Canes’ Svechnikov sidelined with concussion after Ovechkin fight

By Chip Alexander

Carolina Hurricanes rookie forward Andrei Svechnikov is in the concussion protocol and his availability uncertain for the playoff series against the Washington Capitals, Canes coach Rod Brind’Amour said Tuesday.

Svechnikov, the No. 2 pick of the 2018 NHL Draft, was injured in the first period of Game 3 on Monday after a brief but brutal fight with the Caps’ Alex Ovechkin, who landed the heaviest of the blows. Svechnikov, whose head banged off the ice as he fell, was taken to a hospital for treatment and evaluation, Brind’Amour said.

Brind’Amour said he talked with Svechnikov on Tuesday morning, which he called encouraging.

“From seeing him now, he looks normal and he feels great,” Brind’Amour said. “That’s a real positive sign.”

Brind’Amour said it was unlikely Svechnikov would be able to play Thursday in Game 4 of the Eastern Conference quarterfinal series. The Canes, after a 5-0 win Monday, trail 2-1 in the best-of-seven series.

“We’re going to be real careful,” Brind’Amour said. “We’re certainly not going to rush him back.”

Canes forward Micheal Ferland also left Monday’s game with an upper-body injury but Brind’Amour had no update on his availability for Game 4.

The Canes on Tuesday recalled forward Patrick Brown from the Charlotte Checkers of the AHL on an emergency basis. Forward Saku Maenanlanen was a healthy extra on Monday and should be back in the lineup.

Svechnikov, 19, was a 20-goal scorer in the regular season and had both Canes goals in the series opener, a 4-2 loss. He had a few altercations with Ovechkin in Game 2, then a few more Monday before the gloves were dropped by the two Russians.

Brind’Amour said after the game and again Tuesday that he believes Ovechkin, the Caps captain, was primarily responsible for provoking the fight between the two Russians. He noted there are two versions of what occurred -- Ovechkin has said Svechnikov wanted to fight.

“I hear all the comments. I get it,” Brind’Amour said. “But when you’re in the heat of it, you see it a little different. I’m still bothered by it but we’ve moved on now.”

Caps coach Todd Reirden didn’t spend much time Tuesday discussing the fight or aftermath, saying, “I see it as two willing combatants and it’s part of our sport. Two willing combatants, it didn’t work out for one of them and now we’re focused on moving forward.”

The reaction from Svechnikov’s older brother, Evgeny, was stronger. In his Instagram account, Evgeny posted: “One, two Freddy’s coming for YOU” -- a reference to the movie “A Nightmare on Elm Street” and the creepy killer, Freddy Krueger.

Evgeny Svechnikov, a forward with the Detroit Red Wings, later deleted the post and could face some blowback from the league, which has social media guidelines.

Earlier the better for PNC Arena parking and traffic troubles

By Joe Giglio

When Larry Perkins noticed cars pulling into the PNC Arena parking lot nearly seven hours before the start of the Carolina Hurricanes’ game on Monday, he knew playoff hockey was back.

Perkins, the assistant general manager of PNC Arena, also knew there would be some traffic headaches for the fans who couldn’t get a headstart on tailgating before the Canes’ first-round playoff matchup with the Washington Capitals.

By the time the puck dropped for the start of Game 3, a 5-0 win for the Canes, most of the fans who were snarled in traffic on Wade Avenue and Blue Ridge Road had found their way into the arena.

“While we hate to see traffic back up anywhere, I’m happy to say at puck-drop, about 95 percent of the fans were in the building,” Perkins said.

The team’s first home playoff game since 2009 was the first sellout since the season-opener in October. The team had an average attendance of 14,323 during the regular season but an overflow crowd of 18,783 on Monday (18,680 is the capacity for the arena’s hockey setup).

The diehards and tailgate aficionados beat the traffic with no problem. The fans trying to get into the parking lot area after 6 p.m. had a more difficult time.

The parking map for PNC Arena when the four primary entrances are open. About an hour before Monday’s playoff game between the Carolina Hurricanes and Washington Capitals, the Edwards Mill Rd. entrance was closed off.
because the main lot had reached its capacity. Courtesy of PNC Arena

That’s because the arena parking lot hit its capacity of 4,000 spots. The main entrance on Edwards Mill was closed off by the Raleigh Police Department about 45 minutes before the game started.

RPD closed off the Wade Avenue exit ramp to Edwards Mill at 6:07 p.m., Perkins said. That caused some backups on Wade and confusion.

The police working the Edwards Mill entrance were directing cars to the Blue Ridge Road exit off of Wade and funneling cars through the Westchase Road and Trinity Road entrances.

The PNC Arena parking map, and traffic flow, for when the Edwards Mill Rd. entrance is closed. After 6 p.m. on Monday, police were directing fans to the Blue Ridge Rd. and Trinity Rd. parking lot entrances. Courtesy of PNC Arena

Perkins said there was a logistics and security planning meeting last week with arena personnel, the RPD, the NC Department of Transportation, the National Guard and the FBI. The shutdown of the main entrance on Edwards Mill was by design.

“It’s a whole process,” Perkins said. “We had every possible street staffed and ready.”

The early part of the evening went smoothly, but once the arena lot hit capacity, there were some unavoidable delays.

“When you’re dealing with a weekday event, there’s going to be commuter traffic as well,” Perkins said.

The backup of cars and commuters on Wade and Blue Ridge were “sheer volume” issues, not logistics, Perkins said.

“Once we shut the property down, that obviously takes away some of the main staging areas that we have around the property,” Perkins said.

There are an additional 4,000 parking spots in the Carter-Finley Stadium lots, Perkins said, and those are the best option for fans who can’t get to the arena before 6 p.m.

There were 110 arena members of the arena staff working in the parking lots, Perkins said. The general parking cost is $20. There are prepaid parking options, at the time of the ticket purchase, Perkins said.

There are also alternate options to getting to the game. Perkins said between 400 and 500 cars used the Uber or Lyft dropoff area.

Caniac Coach buses also run from downtown and North Hills to the arena and there’s a GoTriangle bus that picks up fans at the Crabtree Valley Mall.

For the fans going to Game 4 on Thursday night, also a 7 p.m. start, Perkins said the best way to avoid traffic issues is to get to the arena early. If you’re running late, avoid Edwards Mill and plan on taking a different entrance.

And, Perkins said, there is one other way hockey fans can get an assist.

“If you’re not going to the game, please take a different route and avoid the area,” he said.

Mrazek, Canes fighting back from rocky start against Caps

By Chip Alexander

For the Carolina Hurricanes, it was a rather ominous start to their Stanley Cup playoff series against the Washington Capitals.

Certainly for goalie Petr Mrazek.

In the first period of the opener, Caps center Nicklas Backstrom carried the puck into the Carolina zone and sent a wrister toward the net. Rather surprisingly, what appeared to be a mostly harmless 40-foot shot whizzed by Mrazek’s glove and into the net and the Caps led 1-0.

The Caps went on to a 4-2 win in Game 1 at Capital One Arena, then won an overtime thriller 4-3 in Game 2 after an even more unlikely event -- a goal from defenseman Brooks Orpik. Brooks Orpik?

Given that, there were questions if Mrazek would be the starting goalie in Game 3 or if Canes might give Curtis McElhinney a start. But coach Rod Brind’Amour again went with the choice of goaltending coach Mike Bales -- Mrazek again -- and Mrazek responded with his fourth career playoff shutout Monday with 18 saves as the Canes rolled 5-0.

“He’s been good,” Brind’Amour said Tuesday. “Maybe he’d want that one (by Backstrom) back but he’s made so many big saves. Even (Monday) night, there wasn’t a lot of work obviously, but it was the early work that for me made the difference in the game. They had the first scoring chance of the game. If that goes in who knows where the game goes, He’s been very solid.”

Coaches like to talk about teams building a game, steadily improving period to period. Mrazek has been building a series and should get a fourth straight start Thursday in Game 4 at PNC Arena as the Canes look to square the Eastern Conference quarterfinal matchup.

Mrazek allowed three goals on 17 shots in the opener, albeit with two Caps scores coming on the power play. Even the first goal might have been stopped had defenseman Jaccob Slavin closed the gap a little more on Backstrom or not unintentionally become a partial screen when Backstrom did shoot.

Mrazek gave up four goals on 33 shots in Game 2, Orpik scoring on the only shot of overtime. He then had the shutout in the Canes’ first home playoff game since May 2009 and appeared buoyed by all the bedlam along the rest of the Canes, later saying the frenzied sellout crowd was “an extra player on the ice for us.”

Those who know Mrazek best talk about his tenacity. While not the biggest goalie in the league at 6-foot-1 and 190
Tom Dempsey was Mrazek's first goalie coach in North America after Mrazek, then 17, arrived from his native Czech Republic to play junior hockey for the Ottawa 67's of the Ontario Hockey League in 2009-2010.

"He had no equipment because his club team in Czech wouldn't let him bring it," Dempsey said. "They didn't want him to come. Petr had to use one of our other goalie's used equipment from the previous year.

"He was the best goalie in the camp. That opened my eyes right there. It was his attitude, his athleticism, his work ethic. Can you imagine, the goalie we had before was 5-foot-8 and Petr had to wear his equipment and he was the best goalie. Most North America goalies wouldn't have gone on the ice. Right from that point, I went, ‘Whoa, this guy is special.’"

Dempsey said when he told Mrazek that he had once coached goalie Marc-Andre Fleury. Mrazek's response was, "I will be better than him. You will see."

A cocky kid? "I would say he has that quiet confidence," Dempsey said, "and he backs it up."

Mrazek, 27, was drafted by the Detroit Red Wings in 2010 and made his NHL debut for the Wings in 2013 -- winning 5-1 -- while helping the Grand Rapids Griffins of the AHL to a Calder Cup championship. He made his Stanley Cup playoff debut in April 2015, making 44 saves in a 3-2 Wings win over Tampa Bay, and later had two shutouts in the series, becoming the first Wings rookie goalie to do that since Harry Lumley in 1945.

Mrazek had the look of a star in the making for the Wings but it didn't work out that way. The losses built up, his confidence waned and his technique suffered. Traded to the Philadelphia Flyers in February 2018, he was not given a qualifying offer by the Flyers after the season.

Carolina goalie Petr Mrazek (34) has words with Washington's Alex Ovechkin (8) during the third period of the Carolina Hurricanes' 5-0 victory over the Washington Capitals at PNC Arena in Raleigh, N.C., Monday, April 15, 2019. Ethan Hyman ehyman@newsobserver.com

Suddenly available as a free agent, Mrazek signed a one-year contract with Carolina for $1.5 million, a bargain price for the Canes, saying he wanted only the chance to prove he could be a No. 1 goalie. Teaming with McElhinney, the two have given the Canes quality goaltending -- McElhinney quiet and cool in net and Mrazek, who won 11 of his last 13 starts in the regular season, bringing more of the fire.

"Petr is an emotional guy and I think he thrives in those situations," Bales said. "I think he's done a great job of being aggressive when he needs to be."

When the Canes clinched the playoff berth April 4 with a 3-1 win over the New Jersey Devils at PNC Arena, Mrazek was named the game's first star. Sitting down at the bench for a postgame interview, he beamed as he shouted, "We're in! We're in! Yes!" and then letting out a "Whooooo!"

"It's amazing. It's the best part of hockey," Mrazek said of the playoffs.

With more still to come.

Extra day comes at good time for Hurricanes after emotional win

By Luke DeCock

There is, hard as it may be to believe, still a playoff series to finish, two more games to play at the minimum, a lot of hockey left. Just because Monday night felt climactic and catastrophic and cataclysmic, almost like a Game 7 and not a Game 3, doesn’t mean life doesn’t go on as normal.

It is, however, probably a very good thing for the Carolina Hurricanes that there are two days off before Game 4, because even if that isn’t enough time for Andrei Svechnikov to recover -- as good as the news seemed to be Tuesday -- it may be enough time for the Hurricanes to regroup and regather the emotion they expended, because it was not an insignificant amount.

The tenor of the series may have changed with an utterly dominant performance in a 5-0 win, but it can change again just as quickly Thursday.

“We understand that it’s going to be a whole new game,” Hurricanes coach Rod Brind’Amour said Tuesday. “We’re not expecting that kind of a game to go that way.”

And they will be short-handed, for certain: Even if Svechnikov was feeling fine Tuesday after Alex Ovechkin’s knockout blow and the ensuing trip to the hospital Monday night, it would be the height of folly to bring him back in this series, maybe even these playoffs should the Hurricanes continue on, and risk two concussions in such short succession this early in his career.

As for Micheal Ferland, who exited the game early, whatever his injury situation is, it is increasingly clear he cannot be relied upon, and the Hurricanes appear increasingly willing to move forward without him -- in this series and in the offseason. And with just the one goal since the trade deadline, how much will he really be missed anyway?

The Hurricanes will need at least one body from Charlotte to replace them, even with Saku Manaelanen ready to step back into the lineup, and Tuesday afternoon Patrick Brown got the first call. He may not be the last.

These are all questions that require some thought and examination, and the Hurricanes have that time, at home, this week. Desperate and wounded, they threw everything they had into Monday’s game, even after the Capitals had sensed the direction of the game and eased up on the gas. There was a statement to be made, and they made it, but it all begins anew Thursday night.

Not to be lost in all of this: Only two of the Hurricanes’ 10 goals have come from players that would have been considered their top six forwards going into the series, Carolina’s power play is actually outscoring Washington’s 3-
2 and the Hurricanes have a 63 percent possession edge five-on-five.

All that said, it takes a tremendous degree of commitment and investment to play with the energy and aggression the Hurricanes demonstrated Monday. The Hurricanes can outplay and outhustle the Capitals, but it takes everything they have, as it did in Game 3. It will take all of two days to gather that again, if they can.

“We needed the two days, though,” Brind’Amour said. “Part of you says it would be great to go right back at it and play. But there was a huge emotional investment in that game for our guys. To have one day and go again, I don’t know. This is going to be nice, I’m hoping anyway, to reset.

“And then come again, hopefully, with a lot of energy. If the building is the same, which I think it will be, we can feed off that. That’s where home ice makes a difference. We need every advantage we can get.”

They’ll have to muster it again. That’s what it will take to even the series against a team that’s unquestionably more talented and experienced. The euphoria is gone. It all begins anew.

Brind’Amour speaks candidly: Should fighting be allowed in hockey or not?

By Mary Dunleavy, WRAL Sports Anchor / Reporter

Raleigh, N.C. — On Monday night, during Game 3 of the Stanley Cup playoffs, one of the best players in the world, 33-year-old Alex Ovechkin, and the Hurricanes’ second overall pick in the NHL Draft, 19-year-old Andrei Svechnikov, got into a fight. Svechnikov was knocked out. The young talent is now in concussion protocol and will likely miss Game 4.

“It’s tough to see though,” said Canes head coach Rod Brind’Amour. “That’s the worst part of it – when guys get hurt. That’s always tough to see.”

It’s a horrible blow to the Canes lineup, as Svechnikov is one of the rising stars in the franchise. Heading into Game 3, he led all rookies with 3 points.

Fighting is a part of the hockey culture. On Tuesday, we had a unique opportunity to get Rod Brind’Amour’s take: Should fighting be allowed in hockey or not?

Brind’Amour said, “I don’t know if it’s ever been necessary. I think it’s been part of, you know, it’s been part of the game forever. No, I don’t think it’s necessary. I don’t think you’re ever going to get it away from the game, but it’s tough to see though.”

After the punches that were thrown at PNC Arena, many were left wondering whether there is any benefit to the game and the players.

Brind’Amour said, “Not really ... probably not.”

The first-year head coach of the Canes pointed out that youth hockey is making an effort to decrease the on-ice brawls.

“It’s getting so much less and less because kids are not brought up with it,” said Brind’Amour. “It’s becoming less a part of the culture so maybe at some point? Certainly the way they call it and stuff in the younger levels, there’s so much penalized by it you miss games. They’re definitely trying to deter it so maybe it will be out, but it will be a while before you see that.”

While Ovechkin did say he hoped Svechnikov is okay, Brind’Amour and the Canes are trying to put the fist fight in the rear-view mirror.

Brind’Amour explained, “Just trying to focus on how we can win a game and get back in this series. Fighting is not a part of what we’re going to be talking about.”
Gravley: Hockey night in Carolina

By Jeff Gravley, WRAL Sports anchor/reporter

THE ATMOSPHERE

In the lead up to Game 3 between the Canes and Caps, I was curious what the atmosphere at PNC arena would be like. I know what it can be like and should be like having lived through the 2009 and 2006 playoff runs. But would fans be in "playoff shape" after a 10-year postseason absence?

Oh did Hurricanes fans deliver!

From the pre-game gatherings outside under a bright blue sky, to the fever pitch inside as the team took the ice. It was a 10-year build-up waiting to explode. With each of the 5 goals scored by the home team, BOOM!! The outburst of ear-piercing sound with a music bed of Petey Pablo's Raise Up. I posted a video on Twitter of the electric atmosphere to which PA announcer H. Wade Minter posted back, "I can't even hear myself in that video, and I know what I'm saying!"

THE GAME

In the first two games, the Canes were down 3-0 and 2-0 before the first period ended. It was important to keep the pregame energy alive by scoring first.

Warren Foegele was knocked down in front of the net and held down, he was able to get back up in time to deflect Justin Faulk's shot for a 1-0 lead for the home squad. Foegele was 13 the last time the Canes made the playoffs. He certainly rose to the occasion with a pair of goals in Game 3.

Ditto for Dougie Hamilton who nets a pair on the power play. Hamilton, Foegele and Jaccob Slavin lead the Canes in the playoffs with 4 points each.

None of their top four scorers from the regular season are contributing points like they need to. Sebastian Aho, Teuvo Teravainen, Justin Williams and Micheal Ferland have combined for 4 points in the first three games.

Big props to the ever-steady Jordan Staal who had two assists and a career high 10 hits and to goalie Petr Mrazek who posted his 4th career shutout in the playoffs. He has a total of 5 postseason wins.

THE FIGHT

I was writing down a note when I heard the crowd noise begin to rise. My eyes were drawn to a "scuffle" below me. Through flinging arms and flying fists I made out the number 8 in white and 37 in black.

Do what?? Are you kidding me???

Alex Ovechkin and Andrei Svechnikov, not known for their fighting, were engaged in a game of Russian roulette. An Ovi connection to the jaw and Svech's head hitting the ice was enough to knock the 19-year-old rookie unconscious and into concussion protocol.

It was the first knockout since March, when EvanderHolyfield took down Jordan Martinook in a one-punch Storm Surge celebration.

But seriously, in the NHL when bodies come in contact with heads, you hear the cries of head injuries. Micheal Ferland was ejected from Game 2 for a questionable hit on Nic Dowd. In Game 3, Brett Pesce took a knock to the noggin and nothing was called.

But when fights are allowed and fists come in contact with heads that leads to someone being knocked out and into concussion protocol, well that's just hockey.

No, that's just bull hockey.

Vicious blows to the head, whether in a fist fight or by a check, need to be treated the same. Hockey is played in a rink. It's not in a boxing ring or a cage, although sometimes it looks that way.
CAROLINA HURRICANES
NEWS CLIPPINGS • April 17, 2019

Andrei Svechnikov in Concussion Protocol
Svechnikov injured in Game 3 after fight with Ovechkin
by Michael Smith

Carolina Hurricanes forward Andrei Svechnikov has been placed in the concussion protocol, according to head coach Rod Brind’Amour.

Svechnikov left Game 3 in the first period after fighting Washington Capitals captain Alexander Ovechkin. The Hurricanes’ 19-year-old rookie did not return to the game and was taken to and subsequently released from the hospital.

“Seeing him now, he looks normal and feels great,” Brind’Amour said on Tuesday morning. “That’s a real positive sign.”

Svechnikov, who tallied two goals and an assist in the first two games of this first-round series, is unlikely to play in Game 4 on Thursday.

“We’re going to be real careful. We’re always careful,” Brind’Amour said. “We’re certainly not going to rush him back.”

In other injury news, Brind’Amour had no further update on Micheal Ferland, who also departed Game 3 in the first period with a reaggravated upper-body concern.

Svechnikov not expected to play Game 4 for Hurricanes
Rookie forward injured in win against Capitals; Ferland status unknown
by Tom Gulitti

RALEIGH, N.C. -- Andrei Svechnikov is not expected to play when the Carolina Hurricanes face the Washington Capitals in Game 4 of the Eastern Conference First Round at PNC Arena on Thursday (7 p.m. ET; NBCSN, TVAS, SN360, FS-CR, NBCSWA).

Hurricanes coach Rod Brind’Amour said the rookie forward, who was injured in a fight with Capitals forward Alex Ovechkin during Carolina’s 5-0 win in Game 3 win on Monday, was at PNC Arena on Tuesday and going through the concussion protocol after being examined at a hospital following the game. The Capitals lead the the best-of-7 series to 2-1.

“It was good to see him,” Brind’Amour said. “He did go to the hospital and everything was checked out there.”

Brind’Amour said Svechnikov looked much better Tuesday than when he saw him during the first intermission Monday. The 19-year-old had to be helped off the ice by teammates with 9:01 left in the first period.

“From seeing him now, he looks normal and he feels great,” Brind’Amour said. “so that’s a real positive sign.” Still, Brind’amour said he assumes Svechnikov will sit out at least Game 4.

“We’re going to be real careful,” Brind’Amour said. “We’re always careful. This year, we’ve dealt with [concussions] with I don’t know how many guys and when they were ready to come back, we waited weeks after. So we’re certainly not going to rush him back.”

Brind’Amour said he had no update on forward Micheal Ferland, who also left in the first period of Game 3 after aggravating a lingering upper-body injury.

With Svechnikov likely out and Ferland’s status unknown, the Hurricanes called up Patrick Brown from Charlotte of the American Hockey League on an emergency basis.
Williams' old friends now playoff foes for Hurricanes

Ties with Capitals put on hold before first-round series, which heads to Game 4

by Tom Gulitti

RALEIGH, N.C. -- Justin Williams had been through enough battles in the Stanley Cup Playoffs to know the lovefest between him and the Washington Capitals wouldn’t last.

So the Carolina Hurricanes forward rolled his eyes at the Capitals’ suggestions before the Eastern Conference First Round began that he played a role in them winning the Stanley Cup last season, though he was no longer a member of their team.

"I’m not going to make this a kumbaya type thing," the Carolina captain said.

No one on either team was singing Kumbaya during or after the Hurricanes’ 5-0 win against the Capitals in Game 3 of the best-of-7 series on Monday. Emotions have become more heated over the course of the series, which the Capitals lead 2-1 with Game 4 at PNC Arena on Thursday (7 p.m. ET; SN360, TVAS, FS-CR, NBCSWA).

Game 3 was a scrum-filled affair that included Williams and Capitals forward Tom Wilson jostling and exchanging words during one post-whistle get-together in the second period. Wilson has credited Williams with taking him under his wing during one post-whistle get-together in the second period. Wilson has credited Williams with taking him under his wing during Williams’ two seasons with the Capitals and they remain friends, but as Williams noted again after the game on Monday, old friendships don’t matter in the playoffs.

"Not for a couple weeks," Williams said. "Nope."

Though there will be handshakes and hugs when the series is over, Williams is doing everything he can do make sure the Hurricanes come out on the winning side of that line. A three-time Stanley Cup winner, including with the Hurricanes in 2006, the 37-year-old is the unquestioned leader in a locker room that includes 11 players who made their NHL debut during Williams’ two seasons with the Capitals and they remain friends, but as Williams noted again after the game on Monday, old friendships don’t matter in the playoffs.

"Leadership’s huge in our sport for a lot of reasons, but I think one of them is the experience factor," Hurricanes coach Rod Brind’Amour said. "Just being able when you’re a young guy to look over at someone when things seem to be going crazy and he’s smiling or laughing or says the right thing, everyone [thinks], ‘Oh, I guess this is normal.’ That’s kind of how it’s been for us with him and he’s a perfect leader for this group."

A veteran of 143 playoff games with 95 postseason points (36 goals, 59 assists) over his 18 NHL seasons, Williams knows the ups and downs of a series as well as anyone. After winning the Cup with the Hurricanes, he was traded to the Los Angeles Kings in 2009 and won it again with them in 2012 and 2014.

Ferland, who had 40 points (17 goals, 23 assists) in 71 regular-season games, has no points in the series.

"Obviously, he’s been there," said Sebastian Aho, a 21-year-old forward and potentially Williams’ eventual successor as Hurricanes captain. "He’s done it three times, so he knows what to do and what to say when the time comes."

