronto's blue liners, particularly Nikita Zaitsev, who had perhaps the worst opening period of any Leaf other than Andersen.

Zaitsev was caught chasing Marchand on the Bruins' first goal instead of watching the goal scorer Pasternak, was beat down low by DeBrusk while shorthanded, then was screening Andersen when the goaltender banked the puck off his behind and into net on Boston's third goal (credited to Miller) and finally was on the ice for Nash's power play goal as well.

The second period wasn't much better for Zaitsev right from the get-go - the Leafs had some good zone pressure going that dissipated when Zaitsev couldn't hold the line, and then he got beat along the wall and stripped of the puck to set up the Bruins in the offensive zone for a couple good opportunities.

Zaitsev was careless with the puck when he did have it, tossing it up along the boards into a sea of Bruins or making the ill-advised pass through traffic that ended up turning play back the other way. Throughout his sophomore season, Zaitsev has failed to establish himself as the dominant defenceman the Leafs hoped he would be when they gave him an eight-year, \$31.5 million contract last year. If they have any hope of winning even a game in this series, they need a much better performance out of him (not to mention his partner Gardiner, who joined Zaitsev at minus-two on the night) than was shown in Game 2.

Second-rate special teams

The Leafs' power play and penalty kill were both poor in Game 1 - the Bruins went 3-for-6 with the extra man on Thursday while the Leafs were 0-for-3. That should have been a clear sign to the Leafs that discipline was important, yet Komarov made the rookie mistake of jumping too soon in the first period to take Toronto's second too many men on the ice penalty in as many games.

Boston scored on the ensuing power play, and again on their second man advantage chance, proving Toronto's kill to be abysmal out of the gate once again. There are many reasons to point at for the kill's struggles, one of which could be the personnel.

Ron Hainsey is the Leafs' most important penalty killer, and played 48 minutes more shorthanded than anyone in the NHL during 80 regular season games, while also skating major minutes at even strength on the Leafs' top defence pairing. At 37 years old, that's a heavy load to carry, and Babcock opted not to give Hainsey any rest after the Leafs' clinched playoffs. That decision appears to be coming back to bite them now, with Hainsey looking average and flat-footed at both 5-on-5 and 5-on-4. Toronto did kill off a pair of penalties late in the game, when the outcome was all but realized, with Boston finishing 2-for-4 (5-for-10 in the series).

At the same time, the Leafs were still unable to do much of anything with their own power play opportunities, going 1-for-4 with the extra attacker (1-for-7 so far in the series). van Riemsdyk's power play goal came late in the third period, with the Leafs' already trailing 6-2. It did prevent Toronto from going two consecutive games without a goal on the power play, something they hadn't done since Feb. 27-March 3. But



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going into the series, those units should have been a major advantage to them in this series but so far as turned up nothing but frustration.

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TSN.CA / With Kadri out, Leafs look to Johnsson for PP spark

Mark Masters

TSN Toronto reporter Mark Masters checks in daily with news and notes from Maple Leafs practices and game-day skates. The Leafs had an optional skate at TD Garden in Boston on Saturday morning ahead of Game 2.

Was Mike Babcock surprised by the length of the suspension handed down to Nazem Kadri?

"Yeah, for sure," the Maple Leafs coach said. "We expected, obviously, a game out of it and so we started with that yesterday. The adversity you face in the playoffs when you're going to have a long run is always there and there's not much you can do about it so let's just get on with it."

Babcock pointed out that Toronto survived despite missing top-line centre Auston Matthews for 20 games during the regular season. And it was clear he didn't want to spend too much time discussing Kadri's ban this morning.

"We're playing Game 2 here today, right? Let's talk about it," he said when asked if the controversy could galvanize his players.

But Kadri's absence would seem to dramatically alter the dynamic in the series.

"It sucks seeing that," said Mitch Marner, who exploded offensively after being moved to Kadri's line in January. "Obviously, there's nothing you can say or really do about it. It's a big loss down the middle for us. He's a big guy to have at home for the match-up against their top line so we have to fill the void and make sure we all step up our game."

"I think Kadri's a real good player," said Bruins coach Bruce Cassidy. "Thirty-goal scorer, does a real good job on their power play, face-offs, match-up guy so I'm sure they'll feel that loss, but they got a lot of real good depth players."

Tommy Wingels, the victim of Kadri's illegal hit on Thursday, returned to the ice this morning and will be a game-time decision tonight. If he can't play then Ryan Donato will draw in.

"Didn't like the hit," Wingels told reporters after Boston's optional skate. "Thought I was in a vulnerable spot and I think as a game, as a league, as players, that's the stuff we don't want in our game. It was handled and I think the league did a good job."

Marner says Kadri is 'a big brother to this team ... a protector out there'

Disappointed by the length of suspension to Nazem Kadri, Mitch Marner says that the team will feel his absence, and that he is a big brother to many of the younger players.