Williams also won the Conn Smythe Trophy as the most valuable player in the playoffs in 2014, when he had 25 points (nine goals, 16 assists) in 26 playoff games for the Kings, and his reputation as a clutch performer was the main reason the Capitals signed him as an unrestricted free agent in 2015. He earned the moniker "Mr. Game 7" with his 14 points (seven goals, seven assists) and 7-0 record in Game 7s before getting to Washington; the Capitals thought they needed someone like him to help them get over the hump in their pursuit of the Cup.

They were eliminated by the Pittsburgh Penguins in the Eastern Conference Second Round in each of Williams’ two seasons with them, including a 2-0 Game 7 loss in 2017, but many of them believe the lessons they learned from him were factors in them winning the Cup last season without him.

"He was obviously one of those guys that brought a level of professionalism here and a guy that knows how to win," Capitals goalie Braden Holtby said. "You watch him play, he doesn’t take a night off. He shows up for every game. One of those guys that you listen to when he talks. He’s just naturally a leader."

Williams signed a two-year contract with Carolina as an unrestricted free agent on July 1, 2017, but with the Hurricanes not in the playoffs last season, he followed his friends in Washington closely during their Stanley Cup run.

"Very closely. Everything," Williams said. "I’m a fan of the game also, but also last year was a fan of them.

After Washington won the Cup with a 4-3 win against the Vegas Golden Knights in Game 5 of the Stanley Cup Final, Williams texted his congratulations to a few of his former teammates. Though the Capitals partied into the early morning hours in Las Vegas following that Game 5 win, some decided to show their appreciation to Williams via a FaceTime call.

"He reached out to a couple of us and he gave his congratulations and said he was happy for us," Capitals forward T.J. Oshie said. "He’s just an overall good person, so I wouldn’t expect less of him."

The Capitals can see firsthand the impact Williams has had on the Hurricanes in his first season as their captain. After falling to qualify for the playoffs for nine consecutive seasons, the Hurricanes are back in the postseason and giving the defending champions all they can handle.
Williams has one assist in the first three games of the series, but as the Capitals know well, his contributions go well beyond points.

"He's a winner," Oshie said. "He demands a lot out of his teammates because he gives a lot to the team, and he's in a position to do that. He doesn't take nights off. Every night he wants to be the best player on the ice and he tries to be the best player on the ice. That bleeds through teams and just that kind of winning mentality and never-give-up mentality that he brings every night, I think guys pick up on that, especially young players."

Regardless of who wins the series, the Capitals will remain grateful for Williams' time as their teammate and how it paid off for them last season. But Williams put all of that aside before the puck was dropped in Game 1.

"Obviously, I have a lot of respect for what they did last year, and I have a lot of really good friends on that team," Williams said. "I was very happy for them, but that was last year."

**AHL Notebook: Calder Cup Playoffs showcase brilliant crop of prospects**

Necas, Foote, Glass among young players looking for postseason experience along journey to NHL by By Patrick Williams

A deep crop of NHL prospects will have a chance to make big impacts when the American Hockey League's Calder Cup Playoffs start Wednesday.

The postseason experience has long been an important final stop for many players before they graduate to the NHL. Last season Toronto (Toronto Maple Leafs) won the Calder Cup in seven games against Texas (Dallas Stars), and six Toronto players converted that experience into NHL opportunities. Forward Andreas Johnsson won the Jack A. Butterfield Trophy as the most valuable player in the Calder Cup Playoffs in his farewell.

Here is a team-by-team look at some of the intriguing prospects who will compete for the Calder Cup this year:

**Bakersfield (Edmonton Oilers)**

As the rebuild continues for the Oilers, Pacific Division champion Bakersfield could play a prominent role by giving players valuable experience with a long postseason run.

Bakersfield, which had a 17-game winning streak earlier this season, the second-longest in AHL history, faces Colorado (Colorado Avalanche) in the first round.

First-round series are best-of-5.

Goalie Shane Starrett and forward Tyler Benson were each named to the AHL Second All-Star Team and the AHL All-Rookie Team last week.

Starrett (6-foot-5, 181 pounds), emerged as Bakersfield's No. 1 goalie and had an exceptional season after spending most of last season with Wichita (ECHL) as a rookie. The 24-year-old undrafted free agent was 27-7-5 in 42 games with a 2.33 GAA ranked first, and his .916 save percentage tied for ninth.

Defenseman Jake Bean, a member of the AHL All-Rookie Team, is with the Hurricanes, but Charlotte has an abundance of young talent to face Providence (Boston Bruins). Charlotte won the Macgregor Kilpatrick Trophy as the regular-season champion with 110 points and 51 wins.

Martin Necas did not turn 20 until Jan. 15, but he's shown why Carolina chose him in the first round (No. 12) in the 2017 NHL Draft. Necas (6-2, 189) finished with 52 points (16 goals, 36 assists) in 64 games. After 21 consecutive games without a goal from Jan. 11 to March 15, the forward found chemistry with Tomas Jurco, a late-season addition. Necas had 17 points (seven goals, 10 assists) in his final 15 games.

Necas is far from the only strong prospect. Goaltie Alex Nedeljkovic was a second-round pick (No. 37) in the 2014 NHL Draft. In his third pro season, the 23-year-old had AHL goaltenders with 51 appearances and was 34-9-5. His 2.26 GAA ranked first, and his .918 save percentage tied for ninth.

Forward Aleksi Saarela (5-10, 200) had 54 points (a team-leading 30 goals, 24 assists) in 69 games as a 22-year-old. Rookie forward Morgan Geekie (6-3, 192) had 46 points (19 goals, 27 assists) in 73 games after Carolina selected the 20-year-old in the third round (No. 67) of the 2017 draft. Julien Gauthier (6-4, 227), selected in the first round (No. 21) of the 2016 NHL Draft, finished second on the team to Saarela with 27 goals. The 21-year-old forward had 41 points in 75 games.

**Chicago (Vegas Golden Knights)**

Injuries to key veteran forwards Daniel Carr and Brooks Macek, first and third in scoring for Chicago, left major holes, but the Golden Knights' AHL affiliate won a regular-season division title for the second consecutive season. Chicago's 98 points and 44 wins also led the Western Conference.

In a first-round series with Grand Rapids, forward Cody Glass (6-2, 178), the sixth pick in the 2017 draft, will have an opportunity to make an impression.

An injury interrupted his WHL season with Portland, but he had 69 points (15 goals, 54 assists) in 38 WHL regular-season games and returned in time for one playoff game. Glass turned 20 on April 1 and joined Chicago the following day. He adjusted quickly to the pro game and had five points (three goals, two assists) in six games, including a two-goal debut on April 5.

The Golden Knights have started to amass young talent in the AHL, starting with their defensemen. Rookie Nic Hague (6-6, 215), a 20-year-old second-round pick (No. 34) in the
2017 draft, had 32 points (13 goals, 19 assists) in 75 games. Rookie Dylan Coghlan (6-2, 190), undrafted from the WHL, had 40 points (15 goals, 25 assists) in 86 games.

Syracuse (Tampa Bay Lightning)

The Lightning have patiently developed a consistently productive prospect group in Syracuse, which won the North Division title and had 102 points, second-most in the AHL.

Headlining a deep collection of prospects that will meet Cleveland (Columbus) is undrafted forward Alex Barre-Boulet (5-10, 170), who finished in a first-place tie with teammate Carter Verhaeghe with 34 goals. The 21-year-old had 34 assists, giving him the rookie scoring title with 68 points.

Defenseman Cal Foote (6-4, 221), taken in the first round (No. 14) in the 2017 draft by Tampa Bay, played in the Calder Cup Playoffs last season before turning pro full-time. The 21-year-old defenseman played 76 games for Syracuse and had 31 points (10 goals, 21 assists).

Facts and Figures: Hurricanes give home fans plenty to celebrate

Shut out Capitals to win first home playoff game since 2009 NHL.com

The Carolina Hurricanes put on a show for the 18,783 fans who packed PNC Arena for their first home playoff game in 10 years by defeating the Washington Capitals 5-0 in Game 3 of the Eastern Conference First Round on Monday.

Warren Foegele scored Carolina's first two goals and assisted on the second of two scored by defenseman Dougie Hamilton to help the Hurricanes outshoot the Capitals 45-18 and cut Washington's lead in the best-of-7 series to 2-1.

It was Carolina's first home playoff game since Game 4 of the 2009 Eastern Conference Final against the Penguins and their first postseason win at home since Game 4 of the 2009 conference semifinals, when current coach Rod Brind'Amour assisted on the winning goal in a 4-1 victory against the Boston Bruins.

Foegele and Hamilton are the fifth set of Hurricanes/Hartford Whalers teammates to each score multiple goals in a playoff game, but the first since Brind'Amour and Ray Whitney each scored twice against the Oilers in Game 1 of the 2006 Stanley Cup Final.

Carolina's plus-27 shot differential was the second-highest in Hurricanes/Whalers playoff history. The Hurricanes outshot the Montreal Canadiens 46-16 (plus-30) in a 4-1 loss in Game 2 of the 2002 Eastern Conference Semifinals.

Makar scores game-winner in NHL debut for Avalanche

Cale Makar wasted no time showing why the Colorado Avalanche were eager to get him into the lineup. Three days after winning the Hobey Baker Award, and two days after playing in the NCAA championship game before signing with the Avalanche, the 20-year-old defenseman scored against his hometown team in his NHL debut, helping Colorado defeat the Calgary Flames 6-2 in Game 3 of the Western Conference First Round at Pepsi Center.

The Calgary native’s first-period goal stood as the game-winner that helped the Avalanche take a 2-1 lead in the best-of-7 series. Makar became the first defenseman and seventh player at any position to score a goal while making his NHL debut in the Stanley Cup Playoffs.

Nathan MacKinnon scored two goals and had an assist for Colorado, which outshot Calgary 56-29. Colorado’s 56 shots on goal were one shy of the Avalanche/Quebec Nordiques playoff record set during Game 4 of the 1996 Western Conference Semifinals against the Chicago Blackhawks.

MacKinnon’s points all came in the first 16:02 of Game 3, matching the Avalanche/Nordiques record for most points in a playoff period. Prior to MacKinnon, the last Avalanche player to have three points in a playoff period was Peter Forsberg in Game 5 of the 2004 Western Conference Quarterfinals against the Dallas Stars.

Maple Leafs outlast Bruins, take series lead

The Toronto Maple Leafs took a 2-1 series lead for the third time in the past 15 years by holding off the Bruins 3-2 at Scotiabank Arena in Game 3. The Maple Leafs also led 2-1 against the Ottawa Senators in the 2004 Eastern Conference Quarterfinals, their last playoff series win, and against the Capitals in the 2017 first round, a series Washington won in six games.

Andreas Johnsson became the second Maple Leafs rookie in 32 years to score a winning goal in the playoffs. He joined Kasperi Kapanen, who scored the double-overtime winner in Game 2 against Washington in 2017. Toronto coach Mike Babcock earned the 89th playoff win of his NHL career, tying him with Glen Sather and Darryl Sutter for seventh-most in postseason history.

Rinne, Predators hold off Stars

Pekka Rinne made 40 saves and forward Mikael Granlund scored the winning goal with 8:19 remaining in the third period to give the Nashville Predators a 3-2 win against the Stars in Game 3 of at American Airlines Center. Nashville has won back-to-back games and leads the best-of-7 series 2-1.

Rinne (45-41) tied Tony Esposito for 24th place on the NHL all-time playoff wins list. He’s third in postseason wins among goalies born outside North America, trailing Dominik Hasek (65) and Henrik Lundqvist (61).

Blue Jackets, Islanders go for sweeps

The Columbus Blue Jackets can become the fourth team in NHL history to sweep a best-of-7 series against the team with the best regular-season record at any point in the Stanley Cup Playoffs when they face the Tampa Bay Lightning at Nationwide Arena in Game 4 of the Eastern Conference First Round on Tuesday (7 p.m. ET; CNBC, SN360, TVAS, FS-O, SUN). A win would also give the Blue Jackets the series lead.
Jackets their first playoff series victory since entering the NHL in 2000.

The New York Islanders also have a chance to complete a sweep when they play the Penguins at PPG Paints Arena in Game 4 of the Eastern Conference First Round (7:30 p.m. ET; NBCSN, CBC, TVAS2, ATTSN-PT, MSG, MSG+). The Islanders have not swept a best-of-7 series since the 1983 Stanley Cup Final, when they eliminated the Oilers in four games.

Svechnikov in concussion protocol after fight with Ovechkin

RALEIGH, N.C. (AP) — Carolina Hurricanes rookie Andrei Svechnikov is in the concussion protocol after Washington Capitals star Alex Ovechkin punched him, sending his head crashing onto the ice.

Coach Rod Brind’Amour said Tuesday that he assumes Svechnikov, who was wearing a helmet, will miss Game 4 of the best-of-seven series Thursday night. He added he’s “going to be real careful” and is “certainly not going to rush him back.”

The two Russians fought with 9:01 left in the first period of Carolina’s 5-0 victory in Game 3 Monday night. In the first playoff fight of his 14-year career, Ovechkin floored Svechnikov with a right hook that left the 19-year-old wobbly and in need of help getting to the dressing room.

Brind’Amour said Svechnikov was evaluated at a hospital and “looks normal and said he feels great.”

The team recalled forward Patrick Brown from its AHL affiliate in Charlotte on an emergency basis. Brown, who had 19 goals and 16 assists in 70 games in the minors, has one goal and one assist in 28 career NHL games.

Ovechkin punch puts Carolina rookie into concussion protocol

By AARON BEARD

RALEIGH, N.C. (AP) — A barrage of punches from Washington Capitals star Alex Ovechkin could have an impact on the Stanley Cup champions’ playoff series against the Carolina Hurricanes.

Ovechkin floored Carolina rookie Andrei Svechnikov with a right hook during the first period of Monday night’s 5-0 loss to the Hurricanes in Game 3 of their first-round series. This was a rare fight for Ovechkin, one that knocked the 19-year-old Svechnikov from the game when he banged his helmet on the ice as he fell backward and ended up in concussion protocol.

Svechnikov, who had two goals in his playoff debut last week, was helped to the locker room and didn’t return. That left his status unclear with the Capitals up 2-1 in the best-of-seven series. Carolina coach Rod Brind’Amour said Tuesday he “would assume” Svechnikov will miss Thursday’s Game 4, and the team will be careful with his return.

“First of all I hope he’s OK,” Ovechkin said. “You’re right: I’m not a big fighter ... He asked me to fight, I said, ‘Let’s go, yeah.’ So, I hope he’s OK. You don’t want to see a guy get hurt or something.”

It was Ovechkin’s fourth career fight and first since 2010, according to HockeyFights.com. It was his first in the playoffs, while Svechnikov had not been in a fight all season.

“How do you comment on it? It’s a little bit tough because I just heard Ovie talk about it. He said our guy challenged him,” Brind’Amour said after Monday night’s game. “If that’s the case, it’s a little different.

“But if you watch the video, because I got to watch it, he slashes him twice, Ovie — whack, whack — and then Svech gives it back. And then, I don’t know if there’s words exchanged, but one guy’s gloves come off way first. And that’s Ovie, it’s not our guy.”

It was less than a year ago that Svechnikov got the chance to meet a player he had long looked up to before the Capitals closed their Cup run and before Svechnikov was the No. 2 overall pick in the draft.

“It’s just an honor to have met with him,” Svechnikov said then of meeting Ovechkin.

This time, things weren’t quite so friendly.

The two Russians fought with 9:01 left in the first period. Ovechkin — with a 40-pound weight advantage — locked a firm hold on Svechnikov’s collar while throwing a steady bombardment of punches.

He eventually landed one squarely in the center of Svechnikov’s face. And as the rookie started falling backward, Ovechkin kept his hold and delivered a final blow toward Svechnikov’s forehead as they fell.

As Ovechkin skated to the penalty box for a 5-minute fighting penalty, Svechnikov was flat on his back, dazed and struggling to sit up as teammates Jordan Staal and Justin Faulk skated to him.
Svechnikov eventually was able to stand but was wobbly as he was helped off the ice.

Brind’Amour said he was “still sick to my stomach about it.”

“It’s a little bit frustrating, because he got hurt, it’s his first fight,” Brind’Amour said. “He’s played 90 games, he never fought in his life, I’m pretty sure Ovie knew that.

“So that stuff bothers me, because that’s…,” Brind’Amour said, his voice trailing off, “but it’s done.”

Ovechkin-Svechnikov fight: Players and coaches weigh in

The most talked about play from all the action in the Stanley Cup Playoffs Monday night was the Alex Ovechkin–Andrei Svechnikov fight. The one-sided battle resulted in Svechnikov – who was 40 pounds lighter than his opponent – laying on the ice and being removed from the game.

The update Tuesday morning is that Svechnikov, obviously, is in concussion protocol and had to be transported to hospital for precautionary measures. Head coach Rod Brind’Amour said he “would assume” Svechnikov will miss Game 4.

The buzz around the fight on Tuesday has a lot to do with who initiated it – was it Ovechkin, who dropped his gloves first, or did Svechnikov push the envelope and ask or insist on a fight? Some question that even if Svechnikov did ask for it, Ovechkin maybe shouldn’t have taken him up on the fight. But, these being the Stanley Cup Playoffs and with everyone involved capable of competing at this level, it’s hardly fair to blame Ovechkin for obliging – if indeed that’s how this all unfolded.

Svechnikov has not been able to comment on it yet, but we do know the 19-year-old Russian is a big fan of, and looked up to, his 33-year-old countryman. Although we can make conclusions about how the fight started by trying to read lips or watch replays, it’s hard to know exactly what happened in the heat of that moment.

The ‘Canes led the game 1-0 at the time of the fight and added another four unanswered goals over the final two and a half periods to run away with a Game 3 victory on home ice that kept them in the series. Will this be a turning point in the series? It’s worth pointing out that Washington mustered only eight shots over the final two periods.

Did the ‘Canes draw some energy from this result to rally around Svechnikov?

We collected some of what the players and coaches said about the fight after the game.

ROD BRIND’AMOUR, CAROLINA HEAD COACH

“Svech means a lot to us. Young kid, just turned 19, he has a special bond with our group and me too so when you see that it makes you sick,” Brind’Amour said after the game. “I’m still sick to my stomach about it. How do you comment on it? It’s a little bit tough. I just heard Ovi talk about it and he said our guy challenged him, so if that’s the case that’s a little different. But if you watch the video, (Ovi) slashes him twice and then Svech gives it back. I don’t know if there’s words exchanged, but one guy’s gloves come off first and that’s Ovi’s, it’s not our guy.

“So it’s a little bit frustrating because he got hurt and it’s his first fight. He’s played 90 games, never fought in his life and I’m pretty sure Ovi knew that. That stuff bothers me.”

JUSTIN WILLIAMS, CAROLINA CAPTAIN

“I love Svech,” Williams said in his post-game scrum. “He’s a gamer and he’s a really good kid. It was already intense, obviously that increased the snarl a bit. Any time something like that happens your intensity is going to ramp up a bit and it did.”

DOUGIE HAMILTON, CAROLINA DEFENCEMAN

“I kept thinking about it the whole game,” Hamilton told reporters. “I just hated seeing that, the whole part of it. It’s just something you never want to see. I just feel bad for him and hopefully he gets better soon.”

He added: “We’re not going to say we rallied around the fight. Everyone knows what happened, we responded and that’s it.”

WARREN FEOGEL, CAROLINA FORWARD

“We all battled together. All 20 guys battled hard,” said Foegele, who had two goals and an assist in the game. “[Svechnikov is] our brother, and we stand up for each other. We knew we needed to get this win, not just for us, but for him.”

TODD REIRDEN, WASHINGTON HEAD COACH

“I hope their player is OK. You never like to see that in a fight. That was something that wasn’t … their player asked our player to fight and you have guys who don’t normally fight that do – that happens sometimes in playoff hockey. Like I said I hope their player is OK. They were maybe able to get some momentum from it or whatever, but that’s on the players that go on the ice after that shift.”

ALEX OVECHKIN

“I’m not a big fighter, he’s the same way,” a quiet Ovechkin said after the game. “He asked me to fight and I said, ‘Let’s go.’ I hope he’s OK. You don’t want to see a guy get hurt.”

It was Ovechkin’s first NHL fight since 2010 and, according to hockeyfights.com, just the fourth of his career.

BRADEN HOLTBY, WASHINGTON GOALIE
“It was big for him to show his emotion. He plays hard against a kid that takes a lot of cheap shots and that kind of thing. That was playoff hockey. But the biggest thing is that we didn’t respond very well. We kind of wasted that energy he created.”

JOHN CARLSON, WASHINGTON DEFENCENMAN

“I’ve seen him fight before,” Carlson said of Ovechkin. “It’s not like I was expecting him to get beat up or anything. But I wouldn’t challenge him to fight.”

Brother of Hurricanes’ Svechnikov sends message to Ovechkin after fight

Mike Johnston

Alex Ovechkin might want to take note if he ever happens to step on the ice at the same time as Evgeny Svechnikov, the older brother of Andrei Svechnikov.

The Washington Capitals superstar shocked the sports world Monday when he knocked out the Carolina Hurricanes rookie during a first-period fight, and the elder Svechnikov took notice.

Evgeny made a reference to famous horror-movie killer Freddy Krueger from the A Nightmare on Elm Street series in a post from his verified Instagram account — and he made sure to tag Ovechkin.

The veiled threat is the first line of an eerie nursery rhyme-style song from the movie series that goes as follows:

One, two, Freddy’s coming for you
Three, four, better lock your door
Five, six, grab your crucifix
Seven, eight, gonna stay up late
Nine, ten, never sleep again

Evgeny Svechnikov, who was born on Halloween — which makes the Freddy Krueger reference all the more fitting — was drafted 19th overall by the Detroit Red Wings in 2015 and has spent the majority of the past two seasons with the Grand Rapids Griffins in the AHL. The 22-year-old forward missed the entire 2018-19 season after tearing his right ACL in his team’s pre-season finale in late September.

The 33-year-old Ovechkin dropped Svechnikov, who turned 19 in late March, with a hard right hand midway through the first period of what ended up being a 5-0 Hurricanes win. The rookie was out before he hit the ground and the back of his head smacked forcefully against the ice.

The team announced Tuesday that Svechnikov is listed as doubtful to suit up in Thursday’s Game 4 in which the Hurricanes will attempt to even the series at two games apiece.

It was the first time Ovechkin had dropped the gloves for a fight since a 2010 scrap with Brandon Dubinsky.

“First of all I hope he’s OK,” Ovechkin told reporters at PNC Arena following the game. “You’re right: I’m not a big fighter … He asked me to fight, I said, ‘Let’s go, yeah.’ So, I hope he’s OK. You don’t want to see a guy get hurt or something.”

Hurricanes head coach Rod Brind’Amour had a difficult time talking about the fight following the game, but suffice it to say he wasn’t happy about how it unfolded.

“How do you comment on it?” Brind’Amour said. “It’s a little bit tough because I just heard Ovie talk about it: he said our guy challenged him. If that’s the case, it’s a little different. But if you watch the video, because I got to watch it, he slashes him twice, Ovie — whack, whack — and then Svech gives it back. And then, I don’t know if there’s words exchanged, but one guy’s gloves come off way first. And that’s Ovie, it’s not our guy.”
Canes teen in concussion protocol after fight

Carolina Hurricanes forward Andrei Svechnikov, 19, is in the concussion protocol after being knocked out by Alex Ovechkin in a fight during Monday night's Game 3 of their first-round playoff series.

Hurricanes coach Rod Brind'Amour made the announcement, saying he assumed that Svechnikov would miss Thursday's Game 4.

Svechnikov is the youngest player in the NHL playoffs. A native of Barnaul, Russia, Svechnikov has said he grew up idolizing Ovechkin, his countryman who is 14 years his senior. Svechnikov appeared to provoke Ovechkin in the first period, and the two exchanged words before dropping the gloves. Svechnikov got a few jabs in before Ovechkin dropped Svechnikov with three hard rights.

Svechnikov's head hit the ice on the way down. He stayed down on the ice for several minutes, then was helped off by Carolina athletic trainers. He did not return to the game.

It was Ovechkin's first fight since Dec. 12, 2010. He received a five-minute major penalty.

"First of all, I hope he's OK," Ovechkin said Monday night. "Yeah, I'm not a big fighter, and he's the same. He asked me to fight and said, 'Let's go.' I hope he's OK. You don't want to see a guy get hurt or something. And you just go a different way."

Brind'Amour said Tuesday he isn't so sure that Svechnikov asked for the fight.

"There's two version going around. I'll just leave it at that," he said.

Capitals coach Todd Reirden had a different take on the whole thing: "I see it as two willing combatants. That's part of our sport, and one player won the fight and one player lost the fight."

When asked Tuesday if fighting is still necessary in hockey, Brind'Amour said: "I don't know if it's ever been necessary. It's been part of the game forever. No, I don't think it's necessary. I don't think you're ever going to get it away from the game. It's tough to see, though. That's the worst part of it that you see when guys get hurt. That's always tough to see."

The Hurricanes won their first home playoff game in a decade, routing the Caps 5-0. Washington has a 2-1 series lead.

Brind'Amour said Monday that Svechnikov had left the building before the game was over.

"Svech means a lot to us. Young kid. Just turned 19. He has a special bond with our group, with me too," Brind'Amour said. "When you see that, it makes you sick. I'm still sick to my stomach about it. ... It's a little bit tough, because I just heard Ovi talk about it; he said our guy challenged him. So, if that's the case, it's a little different. If you watch the video, he slashes him twice -- Ovi, whack, whack -- then Svech gets him back. I don't know if there's words exchanged, but one guy's gloves come off way first. And that's Ovi, not our guy."

"So, it's a little but frustrating, because he got hurt. It's his first fight. He's played 90 games. He's never fought in his life, and I'm pretty sure Ovi knew that. So, that stuff bothers me."

Svechnikov scored two goals and tallied one assist in the Hurricanes' first two games in this series.

Ovechkin won his record eighth Maurice "Rocket" Richard Trophy this season as the league's top goal scorer. He had one goal and two assists in the Capitals' first two games in these playoffs.

"I just hated seeing that. I just hated the whole part of it. Just something you never want to see," Hurricanes defenseman Dougie Hamilton said. "I just feel so bad for [Svechnikov], and hopefully he gets better soon. The game doesn't really matter when something like that happens; you just can't get it out of your head. I just hope he's OK."

With Svechnikov likely out for Game 4, the Hurricanes recalled forward Patrick Brown from AHL-Charlotte on an emergency basis. Brown, who had 19 goals and 16 assists in 70 games in the minors, has one goal and one assist in28 career NHL games.\n
Svechnikov in concussion protocol, unlikely for Game 4 vs. Capitals

By Sean Leahy

The news on Andrei Svechnikov is that “everything checked out,” according to Carolina Hurricanes head coach Rod Brind’Amour, and he’s in concussion protocol and did not suffer any further injury. That means 19-year-old rookie forward will likely miss Thursday’s game (7 p.m. ET; NBCSN) following his Game 3 fight with Alex Ovechkin.

“From seeing him now, he looks normal and thought he feels great,” Brind’Amour said, adding they’re going to be cautious with the player. “That’s a real positive sign.”

The two sparred midway through the first period with the Capitals captain landing a blow that took Svechnikov down. The Russian rookie needed help off the ice and was later ruled out from returning during the Hurricanes’ 5-0 victory.

“First of all I hope he’s OK,” Ovechkin said afterward. “You’re right: I’m not a big fighter … He asked me to fight and I said, ‘Let’s go, yeah.’ I hope he’s OK. You don’t want to see a guy get hurt or something.”

During his Tuesday morning media scrum, Brind’Amour disputed Ovechkin’s claim that Svechnikov asked to go saying, “There’s two versions of that going around. I’ll just leave it at that.”

Without Svechnikov and Micheal Ferland, who left the game in the first period with an upper-body injury, the Hurricanes still dominated Game 3. They controlled possession, shot advantage, and, most importantly, the scoreboard.

Stanley Cup Playoffs 2019: Alex Ovechkin knocks out Andrei Svechnikov in insanely short fight

Ovechkin got a five-minute major for his trouble

by Kevin Skiver

Some fireworks erupted in Game 3 of the Capitals-Hurricanes series. In the Hurricanes’ first home game of the postseason, Alex Ovechkin engaged Andrei Svechnikov, dropping him to the ice after three quick punches to the head. Svechnikov also appeared to hit his head on the ice and was taken off the ice in the altercation.

Ovechkin received a five-minute major for the fight, putting the Capitals legend in the box for a solid part of the first period.

It was worse from another angle, which ultimately showed Ovechkin following through on Svechnikov and putting his head into the ice.

Svechnikov is just 19 years old, 14 years younger than the 33-year-old Ovechkin. He’s also been a key part of the Hurricane forecheck this postseason, notching three points -- including two goals -- in the early going.

The play could end up having a serious effect on this series, especially if Svechnikov ends up missing time with a head injury. Ovechkin has been antagonized by the Hurricanes all series, so it appears that falling behind early in this game mixed with something Svechnikov said was enough to tip him this time around.
Alex Ovechkin absolutely destroys Hurricanes’ rookie in brutal fight

Stan Temming

Life is full of decisions that we regret.

I, for one, regret going to prom with my aunt while in high school.

If your name is Andrei Svechnikov, you probably regret dropping the gloves with Alex Ovechkin during Game 3 of the Eastern Conference first round series between the Washington Capitals and Carolina Hurricanes on Monday night.

With the Hurricanes down 2-0 in the best-of-seven series — but up 1-0 in the first period of the game — Svechnikov and Ovechkin began to battle and trade shots while in the Capitals’ defensive zone. After some chatter, the Hurricanes’ rookie and debatably the greatest goal scorer in NHL history dropped the gloves.

The two traded shots before Washington’s captain caught Svechnikov with a firm right that caused him to crumple to the ice. In the process, his helmet became dislodged, his head slammed onto the ice and he appeared to be knocked out cold.

A different angle of the tilt displays the gruesome moment a little clearer.

The Hurricanes training staff quickly ran onto the ice to tend to the 19-year-old who, fortunately, was able to leave the game under his own power.

To nobody’s surprise, it was announced later that he would not return for the remainder of the game.

Following Carolina’s 5-0 victory on home ice to get themselves back into the first round matchup, the health of their young teammate was top of mind for the Hurricanes.

Having watched the video a few times now, you have to wonder why this tilt became a reality. Svechnikov entered the contest with exactly zero NHL fights to his name. In fact, the last time he dropped the gloves was during a preseason game while with the OHL’s Barrie Colts in 2017, according to hockeyfights.com.

While the opportunity to get under the skin of one of Washington’s top players and take him out of the game for five minutes is intriguing, the risk just isn’t worth it. Ovechkin may only have four NHL fights to his name — the last coming nearly a decade ago against Brandon Dubinsky — but his experience at this level and 40-pound weight advantage shouldn’t have been ignored by Svechnikov.

It’s not his job to beat the Capitals with his fists. After scoring 20 goals and collecting 37 points in his rookie season, the second overall pick in the 2018 draft should be trying to beat them with his high-end skill and ability.

Hopefully he’ll have the opportunity to return to this series when healthy and do just that.

Was Alex Ovechkin’s knockout of Andrei Svechnikov just part of hockey?

What happened?

Just past the halfway point of the first period in Monday night’s game between the defending Stanley Cup champions Washington Capitals and the upstart Carolina Hurricanes, Washington captain Alexander Ovechkin got into a fight.

Was anyone hurt?

Er, yes. A 19-year old Carolina Hurricanes player by the name of Andrei Svechnikov. Svechnikov and Ovechkin were skating next to one another and exchanged a few quick slashes with their sticks. Words were then exchanged. The two dropped gloves, and Ovechkin — who has about 40lbs on Svechnikov — landed a few quick punches, one of which was a knockout blow. Svechnikov fell to the ice, clearly concussed. Svechnikov, the youngest player in this year’s NHL playoffs, is now in the league’s concussion protocol, and will very likely miss Game 4 in the series against Washington on Wednesday night.

Hockey players fight all the time though. Why was Monday night’s fight different?

Mostly because Ovechkin was involved — he rarely fights. He’s done so only four times since he joined the NHL in the 2005-06 season, and this was his first since 2010 when he fought Brandon Dubinsky of the New York Rangers. Ovie is no lightweight – he’s 6ft 3in and 230lbs – but has made his name as a finesse player and high-powered goal-scorer, rather than as a physical presence.

Why is fighting allowed in hockey?

The simplest answer is that it pretty much always has been. An old story goes that the first indoor hockey game was played at the Victoria Skating Rink in Montreal in 1875 – and ended with a fight. Existing members of the rink’s skating club tried to kick the hockey teams off the ice and the groups came to blows. As it happens, head injuries associated with hockey fights go back to the same day: “Newspaper reports of the time indicated a boy got mixed up with the players
during the melee and suffered a head injury and that put an end to things," Scott Burnside recounted on the 142nd anniversary of the game (and the skirmish).

Related: Liberté, Egalité, Gritté: how an NHL mascot became an antifa hero

Fighting in hockey has evolved with the sport, but has long been a way for teams to either set a tone for the kind of game they’re looking to play, create energy on the bench when they find themselves lagging, or as simple retribution. Unlike other sports where it’s strictly forbidden, over the decades, fighting became built-in to hockey and its officiating – regulated rather than banned.

Isn’t anyone trying to stop fighting in hockey?

Yes, but it’s also stopping of its own accord. Monday night’s fight was also notable simply because it happened at all. There are generally fewer fights during the playoffs, because the stakes are higher and a five-minute major penalty is too risky. But aside from that, despite hockey’s enduring reputation as a punch-up, fighting is actually on its way out of the NHL. According to TSN, the average number of fights per NHL game is steadily falling. The rate of fights per game was just 0.2 as of November, down from 0.6 a decade ago, and a far cry from the 1980s, where you’d likely see at least one per game, according to TSN.

That trend isn’t necessarily because of enforcement (though that’s helped), but also due to a shifting culture within hockey itself – from coaches to players – and amongst fans. Fighting’s place in hockey is still accepted, and when fights occur, fans are still excited, but as individual skill and speed has increased, fighting just doesn’t have the cache it once did.

At its most notorious – in the latter decades of the 20th century – teams adopted fighting as a more obvious tactic, employing “enforcers” whose role was to protect higher-skilled players and, essentially, pick fights. Guys like Marty McSorley, Dave “Tiger” Williams, Bob Probert, Donald Brashear, Dave “Cementhead” Semenko, Tie Domi, Georges Laraque, and Derek Boogaard (to name a few) all made a name for themselves doing this job.

The fact that everyone in and around hockey is so familiar with the last name on that list is probably one of the reasons the “enforcer” role has faded away, and fights have gone with it. Boogaard’s death at 28 from an accidental overdose of oxycodone and alcohol, occurred shortly after the deaths of two other “enforcers”, Rick Rypien and Wade Belak, and it proved a catalyst for a shift in the conversation about concussions (Boogaard’s brain showed advanced chronic traumatic encephalopathy – as did that of Probert) and questions about why fighting had been tolerated for so long.

Though NHL commissioner Gary Bettman has pushed back against growing evidence that the game – and particularly the concussions that occur during it – can cause brain damage, players, fans and above all parents enrolling their kids in youth hockey are less deaf to the science.

So, will Ovechkin get into trouble?

Technically, he did. Ovechkin was given a five-minute major penalty after the fight. He sat in the penalty box for the allotted time, then returned to the ice when it was over. As it happens, Svechnikov was also given a five-minute major penalty – he just wasn’t able to return from it. It remains to be seen when he will.
Opinion: Fighting in the NHL is brutish and outdated, and needs to be banned

Nancy Armour

Yet another NHL player has been seriously hurt because Gary Bettman insists on fighting a losing game.

Carolina Hurricanes rookie Andrei Svechnikov is in the concussion protocol and likely to miss Game 4 of the playoffs Thursday night, an outcome just about anybody could have predicted after watching him get decked by Alex Ovechkin. Svechnikov’s head slammed against the ice after the fight in the first period Monday night, and he spent about 30 seconds on all fours before being helped to his feet and wobbling to the locker room.

“(He) looks normal and said he feels great,” Carolina coach Rod Brind’Amour said Tuesday.

Of course Svechnikov did. What else is a 19-year-old supposed to say when Bettman has made it clear he doesn’t give a damn about his players’ health and safety?

Time and again, the NHL commissioner has refused to acknowledge hockey’s culpability in robbing former players of their memories and motor skills, making them unrecognizable to their families and friends in the most severe cases. This despite the ever-growing body of science linking repetitive head trauma to chronic traumatic encephalopathy (CTE) and other neurodegenerative diseases.

Bettman’s stock, belligerent answer is to say there’s no way to know for sure that repetitive head trauma – you know, like what hockey players experience – causes CTE because there’s still no living diagnosis. Therefore, the NHL doesn’t need to do anything or make any changes.

Like banning fighting.

There’s no reason for what the NHL still quaintly terms “fisticuffs” and everybody, even Bettman, knows it. It’s a relic of a bygone, brutish era when people didn’t know better, and adds no value to the modern game.

“No really,” Brind’Amour said Tuesday when asked if fighting was still necessary to the NHL. “Probably not.”

Fighting doesn’t make the NHL better, slowing the free flow of the game and disrupting the pace. That’s evident during every Olympics and world championships, where fighting is banned under International Ice Hockey Federation rules and no one complains of missing it.

It also doesn’t make the game safer, as Bettman has claimed before. Not when hockey now is so much faster, and the players so much bigger.

Who could have watched Ovechkin continuing to pummel Svechnikov as the younger and smaller player fell, and thought that was a good way to settle an on-ice dispute? Or an effective deterrent against future dust-ups?

It wasn’t, and it won’t be. It’s an MMA-like sideshow, and a poor one at that.

“Let’s forget about the semantics & weight/height differences & who asked who…. Do we want to see NHL stars like Ovechkin & Svechnikov bare knuckle boxing?” Daniel Carcillo, whose effectiveness as an enforcer earned him the nickname “CarBomb” but who is now a fierce critic of the NHL’s approach to head trauma, said on Twitter.

“If the #NHL was conceived today, would it include fighting? Doubt it.”

Contrary to Bettman’s obstinence, hockey has always recognized that hits to the head are dangerous. That’s why there are penalties for high sticking and elbowing.

Banning fighting is simply the logical extension of that, Hall of Famer Ken Dryden told the New York Times last year following the publication of his book, Game Change: The Life and Death of Steve Montador, and the Future of Hockey.

“What we’ve come to understand better, with the force and the frequency of the collisions now, is that the dangerous instrument is not the stick or the elbow, it’s the body as a whole. So you don’t call a penalty for a stick or an elbow and not call one for a shoulder or a fist,” Dryden said.

“It’s not the cause, it’s the effect,” Dryden added. “It’s not whether it’s intentional or accidental. The brain doesn’t distinguish. The brain is affected similarly.”

It won’t help Svechnikov or Montreal’s Paul Byron or any of the countless other players who’ve been injured for no good reason, but fighting’s days in the NHL are numbered.

Last week, researchers at Boston University’s CTE Center announced that brain scans of a small group of living NFL players had shown elevated levels of tau proteins, which cause CTE, in the areas where CTE has typically been found during autopsies. That follows the announcement in 2017 by researchers at UCLA and NorthShore University Health System that an autopsy had confirmed a former NFL player
About Last Night: Nearly Perfect

For as great as their victory was, the fight in the first period keeps this from being completely perfect.

By Cody Hagan

It was a monumental night in Raleigh last night as the Carolina Hurricanes hosted their first playoff game since 2009. Dougie Hamilton and Warren Foegele led the way offensively as Petr Mrazek shut the door on the other end to give the Canes a 5-0 victory over the Washington Capitals.

PNC Arena was absolutely electric from the moment the doors opened and the team played phenomenal hockey from start to finish. Yet, for as great as everything was, the scary ending to the Alex Ovechkin and Andrei Svechnikov fight kept last night from being a truly perfect storm.

The Good - Utter Dominance

From the very beginning of the game it was clear the Hurricanes came to play. For the first time in the series they were able to take a lead in a game and they never looked back after that point. That lead came via Warren Foegele’s first goal of the evening as he was able to deflect a puck past Braden Holtby despite being harassed in front of the Washington net.

Foegele scored a huge goal to break the ice in the game against Montreal that clinched the Hurricanes’ playoff berth, and he came through again last night. But one goal wasn’t enough for the rookie, as he tallied the second goal of the game as well off a feed from Sebastian Aho.

Neither goal was a skill goal if you will but both came from being in the right position. Never giving up while fighting to win the net front battle leads to the first goal and Aho sets up Foegele for an easy tap in on the second one. Foegele will likely have an opportunity to slide up in the lineup if Svechnikov and Micheal Ferland are out and after last night he has earned that right.

No matter your stance on fighting, the one thing you never want to see is someone get hurt, and especially not a talented young rookie like Andrei Svechnikov. Everyone knew that Alex Ovechkin had been trying to bully Svechnikov in the first two games and it came to a tipping point last night.

Ovechkin claimed after the game that Svechnikov asked him to fight but Ovi sure dropped the gloves first. What was actually said between the two will never be truly known but no matter how it started, the end result was bad for everyone. The Hurricanes will likely be without one of their best forwards for a while but the NHL as a whole will be without a superstar in the making during the playoffs and that is the real shame in this all.

We all hope Svechnikov will be okay. It was a very scary situation and one nobody should ever want to see. The team as a whole policed it fairly well afterwards but there is no doubt Ovechkin is now public enemy number one in Raleigh - and it’s no small feat to push Brooks Orpik out of that spot. One has to also think that Jordan Martinook or Brock McGinn will likely have some sort of response in game four on Thursday.

Brind’Amour said on Tuesday morning that, unsurprisingly, Svechnikov was in the concussion protocol. He was moving around the locker room and looked to be in good spirits, according to the coach, so while he’s unlikely to play in Game 4, here’s hoping his injury won’t be any more than a short-term thing that doesn’t linger and affect his game in the years to come.

The Great - The Atmosphere

If you weren’t lucky enough to be one of the 18,783 fans in attendance last night... I’m sorry. The atmosphere inside PNC Arena was everything you knew it would be and then some. The tailgating started around 2pm (that included a real life cousin of Stormy), the woo’s began over an hour before puck drop, and the party may still have not stopped.

There are not enough words to describe how great it felt for there to be playoff hockey in Raleigh again. The fans are
back, the life in the arena is back, and there’s an entire
generation of fans who though The Loudest House In The
NHL was a joke that are now being proven wrong.

The best way to explain this is to just show it. Here are a few
clips from last night of just how amazing the atmosphere truly
was:

The players took notice too:
Also witnessed by Gary Bettman and Bill Daly.
The Washington Capitals and the NHL have been on notice,
The Loudest House In The NHL is BACK. Expect Thursday
to be even crazier.

Moral of the Story
Last night was great in so many ways. The atmosphere was
unbelievable, the team played lights out, and most
importantly the Canes got the victory. You wish the injury to
Svechnikov had not happened but it did. All you can do is
move forward and hope he gets better soon. It is the only
downside to an otherwise perfect night for the Carolina
Hurricanes.

For now, celebrate and enjoy this one, but there has to be a
repeat on Thursday to keep this series from getting out of
hand. If last night was any indication, that certainly can
happen.

Systems Analyst: A Special Night
Stellar special teams performances helped the Hurricanes
secure their first postseason victory in a decade.

By Ford Hatchett

Monday night’s 5-0 drubbing of the Washington Capitals
served as catharsis for Caniacs who had long been waiting
for an opportunity to roar as loudly as they did throughout
Game Three. The PNC Arena crowd was raucous, creating a
special atmosphere and a special night, all fueled by special
teams.

Special teams have been instrumental for each team
throughout the series, with Washington taking Game One in
large part thanks to a pair of power-play goals. But on
Monday it was the Hurricanes’ power play, specifically two
Dougie Hamilton goals, that propelled Carolina to victory.

To date in the series, the Capitals’ PK has relied on
aggressively pressuring the point. It’s worked with great
success against Carolina’s top unit, but has given up good
looks against the second unit. That’s in large part due to the
second PP unit’s movement, as seen here.

Hamilton’s goal was aided by great puck movement and
stagnant Capital defenders. But Jacob Slavin’s movement
down the wall and Lucas Walmark’s backdoor drive have to
be respected by the Washington penalty killers, specifically
Lars Eller and Carl Hagelin. So once those two aggressive
killers are drawn below the tops of the circles, lots of open
ice in the highs slot becomes available for Hamilton to rifle
one past Braden Holtby. In addition, Warren Foegele’s
screen left Holtby with almost no sightline to the puck.

That’s a sensational screen and, if you didn’t notice it
already, revisit the first GIF of the overhead angle of the goal
and just watch Holtby’s head as he tries to peer around the
traffic in front. He never stood a chance.

The second Hamilton goal began with tenacity and hunger
from both Jordan Staal and Foegle to win a puck battle,
setting up the Hamilton shot.

Holtby was screened on this goal as well, but not by a
Hurricane. Despite having a slightly better sightline to this
shot, Hamilton’s point blast again beat Holtby low on the
blocker side.

The penalty kill also helped the Canes’ cause. After allowing
goals on the first two Capitals’ power plays of the series, the
Carolina killers have made adjustments and stymied one of
the league’s most lethal power plays.

Great neutral zone play by Carolina’s killers on this Caps’
power play in the first period prevented from Washington
from sustaining possession in zone for a full 1:10. When the
Caps did set up in-zone, Foegele continued his career night,
making an excellent defensive read to help down on Tom
Wilson and alter his bid from the slot.

At times, the Cane killers have given the Caps’ skilled power
play too much time and space, but that wasn’t the case on
Monday night as evidenced by excellent sticks and
desperation from Jordan Martinook and Staal.

It shouldn’t be overlooked how well the defensemen were on
the kill either. In the clip above, both Brett Pesce and Slavin
play the Capitals’ zone entry about as well as a coach could
hope for, forcing Washington to the wall, then the corner and
then earning a turnover.

Both sides of the Canes’ special teams were excellent on
Monday, and if that strong play continues, this series is far
from over.

Charlotte Checkers Corner: It’s Go Time

The Checkers wrap the regular season and head into the
playoffs.

By Justin Lape

The accolades rolled in for Charlotte this week with many
award winners announced as the season came to a close.
Checkers head coach Mike Vellucci was named the winner
of the Louis A.R. Pieri Award as the AHL’s outstanding
coach. Alex Nedeljkovic was named to the AHL First All-Star
team and Andrew Poturalski was named to the AHL Second
All-Star team. To add to the accolades, the Checkers added
another pair of wins to wrap up a sterling regular season.

Weekly Recap
The Checkers topped the Cleveland Monsters in overtime last Thursday thanks to an Aleksi Saarela goal. The Monsters burst out to an early 2-0 lead before the Checkers stormed back and tied it up before the end of the first period. Julien Gauthier scored his 26th of the season and Martin Necas added a pair of assists. Nedeljkovic stopped 25 shots in the win.

Charlotte wrapped its regular season the next night with a 2-1 win over the Monsters. Tomas Jurco and Julien Gauthier scored the pair of goals for the Checkers with Jurco getting his 12th of the season. Necas had another pair of helpers in the win, finishing the season with 36 assists. Dustin Tokarski stopped an astounding 40 shots in the win.

Player of the Week

How could you not give player of the week to the pair of players of the year? Alex Nedeljkovic has taken strides in his development and his numbers show a promising trend. Nedeljkovic finished the season with a 34-9-5 record, a .916 save percentage and a 2.26 goals against average. His save percentage is way up from a mediocre .903 last year. Poturalski met the 70 point plateau with 23 goals and 47 assists. His 70 points were good enough for fifth in the league.

Thought of the Week

To me, the AHL has always been weird. While NHL teams with the better record typically get to play the first two games at home, the AHL does not honor that in the first round. The Checkers will play Games 3, 4 and 5 at home instead. If a team goes down 2-0 in the first pair of games with a hostile environment playing a factor, the three home games remaining leave little room for error. Why not have a format similar to the NHL? Standardize it across the league: 2-2-1 with the final game going to the higher seed and the first two games of the series also going to the team that’s the higher seed. Just my two cents.

With Andrei Svechnikov’s unfortunate injury that will likely keep him out the remainder of the postseason, it’s pretty baffling the Hurricanes would not call up top prospect Martin Necas. The Czech forward is coming off a five-game stretch in which he totaled 10 points (two goals, eight assists). Necas finished the regular season with 52 points in 64 games and looked to fit right in with the rest of the league. Instead, the Hurricanes opted for Patrick Brown (press release below). I’m not too sure Brown could make a substantial impact like Necas could have. It was worth a roll of the dice to bring him up.

Looking Ahead

The Charlotte Checkers will now take on the Providence Bruins for a best-of-five series. Here’s a look at the upcoming schedule:

- **Game 1** - Saturday, April 20 - 7:05 p.m. - Providence
- **Game 2** - Sunday, April 21 - 5:05 p.m. - Providence
- **Game 3** - Wednesday, April 24 - 7:00 p.m. - Charlotte
- **Game 4** - Friday, April 26 - 7:00 p.m. - Charlotte
- **Game 5** - Saturday, April 27 - 6:00 p.m. - Charlotte

CANES RECALL BROWN FROM CHARLOTTE

Checkers captain posted career highs in goals and points this season

Don Waddell, President and General Manager of the National Hockey League’s Carolina Hurricanes, today announced that the team has recalled forward Patrick Brown from the Charlotte Checkers of the American Hockey League (AHL) on an emergency basis.