Marner says Kadri is 'a big brother to this team ... a protector out there'

Disappointed by the length of suspension to Nazem Kadri, Mitch Marner says that the team will feel his absence, and that he is a big brother to many of the younger players.

With Kadri suspended, rookie Andreas Johnsson will draw into the Leafs lineup making his NHL playoff debut.

"He's got good speed, good skill," said Babcock. "Ideally, he saw the game the other night and now has a handle on what's going on and how competitive you have to be at playoff time to be a good player."

Johnsson will take Kadri's spot on the top power-play unit. The 23-year-old was effective as the man in the middle on the second unit during a nine-game audition in the regular season.

"He was skilled, he was tenacious," observed Babcock, "[the Matthews] power play [unit], I don't know if you noticed, as soon as he went on it, it got better. That was a positive thing. I just think his skill-set and his hockey IQ leads to him being successful in that area."

The Leafs went 0/3 on the man advantage in Game 1, but were happy with the chances they generated.

"They get to the net on the power play," Cassidy said. "They converge as well as anyone in the league. They get it to the elbows. Entries and elbows is what we're trying to focus on. They get it to the net and everybody goes to the net and they had a couple real good chances around there that just didn't bounce their way or we got the save. We were ready for it. We were hard in front of our net and that's a game plan of ours, because they get there."

Toronto's power play ranked second during the regular season (25%). Kadri led the way with 12 man-advantage goals.

Leafs Ice Chips: Marleau in the middle, Johnsson gets his chance

With Nazem Kadri serving the first of his three-game suspension tonight, the Maple Leafs have juggled their lines, moving Patrick Marleau to centre with Mitch Marner and Zach Hyman. Andreas Johnsson will also make his playoffs debut. Mark Masters has more.

Leafs Ice Chips: Marleau in the middle, Johnsson gets his chance

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The Leafs' penalty kill was a strength of the team for much of the season, but has fallen on hard times of late allowing nine goals in the last six games, including three on Thursday. Babcock believes the absence of Leo Komarov (lower-body injury) and Nikita Zaitsev (illness) stalled the group's momentum down the stretch and they've struggled to regain their swagger.

"The biggest thing is our penalty kill wasn't as good at the end of the year, partly because the people that were in it were out of the lineup," the coach said. "But, we've had a real good penalty kill all year. I don't think you want to base your confidence on one game. I talked to the guys, 'You played well all year to know how good you are.' You lose games during the year, you bounce back. That's what we're going to do here tonight."

Toronto's penalty kill was third in the league from October to the end of February, but from March 1 to the end of the regular season the unit was 24th in the NHL.

Boston's power play ranked fourth in the NHL in the regular season, so they were bound to do some damage in this series. But Babcock made it clear his penalty kill wasn't as bad as the Game 1 scoresheet suggests.

"If coaches call the one offside, it was offside, so that's one," he said. "The other one, we had a two-on-two down low, we weren't even outnumbered, they passed it by us. The third one was – you saw it."

The third power-play goal Boston scored was accidentally deflected into the net by Frederik Andersen. Boston was offside on the first one, but the Leafs didn't get the right replay in time to challenge it.

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



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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.

Of course, the Leafs can take some pressure off their penalty killers by not taking so many penalties. They were whistled six times in Game 1.

"With 4:25 left [in the second] the game was 1-1 and we had just played a real good second period," Babcock said. "Then we were shorthanded I think, if I'm not mistaken, 11 of the next 24 minutes or something like that."

The slew of penalties inflated the ice time of players like Ron Hainsey and Komarov while scorers like Matthews, William Nylander and Marner waited on the bench. Hainsey logged almost seven minutes shorthanded and appeared to be completely spent on the second Bruins power play goal as a pass got by him allowing David Backes to score from the doorstep.

So, the Leafs need to make sure they manage their emotions well, which can be tough in a playoff series especially when a guy like Brad Marchand is making camp in the grey area of the game. His kiss/lick on Komarov in Game 1 was only the latest example of his agitating behaviour.

"I expect that things will get a little more intense and ramp up as the series goes along," Marchand told Boston's WBZ-TV. "Things might heat up moving forward, but now they all know that I have bad breath."

Marchand on kiss: 'Now they all know I have bad breath'

After his kiss on Leo Komarov in Game 1 was shown on highlight shows across North America, Bruins forward Brad Marchand jokes about his latest on-ice interaction with the gritty Leafs forward.

Marchand on kiss: 'Now they all know I have bad breath'

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Projected Leafs line-up for Game 2:

Komarov-Matthews-Nylander

Hyman-Marleau-Marner

JvR-Bozak-Brown

Johnsson-Plekanec-Kapanen

Rielly-Hainsey

Gardiner-Zaitsev

Dermott-Polak

Andersen starts

McElhinney

Suspended: Kadri

Scratches: Moore, Martin, Leivo, Carrick

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USA TODAY / NHL playoffs: Which 0-2 teams have best shot at rallying in first round?