Brown, 26, registered 35 points (19g, 16a) in 70 games with Charlotte this season. The 5’11”, 214-pound forward set AHL career highs in goals, points, power-play goals (5) and game-winning goals (3) in 2018-19 and ranked tied for fourth on the team in goals and power-play goals. Brown has earned 125 points (53g, 72a) in 334 career AHL games. The Bloomfield Hills, Mich., native has earned two points (1g, 1a) in 28 career NHL games with the Hurricanes.
3 Thoughts on the Svechnikov vs Ovechkin “Fight”

By Mark Shiver

Monday night was epic in Raleigh, NC as the Carolina Hurricanes hosted the Washington Capitals in what was their first home playoff game in a decade. A capacity crowd was loud and all-in to help their team battle back from being down 2-0 in the series to the defending Stanley Cup champion.

In the first period, Andrei Svechnikov and Alex Ovechkin dropped the gloves. What ensued was not pretty, as Ovechkin pounded Svechnikov, whose head bounced off the ice as he went down apparently unconscious from a big Ovechkin roundhouse punch.

Svechnikov had to be helped off the ice and did not return to the game. Tuesday morning the Hurricanes coach Rod Brind’Amour said that “Svech” is in the concussion protocol and is not likely to play in Thursday night’s upcoming game with the Caps.

Emotions and Svechnikov vs Ovechkin

Emotions were at a fever pitch in Raleigh’s PNC Arena. It’s part of the allure of playoff hockey. The fans are in it from the opening puck drop to the very end. Also, the players are wound up emotionally, knowing what is at stake with every mistake.

There is nothing in all of the sports universe to match the emotional intensity of the NHL playoffs. It is this intensity from the players that feed the fans which in turn feeds the emotional intensity of the NHL playoffs. It is this intensity that makes playoff hockey so special.

Svechnikov Provoked, or Lost His Cool?

In nearly all of the post-fight analysis, there seems to be some agreement that Ovechkin had been “needling” Svechnikov all series long. At 19 years old, Svechnikov was running wide open emotionally. Up to that point, he was the leading scorer for the Hurricanes in the playoffs and was matched repeatedly with the veteran Ovechkin.

“Ovi” knows how to get under the skin of his opponents. Some call him a dirty player, others call him experienced. Svechnikov found himself on the receiving end of stick checks and other irritants that finally boiled over. But, others say that it was Svechnikov doing the irritating and instigating of the fight. Again, playoff hockey adrenaline is like no other and maybe the testosterone is, too.

In hindsight, there is nothing noble what he did. He got pulverized and now may be out for the rest of the series. Ask Jeff Skinner about concussions early in your career. Hopefully, Svechnikov has learned that walking away is a better alternative than posting up with someone like Ovechkin.

There are Two Sides to Every Fight

Brind’Amour said after the game, “It’s a little bit tough because I just heard Ovi talk about it; he said our guy challenged him. So, if that’s the case, it’s a little different. If you watch the video, he slashes him twice — Ovi, whack, whack — then Svech gets him back. I don’t know if there’s words exchanged, but one guy’s gloves come off way first. And that’s Ovi, not our guy.”

Ovechkin blamed Svechnikov and Brind’Amour saw it differently. At the end of the day does it really matter? It’s fodder on both sides for social media, but the teams have moved on. Everyone hopes that Svechnikov will be okay, but they are not dwelling on it...they can’t.

The Hurricanes have another game Thursday night in which they have to summon the same level of emotion to try and pull even in the series. The Capitals have to act like they care about Game 4 and make it competitive.

Hurricanes Need to Get Tougher

One question that came out of Monday night’s Svechnikov vs Ovechkin bout was “Do the Hurricanes need an enforcer type of player?” The NHL has moved a long way away from the days of goons and enforcers, but are the “Canes vulnerable to incidents like what happened with Svechnikov? Who was there on the team to step up for him if they decided to retaliate against Ovechkin?

The answer is nobody. Micheal Ferland has been the team’s most involved fighter this season, but he has a lingering upper-body injury issue that caused him to have to leave Monday night’s game about the same time Svechnikov had to leave and not return.

The Hurricanes are largely a young team. Does general manager Don Waddell need to spend time this offseason looking for a veteran player who can square off with guys like Ovechkin when necessary? (Ovechkin had not been in a fight in years so he is not necessarily a target for teams. Tom Wilson on the other hand...)

In retrospect, Svechnikov should have left his gloves on and not challenged Ovechkin – or accepted his challenge if that were the case. A 19-year-old who’s never fought should not square off against Ovechkin. The fight did not give the “Canes fresh momentum or energy as they had an abundance of that all game.

Brind’Amour said Tuesday he saw Svechnikov and that he looks good. Perhaps he dodged a bullet and won’t suffer long-term consequences from a concussion. Svechnikov has probably the brightest future of anyone on the Hurricanes’ roster, with the possible exception of Aho. He needs to be smart and understand that fighting is not where he is going to make his mark in the NHL.
Checkers Sign Jacob Pritchard to ATO
Written by Nicholas Niedzielski
The Checkers today announced that they have signed forward Jacob Pritchard to an amateur tryout.

The 24-year-old inked a one-year, entry-level contract with the Hurricanes that will begin next season.

Pritchard is coming off a big season with UMass where he ranked second on the team with 47 points (16g, 31a) in 41 games and helped lead the Minutemen to the NCAA National Championship game before they fell to the University of Minnesota-Duluth. Pritchard was also named to the Hockey East Second All-Star Team.

Prior to transferring to UMass, Pritchard spent three years at St. Lawrence University and totaled 63 points (27g, 36a) over 96 games. The native of Macomb, MI, also spent three seasons in the USHL, including leading the Indiana Ice to a Clark Cup championship in 2013-14. Pritchard will now join the Checkers as they take on Providence for the first-round matchup in the Calder Cup Playoffs.

Hurricanes Recall Patrick Brown On Emergency Basis
Written by Nicholas Niedzielski
The Carolina Hurricanes today announced that they have recalled Patrick Brown on an emergency basis.

This marks the second NHL recall of the season for the Checkers' captain, though he didn't appear in a game during his February call up. Over his five-season career Brown has logged 28 NHL games for the Hurricanes – most recently in the 2016-17 season – and picked up a goal and an assist along the way.

Brown recently capped off a career year for the Checkers, where he set career highs in both goals (19) and points (35), tying for fourth on the team in the former category.

The move comes after both Micheal Ferland and Andrei Svechnikov exited Carolina's Game 3 win last night with injuries and did not return. The Canes' series against Washington resumes Thursday for Game 4, while the Checkers begin their first-round series against Providence on Saturday.

Checkers vs. Bruins Preview: Part 1 - Overview
Written by Nicholas Niedzielski
Before the puck drops for Game 1 on Saturday, we're going to preview the Checkers' first-round series against Providence piece by piece. First up is an overview of the two teams' seasons.

The Checkers roll into the postseason after the most impressive campaign in franchise history. They sat atop the AHL standings nearly wire to wire, capturing the Macgregor Kilpatrick Trophy as the regular season's best team with a staggering 110 points.

But even so, the team knows those accolades don't mean anything once the playoffs kick in.

"I just talked to the players, it doesn't matter what you do in the regular season," said head coach Mike Vellucci. "We had a good season but now it starts new. Everyone is 0-0. We played the right way getting into the playoffs and now it's a new slate and it starts with that first puck drop."

Actually, there is one regular season accomplishment that should come in handy for the Checkers moving forward.

"We do have home ice and that's key, that's what we were working towards," said Vellucci. "Obviously we're going in there and trying to win every game that we can. You would like to at least split in Providence, but if not you have home ice so you have the next three in your building."

Because of the distance between Charlotte and Providence, their best-of-five first-round series will begin with two games in Rhode Island before shifting to North Carolina for however much longer the series goes. It's a unique setup that puts the first-place Checkers on the road to start, but they're prepared for the challenge.

"They'll have last changes so we'll see what kind of matchups they want," said Vellucci. "There may be some strategy to moving things around. But we've been successful playing four lines this year. I'm not too worried about the
matchups up front. On defense we’re a little more aware of what we’re going to do. But if I can roll four lines up front and get maximum effort out of everybody then it usually means better results for us.”

FINISHING STRONG

The Checkers rolled their way through much of the regular season, but they really ratcheted things up down the final stretch. Charlotte won 17 of their final 21 games, including notching several victories after having wrapped up all available accolades.

“What’s so encouraging to me is that those last two games in Cleveland meant everything to them and meant nothing to us but our guys were still blocking shots and paying the price and doing the little things to win two games that didn’t mean anything,” said Vellucci. “That’s the character and leadership in the room.”

The Bruins had a different path to the postseason, squeaking into the fourth and final spot in the Atlantic Division by holding off the Lehigh Valley Phantoms by two points. They nabbed that spot despite going 5-5-0 over their final 10 contests, alternating wins and losses through that stretch.

The two sides may have come into the postseason on different trajectories, but as Charlotte’s coaching staff has been harping, things are different in the playoffs.

“I think we can still play better for sure,” said Vellucci. “It’s not only another gear, it’s when you face adversity, how do you overcome that? Making your own bounces and when things aren’t going your way you have to work on digging deeper and create your own opportunities. We can still play better.”

HEAD TO HEAD

As Atlantic Division rivals the Checkers and Bruins faced each other eight times throughout the regular season, with Charlotte logging a 4-2-2 record. The tightly contested series wrapped up a while ago — the two squads haven’t played since the middle of February — and seven of the eight meetings were decided by one goal, with the lone outlier being decided by two.

“It was a very tight series, most of them were low-scoring one-goal games,” said Vellucci. “They’re technically very good, we have to play a very good structured game. There’s not a lot of room in the neutral zone. The team that makes the least amount of mistakes is going to be the team that wins the series.”

INJURY UPDATES

The Checkers went through the final week of the regular season with several key pieces missing from the lineup, but the good news is that it appears most of them are on the mend.

Josiah Didier, who has missed the last six games, Clark Bishop, who has missed the last nine games, and leading scorer Andrew Poturalski, who has missed the last four games, were all full participants in practice both Monday and Tuesday, a good sign for their improving health.

“I’m not sure if they’re going to be in this weekend, but they’re looking good, they’re looking better,” said Vellucci of the trio. The bad news is that the blue line has taken a hit, with Roland McKeown being sidelined.

“McKeown is going to be out for an extended period of time,” said Vellucci of the defenseman who finished the season at a team-best +30 rating.

Carolina Hurricanes honor soldier who earned Soldier’s Medal for valor

By: Joshua Axelrod

The Carolina Hurricanes beat the Washington Capitals 5-0 Monday night, but that isn’t the only heroic feat to be celebrated from that NHL playoff game.

During the game, the Hurricanes took some time to honor Army Capt. Jacob Riffe, who recently received the Soldier’s Medal for saving the lives of two people in a burning vehicle in April 2018.

“I’m a very humble person, so it was a lot to take in,” Riffe told Army Times. “To get that level of support and appreciation was really humbling. I couldn’t stop smiling.”

Riffe is a 29-year-old operations officer with the 264th Combat Sustainment Support Battalion, 3rd Expeditionary Sustainment Command. He received the Soldier’s Medal — the Army’s highest non-combat medal for valor — during a March 22 ceremony at Fort Bragg, North Carolina.

He earned the medal for saving an elderly man and his caregiver from a nasty car wreck while he was off duty, which is why the Hurricanes decided to make him their “Hero of the Game.”

“He’s a serviceman from our state of North Carolina, served our country twice in Afghanistan,” said Jon Chase, the Hurricanes’ vice president of community outreach. “When he’s not even at work, he saves two lives. That’s an American hero right there. We [were] honored to have him here with us tonight.”

Chase said the Hurricanes’ Hero of the Game is always a military member, first responder or educator from North Carolina.
“Our goal with the Hero of the Game is that we look to honor a serviceman or servicewoman who represents their country proudly,” he said. “And when we do that, we want to make sure that it’s going to be a positive and uplifting experience for them.”

That’s certainly how Riffe was feeling the morning after the game. He was delighted to see the reverence the crowd showed not just for his good deed, but for the country as a whole.

“There is still a level of patriotism despite what’s going on in the world, whatever divide there is,” he said. “It’s great to see sports bring everyone together. It’s good to see that there’s still a level of love for the American flag.”

This also happened to be Riffe’s first National Hockey League game, and he said he was impressed with how endearingly raucous the Hurricanes’ playoff atmosphere was.

Overall, Riffe said, he felt welcomed and appreciated by Hurricanes fans.

“It was good to see there’s still a lot of support for the military,” he said. “They were just happy I was there. I couldn’t have asked for more.”

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Earlier the better for PNC Arena parking and traffic troubles

BY JOE GIGLIO

Raleigh-When Larry Perkins noticed cars pulling into the PNC Arena parking lot nearly seven hours before the start of the Carolina Hurricanes’ game on Monday, he knew playoff hockey was back.

Perkins, the assistant general manager of PNC Arena, also knew there would be some traffic headaches for the fans who couldn’t get a headstart on tailgating before the Canes’ first-round playoff matchup with the Washington Capitals.

By the time the puck dropped for the start of Game 3, a 5-0 win for the Canes, most of the fans who were snarled in traffic on Wade Avenue and Blue Ridge Road had found their way into the arena.

“We hate to see traffic back up anywhere, I’m happy to say at puck-drop, about 95 percent of the fans were in the building,” Perkins said.

The team’s first home playoff game since 2009 was the first sellout since the season-opener in October. The team had an average attendance of 14,323 during the regular season but an overflow crowd of 18,783 on Monday (18,680 is the capacity for the arena’s hockey setup).

The diehards and tailgate aficionados beat the traffic with no problem.

The fans trying to get into the parking lot area after 6 p.m. had a more difficult time.

“The early part of the evening went smoothly, but once the arena lot hit capacity, there were some unavoidable delays.

“When you’re dealing with a weekday event, there’s going to be commuter traffic as well,” Perkins said.

The backup of cars and commuters on Wade and Blue Ridge were “sheer volume” issues, not logistics, Perkins said.

“Oh, once we shut the property down, that obviously takes away some of the main staging areas that we have around the property,” Perkins said.

There are an additional 4,000 parking spots in the Carter-Finley Stadium lots, Perkins said, and those are the best option for fans who can’t get to the arena before 6 p.m.

There were 110 arena members of the arena staff working in the parking lots, Perkins said. The general parking cost is $20. There are prepaid parking options, at the time of the ticket purchase, Perkins said.

There are also alternate options to getting to the game. Perkins said between 400 and 500 cars used the Uber or Lyft dropoff area.

Caniac Coach buses also run from downtown and North Hills to the arena and there’s a GoTriangle bus that picks up fans at the Crabtree Valley Mall.

For the fans going to Game 4 on Thursday night, also a 7 p.m. start, Perkins said the best way to avoid traffic issues is to get to the arena early. If you’re running late, avoid Edwards Mill and plan on taking a different entrance.

And, Perkins said, there is one other way hockey fans can get an assist.

“If you’re not going to the game, please take a different route and avoid the area,” he said.

News Observer LOADED: 04.17.2019

Mrazek, Canes fighting back from rocky start against Caps

BY CHIP ALEXANDER

Raleigh-For the Carolina Hurricanes, it was a rather ominous start to their Stanley Cup playoff series against the Washington Capitals.

Certainly for goalie Petr Mrazek.

In the first period of the opener, Caps center Nicklas Backstrom carried the puck into the Carolina zone and sent a wrister toward the net. Rather surprisingly, what appeared to be a mostly harmless 40-foot shot whizzed by Mrazek’s glove and into the net and the Caps led 1-0.

“Mrazek is our No. 1, he’s our clear No. 1, so when you’re talking about a loss like that, it’s not the start you want,” coach Rod Brind’Amour said. “But the way we talked about it in the room was that we’ve got to forget it and we’ve got to move on.”
The Caps went on to a 4-2 win in Game 1 at Capital One Arena, then won an overtime thriller 4-3 in Game 2 after an even more unlikely event -- a goal from defenseman Brooks Orpik. Brooks Orpik?

Given that, there were questions if Mrazek would be the starting goalie in Game 3 or if Canes might give Curtis McElhinney a start. But coach Rod Brind’Amour again went with the choice of goaltending coach Mike Bales -- Mrazek again -- and Mrazek responded with his fourth career playoff shutout Monday with 18 saves as the Canes rolled 5-0.

“He’s been good,” Brind’Amour said Tuesday. “Maybe he’d want that one (by Backstrom) back but he’s made so many big saves. Even (Monday) night, there wasn’t a lot of work obviously, but it was the early work that for me made the difference in the game. They had the first scoring chance of the game. If that goes in who knows where the game goes, He’s been very solid.”

Coaches like to talk about teams building a game, steadily improving period to period. Mrazek has been building a series and should get a fourth straight start Thursday in Game 4 at PNC Arena as the Canes look to square the Eastern Conference quarterfinal matchup.

Mrazek allowed three goals on 17 shots in the opener, albeit with two Caps scores coming on the power play. Even the first goal might have been stopped had defenseman Jacob Slavin closed the gap a little more on Backstrom or not unwittingly become a partial screen when Backstrom did shoot.

Mrazek gave up four goals on 33 shots in Game 2, Orpik scoring on the only shot of overtime. He then had the shutout in the Canes’ first home playoff game since May 2009 and appeared buoyed by all the bedlam along the rest of the Canes, later saying the frenzied sellout crowd was “an extra player on the ice for us.”

Those who know Mrazek best talk about his tenacity. While not the biggest goalie in the league at 6-foot-1 and 190 pounds, he can be fiery, combative at times -- encroach in his crease and he can lash out -- and intensely competitive.

Tom Dempsey was Mrazek’s first goalie coach in North America after Mrazek, then 17, arrived from his native Czech Republic to play junior hockey for the Ottawa 67’s of the Ontario Hockey League in 2009-2010.

“He had no equipment because his club team in Czech wouldn’t let him bring it,” Dempsey said. “They didn’t want him to come. Petr had to use one of our other goalie’s used equipment from the previous year.

“He was the best goalie in the camp. That opened my eyes right there. It was his attitude, his athleticism, his work ethic. Can you imagine, the goalie we had before was 5-foot-8 and Petr had to wear his equipment and he was the best goalie. Most North America goalies wouldn’t have gone on the ice. Right from that point, I went, ‘Whoa, this guy is special.’”

Dempsey said when he told Mrazek that he had once coached goalie Marc-Andre Fleury, Mrazek’s response was, “I will be better than him. You will see.”

A cocky kid? “I would say he has that quiet confidence,” Dempsey said, “and he backs it up.”

Mrazek, 27, was drafted by the Detroit Red Wings in 2010 and made his NHL debut for the Wings in 2013 -- winning 5-1 -- while helping the Grand Rapids Griffins of the AHL to a Calder Cup championship. He made his Stanley Cup playoff debut in April 2015, making 44 saves in a 3-2 Wings win over Tampa Bay, and later had two shutouts in the series, becoming the first Wings rookie goalie to do that since Harry Lumley in 1945.

Mrazek had the look of a star in the making for the Wings but it didn’t work out that way. The losses built up, his confidence waned and his technique suffered. Traded to the Philadelphia Flyers in February 2018, he was not given a qualifying offer by the Flyers after the season.

Carolina goalie Petr Mrazek (34) has words with Washington’s Alex Ovechkin (8) during the third period of the Carolina Hurricanes’ 5-0 victory over the Washington Capitals at PNC Arena in Raleigh, N.C., Monday, April 15, 2019. Ethan Hyman
EHYMAN@NEWSOBSERVER.COM

Suddenly available as a free agent, Mrazek signed a one-year contract with Carolina for $1.5 million, a bargain price for the Canes, saying he wanted only the chance to prove he could be a No. 1 goalie. Teaming with McElhinney, the two have given the Canes quality goaltending -- McElhinney quiet and cool in net and Mrazek, who won 11 of his last 13 starts in the regular season, bringing more of the fire.

“Petr is an emotional guy and I think he thrives in those situations,” Bales said. “I think he’s done a great job of being aggressive when he needs to be.”

When the Canes clinched the playoff berth April 4 with a 3-1 win over the New Jersey Devils at PNC Arena, Mrazek was named the game’s first star. Sitting down at the bench for a postgame interview, he beamed as he shouted, “We’re in! We’re in! Yes!” and then letting out a “Whoooo!”

“It’s amazing. It’s the best part of hockey,” Mrazek said of the playoffs. With more still to come.

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1141227 Carolina Hurricanes

Extra day comes at good time for Hurricanes after emotional win

BY LUKE DECOCK APRIL 16, 2019 03:50 PM

Raleigh—There is, hard as it may be to believe, still a playoff series to finish, two more games to play at the minimum, a lot of hockey left. Just because Monday night felt climactic and catastrophic and cataclysmic, almost like a Game 7 and not a Game 3, doesn’t mean life doesn’t go on as normal.

It is, however, probably a very good thing for the Carolina Hurricanes that there are two days off before Game 4, because even if that isn’t enough time for Andrei Svechnikov to recover -- as good as the news seemed to be Tuesday -- it may be enough time for the Hurricanes to regroup and regather the emotion they expended, because it was not an insignificant amount.

The tenor of the series may have changed with an utterly dominant performance in a 5-0 win, but it can change again just as quickly Thursday.

“We understand that it’s going to be a whole new game,” Hurricanes coach Rod Brind’Amour said Tuesday. “We’re not expecting that kind of a game to go that way.”

And they will be short-handed, for certain: Even if Svechnikov was feeling fine Tuesday after Alex Ovechkin’s knockout blow and the ensuing trip to the hospital Monday night, it would be the height of folly to bring him back in this series, maybe even these playoffs should the Hurricanes continue on, and risk two concussions in such short succession this early in his career.

As for Micheal Ferland, who exited the game early, whatever his injury situation is, it is increasingly clear he cannot be relied upon, and the Hurricanes appear increasingly willing to move forward without him -- in this series and in the offseason. And with just the one goal since the trade deadline, how much will he really be missed anyway?
The Hurricanes will need at least one body from Charlotte to replace them, even with Saku Maenanlanen ready to step back into the lineup, and Tuesday afternoon Patrick Brown got the first call. He may not be the last.

These are all questions that require some thought and examination, and the Hurricanes have that time, at home, this week. Desperate and wounded, they threw everything they had into Monday’s game, even after the Capitals had sensed the direction of the game and eased up on the gas. There was a statement to be made, and they made it, but it all begins anew Thursday night.

Not to be lost in all of this: Only two of the Hurricanes’ 10 goals have come from players that would have been considered their top six forwards going into the series, Carolina’s power play is actually outscoring Washington’s 3-2 and the Hurricanes have a 63 percent possession edge five-on-five.

All that said, it takes a tremendous degree of commitment and investment to play with the energy and aggression the Hurricanes demonstrated Monday. The Hurricanes can outplay and outmuscle the Capitals, but it takes everything they have, as it did in Game 3. It will take all of two days to gather that again, if they can.

“We needed the two days, though,” Brind’Amour said. “Part of you says it would be great to go right back at it and play. But there was a huge emotional investment in that game for our guys. To have one day and go again, I don’t know. This is going to be nice, I’m hoping anyway, to reset.

“And then come again, hopefully, with a lot of energy. If the building is the same, which I think it will be, we can feed off that. That’s where home ice makes a difference. We need every advantage we can get.”

They’ll have to muster it again. That’s what it will take to even the series against a team that’s unquestionably more talented and experienced. The euphoria is gone. It all begins anew.

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1141228 Carolina Hurricanes

Canes’ Svechnikov sidelined with concussion after Ovechkin fight

BY CHIP ALEXANDER

Raleigh-Carolina Hurricanes rookie forward Andrei Svechnikov is in the concussion protocol and his availability uncertain for the playoff series against the Washington Capitals, Canes coach Rod Brind’Amour said Tuesday.

Svechnikov, the No. 2 pick of the 2018 NHL Draft, was injured in the first period of Game 3 on Monday after a brief but brutal fight with the Caps’ Alex Ovechkin, who landed the heaviest of the blows. Svechnikov, whose head banged off the ice as he fell, was taken to a hospital for treatment and evaluation, Brind’Amour said.

Brind’Amour said he talked with Svechnikov on Tuesday morning, which he called encouraging.

“From seeing him now, he looks normal and he feels great,” Brind’Amour said. “That’s a real positive sign.”

Brind’Amour said it was unlikely Svechnikov would be able to play Thursday in Game 4 of the Eastern Conference quarterfinal series. The Canes, after a 5-0 win Monday, trail 2-1 in the best-of-seven series.

“We’re going to be real careful,” Brind’Amour said. “We’re certainly not going to rush him back.”

Canes forward Micheal Ferland also left Monday’s game with an upper-body injury but Brind Amour had no update on his availability for Game 4.

The Canes on Tuesday recalled forward Patrick Brown from the Charlotte Checkers of the AHL on an emergency basis. Forward Saku Maenanlanen was a healthy extra on Monday and should be back in the lineup.

Svechnikov, 19, was a 20-goal scorer in the regular season and had both Canes goals in the series opener, a 4-2 loss. He had a few altercations with Ovechkin in Game 2, then a few more Monday before the gloves were dropped by the two Russians.

Brind’Amour said after the game and again Tuesday that he believes Ovechkin, the Caps captain, was primarily responsible for provoking the fight between the two Russians. He noted there are two versions of what occurred -- Ovechkin has said Svechnikov wanted to fight.

“I hear all the comments. I get it,” Brind’Amour said. “But when you’re in the heat of it, you see it a little different. I’m still bothered by it but we’ve moved on now.”

Caps coach Todd Reirden didn’t spend much time Tuesday discussing the fight or aftermath, saying, “I see it as two willing combatants and it’s part of our sport. Two willing combatants, it didn’t work out for one of them and now we’re focused on moving forward.”

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1141229 Carolina Hurricanes

‘I wouldn’t challenge him to fight’: Alex Ovechkin KOs Andrei Svechnikov as Capitals-Hurricanes series turns nasty

By Chris Kuc Apr 16, 2019

RALEIGH, N.C. — Sitting in the penalty box moments after jackhammering his right fist into the face of fellow Russian Andrei Svechnikov, Alex Ovechkin plopped a bag of ice on his knuckles.

The first-round series between the Capitals and Hurricanes is, as they say, on. There were scuffles all over the ice during the Hurricanes’ 5-0 throttling of the defending Stanley Cup champions Monday night at PNC Arena. That isn’t a huge surprise as there aren’t too many postseason series that don’t ramp up in intensity as they move forward, but the ferocity of the physical play was a bit startling after relatively tame Games 1 and 2. Suddenly, a barroom brawl broke out, and it doesn’t figure to stop until the final handshake line of the series.

While there were heavy hits and post-whistle skirmishes from the outset, it was a fight between two players who don’t drop the gloves often that set the tone for the game and likely the rest of the series.

Midway through the first period, Ovechkin and Svechnikov squared off, and the result was ugly. Svechnikov took repeated right hands to the face before falling backward and hitting the back of his head on the ice. The 19-year-old rookie, who had fought once in the OHL but never in the NHL, had to be helped to the dressing room and didn’t return.

OVECHKIN VS. SVECHNIKOV. PIC.TWITTER.COM/TL6PIDZC8F

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OVECHKIN VS. SVECHNIKOV. PIC.TWITTER.COM/TL6PIDZC8F

— SHANE O’DONNELL (@SHANE1342O) APRIL 15, 2019

Ovechkin had three previous fights during his NHL career but hadn’t had one since a bout with the Rangers’ Brandon Dubinsky on Dec. 12, 2010, according to HockeyFights.com.
On Monday, Ovechkin and Svechnikov exchanged jabs with their sticks — and words — and Ovechkin, who has 40 pounds on the Hurricanes rookie, said it was Svechnikov who then challenged him to fight.

"First of all, I hope he's OK," Ovechkin, 33, said. "I'm not a big fighter, and he's the same. He asked me to fight and said, 'Let's go.' I hope he's OK. You don't want to see a guy get hurt or something."

Said Capitals defenseman John Carlson: "I've seen (Ovechkin) fight before. It's not like I was expecting him to get beat up or anything. But I wouldn't challenge him to fight."

Unfortunately, Svechnikov apparently did, and it was a scary sight to see one of the most talented young players in the league being helped off the ice.

"I kept thinking about him the whole game," said Hurricanes defenseman Dougie Hamilton, who scored two power-play goals. "I just hated seeing that. I just hated the whole part of it. (It's) just something you never want to see. I just feel so bad for him, and hopefully, he gets better soon. The game doesn't really matter when something like that happens, you just can't get it out of your head. I just hope he's OK."

After the game, Hurricanes coach Rod Brind'Amour said he didn't have an update on Svechnikov's condition.

"When you see that, it makes you sick," Brind'Amour said. "(I'm) still sick to my stomach about it."

When asked to comment on the fight specifically, Brind'Amour seemed to put the onus on Ovechkin.

"How do you comment on it?" Brind'Amour said. "It's tough because I just heard Ovi talk about it. He said our guy challenged him. So, if that's the case it's a little different. But if you watch the video — because I got to watch it — he slashes him twice, Ovi, whack, whack, and then Svech gives him back and then I don't know if there's words exchanged, but one guy's gloves come off way first, and that's Ovi's. That is not our guy's. So, it's a little bit frustrating because (Svechnikov) got hurt. It's his first fight. He's played 90 games. He's never fought in his life and I'm pretty sure Ovi knew that. So, that stuff bothers me. But, it's done."

It is far from done.

Capitals goaltender Braden Holtby said it was "big for (Ovechkin) to show his emotion."

"He plays hard," Holtby said. "(Svechnikov) is a kid that takes a lot of cheap shots and that kind of thing. It was playoff hockey. But the biggest thing is we didn't respond very well after it. We kind of wasted that energy that (Ovechkin) created. (If) that happens again we won't sit back."

On Tuesday, Brind'Amour said that Svechnikov is in concussion protocol and he "would assume" the winger will be sidelined for Game 4.

"Seeing him now he looks normal and he feels great," Brind'Amour said. "That's a real positive. We're going to be real careful."

When asked if he is still bothered by Ovechkin's role in the fight, Brind'Amour said, "Same. All the comments, I get it. But when you're in the heat of it you see it a little different. But, yeah, I'm still bothered by it but we've moved on now."

The Hurricanes coach was also asked if Svechnikov told him who asked for the fight.

"There's two version going around," Brind'Amour said. "I'll just leave it at that."

During his off-day news conference, Capitals coach Todd Reirden gave his take on the fight, but avoided delving into any controversy of who started it.

"I see it as two willing combatants (and) that's part of our sport. And one player won the fight and one player lost the fight," Reirden said Tuesday.

"It's always been my stance to not talk negatively about another team's players. That's always been a cardinal rule for me as a coach. I don't yell at other team's players from the bench. That's just how I handle things."

After the game, Ovechkin said it was just a matter of time before things turned nasty between the teams.

"We knew they weren't going to sit back and wait for something to happen," Ovechkin said. "We knew they were going to push. We knew they were going to play hard, and they did."

That effort helped the Hurricanes cut the Capitals' lead in the best-of-seven series to 2-1 with Game 4 scheduled for Thursday night at PNC Arena.

"We have two days (and) we're going to get some rest and forget about this loss," Ovechkin said. "You can't win four in a row in the playoffs. It's hard. Everybody is going to be battling, everybody is going to play hard."

The Athletic LOADED: 04.17.2019

By Samantha Pell
April 16 at 3:57 PM

RALEIGH, N.C. — Washington fourth-line center Nic Dowd stood in the bowels of PNC Arena after the Capitals' 5-0 loss to the Carolina Hurricanes on Monday night. Out of his pads and wearing casual team gear, he watched highlights from the game on a nearby TV.

Standing in silence, eyes fixed on the replays in front of him, Dowd's demeanor mirrored the rest of the Capitals' dressing room after their Game 3 hiccup. From center Nicklas Backstrom, to forward Lars Eller to captain Alex Ovechkin, the veteran group was calm. More than anything, the Capitals knew this game doesn't decide the series, and Washington showed no sense of panic heading into Thursday's Game 4 in Raleigh with its two-game series lead cut in half.

"[Monday] was a little step back for us, and now we have to take a step forward the next game," Eller said. "We know what we're capable of."

As defending Stanley Cup champions, the Capitals know how to regroup, move forward and bounce back. With a veteran team still holding a 2-1 advantage in the best-of-seven series, the group has the experience and self-awareness to recognize its errors and what it takes to fix them. The Capitals won't throw away the tape from the disappointing Game 3, Coach Todd Reirden said. Instead, they will use it, like Dowd was trying to do just minutes after the game.

"You're obviously going to have your ups and downs through the playoffs, highs and lows, but overall you've just got to make sure you manage the game and make sure you do the right things at the right time," Backstrom said. "As this group maybe proved last year, we kept calm. If anything happens — you score a goal or you let in a goal — you've got to keep calm, I think, and make sure you stick to the game plan."

The Capitals are no strangers to playoff adversity. Last year, they climbed out of a 2-0 hole to open the first round against Columbus, vanquished their demons by finally beating Pittsburgh in the second round, lost three straight after opening a 2-0 series lead against Tampa Bay in the Eastern Conference finals, and then, at last, bounced back after a Game 1 loss to Vegas in the Stanley Cup finals to win four straight en route to the franchise's first Stanley Cup.
RALEIGH, N.C. — As Alex Ovechkin exited the penalty box after his five-minute sentence, players on the Washington Capitals' bench stood and smacked their sticks against the boards in appreciation of their captain. Meanwhile, the crowd at PNC Arena booed. The central, polarizing figure of this first-round Stanley Cup playoff series between the Carolina Hurricanes and Capitals has arrived, and while it’s no surprise that it's Ovechkin — he has played that role his whole career — how he got there says a lot about what kind of player he is these days.

Ovechkin’s contributions tend to come in the form of scoring goals, but after three games he has just one, from Game 1. Instead, his most memorable moments this series have been the two slick feeds that set up goals in Saturday’s Game 2, the team-high 15 bruising hits he has delivered and his devastating punches to Carolina rookie Andrei Svechnikov in a shocking bout 11 minutes into Monday night’s Game 3. Remember when Ovechkin used to get criticized for being one-dimensional in the spring?

Although the Capitals prefer Ovechkin not drop the gloves and risk injury, he was the rare Washington player who showed life in Monday’s abysmal 5-0 loss, which trimmed the team’s series lead to 2-1. "That was big for him to show his emotion," Capitals Coach Todd Reirden said. "We kind of wasted that energy that he created. That happens again, we won’t sit back," Capitals goaltender Braden Holtby said.

The 19-year-old Svechnikov has been one of the Hurricanes’ best players this season, and Carolina Coach Rod Brind’Amour confirmed he is in the league’s concussion protocol after the fight. He almost certainty won’t play in Thursday’s Game 4, and it’s unclear whether the Hurricanes will have defenseman Calvin de Haan or forward Michael Ferland, who are also nursing injuries. After Monday’s game, Brind’Amour seemed to criticize Ovechkin for accepting a fight with a player 14 years younger and 40 pounds lighter: "It’s tough because I just heard Ovi talk about it; he said our guy challenged him, so if that’s the case it’s a little different. ... I don't know if there’s words exchanged, but one guy’s gloves come off way first and that’s Ovi's. That’s not our guy’s.”

Then, on Tuesday, after Brind’Amour got a chance to speak with Svechnikov, he implied that Ovechkin wasn’t being entirely truthful when he said Svechnikov was the one who asked for the bout.

“There’s two versions going around," Brind’Amour said. "I'll just leave it at that.”

Capitals Coach Todd Reirden’s response contained a couple of not-so-subtle jabs back at Brind’Amour, who appeared to be having words with Washington forward Tom Wilson after the fight.

“I see it as two willing combatants," Reirden said. "That’s part of our sport, and one player won the fight and one player lost the fight. It’s always been my stance to not talk negatively about another team’s players. That’s always been a cardinal rule for me as a coach. I don’t yell at other teams’ players from the bench. That’s just how I handle things. ... Now we’re focused on moving forward here.”

And just like that, the first real controversy of the series has arrived, and while many predicted the pugilistic Wilson would be involved, it’s Ovechkin, who has fought just four times in his 14-year career. Who challenged whom isn’t as relevant as both participants agreeing to the fisticuffs, which was clear from the replay. And for the Capitals, none of that matters as much as the statement that their longest-tenured player and dressing room leader made that he again is not going to shy away from anything this time of year.

“I think he’s pretty much sent a message from the minute he showed up at training camp that he’s all-in," Reirden said. "That’s been through his play, and we talked about his play at length from Game 2 with how those plays start before he obviously executes them — some high-end rush plays with great passes. One of them comes off a full-length 200-foot backcheck. Another one of them comes off the defensive-zone coverage where their defenseman is down the wall, he finishes the player with a legal check and then beats him up the ice to be able to create offense.

“He’s been all-in, and he’s been all-in since the beginning of the season and I wouldn’t expect anything less.”

Ovechkin was awarded the Conn Smythe Trophy as the MVP of Washington’s Stanley Cup run a year ago not because he was the team’s leading scorer — that was center Evgeny Kuznetsov. It was because of how he owned the responsibility of the “C” on his chest by...
The team is experienced. The coach — in this case, Reirden as the head coach — is not. When Reirden spoke of the success they had last year with making adjustments in series, a key decision maker in those adjustments in missing — Barry Trotz, the Stanley Cup winning coach who owner Ted Leonsis wouldn’t pay for bringing the franchise the only championship in its 44-year history. Trotz appears to be making very successful adjustments in Long Island as the head coach of the New York Islanders.

Reirden is credited for many of last postseason’s defensive adjustments, but that was as an assistant. The iPad gets a little heavier when you are the head coach.

So when he says after their Game 2 win that they have to be “one step ahead” of the Carolina coaching staff when it comes to adjustments, and the result of that is a 5-0 loss where the only adjustment was how poorly the Capitals played — the natural “response” is concern. Not panic. But concern.

Concern was the operative word Monday night when in the first period Ovechkin pummeled 19-year-old Andrei Svechnikov, who is in concussion protocol and out for at least Game 4 Thursday night. At the moment he went down, he looked liked he risked being out permanently. This is the horrible culture of hockey that has deemed it totally appropriate for two men, in the middle of a hockey game, to drop their gloves and bash each other while the officials look on and everyone cheers. If Svechnikov were a boxer, he wouldn’t be allowed to step in the ring again for 90 days.

It was a startling scene, for two reasons — the brutality of the punches that knocked Svechnikov out and that they came from Ovechkin, who never engages in this kind of nonsense, while still being a physical player. The last fight Ovechkin had been in was in 2010.

It was so shocking that it appeared to stun his Capitals teammates, who were lifeless after the fight and Ovechkin’s five-minute major penalty resulting from the brawl.

Now the concern for everyone should be the response of both teams — will the Hurricanes retaliate and how will the Capitals answer?

The answer can’t be unleashing the fury of Tom Wilson, who is on double-secret probation by the league for his violence and fighting, starting off the season serving a 20-game suspension from a preseason hit (reduced later to 14 games, even though Wilson wound up serving 16 games of the punishment), Wilson can’t afford to go to war with the Hurricanes players.

These are not the game-to-game strategies and responses that Reirden hoped to enjoy this postseason.
Ovechkin knocked Svechnikov to the ice in a fight in the first period of Monday's Game 3, and Svechnikov had to be helped to the locker room and missed the rest of the game.

Brind'Amour said Svechnikov was checked out at a local hospital Monday night and remained in the NHL concussion protocol Tuesday. He implied Svechnikov's fall Monday looked worse than it turned out to be, and the 19-year-old told him he feels "great."

Still, the coach said "I would assume" Svechnikov will miss Game 4. Svechnikov was the No. 2 overall draft pick in 2018 and scored 20 goals for the Hurricanes, the fourth most on the team. Without him and potentially another winger, Michal Ferland, who left Game 3 with an upper-body injury, Carolina will be in a difficult spot.

The fight drew mixed reaction on social media, and because it involved one of the league’s biggest stars and the larger stage the postseason provides, it's beginning to stir up the debate over why hockey culture tolerates fighting at all.

"There's two versions going around," Brind'Amour said. "I'll just leave it at that," whether Svechnikov admitted he asked for the fight.

"First of all I hope he's OK," Ovechkin said. "I'm not a big fighter and he's a kid. Against a kid that kind of, you know, takes a lot of cheap shots and that kind of thing, it was, you know, playoff hockey."

Ovechkin said he didn't want Svechnikov to be hurt.

"I don't know if it's ever been necessary," said Brind'Amour, who played 20 seasons in the NHL. "It's been a part of the game forever. No, I don't think it's necessary. I don't think you're ever going to get it away from the game. It's tough to see, though. That's the worst part of it that you see when guys get hurt."

But even if it is not eradicated, fighting is certainly in decline. Statistics from hockeyfights.com, a database tracking all fights in the NHL and other leagues around the world, show NHL players are fighting at the lowest rate of the millennium.

Only 16.72 percent of games in the 2018-19 regular season featured a fight; just two seasons ago, that rate was about 25 percent, and in 2009-10 it was 40 percent.

Brind'Amour joined the likes of Wayne Gretzky and Mike Bossy in speaking out against fighting after their playing careers. But Capitals coach Todd Reirden played at the NHL level, too, and perhaps represents the majority of the hockey community that isn't bothered.

"I see it as two willing combatants, and that's part of our sport," Reirden said Tuesday. "One player won the fight and one player lost the fight."

Unsurprisingly, Capitals players praised Ovechkin for taking the fight, while the Hurricanes took issue with how it played out.

"It was big for him, showing his emotion," Braden Holtby said of Ovechkin. "I mean, he plays hard. Against a kid that kind of, you know, takes a lot of cheap shots and that kind of thing, it was, you know, playoff hockey."

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Where did the #KuzyChallenge come from?

The #KuzyChallenge involves eating a plate of spaghetti and steak covered in ketchup, mayonnaise and Parmesan cheese.

What is exactly is the #KuzyChallenge?

The #KuzyChallenge involves eating a plate of spaghetti and steak covered in ketchup, mayonnaise and Parmesan cheese.

Where did the #KuzyChallenge come from?

In an interview with the NHL Players' Association, the Capitals center described the above ingredients as his pregame meal of choice.

Don't blame Alex Ovechkin for the injury to Andrei Svechnikov, blame fighting in the NHL

By J.J. Regan
April 16, 2019 1:49 PM

Monday’s Game 3 in Raleigh had an ugly end for the Capitals, but the start was just as ugly for everyone watching. Early in the first period Alex Ovechkin and Andrei Svechnikov dropped the gloves and Ovechkin dropped Svechnikov soon after. Ovechkin connected with a punch and Svechnikov went down hard to the ice, hitting his head on the ice as he fell. He had to be helped to his knees and off the ice. He did not return to the game.

Carolina head coach Rod Brind’Amour told the media on Tuesday that Svechnikov went to the hospital on Monday and is in the NHL’s concussion protocol. He is not expected to play in Game 4.

You never want to see a player injured, especially a 19-year-old kid. It was tough to watch and an unfortunate result of the fight. But because it was such a cringe-worthy moment, Ovechkin has faced some criticism for participating in the fight in the first place. A lot of this has to do with Brind’Amour fanning the flames of what is essentially a non-controversy by disputing Ovechkin’s account of what happened.

While Ovechkin said Svechnikov asked to fight, Brind’Amour said, “If you watch the video, because I’ve got to watch it, he slashes him twice, Ovi. Whack, whack. And then Svech gives him back. I don’t know if there’s words exchanged, but one guy’s gloves comes off way first and that’s Ovi’s, it’s not our guy’s,” Brind’Amour told reporters on Monday.

That guy was looking for trouble,” Cherry argued. “You play with the bull, you get the horns.”

Both players are engaged with one another before the fight. Who slashes whom, who shoves whom, is irrelevant. The notion that Brind’Amour doesn’t know if words were exchanged means he either did not watch the

For once, Don Cherry is on the Capitals’ side.

The sportscaster defended Alex Ovechkin’s decision to agree to a fight 19-year-old Hurricanes rookie, Andrei Svechnikov, which resulted in Svechnikov missing most of Game 3 and Game 4.

“When you stick a guy, and you go after a guy, you better be prepared,” Cherry said in his Coach’s Corner segment on Sportsnet.

Co-host, Ron MacLean disagreed. “I say he shouldn’t have picked on a kid.”

“He never picked on a kid!” Cherry exclaimed.

Hurricanes fans were outraged by the fight and the team’s head coach, Rod Brind’Amour, disputed that Svechnikov started the fight.

“I don’t know if there’s words exchanged, but one guy’s gloves comes off way first and that’s Ovi’s, it’s not our guy’s,” Brind’Amour told reporters on Monday.

“The guy that was looking for trouble,” Cherry argued. “You play with the bull, you get the horns.”

For those “hot takes” out there saying what Ovechkin did was assault, you never want to see a player injured, especially a 19-year-old kid. It’s tough to watch and an unfortunate result of the fight. But because it was such a cringe-worthy moment, Ovechkin has faced some criticism for participating in the fight in the first place. A lot of this has to do with Brind’Amour fanning the flames of what is essentially a non-controversy by disputing Ovechkin’s account of what happened.

While Ovechkin said Svechnikov asked to fight, Brind’Amour said, “If you watch the video, because I’ve got to watch it, he slashes him twice, Ovi. Whack, whack. And then Svech gives him back. I don’t know if there’s words exchanged, but one guy’s gloves comes off way first and that’s Ovi’s, it’s not our guy’s. It’s a little bit frustrating because he got hurt and it’s his first fight. He’s played 90 games, he’s never fought in his life and I’m pretty sure Ovi knew that.”

Brind’Amour doubled down on Tuesday as he told the media, “There’s two versions going around,” seemingly calling into question Ovechkin’s contention that Svechnikov asked for the fight.

It’s fair to hate what happened to Svechnikov. It’s fair to wish he never got hurt. But it’s not fair to blame the incident on Ovechkin.

For those “hot takes” out there saying what Ovechkin did was assault, the sport of hockey isn’t for you. A lot of sports, in fact, may not be for you.

Yes, punching a person in real life is considered assault. So is body-checking. So is hitting a person with a wooden stick. So is a football tackle, a basketball charge, a pitcher beaning a batter, etc. As a society, we have decided that during a professional sports competition, we will accept a different standard of behavior. We do not get to pick and choose when that applies and when it doesn’t.

Brind’Amour’s account of what happened as he describes it just is not accurate.

Here’s a replay of the fight and the events that preceded it.

Both players are engaged with one another before the fight. Who slashes whom, who shoves whom, is irrelevant. The notion that Brind’Amour doesn’t know if words were exchanged means he either did not watch the
video or did not pay attention to it. Clearly, they are talking with one another before they drop the gloves.

As for what was said, all we know is what Ovechkin told us and that is that Svechnikov challenged him. If you decide you do not believe that, that’s fine. I don’t speak Russian and I’m not a lip reader. Having said that, you cannot watch the video and tell me that either player was unwilling or surprised when the fight started. They both knew what was coming and they both consented to it.

Yes, Ovechkin is listed at 235 pounds, Svechnikov at 195. Yes, Svechnikov is young, but he is an adult playing in the NHL. He is responsible for himself on the ice. He did not get jumped, he did not get sucker punched. He knew what he was getting into. At least, he thought he did. He got injured as a result and it was horrifying to watch, but you cannot blame Ovechkin for accepting the challenge.

So long as fighting is legal in the NHL, mismatches are going to happen. Knockouts are going to happen. If you don’t like that, blame the fact that fights are still a part of the NHL, not Ovechkin.

I am not arguing whether fights should or should not be taken out of the game.

All I am saying is that if you cringed when you saw Svechnikov go down on Monday, that has more to do with the fight itself than the man throwing the punches.

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1141392 Washington Capitals

What we learned: Capitals drubbed by Hurricanes in Game 3

By Brian McNally
April 16, 2019 12:50 PM

RALEIGH — The Capitals were ahead in this Stanley Cup first-round playoff series against the Carolina Hurricanes, but not in control.

Monday night’s Game 3 proved that as the minutes came and went and Washington couldn’t so much as put a shot on goal against Hurricanes goalie Petr Mrazek until well into the second period. Here are some things we learned about both teams heading into a critical Game 4 here in Raleigh.

This is unsustainable

The shot totals were always going to be out of whack in this series. The Hurricanes put shots on goal from all over the ice. They’ve been doing it all year. Hell, they’ve been doing it for a few years now. And their goal results never quite live up to what you’d expect. That’s lack of skilled depth more than anything. The Capitals are the opposite — a group of skilled snipers up and down the lineup who are selective, maybe to a fault. They possess the puck less than title contenders and yet score just fine. But this series is testing the limits of that strategy.

Carolina has 81 shots at 5-on-5 play. The Capitals have 45. Again, some of that is by design. But much of that is the Hurricanes dominating puck possession.