Kevin Allen

1:19 a.m. ET April 15, 2018

The Nashville Predators, Winnipeg Jets, Tampa Bay Lightning, Vegas Golden Knights and Boston Bruins have converted home-ice advantage into 2-0 leads in their best-of-seven NHL first-round series.

The San Jose Sharks, meanwhile, have grabbed a 2-0 lead by winning both of their games against the Ducks on the road in Anaheim.

Historically, teams that have taken a 2-0 lead in a series go on to win 88.7% of the time. Which of the trailing teams have the best shot of turning around those series?

We rank them as they prepare for Game 3:

1. Los Angeles Kings (trailing the Vegas Golden Knights 2-0): The expansion Golden Knights are continuing one of the most impressive team performances in NHL history.

This team, which didn't exist during the 2017 playoffs, has engineered two impressive nip-and-tuck wins against a Kings team that boasts multiple players with championship rings. Everyone is running short of superlatives to use about the Knights.

But don't bury the Kings yet. Defenseman Drew Doughty missed Game 2 because of a suspension. He's back. Plus, these Kings have ample poise and experience to cope with a series deficit. Anze Kopitar and Jeff Carter are capable of taking over a game, and Kings goalie Jonathan Quick has a .964 save percentage in this series.

It comes down to the Kings finding a way to eliminate the spell that Vegas goalie Marc-Andre Fleury has on them. He's in their head. They need to drive traffic in front of him.

2. New Jersey Devils (trailing the Tampa Bay Lightning 2-0): The Devils' hope centers on the fact they beat the Lightning three times in the regular season.

The problem is the Lightning are in playoff mode, and they are the more experienced team. They have a greater understanding of what it takes to be successful in the postseason. The Devils, a surprise playoff qualifier, are trying to learn that now.

The Devils put pressure on Tampa Bay in Game 2, forcing Lightning goalie Andrei Vasilevskiy to be at his best to preserve the win.

The Devils are generating enough shots, 75 in the two games. Taylor Hall has 11. They need to force Vasilevskiy to move more across the crease and to impede his vision with screens.

3. Anaheim Ducks (trailing the San Jose Sharks 2-0): It doesn't get any easier for the Ducks, who now must go to San Jose for two games in the Shark Tank.

The Sharks' talent and depth have flown under the radar this season. The acquisition of Evander Kane has given the Sharks more scoring and muscle up front. That's important against the Ducks.

The primary reason why the Ducks can't be written off is that their big center combination of Ryan Getzlaf and Ryan Kesler should be an advantage. Plus, the Ducks went 10-1 down the stretch to ready themselves for the playoffs. This is a team that almost reached the Stanley Cup Final last year.

4. Minnesota Wild (trailing the Winnipeg Jets 2-0): Wild goalie Devan Dubnyk has kept this series closer than it should be. The Jets have outshot the Wild 84-37. The Wild had a 2-1 lead in third period of Game 1, but lost that game 3-2. They lost 4-1 in Game 2.



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If the Ryan Suter-less Wild want to tighten this series, they need to move the puck more quickly out of their zone. The Jets are forcing the puck deep and preventing the Wild from moving the puck up ice. The Wild haven't measured up yet to the Jets' pressure. The Wild must find an answer for Patrik Laine, who has two goals and 10 shots on goal in the series.

The Wild need Jason Zucker, Eric Staal and Nino Niederreiter to produce. Those three combined for 93 goals in the regular season and have combined for zero points in the first two games.

5. Colorado Avalanche (trailing the Nashville Predators 2-0): Considering the Avalanche were last in the NHL in 2016-17, just qualifying for the playoffs must feel like winning a championship.

They've already had an exceptional season, and now they are trying their hardest to push back against the Predators, falling 5-4 on Saturday in Game 2.

But the bottom line is the Predators are deeper, stronger, better defensively and more accomplished in net. The Predators haven't found their postseason rhythm yet, but they are in control of this series. Don't forget the Predators were in the Stanley Cup Final last year while the Avalanche were golfing and boating.

6. Toronto Maple Leafs (trailing the Boston Bruins 2-0): The impressive Bruins have humbled the Maple Leafs in the first two games. The Leafs defensive corps doesn't know what to do with David Pastrnak, who has nine points in two games.

Make it a hat trick for @pastrnak96!    pic.twitter.com/PHgZ4hGav2

— NHL GIFs (@NHLGIFs) April 15, 2018

The Maple Leafs' forward group is better than it is showing. Nazem Kadri's three-game suspension makes it even harder for the Maple Leafs to come back in this series. They could use his skill and fiery style against a confident Bruins team.

Auston Matthews would have become a monstrous force to make Toronto competitive in the series.

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