Special teams struggles

In Game 1, special-teams play saved the Capitals, who only had 12 shots during 5-on-5 play. Nicklas Backstrom and Alex Ovechkin each scored on the power play in the first period and it was 3-0 before you could blink. That has slowly changed and you wonder if the series is changing with it.

Washington is 0-for-10 since Ovechkin scored at 18:05 of the first period of Game 1. The Capitals have only 15 shots on goal in those 10 chances and looked especially shaky in Game 3 on Monday as the Hurricanes pressured the puck all over the ice. They need quicker puck movement because their skill players are getting smothered right now. They also need to hit the net. Too many shots are rushed and going wide. There won’t be many more easy one-timers for Ovechkin from the left circle.

And if Carolina is going to continue to dominate 5-on-5 play, Washington sure can’t allow the penalty kill to slip. Hurricanes defensemen Dougie Hamilton scored twice on the power play to put Game 3 out of reach. These are small sample sizes, but Carolina has scored on 3-of-10 power plays since getting blanked in Game 1.

Blueline adjustments

Reirden talked about getting defenseman Christian Djoos more playing time after he was under 10 minutes in both Games 1 and 2. But after an early turnover led to a Carolina goal, you wonder how much more of a leash Djoos has. The truth is the blueline has been in flux since Michal Kempny’s March 20 season-ending hamstring injury. He was the perfect complement to John Carlson and now the Capitals are left struggling to fit their pieces together. Nick Jensen isn’t comfortable on the left side, but playing Carlson there isn’t ideal.

Reirden will say in this system players are used to crossing sides of the ice, that it shouldn’t be an issue, that the adjustments are minor. And that’s certainly true. But THESE players don’t have much ice time together and you can’t predict chemistry and communication and all the rest. It doesn’t have to be a complete overhaul. The Capitals still have Braden Holtby playing pretty well in goal and they did win the first two games. But maybe roles become a little clearer if Dmitry Orlov plays with Carlson and Brooks Orip plays with Matt Niskanen and Jonas Siegenthaler jumps into the lineup with Jensen. That’s a tough ask of Siegenthaler against an opponent that can skate like Carolina so maybe Djoos gets a reprieve. But Reirden needs to find an answer here. The Capitals couldn’t escape their own zone for long stretches of Game 3 and while the Hurricanes deserve great credit for that, an adjustment needs to be made.

No panic

There’s no question that was an unsettling loss. Probably Washington’s worst since Game 7 against the Rangers in the first round, a 5-0 blowout. But maybe the 6-2 loss to the Penguins in Game 2 at home in 2016 is a better example. That left them down 0-2. Yet many of these same players responded with an overtime win in Game 3. It’s the same team that trailed in every series last year and faced elimination twice. It is a great advantage to have a team that knows it can shake off a loss like that one, with the mental toughness to handle playing on the road in front of a roaring crowd. PNC Arena was blisteringly loud for Game 3 and you can expect more of that on Thursday. There was little outward panic of frustration in the locker room after the 5-0 loss, just resolve. We’ll see if that holds, but it’s nice to draw upon.

“You just don’t think about it,” Ovechkin said. “I think we learned from last year. We’ve been in bad situations. We’ve been in worse, but we stick together. Game by game. Win or lose, we forget it and move forward.”

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1141393 Washington Capitals

Alan May doesn’t expect any retaliation for Ovechkin’s fight with Tom Wilson on the Capitals’ side.
Svechnikov decided to drop the gloves in a rather peculiar fight, in which turnover by Christian Djoos. After that, Alex Ovechkin and Andrei
The night opened with a goal from Warren Foegele, which came off a traction in their respective series.
Hurricanes remind Caps to take warning with 5-0 win
however, the momentum wouldn't shift away from Carolina; in the second period, another goal from Foegele and a power-play tally from Dougie Hamilton made it 3-0. Hamilton struck again in the third, with Brook McGinn scoring Carolina's fifth goal to finish with a goal and assist. Petr Mrazek got the shutout, but it wasn’t too big of a challenge; Washington had just 18 shots and barely saw time in the offensive zone.
In the second period, they were outshot 18-1.
Washington still leads the series 2-1, but will have to be stronger in Game 4 when they face the Hurricanes again on the road.
Prior to Monday’s tilt with Boston, Toronto learned that they would be without center Nazem Kadri, who has been suspended for the rest of the first round for his high hit on Jake DeBrusk in Game 2. Despite having one of their impact players out of the lineup, the Leafs were able to come out on top in Game 3 with a 3-2 victory over the Bruins.
All of the scoring happened in the second period, when Trevor Moore gave the Maple Leafs a 1-0 lead about two minutes in. However, David Krejci would tie the game less than a minute later to make it 1-1.
Later in the second, Toronto capitalized on two power plays with goals from Auston Matthews and Andreas Johnsson. It was Matthews and Johnsson’s first goals of the postseason, and both of them finished with a goal and a helper.
Charlie Coyle struck on the man advantage with about 48 seconds left in the period to pull the Bruins within one, but the lead carried through the third with the Leafs coming up big on defense, including two huge blocks from Mitch Marner in the end to guarantee the victory.
Laying everything on the line!
Frederik Andersen finished with 34 saves on 36 shots, and Toronto now leads the series 2-1.
Predators top Stars, 3-2
It was a back-and-forth battle between Nashville and Dallas on Monday, but ultimately, big performances from some of the Preds’ young guns helped Nashville escape with the victory on the road.
About three minutes into the second period, Rocco Grimaldi scored his second of the playoffs to make it 1-0, and soon after, a long pass from Nick Bonino landed right on the tape of Filip Forsberg, who crashed the net and gave Nashville a 2-0 lead.
However, with a little over two minutes remaining in the frame, Mats Zuccarello was able to cut the lead to one with his second goal of the playoffs. Tyler Seguin would tie the game at 2 in the third, but Mikael Granlund came up big and struck with less than 10 minutes to go in regulation to put Nashville up 3-2. Pekka Rinne was able to stop all 15 shots from the Stars and came up with big saves in the final 20 minutes of regulation to guarantee the win for the Predators.
He finished with 40 saves on the night, and Nashville now has a 2-1 series lead.
Avalanche stun Flames, 6-2
Colorado is the underdog in this series, but that status wouldn’t stop them as they hosted Calgary on home ice and took an impressive 6-2 victory.
A huge first period from Nathan MacKinnon powered the Avalanche to a comfortable 3-0 lead, as he managed two crafty goals and an assist. Defenseman Cale Makar, who just joined Colorado after finishing up at U-Mass and winning the Hobey Baker award, scored his first NHL postseason goal in his debut on a snipe that found its way past Mike Smith.
Hey NHL, meet Cale Makar.
Matt Nieto struck shorthanded around seven minutes into the second to make it 4-0, but a power-play goal from Sam Bennett would spoil the shutout for Philipp Grubauer. Mikko Rantanen scored his first career playoff goal just minutes later to make it 5-1 heading into the third period.
As the 2019 Stanley Cup Playoffs roll on, there’s been no shortage of action or surprises as the series continue to shift. On Monday, the Hurricanes, Maple Leafs, Predators and Stars came up big to gain traction in their respective series.
Here’s everything you need to know about Monday’s games from around he league.
Hurricanes remind Caps to take warning with 5-0 win
PNC Arena is a tough venue to win in, especially if you’re the Hurricanes and playing in your first home playoff game in a decade. In every aspect, the Hurricanes were able to dominate Washington and easily took a 5-0 win.
The night opened with a goal from Warren Foegele, which came off a turnover by Christian Diop. After that, Alex Ovechkin and Andrei Svechnikov decided to drop the gloves in a rather peculiar fight, in which Ovechkin knocked out the Hurricanes rookie.
However, despite the Hurricanes dominance in the series, the Hurricanes were able to dominate Washington and easily took a 5-0 win.
Andrei The rookie captain got into his first fight in nearly nine years with the Hurricanes in April 2019.
In every aspect, the Hurricanes were able to dominate Washington and easily took a 5-0 win.
By Sammi Silber
April 16, 2019 10:27 AM
NBC Sports Washington Capitals analyst doesn’t expect the Hurricanes to gain anything if they go after Alex Ovechkin in retaliation for the fight that ended rookie Andrei Svechnikov’s Game 3 early on Monday.
On Monday, in the Capitals’ 5-0 loss to the Carolina Hurricanes, the Caps captain got into his first fight in nearly nine years with the Hurricanes rookie in the first period.
It took only three punches to knock Svechnikov out cold, who did not return to the game after that and is in concussion protocol.
“This is just one of those things where it’s a big highlight for a couple of days,” May said Tuesday on The Sports Junkies. “If they think they can go after Ovechkin, then the Caps can do the same thing and start going after their players, and [Tom] Wilson can just skate over to their bench, he’s the toughest player on the ice, he can say, ‘if anyone does anything like that again, I’m grabbing Sebastian Aho and he’ll never play hockey the rest of this series.’”
After the Capitals loss, Ovechkin said he hoped Svechnikov was OK - but reiterated that the Hurricanes player had challenged him to a fight.
“I’m not a big fighter and he’s same way,” he said. “He asked me to fight and I said, let’s go. Yeah.”
May said he didn’t think Ovechkin owed anyone an apology.
“Back in my era, no one ever apologized for a fight,” May said on The Capitals Talk Podcast on Monday. The Capitals take on the Hurricanes again in Raleigh on Thursday for Game 4.
By Caroline Brandt
April 16, 2019 11:01 AM
CAROLINA HURRICANES
NEWS CLIPPINGS • April 17, 2019
Hey NHL, meet Cale Makar.
Defenseman Cale Makar, who just joined Colorado after finishing up at
RALEIGH – After 21 years, the Capitals and Carolina Hurricanes might finally have a rivalry on their hands.

Regular season games are one thing. Regular-season games in the pedestrian Southeast Division are another, about as far off the radar as hockey got in the last decade and early in this one. But now? In their first Stanley Cup playoff meeting ever, the Metropolitan Division rivals have something cooking.

It took until Game 3 on Monday night at PNC Arena, when Alex Ovechkin – in an unfortunate fight - pummeled a young Russian countryman who grew up idolizing him. Andrei Svechnikov was knocked senseless by a rapid series of right hands. He had to be carried off the ice like a Gladiator from the arena.

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Here’s a replay of the fight and the events that preceded it:

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Rod Brind’Amour disputes Ovechkin’s account on the Svechnikov fight

By J.J. Regan
April 15, 2019 11:56 PM

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CAROLINA HURRICANES
NEWS CLIPPINGS • April 17, 2019

They were going to play hard and they did. I think how I said tonight all four lines didn’t play the right way. We didn’t play our game at all. We have two days (and) we’re going to get some rest and forget about this loss."

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“It is obviously not acceptable the way we came out this flat,” Backstrom said. “At the same time, I mean they played some good hockey and they were aggressive and they came out hard and they played physical. That’s the way they did it. We just have to learn from it and make sure we adjust and get better and go at them on Thursday.”

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Clearly, both players are giving it to one another before the fight. Who started it, who gave it worse, that seems irrelevant. They were sparring with one another.

By Brian McNally
April 16, 2019 6:00 AM

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How Game 3 might have finally ignited a Caps-Hurricanes rivalry

By Brian McNally
April 16, 2019 6:00 AM

RALEIGH – After 21 years, the Capitals and Carolina Hurricanes might finally have a rivalry on their hands.

Regular season games are one thing. Regular-season games in the pedestrian Southeast Division are another, about as far off the radar as hockey got in the last decade and early in this one. But now? In their first Stanley Cup playoff meeting ever, the Metropolitan Division rivals have something cooking.

It took until Game 3 on Monday night at PNC Arena, when Alex Ovechkin – in an unfortunate fight - pummeled a young Russian countryman who grew up idolizing him. Andrei Svechnikov was knocked senseless by a rapid series of right hands. He had to be carried off the ice like a Gladiator from the arena.

Within minutes, however, the Hurricanes had laid the Capitals low in what became a 5-0 beating that wasn’t even that close. Washington had one shot on goal in the second period. It had 17 for the game. After Ovechkin’s fight, the Capitals seemed to lose energy, not gain it. And against a team playing down two forwards – forward Micheal Ferland also left the game with an upper-body injury – they were helpless to sustain anything in the offensive zone.

It was as bad a playoff loss as any since Game 7 of the first round in 2013 when the New York Rangers eliminated Washington 5-0 in front of a mortified home crowd. And, for a burgeoning rivalry, it was almost the perfect tonic. The Capitals lead has been cut to 2-1 in the series with Game 4 at PNC Arena on Thursday.

“They are at home, they got the home crowd into it and they got emotional,” center Nicklas Backstrom said. “They got emotional I think and that is what playoffs are all about. We just have to regroup here and make sure we are better on Thursday.”

A series that hadn’t had much in the way of controversy suddenly found some in the cauldron of noise generated by the crowd at PNC Arena.

They hadn’t seen their Hurricanes play a home playoff game in 10 years. It felt like it. Down 2-0 in the Stanley Cup playoff first round series, Carolina played with desperation the Capitals matched for maybe 10 or 12 minutes. It wasn’t near enough.

By the end, every Hurricanes hit was followed by a jeering, bloodthirsty howl from the crowd. Every goal brought the roof off the place. The Hurricanes didn’t just beat Washington, they embarrassed the Capitals. That’s how rivalries grow from a handful of relatively meaningless regular-season games to heated, must-see television.

“We knew they weren’t going to sit back and wait for something to happen,” Ovechkin said. “We knew they were going to push. We knew they were going to play hard and they did. I think how I said tonight all four lines didn’t play the right way. We didn’t play our game at all. We have two days (and) we’re going to get some rest and forget about this loss.”
Brind’Amour must not have been watching the video very closely if he doesn’t know if words were exchanged. You can clearly see both players talking to each other before the punches start getting thrown.

We don’t know what was said, all we have is what Ovechkin told us and that was that Svechnikov challenged him. Even if you do not believe him, however, you cannot watch the video and claim Ovechkin took him by surprise. Yes, his gloves came off first, but this was not a Brad Marchand jumping Lars Eller situation or Max Domi sucker-punching Aaron Ekblad. Svechnikov and Ovechkin knew what they were doing and they knew what was about to happen.

Sure, Ovechkin probably knew Svechnikov was a rookie. You also do not have to compare the two for very long to know that Ovechkin is a lot bigger than Svechnikov. But if Svechnikov is ready and willing to fight, is it on Ovechkin to walk away?

By Chris Kuc

Apr 16, 2019

RALEIGH, N.C. — Sitting in the penalty box moments after jackhammering his right fist into the face of fellow Russian Andrei Svechnikov, Alex Ovechkin plopped a bag of ice on his knuckles.

The first-round series between the Capitals and Hurricanes is, as they say, on. There were scuffles all over the ice during the Hurricanes’ 5-0 throttling of the defending Stanley Cup champions Monday night at PNC Arena. That isn’t a huge surprise as there aren’t too many postseason series that don’t ramp up in intensity as they move forward, but the ferocity of the physical play was a bit startling after relatively tame Games 1 and 2. Suddenly, a barroom brawl broke out, and it doesn’t figure to stop until the final handshake line of the series.

While there were heavy hits and post-whistle skirmishes from the outset, it was a fight between two players who don’t drop the gloves often that set the tone for the game and likely the rest of the series.

Midway through the first period, Ovechkin and Svechnikov squared off, and the result was ugly. Svechnikov took repeated right hands as there aren’t too many many postseason series that don’t ramp up in intensity as they move forward, but the ferocity of the physical play was a bit startling after relatively tame.

Unfortunately, Svechnikov apparently did, and it was a scary sight to see one of the most talented young players in the league being helped off the ice.

“I kept thinking about him the whole game,” said Hurricanes defensemen Dougie Hamilton, who scored two power-play goals. “I just hated seeing that. I just hated the whole part of it. (It’s) just something you never want to see. I just feel so bad for him, and hopefully, he gets better soon. The game doesn’t really matter when something like that happens, you just can’t get it out of your head. I just hope he’s OK.”

After the game, Hurricanes coach Rod Brind’Amour said he didn’t have an update on Svechnikov’s condition.

“When you see that, it makes you sick,” Brind’Amour said. “(I’m) still sick to my stomach about it.”

When asked to comment on the fight specifically, Brind’Amour seemed to put the onus on Ovechkin.

“How do you comment on it?” Brind’Amour said. “It’s tough because I just heard Ovi talk about it. He said our guy challenged him. So, if that’s the case it’s a little different. But if you watch the video — because I got to watch it — he slashes him twice, Ovi, whack, whack, and then Svech gives him back and then I don’t know if there’s words exchanged, but one guy’s gloves come off way first, and that’s Ovi’s. That is not our guy’s. So, it’s a little bit frustrating because (Svechnikov) got hurt. It’s his first fight. He’s played 90 games. He’s never fought in his life and I’m pretty sure Ovi knew that. So, that stuff bothers me. But, it’s done.”

It is far from done.

Capitals goaltender Braden Holtby said it was “big for (Ovechkin) to show his emotion.”

“He plays hard,” Holtby said. “(Svechnikov) is a kid that takes a lot of cheap shots and that kind of thing. It was playoff hockey. But the biggest thing is we didn’t respond very well after it. We kind of wasted that energy that (Ovechkin) created. (If) that happens again we won’t sit back.”

On Tuesday, Brind’Amour said that Svechnikov is in concussion protocol and he “would assume” the winger will be sidelined for Game 4.

“Seeing him now he looks normal and he feels great,” Brind’Amour said. “That’s a real positive. We’re going to be real careful.”

When asked if he is still bothered by Ovechkin’s role in the fight, Brind’Amour said, “Same. All the comments, I get it. But when you’re in the heat of it you see it a little different. But, yeah, I’m still bothered by it but we’ve moved on now.”

The Hurricanes coach was also asked if Svechnikov told him who asked for the fight.

“There’s two version going around,” Brind’Amour said. “I’ll just leave it at that.”

During his off-day news conference, Capitals coach Todd Reirden gave his take on the fight, but avoided delving into any controversy of who started it.

“I see it as two willing combatants (and) that’s part of our sport. And one player won the fight and one player lost the fight,” Reirden said Tuesday.

“It’s always been my stance to not talk negatively about another team’s player. That’s always been a cardinal rule for me as a coach. I don’t yell at other team’s players from the bench. That’s just how I handle things.”

After the game, Ovechkin said it was just a matter of time before things turned nasty between the teams.

“Where they weren’t going to sit back and wait for something to happen,” Ovechkin said. “We knew they were going to push. We knew they were going to play hard, and they did.”
Morrissey now qualify as stars. Others, like Henri Jokiharju, Jake Bean
particular outcome is highlighted in gold or silver): defenceman since 2009-2010 (a player's rank in first or second in a
Elynuik. Below is a look at the 20 most productive U18 season by a WHL
season by a WHL defenceman when you account for the fact that Ty
In the last 10 years, Byram's season ranks as arguably the best under-18
The numbers speak for themselves.
No. 1 ranked defenceman for 2019.
No. 7 in February, and will now sit somewhere inside the top five as my
Another of those three players is defenceman Bowen Byram (I'll keep the
midseason list, it was Dylan Cozens. And though I am no longer
Matthew Boldy. In the middle of February, when I released my
would listen to an argument for any of those players at third overall. At
and extends roughly half a dozen players deep. And the truth is that I
This year, as I prepare my final top 100 for the 2019 draft class (due out
But as I have said all year, in both my preliminary top 62 and my
midseason list, it was Dylan Cozens. And though I am no longer
another player who finished ahead of him, Dawson Davis. Byram's 0.7 primary points per game also bested Smith (0.63), who is
more than a year older than him.
Byram (a left-shot defenceman who stands 6-foot-1 and 192 pounds) is
than the only other player who finished ahead of him, Dawson Davis. Byram's 0.7 primary points per game also bested Smith (0.63), who is
more than a year older than him.
Byram (a left-shot defenceman who stands 6-foot-1 and 192 pounds) is
young too, thanks to a June 15 birthday. Only a handful of prospects with a
real shot at the first round in this draft are younger than Byram (Vasili
Podkolzin, Philip Broberg, Bobby Brink, Philip Tomasino, Thomas Harley
and Arthur Kaliyev).
His skill set matches what we see in the data too. Because players his
age develop so quickly, I reviewed Byram's six-game first-round series
against the Seattle Thunderbirds in order to give you the best possible
visual for the state of his game right now.
A few days ago, one of Byram's assists in Vancouver's second-round
series against the Victoria Royals made the rounds on social media when
the WHL made it their highlight of the night.
It was brilliant. Byram (No. 44 in all clips) used his skating to blow wide
down the left-wing for a tuck play at the far post, picked up his own
rebound, circled up the right-wing boards, made a Royals forward look
silly with a stop-up play, delayed across the top of the zone with the puck
on the heel of his blade, and found Milos Roman backdoor for tap-in at
the same post he attempted the tuck.
It looked like this:
The play was a combination of poise, puck handling, edge work, and
cross-ice vision. On its own, it wows you. But it's also the kind of play that
can trick casual fans (whose interest in draft prospects is peaked this
time of the year) into a false sense of how dynamic a player is. Every top
prospect has made a similar highlight-reel type of play this season.
What makes Byram impressive is the frequency with which he makes
that play. He did it twice more in the first round.
Notice, below, that heel-of-his-blade delay across the offensive zone
to give himself the time and space he needs to circle and find his man here,
against the Thunderbirds now:
And look for the stop-up, first at the left-wing boards and then at the right-
wing faceoff dot, to burn defenders below for a third highlight reel assist
(that patience and control as a puck handler at the offensive zone blue
line is impressive too):
When Byram is on the ice, everything runs through him and he dictates
rather than reacts. It's not just in a hang-onto-the-puck kind of way either
(that's not all that rare in junior hockey).
Though Byram's assist totals rank fifth in the last 10 years (a little lower
than his other outputs), it's not because he lacks playmaking ability. It's
because he's such a threat as a shooter that he doesn't rely on his
playmaking and can allow the game to come to him a little more than
some of the other players. 
And when the game is easy, production follows. It starts with that shot though. Byram’s shot is heavy and accurate (a lot of defencemen tend to sacrifice one for the other).

Byram has everything you look for in a shooter.

He beats goalies cleanly by picking his spots with his release:

He rarely misses the net with his one-timer:

He uses his feet to get pucks through when power isn’t the best option:

He regularly goes short-side (which more young players need to adopt):

And, maybe most of all, he doesn’t hesitate to drive the net when the opportunity is there.

Byram doesn’t relegate himself to the blue line just because he’s a defenceman. If there’s space to slide into, he’ll take advantage of those pockets:

That can work against him at times (more on that later) but is an absolutely necessary trait in a defenceman if he is to become more than just good.

Byram is confident enough to make the dangerous play:

In doing so, teams have to front the net when he’s on the ice, the wall opens up, and his playmaking comes naturally. His playoff totals could actually be higher were it not for some goal-driving plays he made that resulted in third assists, too.

You can notice the way opposing teams respect his shot in the little things. Most penalty-killing forwards will use their stick to protect the passing lane. Watch the stick positioning of the Seattle forward here, and the way it opens up Byram’s pass (even though he doesn’t get credited with an assist):

Plays like that happened three times in the first round alone.

He moves the puck quickly for an elusive third assist here:

And again here:

His vision isn’t limited to the simple play either. Byram is an excellent east-west and north-south passer.

He routinely recognizes and finds players across the offensive zone as a passer on the power play:

And he’s an excellent stretch passer:

The following sequence stands out for me because of the way Byram utilizes all of those little details over the course of three plays:

There, after his shot is blocked the first time, he uses his feet to feign as though he’s going to attack the middle and use the shot later in the same sequence before drawing the necessary attention to find his winger when not one but two Thunderbirds fade to the slot to block a shot that never comes.

None of this is to say Byram isn’t without his flaws. I have two major concerns with his game.

The first, is that he tends to cheat a little too much for offence in his own zone.

Watch, late in the sequence below at the bottom of the screen, the way he pushes out before the puck and gets burned when his teammate has the puck lifted and he’s already at the defensive zone blue line:

And watch it again here:

This shouldn’t happen if you’re a defenceman:

Byram’s second issue is one of positioning and laziness.

Watch the way he loses his guy (after stepping up on him earlier in the sequence he must track him back to the front of the net) here:

Byram plays a bit too static in his own zone (a lot like Oilers prospect Evan Bouchard does, frankly) and it often burns him.

And because he cheats so often, he tends to get caught behind the play, forcing him to track back late on chances the other way:

The front part of the below sequence also speaks to his tendency to play catch-up defensively. But it’s the end that really makes a coach crazy because Byram actually fades away from the net. He makes no effort to track the carrier or take a man:

This… yeah, this can’t happen either:

Ultimately, though, problems of effort and cheating can be corrected (at least with most players). They’re also bound to happen when a player is logging the minutes Byram is right now (he’s actually a strong man-on-man defender off the rush, it’s mostly his in-zone coverage that needs work).

And with Byram, the risk is counteracted by the reward. You can’t teach the way he controls games offensively.

In a draft class bereft of high-end defencemen (a stark contrast to the 2018 class), he now stands alone because of his talent, not the mistakes.

Byram is far-and-away the biggest shot threat defenceman in the 2019 draft, without sacrificing much (if anything) by way of playmaking to a prospect like USA Hockey national development program standout Cam York.

He’s a game breaker. He’s dynamic. He impacts a game in several ways.

And game breakers become first-pairing defencemen instead of second-pairing defencemen. Game breakers end up on PP1s instead of PP2s.

For that, Byram should be in the conversation for the Blackhawks at No. 3, the Avalanche at No. 4, the Kings at No. 5, or, at the very least, the Red Wings at No. 6. And if he falls much further than that, he’ll likely make the team that gets him very, very happy.

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The Athletic / Down Goes Brown: A brief history of really good teams that didn’t win a playoff game

By Sean McIndoe
Apr 16, 2019

What the hell is happening to the Lightning?

That’s the big question in the NHL these days, and honestly, I have no idea. None. I know there are easy narratives we can grasp at — They’re not built for playoff hockey! They don’t want it bad enough! They haven’t had to face enough adversity! — but I think we all realize on some level that it’s nonsense. Teams that rack up 62 wins don’t suddenly become fatally flawed in the playoffs.

Except that yeah, the Lightning sure seem flawed. A month ago I wrote about pretty much this exact scenario, where the Lightning suffer through a shocking exit and we all race to slap an explanation on it. But even then, I was working under the assumption that a Lightning upset would feel like, well, an upset. That they’d run into a hot goalie or have a bunch of bad bounces or whatever. That’s not what’s happening. They’re getting their butts kicked. The Blue Jackets have been the better team since the first period of Game 1. This is some history-making madness.
So yeah, I’m as lost as you are. But the reality is that there’s a good chance that the series ends tonight, and the Lightning season will end without so much as a playoff win to their name. And they may not be alone – the 100-point Penguins are also staring down a sweep tonight. Those are two pretty good teams, and they might combine for zero wins in the postseason.

That’s hard to explain. But it’s not unprecedented. So today, let’s try to make Lightning fans feel better – or let’s face it, probably worse – by looking back at eight of the best regular season teams in NHL history who didn’t win a single playoff game.

The team: 1992-93 Chicago Blackhawks

The regular season: Under rookie head coach Darryl Sutter, the Hawks had one of the best regular seasons in franchise history. They finished the year with a record of 47-25-12, good for a conference-best 106 points that set up a first-round meeting with the 85-point Blues. Easy, right?

The disaster: Curtis Joseph has a weird tendency to show up in these stories. This one was the 24-year-old’s first time performing what would become his trademark move for the rest of the ’90s: pretty much single-handedly winning a playoff series.

After making 24 saves in a 4-3 win in Game 1, Joseph went on to shut out the Hawks in back-to-back games, making 81 saves in the process. That pushed the Hawks to the brink, and while Chicago would find the net again in Game 4, the Blues finished the job in overtime. That goal came with a bit of controversy, and an appropriately heated Ed Belfour meltdown.

The epilogue: This was the second stunning first-round exit in three years by the Hawks; they’d lost to the North Stars in six games in 1991. They’d followed that with a trip to the final in 1992, but there was no similar rebound here. The Hawks would win just three more rounds in 15 seasons until reemerging as Cup contenders in the Jonathan Toews/Patrick Kane era.

The team: The 1980-81 Canadiens

The regular season: By 1981, the Habs dynasty of the late-’70s was essentially over. For the first time in five years, they hadn’t won the Cup in 1980, and key pieces like Scotty Bowman, Jacques Lemaire and Ken Dryden were gone. But they still had guys like Guy Lafleur, Larry Robinson and Steve Shutt on a roster that featured seven Hall of Famers, and they rolled to a conference-best 103 points. That earned them an easy first-round matchup against a 74-point team that had never won a playoff game.

The disaster: That first-round opponent was the Edmonton Oilers, and they turned out to have a few Hall of Famers of their own. Even though they’d only won 29 of their 80 games during the season, the Oilers stunned the Canadiens by pumping home 15 goals in a three-game preliminary round sweep.

The epilogue: Those early-80s best-of-five openers were tricky – they also saw sweeps of 100-point teams like the 1982-83 Flyers, 1983-84 Sabres and 1983-84 Bruins.

As for the Canadiens, they finished first again in 1981-82, only to suffer yet another first-round upset, this time to the Nordiques in five. Montreal wouldn’t win another playoff round until Steve Penney showed up in 1984, and some other rookie goalie who arrived a year later helped them get back to winning Cups. And those upset Oilers went on to win a few of their own.

The team: The 2000-01 Ottawa Senators

The regular season: After faceplanting out of the starting gate as an expansion franchise, the Senators had firmly established themselves as a very good team. They’d made the playoffs in 1997, won a round in 1998 and racked up 103 points during the 1998-99 season. Two years later, they shattered that franchise record by going 48-21-9-4 for 109 points.

That earned them a first-round gimme with the 86-point Sabres, who hadn’t even won a round in nearly a decade.

The disaster: Buffalo stole Game 1 in overtime on a goal by formerBruin Bob Sweeney. That was followed by a 34-save shutout from Grant Fuhr, who the Sabres had acquired during the season because they didn’t have any future Hall of Fame goalies on the roster. That sent the series to Buffalo, where they completed the sweep with two more overtime wins. You might remember the second one:

The epilogue: Ray Bourque’s Bruins had seemed like they were this close. They’d been to the Stanley Cup final in 1988 and 1990, and had made back-to-back trips to the conference final in 1991 and 1992. But this upset seemed to spell the end of the team’s run as top contenders, and they wouldn’t see the third round again until their Cup win in 2011.

The team: The 2002-03 Mighty Ducks

The regular season: The Mighty Ducks were coming off a 2001-02 season that saw them rack up 116 points, run away with the Presidents’ Trophy and capture another Stanley Cup. That team had been almost impossibly stacked with Hall of Famers, and most of them were back for an encore.

The 2002-03 Ducks said goodbye to Dominik Hasek, but replaced him with Curtis Joseph and added rookie Henrik Zetterberg. They finished the year 48-20-10-4 for 110 points, setting up a first-round meeting with the eighth-seeded Mighty Ducks.

The disaster: The Ducks took the first two games in Detroit, including a triple-overtime marathon in the opener won by Paul Kariya. That wasn’t good, but it was hardly a reason to panic. After all, the 2002 team had lost their first two on home ice too, falling behind 2-0 to the Canucks before Nicklas Lidstrom’s center ice bomb flipped the series. Surely, something like that would happen again.

But then it didn’t. The Ducks won two more tight ones, finishing the series off in overtime of Game 4, and the defending champs were done.

The epilogue: Every collapse needs a few scapegoats, and the Ducks found two. The first was Joseph, who saw Hasek return to reclaim the starter’s job. The second was head coach Dave Lewis, who’d had the enervable task of taking over for Scotty Bowman. He lasted one more year before being replaced by the man who’d coached the Ducks to that 2003 upset: Mike Babcock. He’d suffer through another stunning first-round exit in 2006 before leading the Ducks back to another Cup in 2008.

The team: The 1992-93 Bruins

The regular season: Sure, we already did a 1992-93 upset up above with the Hawks and Blues. What can we say, the 1992-93 season was a good one for stunning upsets, and just about everything else.

That year’s Bruins were even better than the Hawks, finishing 51-26-7 for 109 points. That gave them the second-best record in the NHL, and earned them a first-round gimme with the 86-point Sabres, who hadn’t even won a round in nearly a decade.

The disaster: Buffalo stole Game 1 in overtime on a goal by former Bruin Bob Sweeney. That was followed by a 34-save shutout from Grant Fuhr, who the Sabres had acquired during the season because they didn’t have any future Hall of Fame goalies on the roster. That sent the series to Buffalo, where they completed the sweep with two more overtime wins. You might remember the second one:

The epilogue: Ray Bourque’s Bruins had seemed like they were this close. They’d been to the Stanley Cup final in 1988 and 1990, and had made back-to-back trips to the conference final in 1991 and 1992. But this upset seemed to spell the end of the team’s run as top contenders, and they wouldn’t see the third round again until their Cup win in 2011.

The team: The 2000-01 Ottawa Senators

The regular season: After faceplanting out of the starting gate as an expansion franchise, the Senators had firmly established themselves as a very good team. They’d made the playoffs in 1997, won a round in 1998 and racked up 103 points during the 1998-99 season. Two years later, they shattered that franchise record by going 48-21-9-4 for 109 points.

That earned them a first-round matchup with a Maple Leafs team that had barely snuck into the playoffs with a 90-point season. It was the second straight year the two teams had met in the first round, as a provincial rivalry was starting to take its first steps.

The disaster: First things first – this is the year that brought us Harry Neale’s infamous “take a big bite out of my ass” moment. Just wanted to make sure I mentioned that.

The playoffs opened with what was just about the ideal game for defensive-minded Sens coach Jacques Martin: a 0-0 tied through 60 minutes. But Mats Sundin’s long-distance bomb – PING! – earned the Leafs the win for the Leafs, and they followed that up with a second straight shutout by (who else) Curtis Joseph in Game 2. The series headed back to Toronto, where it looked like the Sens might be blanked again before they rallied to send Game 3 to overtime. But that just set the stage for the biggest moment of Cory Cross’s career, and the deflated Sens basically rolled over in Game 4.

The epilogue: While the loss was tough, the worst part of this story is that it played right into what was already becoming a narrative around the
The Athletic LOADED: 04.17.2019

1141411  Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Jets rediscover last year's Stanley Cup Playoffs form vs. Blues

Iain MacIntyre | @imacSportsnet
April 17, 2019, 1:55 AM

After an uneven 82-game regular season that saw them decline by 15 points, and two more playoff losses on home ice, the Winnipeg Jets went to St. Louis and rediscovered the formidable form that brought them within three wins of the Stanley Cup Final last spring.

Kyle Connor’s calm tap-in from Mark Scheifele’s centring pass at 6:02 of overtime gave the Jets a 2-1 win against the St. Louis Blues and a 2-2 tie in their first-round series that seemed improbable after the Jets lost their first two games in Winnipeg.

But they looked like a team transformed in St. Louis, handling the Blues 6-3 on Sunday to climb back in the series and then following with Tuesday’s powerful performance even rookie miracle-worker Jordan Binnington was unable to ruin from his place in the St. Louis net.

Binnington, the 25-year-old who went 24-5-1 to magnificently seize his National Hockey League chance after the Blues promoted him from the minors in January, was superb again on Tuesday. And still it wasn’t enough for St. Louis.

He made 37 saves but after the last of them, Scheifele collected his own rebound to Binnington’s right, briefly froze the netminder and then slid the puck to Connor for his third goal in three games. Connor scored only three times in the Jets’ 17-game playoff run a year ago when Winnipeg was one of the Cup favourites.

No one was picking them this year.

Although the Jets finished ahead of the Blues on a tie-breaker, St. Louis was the best team in the NHL in the second half of the season. The Jets finished the season 2-4-1. They looked like two teams speeding in opposite directions.

But the best skaters the last two games were nearly all Jets: the Scheifele-Connor-Blake Wheeler line, defenceman Dustin Byfuglien, winger Patrik Laine.
No one will know until Game 5 on Thursday if the Jets are really back, or whether the last two games were merely another fleeting summit in a season of peaks and valleys. But it has been a while since Winnipeg looked this good.

"Now we're fired up," Jets captain Blake Wheeler said. "Obviously we came in here in a hole and with a job to do and mission accomplished. We're playing well. It's a helluva series."

Yes, it is.

Obviously stung by their performance on Sunday, the Bluesouthshot the Jets 8-0 in the first 10 minutes Tuesday. But Winnipeg goalie Connor Hellebuyck was sharp, his teammates settled themselves with the help of a power play and the Jets gradually took over the game from there.

Shots were 39-24 for Winnipeg over the final 56 minutes.

And yet, Binnington had the Blues 12 1/2 minutes away from a 3-1 series lead before Scheifele worked a give-and-go with Connor to tie Game 4 1-1 at 7:33 of the third period.

Scheifele reached bravely to redirect the return pass into the top corner as he crashed into Binnington. The Jets’ centre, who had seven shots on goal and 11 attempts, ended up on the ice with Binnington’s stick.

He heaved it away. If only the Jets could do the same with Binnington, but the Calder Trophy candidate followed Winnipeg’s tying goal by making a succession of close-range saves against Brandon Tanev, Nikolaj Ehlers, Connor and Laine as the Blues were being overrun. He also somehow saved a double deflection last touched by Wheeler.

"Heckuva play for those two guys," Wheeler said of Scheifele’s finish from Connor on the tying goal. "When he gets going downhill like that, he’s pretty tough to stop. That’s Mark Scheifele, man."

Hellebuyck was as perfect as Binnington until Vladimir Tarasenko made it 1-0 35 seconds into the third period on a St. Louis power play. With Mathieu Perreault in the penalty box for a high cross-check — the Jet doubled-down by taking another careless penalty late in regulation time — Tarasenko lasered a shot from the left-wing circle past Hellebuyck’s glove.

The goal imperilled the Jets, but did not deter them.

"The consistency comes from a belief in what you’re seeing," Winnipeg coach Paul Maurice said. "It’s a harder sell for me to tell you that after Games 1 and 2, but we liked big chunks of our games there. And the players know it. So even when you’re down one and you’re facing a goaltender that’s having a real special night, it really isn’t an option for you, how you’re going to go forward. You’re not going to change anything because you like the way you’re playing. This was our best game."

Binnington had not lost consecutive NHL games until Tuesday. The two losses equal the Blues’ second-longest losing streak since December.

"We knew it was going to be a hard series, right?" Blues defenceman Alex Pietrangelo said. "We took two in their building. So, regroup and hopefully steal another one in there.

"The series is tied for a reason; both teams have played well. You don’t see the road team steal two in each building very often but it makes us feel good going into the next one."

We’re guessing the Jets feel even better.

Sportsnet.ca / Auston Matthews’s decision to switch sticks pays off for Maple Leafs

Chris Johnston | @reporterchris
April 16, 2019, 8:39 PM

TORONTO — Nothing is sacred when it comes to searching out an edge at playoff time.

Not even a sniper’s stick.

Hence the decision by Auston Matthews to switch up his most important piece of equipment on Monday night, swapping out the Bauer model he’s been loyal to throughout his three-year NHL career for one from Warrior.

The Toronto Maple Leafs star made good use of his new tool, beating Tuukka Rask with a quick release for his first goal in these playoffs during a 3-2 victory over the Boston Bruins.

"I guess I’ll have to keep using it," Matthews told Sportsnet on Tuesday.

The performance of a stick is paramount for an elite shooter like Matthews, who has scored 117 times in 228 career games. He indicated he was looking for a little different feel after being held without a goal for the final four regular-season games and the first two of the playoffs.

It’s not an insignificant change.

Matthews has a unique release and fires the puck with pinpoint accuracy. He’s fond of a whippy 80 flex and the Joe Sakic curve, and hasn’t been known to tinker much since scoring four goals in his NHL debut.

"I’ve found a pretty comfortable one and I really like it," he said in a 2017 Sportsnet feature on his stick.

The goal Matthews scored midway through Monday’s game came on his 11th shot and 23rd attempt of the first-round series. Heading into Game 4 on Wednesday, he leads the Leafs in scoring chances (17) and attempts (25), and sits second in shots on goal (12) and third in expected goals (1.14).

There are very few Grade-A looks available at this time of year, especially in the areas where Matthews does most of his damage: The bottom of the left circle or off the rush.

"You want to obviously score and create and produce," he said. "If you’re getting shots and opportunities from the slot and they’re not going in you’ve just got to keep shooting and stay patient."

The 21-year-old centre drew praise from head coach Mike Babcock after the Leafs took a 2-1 series lead. He could have had more than one goal in Game 3.

"He didn’t turn over the puck, looked after it and then was rewarded," said Babcock. "He’s a proud guy who wants to be good every night and wants to score, loves to score."

Matthews was held to one goal in last year’s seven-game playoff loss to Boston despite producing the most shots in the series. It was a frustrating stretch. This time Babcock sensed a little more calm when he was held off the scoresheet through two games in Boston.

"I don’t think he was feeling the pressure," said Babcock. "You’re a year older, you’ve been around, you look around the league and you see other real high-end players with no points. That’s playoff hockey. Sometimes your teammates got to buy you some time.

"I feel if he plays real well without the puck, he’s going to have the puck a ton and in the end he’ll score."

Especially if he’s got the right tool to do it with.
DENVER — Johnny Gaudreau is not the reason the Calgary Flames are reeling, down 2-1 against a surging Avalanche squad.

That has more to do with Nathan MacKinnon.

Heading into the matchup, and throughout the series, you can’t mention one without the other. Two superstars coming off 99-point seasons, who are having dramatically different impacts on this series.

One is running away with it, the other has been pedestrian at best.

Gaudreau’s playoff performance has been a concern in Calgary for several years, as many wonder if the undersized winger is capable of elevating his game when physicality increases, whistles are muted and time and space are at a premium.

Gaudreau was a non-factor in the Flames’ four-game loss to Anaheim two years ago, picking up just two assists and finishing minus-4 with eight shots.

So far in this series the storyline has been similar as he has one assist.

“Everyone has got to be better – not just one guy,” said Gaudreau, well aware the questioning was pointing out his obvious shortcomings this spring.

“We’re a team here. We’re a team of 23 here and all of us are going to be better next game and that’s one of the things we talked about.”

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He’s certainly right, as his team has far too many passengers on board. It’s incumbent on Gaudreau to be one of the drivers.

Three provinces to the east the people in Toronto are preparing to commission a statue of Mitch Marner for his playoff efforts throughout the Leafs’ 2-1 series edge.

He and Gaudreau are built and wired much the same way as speedy, diminutive playmakers. One has found a way to make a difference offensively and defensively.

The other hasn’t.

“Obviously I haven’t gotten too many looks – they’ve done a good job defensively,” said Gaudreau, 25, following sobering team meetings Tuesday dissecting a 6-2 loss in which the Flames surrendered 56 shots.

“Last game felt like we were in the d-zone most of the game, which was unfortunate.”

They sure were, as Avalanche coach Jared Bednar was delighted in matching up MacKinnon’s line (with Gabriel Landeskog and Alex Kerfoot) with Gaudreau’s line (alongside Sean Monahan and Elias Lindholm).

It’s a sad commentary to point out what a mismatch it is on how Calgary’s top line has performed early on in this series.

Gaudreau and his gang need to take a different tack to be as effective as they were before the all-star break when they were one of the league’s most dangerous trios.

“In the end everyone is going to look to your top players in a series,” said Flames assistant GM Craig Conroy. “Johnny is not going to be a physical guy. For me, Johnny has got to figure out what’s going to make him effective in this series.

“When you’re the best player they’re coming after you and you have to relish that. It probably hasn’t gone the way he’s wanted it, but we’ve got a long series here and we’re going to need Johnny to figure out how to have an impact on the game and once he does that will spark the whole team.”

Let’s be clear, a hat trick from Gaudreau Monday probably couldn’t have bridged the gap between the high-flying Avs and the back-on-their-heels Flames.

Most of the questions thrown at Flames players Tuesday revolved around how the Flames can stop MacKinnon, whose speed is rivalled only by Connor McDavid.

His two goals, assist, drawn penalty and four shots in the first period alone blew the game wide open.

The Avs turned Game 3 into a track meet, which doesn’t suit a Flames club that was significantly outplayed the last two games.

“Obviously he’s a good player,” said Gaudreau, who tied for seventh in league scoring this year with MacKinnon.

“He’s playing well right now. He’s finding the net, he’s skating with a lot of speed, so as a team we have to shut him down. Our line will probably be matched against him so hopefully we’ll play in the offensive zone a little more next game against them.”

That would sure help ease the pressure on Mike Smith, who has unquestionably been the Flames’ MVP this spring.

It’s certainly worth noting Gaudreau played a significant role offensively four years back when the Flames upset Vancouver. On any given night he can finish with five points.

The concern is, his impact on games the last few months has diminished significantly. It needs to turn and soon.

“We’ve got to get back to the way we were playing all year,” said Gaudreau, whose club is vowing not to panic — after all, a win by the Western Conference champs Wednesday gives them home ice advantage again.

“It’s a little wakeup call there. We learned a lot of things from last game. We didn’t play like we’ve played all year and we know that.

“We’ll be better.”
Here, in his own words, Hutchinson shares his story with us, smiling the entire while.

My wife, Jenna, she owns a bakery in Winnipeg.

Years ago, she was doing a custom cake and she had to paint the name on a disc for the cake. The person's name was Lilah, so as she's writing, she says, "That's a really pretty name." This was way before we were even thinking of kids. Then she said, "If I ever have a daughter, I'd love to name her Lilah."

Right away, I loved the name too.

When I was in Springfield, Mass., playing for the AHL Thunderbirds this year, my wife went for a checkup and got an envelope with the baby's gender inside.

She got her sister, Ashley, who also works at the bakery, to make gender-reveal cupcakes. My wife flew in to visit, and she had a box of cupcakes. She had that envelope for almost a month, though. I can't believe she didn't take a peek.

She wanted to wait for me to share that moment, so it was pretty cool that we did a gender-reveal to still get that surprise and still have time to get everything ready.

As soon as we found out we were having a daughter, we looked at each other.

"Lilah?"

"Yep."

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It'd be cool to have a boy, but my wife has two sisters and a brother and just seeing how the girls take care of their dad later on in life, it's something where if I only have daughters, I'll be content with that. Having a boy would be something cool, too.

I've had a good mindset all season [despite switching cities three times]. I tried to be in a happy place and enjoy the moment. Since I've got to Toronto, it's been easier to be in that mindset.

We had a doctor's checkup last week, and the doctor said, "it's probably best you get induced right away."

The team was unbelievable. Kyle and Babs were really supportive of it, making sure I enjoyed the moment. They wanted the focus to be family first, even though it's the playoffs. Hockey is hockey. Family is family.

They were unbelievable.

She ended up having a C-section after a few hours of labour. I was there during it all.

My wife did an amazing job.

Her mom and her sister were able to fly in and be there for the birth. My parents drove in from Barrie, so it was great to have them all there.

It's kinda funny, y'know? Going into it, I don't do well with blood and stuff like that, but you're so caught up in the moment that you don't notice anything besides the baby.

I'm glad I cut the cord. Glad I was there for every single moment of it.

Hearing the baby cry for the first time and being able to hold her was just... unbelievable.

Six pounds, four ounces. We knew she'd be a bit smaller, but she's happy and healthy. Just content. A great baby.

Everyone tells me she looks like more me. She has my mouth. I think she has her mom's eyes. She has really dark blue eyes. It's neat to see.

So, it was a couple nights just sleeping at the hospital, missing the first two games, but it was great.

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John Hufnagel | Sportsnet.ca

Hufnagel says it's no coincidence the Leafs are looking at a Montreal Canadiens-like streak in the playoffs.

Many times the Leafs have been in a spot like this before — facing a 2-1 series deficit.

But they haven't been able to reach the same level of success. They've been eliminated in the first round three times in the past five years.

The Leafs are in a different spot this year.

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The NHL playoffs are in full swing.

The Carolina Hurricanes are back in the playoffs after a four-year absence.

They're playing against the New Jersey Devils, who are the defending champions. The Hurricanes are looking to advance to the second round of the playoffs for the first time since 2012.

The Hurricanes are led by forward Teuvo Teravainen, who was the team's top scorer last season with 33 goals and 38 assists.

The Devils are led by goaltender Mackenzie Blackwood, who was the team's starting goalie last season and helped the team win the Stanley Cup.

The Devils have a strong defense led by Nate Thompson, who was the team's top scorer last season with 20 goals and 37 assists.

The Hurricanes and the Devils are set to play a best-of-seven series in the first round of the playoffs.

The first game is set for Saturday, April 20.
The first game I watched in the hospital with my wife and her parents and sister. It’s a pretty surreal moment: holding my daughter and watching the Leaf game and enjoying it.

Then Saturday night, we had just got home from the hospital and were able to watch Game 2 a little more comfortable from there. A special experience.

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Once the baby was born, all the guys were sending me texts. Jake Gardiner and his wife sent my wife Uber Eats gift cards. Everyone went above and beyond. We felt thankful for everyone in our lives who reached out.

I didn’t even realize Jake Muzzin and his wife are ready to have a daughter. We were out on the ice Monday, and he said, “Yeah, I got one coming too!” After the game, I’m sure we’ll have a big talk about it and hopefully everything goes as well for him as it did for me.

Now that I have a daughter, it’s a weird moment. This is the first time during a season where hockey wasn’t the No. 1 thing on my mind, where it wasn’t the No. 1 priority for a few days.

I’m excited to be back now and get back in my normal routine for the rest of my playing career, but it’s crazy how instantly having a child changes your whole life, your whole perspective.

My wife and my daughter have the same middle name. My wife thought it would be nice to share between the two of them.

Lilah Rae Hutchinson.

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Sportsnet.ca / Flames could be in for short playoff run if poor play continues

Eric Francis | @EricFrancis

April 16, 2019, 2:14 AM

DENVER – Nathan MacKinnon has officially taken over this series.

The first hint of the Avalanche star’s heroics came at the end of Game 2 when his overtime snipe in Calgary equaled the series.

It was his first goal in 12 shots.

On Monday it snowballed.

By the end of the first period alone the speedy centre had two power play goals, an assist, four shots and he drew a penalty in an easy win to put the Avalanche up 2-1 in the series.

By the end of the period Colorado had outshot Calgary 21-8, outscored them 3-0 and had helped make history when Calgary-born Cale Makar became the first defenceman in NHL lore to make his NHL debut in the playoffs and score a goal in the same game.

From there the Avalanche cruised to a 6-2 win that saw the hosts electrify the Pepsi Center by humiliating a Flames team that would have lost by at least a touchdown had it not been for the brilliance of Mike Smith.

Again.

It got so bad the coach and Smith were involved in a discussion in the second intermission revolving around whether he wanted a mercy-pull.

“Yes there was,” admitted Smith, who had faced 40 shots at that point to be the Flames best player for the third straight game.

“I honestly just didn’t want to come out of that game and have Ritter (David Rittich) have to go in for the third like that. You want to be in there battling with your team no matter what the score is.”

It’s unclear whether his teammates felt the same way.

There’s a real sense at this point the vintage performance from the Flames’ 37-year-old netminder is being wasted, as he faced an unheard of 56 shots all told.

The easy thing would be to point out MacKinnon is the only superstar in the series to play as such, but this one wasn’t on Johnny Gaudreau.

It’s on the entire Flames squad, which promised to be better after Game 2.

They promised to be hungrier.

They promised to be grittier.

They promise to be done in five games if they continue to play like this.

“We got down and then we just played high-risk hockey the rest of the night and they made us pay,” said Flames captain Mark Giordano.

“We’ve got to regroup here and our compete level has to go way up. There wasn’t much good, honestly, throughout the night. We made that team look and feel good all night.”

The western conference champs were manhandled from the get-go by an eighth-placed Avalanche team that is on a tremendous role of late, thanks to blazing speed and stellar netminding.

On Monday they didn’t need the latter—they just needed MacKinnon to get things rolling.

The 23-year-old set the tone early, giving the hosts endless confidence heading into Wednesday’s Game 4.

His first goal came eight minutes in on a five-on-three that saw him use Fantenberg with his speed before setting up Makar in the slot for a goal that had a raucous gathering on their feet celebrating when it was announced it was his first goal.

Fact is, they already knew, as the anticipation of his arrival has been as high as the team’s current confidence.

They can thank MacKinnon and the Flames for that.

When Ian Cole is allowed to come in alone twice in one shorthanded shift against you, there are pressing mental lapses that need to be addressed.

“The penalties were definitely a recipe for disaster,” said Smith.

“You go five-on-three for two minutes with the guys they have over there its tough battling back from that. Tough start.”

Smith was hung out to dry all night long, facing endless odd man rushes and point-blank shots.

That was the case midway through the game when Matt Nieto scored his second shorthanded goal of the series.

One of the lone bright spots in the Flames lineup, Sam Bennett, got his fourth point in the series when he scored his first goal.

It was his first goal in 12 shots.

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One of the lone bright spots in the Flames lineup, Sam Bennett, got his fourth point in the series when he scored his first goal.
Bennett tried his best to drag his team into the fight in the third by trying to fight Matt Calvert, earning him a ten-minute misconduct.

Matthew Tkachuk, who has also been silenced since Game 1, received a double minor and misconduct late for dropping the mitts with Gabriel Landeskog and giving him a punch that bloodied the Avs captain.

The few signs of fight from a Calgary team desperate to come up with a response so sorely needed to a monumental beat down.

“We won the west but that doesn’t matter now,” said Elias Lindholm.

“We know we’re a good team. Right now we’re not playing our game – our details are in no man’s land I think. We’ve got to get back to playing the right way every shift.”

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Sportsnet.ca / Flames Thoughts: Flames have yet to reach full potential in playoffs

Derek Wills | @Fan960Wills
April 16, 2019, 8:42 PM

After two disappointing performances, the Calgary Flames head into an important Game 4 looking to avoid a major hole in their series with the Colorado Avalanche.

Here are some Flames Thoughts from the first three games of this first-round series.

FAR FROM THEIR BEST

Over the course of 82 regular season games, the Flames were the best team in the Western Conference. They finished with 50 wins and 107 points, the second-highest totals in the 46-season history of the Atlanta/Calgary Flames franchise.

They also finished a whopping 17 points ahead of the Avalanche, who didn’t punch their ticket to the post-season until April 4, the third-to-last day of the regular season. With all of that said, three games into their best-of-seven series versus the Flames, the Avalanche have looked like the better team. As strange as this might sound, that might be a good thing for the Flames. Here’s why.

If the Flames were playing well and still being dominated by the Avalanche, it would be difficult to be optimistic about their chances to win the series. The bottom line is the Flames haven’t played anywhere close to their potential in the first three games. Sure, they were good in Game 1, but if Mike Smith wasn’t great in that one, who knows how it would have played out. The Flames weren’t very good in Game 2 but were still less than three minutes away from taking a 2-0 series lead. The Avalanche scored with their goaltender on the bench and an extra attacker on the ice to tie the game and then completed the comeback on a beauty by Nathan Mackinnon in overtime, just seconds after Michael Frolik had a great chance at the other end of the ice.

While I thought that tough-to-swallow loss would be a wake-up call for the Flames, it clearly wasn’t as they were even worse in Game 3. In my opinion, they are too talented, too deep, too good, and too well coached to keep playing bad. After talking to Flames coaches and players today, I predict they’ll bounce back by playing their best game of the series on Wednesday night. If they do, we’ll see if that’s enough against a good Avalanche team that’s playing its best hockey of the season.

BEST OF THE BUNCH

In my opinion, the two best Flames in the first three games of this series have been Smith and forward Sam Bennett.

Smith was world-class in Game 1, when he stopped all 26 shots, added an assist and was the First Star in a 4-0 Flames win. As strange as this might sound, the 37-year-old may have been even better in Game 2, when he put his team in a position to win a game that they deserved to lose, turning aside 38 of 39 shots in a 3-2 overtime loss.

While Smith wasn’t quite as sharp in Game 3, he was probably the Flames’ best player despite surrendering six goals on 56 shots. As a number of his teammates said after the game, the Flames hung their goaltender out to dry at Pepsi Center on Monday night.

Smith is playing his best hockey of the season — maybe in many seasons. If the Flames start playing the right way in front of their veteran goaltender, Smith could do for the 2019 Flames what he did for the 2012 Coyotes — take them deep into the Stanley Cup Playoffs.

Another bright spot for the Flames in the first three games of the series has been Bennett. You could make a strong argument that Bennett has played his best hockey as an 18-year-old, a 20-year-old, and now, as a 22-year-old in the Stanley Cup Playoffs. Bennett has been both productive — he leads the team with four points — and physical as he’s tied for third on the team with 11 hits.

The man sporting a Lanny McDonald-like moustache has shown a willingness to go to the tough areas, as he did when he redirected a Rasmus Andersson point shot past Philipp Grubauer in Game 3. Five seasons into his NHL career, I think it’s now safe to say the highest draft pick in franchise history (fourth-overall in 2014) is wired to be at his best when games mean the most.

NO MATCH FOR MACKINNON

Even though the Flames managed to keep Nathan MacKinnon off the scoresheet in a 4-0 shutout win in Game 1, the Avalanche centre was still extremely dangerous with five shots on goal and 12 shot attempts. MacKinnon was equally as dangerous in Game 2, and on his 12th shot and 24th attempt of the series, he finally put the puck past Mike Smith at 8:28 in overtime, beating the Flames goaltender with a sizzling snapshot to give the Avalanche a 3-2 win.

Unfortunately for the Flames, MacKinnon was just getting started.

The first-overall pick in the 2013 NHL Draft scored a pair of power play goals and added an assist in Colorado’s convincing 6-2 victory over Calgary in Game 3. Going into Tuesday’s games, MacKinnon led the NHL in post-season shots with 27, was tied for the league-lead in power play goals with two and second in goals with three. MacKinnon also leads all forwards in time on ice, having played an average of 24:07 in the first three games.

MacKinnon’s combination of speed, skill and size makes him almost impossible to stop — but the Flames have to find a way to slow him down, both literally and figuratively. While it’s a lot easier said than done, having tighter gaps at the blue line, which will be easier for the defencemen if the forwards apply back pressure, would be a good start. Ultimately, the Flames have to find a way to make life as difficult for MacKinnon as the Avalanche have for fellow 99-point producer Johnny Gaudreau.

CHASING THEIR TAILS

Between trying to catch MacKinnon and company on the ice and the Avalanche on the scoreboard, the Flames spent far too much time chasing in Games 2 and 3. If they’re going to bounce back in Game 4, the Flames are going to have to play a much more structured brand of hockey.

The Avalanche recorded a franchise-record high 56 shots in Game 3, which is exactly twice the number of shots that the Flames surrendered on average during the regular season, when they led the NHL with just
March, with a hard right hand midway through the first period of what The 33-year-old Ovechkin dropped Svechnikov, who turned 19 in late September.

forward missed the entire 2018-19 season after tearing his right ACL in two seasons with the Grand Rapids Griffins in the AHL. The 22-year-old by the Detroit Red Wings in 2015 and has spent the majority of the past two seasons with the Grand Rapids Griffins in the AHL. Evgeny made a reference to famous horror-movie killer Freddy Krueger from the A Nightmare on Elm Street series in a post from his verified Instagram account — and he made sure to tag Ovechkin.

The veiled threat is the first line of an eerie nursery rhyme-style song from the movie series that goes as follows:

One, two, Freddy’s coming for you
Three, four, better lock your door
Five, six, grab your crucifix
Seven, eight, gonna stay up late
Nine, ten, never sleep again

Evgeny Svechnikov, who was born on Halloween — which makes the Freddy Krueger reference all the more fitting — was drafted 19th overall by the Detroit Red Wings in 2015 and has spent the majority of the past two seasons with the Grand Rapids Griffins in the AHL. The 22-year-old forward missed the entire 2018-19 season after tearing his right ACL in his team’s pre-season finale in late September.

The 33-year-old Ovechkin dropped Svechnikov, who turned 19 in late March, with a hard right hand midway through the first period of what ended up being a 5-0 Hurricanes win. The rookie was out before he hit the ground and the back of his head smacked forcefully against the ice.

The team announced Tuesday that Svechnikov is listed as doubtful to suit up in Thursday’s Game 4 in which the Hurricanes will attempt to even the series at two games apiece.

It was the first time Ovechkin had dropped the gloves for a fight since a 2010 scrap with Brandon Dubinsky.

“First of all I hope he’s OK,” Ovechkin told reporters at PNC Arena following the game. “You’re right: I’m not a big fighter … He asked me to fight, I said, ‘Let’s go, yeah.’ So, I hope he’s OK. You don’t want to see a guy get hurt or something.”

Hurricanes head coach Rod Brind’Amour had a difficult time talking about the fight following the game, but suffice it to say he wasn’t happy about how it unfolded.

“How do you comment on it?” Brind’Amour said. “It’s a little bit tough because I just heard Ovie talk about it: he said our guy challenged him. If that’s the case, it’s a little different. But if you watch the video, because I got to watch it, he slashes him twice, Ovie – whack, whack – and then Svetch gives it back. And then, I don’t know if there’s words exchanged, but one guy’s gloves come off way first. And that’s Ovie, it’s not our guy.”

28.1 shots against per game. Because it’s tough to stick to playing structured hockey when you fall behind by multiple goals early in a game — as the Flames did on Monday night when the Avalanche took a 3-0 lead before the 17-minute mark — ideally the Flames would love to score first on Wednesday night.

If they don’t, they can’t stop playing defence in an attempt to create offence.

SWING GAME

As poorly as the Flames played in Game 3, a win in Game 4 would completely change the complexion of the series. After losing Game 1, the Avalanche stole home ice advantage from the Flames by winning Game 2. If the Flames rebound from Monday’s lopsided loss with a win at Pepsi Center on Wednesday, they would regain home ice advantage going into Game 5 at Scotiabank Saddledome on Friday.

Historically speaking, Game Four 4 been pivotal in best-of-seven series that aren’t already at 3-0. In NHL history, when a series is at 2-1, the winner of Game 4 has gone on to win 330 of 492 series, or 67.1 per cent of the time.

The Washington Capitals superstar shocked the sports world Monday when he knocked out the Carolina Hurricanes rookie during a first-period fight, and the elder Svechnikov took notice.

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Tavares, who potted 47 goals in the regular season, has been going head-to-head with four-time Selke Trophy winner Patrice Bergeron for most of this first-round series against the Bruins and is coming out on top so far.

“You can’t take a second off,” Tavares said of the challenge going against the Bruins star.

Tavares is making every second count. He’s averaging 19:10 of ice time per game in the playoffs, which is up only five seconds from the regular season. However, he’s getting two more shifts per game (26.3) than in the regular season when he averaged 24.

“His ice time is almost the same, it’s just his shifts are 10 seconds less,” Babcock pointed out. “It’s always interesting to me each night, we’re talking about ice time, but what I do is I just look at their shifts and how many shifts they had and did they go long … Our game, the way it is, if you play too long, you’re building up lactic acid and you can’t perform at the highest level. In order to play defence, you’ve got to be fresh. He’s done a real good job of that.”

Tavares, who finished with a career-high plus-19 rating, credits Babcock and Toronto’s coaches for helping him take some steps defensively this
Monday night’s game was the first home playoff game in Toronto for the Oakville, Ont., native.

“Seeing all the blue and white in the stands and driving in to Scotiabank Arena yesterday was phenomenal,” he said.

And Tavares put forward an inspired effort, picking up a beautiful assist on the Andreas Johnsson power-play goal. He, Marner and Hyman teamed up with the defensive pair of Jake Muzzin and Nikita Zaitsev to hold Boston’s top line—Brad Marchand, Bergeron and David Pastrnak—to seven shots and no points. In fact, Bergeron and Marchand were both on the ice for Toronto’s two power-play goals.

“He’s reliable, he’s strong,” Muzzin said when asked about Tavares. “We need a group of five against that top line. Obviously, they are dangerous. With Hymie, Mitch and Johnny, we’ve done a pretty good job of shutting them down and we’re going to have to continue getting better for the next game.”

After torching Toronto a year ago, Boston’s top line has contributed just one even-strength goal (Marchand in Game 2) in the series so far.

Tavares even got the better of Bergeron in the faceoff circle on Monday, winning 10 of 16 draws against him. Overall, Tavares has won 59 per cent of his faceoffs in the series, which is up from 54.4 per cent in the regular season. Meanwhile, Bergeron is down to 49.2 per cent in the series after winning 56.6 per cent of his faceoffs in the regular season.

“It’s not easy,” Tavares said of his success at the dot. “When you see someone consistently over a series they get more and more comfortable with you. I kind of compare it to almost a (pitcher) and a batter so there’s always adjustments being made. You have to be prepared for every, single second you’re out there against them."

Tavares on containing Bergeron: “You can’t take a second off"

The Leafs have a done a great job of containing Patrice Bergeron and the Bruins’ top line through three games. John Tavares and Jake Muzzin discuss the challenges of playing against an elite player like Bergeron.

For the third straight playoffs, Auston Matthews entered Game 3 without a point and for the third straight time he came through on home ice. Last year, he described his Game 3 tally as a relief, hoping it may lead to a more relaxed approach and more goals. But he didn’t manage another goal the rest of the series and the Leafs fell in seven games.

So, Babcock was asked if last night’s power-play marker may loosen up the 21-year-old centre.

“Auston Matthews scored his first goal of the playoffs in Game 3 and despite his postseason struggles prior to that, Mike Babcock says he wasn’t feeling the pressure heading into the series against the Bruins. Frederik Andersen is off to a strong start to the series with a .939 save percentage through three games. What does Babcock notice about his goalie right now?

“Well, I mean, we’re three games in,” the coach said before knocking on a wood panel behind him.

Andersen’s career playoff save percentage is .914.

At the start of every practice, the players congregate at centre ice for a stretch and usually someone scoots into the middle to lead it. On Tuesday, no one was at the dot, leading Babcock to loudly ask who should get in the middle.

A couple players yelled, “Naz!”

That would be Nazem Kadri, who is suspended for the rest of the series. Kadri smiled and moved to the centre of the team. He was a full participant in practice, but did not speak to reporters afterwards, which is unusual. Per a team spokesperson, Kadri won’t address the media until he’s done serving his suspension.

“To me it’s just like an injured player,” said Babcock. “He’s not available, the rest of us are moving on here. Ideally, if we play well enough, Naz will join us again.”

Leaves Ice Chips: Kadri won’t meet with media until after suspension

Nazem Kadri led the Maple Leafs’ stretch before Tuesday’s practice, but we won’t hear from him until the conclusion of the series against the Bruins and after he’s done serving his suspension. Mark Masters has more.

With Kadri out, William Nylander shifted over to the third-line centre spot.

“He was good,” Babcock said. “I’m actually going to meet with him here in a bit and show him a lot of good clips in the defensive zone. We need him to really commit defensively, that’s way different job than being a winger. To have success, he’s got to be good without the puck.”

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TSN.CA / Marner putting two-way game on full display

Kristen Shilton

TORONTO – Mitch Marner has built his reputation on the kind of elite-level offence that populates highlight reels and brings Maple Leafs fans out of their seats.

But it was his willingness to take on the blue-collar role of shot blocker late in Game 3 of the Leafs’ first-round series with the Boston Bruins that was still a major talking point the day after Toronto’s 3-2 win.

Marner took centre stage in the final 10 seconds as the Bruins pressed for the tying goal with an extra attacker. As David Pastrnak wound up for a slap shot, Marner hurled his body in front of the puck, falling face-first to the ice.

Pastrnak corralled the puck on his stick again with Marner lying mere feet away, staring directly at a shot that ricocheted off his body right before
the final buzzer sounded to give the Leafs a 2-1 lead in the best-of-seven series.

“There are dentists for a reason, so whatever,” said Marner after Toronto’s practice on Tuesday. “Lucky enough it didn’t hit me in the face; it could have been a tough result if it did. I knew if [the shot] got in there it was going to be a tough shot for Freddie [Andersen] to save. It was going to be low and hard and I didn’t know what could happen, so I just tried to sprawl my arms out as much as possible.”

Marner’s commitment in the dying moments impressed his teammates so much that they bucked tradition and swarmed him, instead of Andersen, immediately following the win.

“I think we were just screaming at each other,” said John Tavares. “I don’t remember saying a whole lot. But a hell of a job stepping right into a pretty good one-timer and blocking another one on the ice. Big play for us.”

While a few Leafs were surprised Marner escaped the play without any lasting damage, Pastnak’s initial windup did leave a mark.

“The first shot was just a quick sting, but those shots always kind of do that for a brief little second and then it’s fine,” Marner said of being temporarily hobbled. “[After that] I just tried to starfish on him and take up as much space as I can on the ice. I was so close I didn’t think [the puck] was going to be able to get up too much. I don’t really know where it hit me. I didn’t really feel it anywhere.”

After the game, Leafs’ coach Mike Babcock called Marner’s sacrifice the epitome of “team building” and something his teammates could emulate.

“I think anyone on this team would have done it,” Marner said on Tuesday. “We’re determined in this locker room, we want to win games. If it didn’t hit me. [Zach] Hyman or [Jake Muzzin] would have gotten in the way of that. Everyone wants to win in this locker room and do whatever it takes.”

“We need everyone to have that mindset and that mentality,” Muzzin said. “That’s just a guy doing whatever it takes to keep the puck out of the net.”

A willingness to contribute at both ends of the ice was a hallmark of Marner’s career-best (and team-leading) 94-point regular season. Marner proved he could produce offensively in his first two NHL seasons, leading the Leafs in points last year as well with 69.

But it wasn’t until this third campaign that the 21-year-old unleashed a strong defensive game to match.

His play in his own zone is rooted in lessons learned during his days with the Ontario Hockey League’s London Knights. Under the tutelage of Mark and Dale Hunter, the team’s general manager and head coach respectively, Marner first learned how critical a sound 200-foot game would be to success at every level.

“The reason why [the Knights won a Memorial Cup in 2016] was because the [Hunters] made everyone buy into the defensive side of the puck and make sure you’re in lanes,” Marner explained.

“They really emphasized that. The first two years [in Toronto], I think I was cheating a little bit more for offence, trying to get more odd-man rushes and things like that. I think I’m realizing that, defensively speaking, you have to stop people in your own zone and get your chances offensively from that.”

Marner is averaging a point-per-game pace (two goals, one assist) through the first three games of these playoffs, but it’s the way he’s helped slow down the Bruins’ top scorers that’s becoming the larger story.

Along with linemates Tavares and Zach Hyman, plus the efforts of defencemen Jake Muzzin and Nikita Zaitsev, Marner has held Boston’s big line of Pastnak, Patrice Bergeron and Brad Marchand to a combined two points at even strength.

Marner’s ferocious backchecking was on full display in Game 3, frustrating the Bruins’ stars through the neutral zone and robbing them of momentum.

“For our line, it’s just making sure we’re being smart with the puck, when we get our chances, try to put it in as much as possible,” Marner said. “And when there’s not a play to make, try to put it behind them and get on their D and get on the cycle quickly. I think we’ve done a good job of that, but going forward it’s going to get harder.”

That may be the case, but Tavares has no doubt Marner is up to any challenge. The opportunity to play with the right winger was a major draw for Tavares in deciding to join the Leafs as a free agent last summer and Marner has more than delivered.

“I knew he was an extremely talented player and had a great hockey sense,” Tavares said. “But once you’re around him every day and playing with him game in, game out, there are always times that he wows you and [does] things that you’re very impressed by. He plays a big role for our team, and does it throughout every game.”

TORONTO – Auston Matthews knew the pressure was mounting.

It was there even before Nazem Kadri was suspended on Monday for the remainder of the Maple Leafs’ first-round NHL playoff series against Boston, tossed out for cross-checking Jake DeBrusk in the head in Saturday’s Game 2. Matthews had zero points in the series ahead of Monday’s Game 3, and had accumulated only two points total in his last nine postseason outings (all against the Bruins).

Now Kadri was unavailable, too, and the Leafs needed Matthews to be a star. Right on cue, the 21-year-old delivered a two-point night to help lead Toronto past Boston 3-2 in Game 3 to give them a 2-1 lead in their best-of-seven Eastern Conference series.

“He’s a proud guy, wants to be good every night, loves to score, wants to score, so that probably relieves a lot of pressure of him,” said Leafs coach Mike Babcock of Matthews’ performance. “I thought he was real good tonight, I thought he had real good legs, skated good, was real good defensively and stayed patient. Didn’t turn the puck over, looked after it, and then was rewarded.”

In addition to tallying his goal and assist on the night, Matthews sent four shots on net and recorded 59 per cent possession in 19:34 time on ice.

Matthews wasn’t the only top player who cranked it up for the Leafs, either. His linemate Andreas Johnsson contributed a power play goal and an assist in the victory as well, while Mitch Marner awed with a pair of jaw-dropping shot blocks in the final minute to preserve Toronto’s one-goal advantage.

In between, Toronto held the Bruins’ big line of Patrice Bergeron, Brad Marchand and David Pastrnak off the scoresheet entirely. By striking the right balance of physicality and speed, the Leafs unearthed a winning formula to hold the Bruins just enough at bay.

“I feel like we played much harder, we forced it hard and were heavier on the puck,” Johnsson said of his line. “We didn’t lose it too much so we...
didn’t have to backcheck a lot. It was more controlled play and so we didn’t have to waste a lot of energy in our zone.

Matthews in particular was buzzing with greater efficiency than he’d shown so far in the series, making quick transitions with the puck and working the cycle better to limit momentum-killing one-and-done rushes that plagued Toronto in Game 2.

It was Trevor Moore who got the ball rolling for the Leafs up front, scoring the team’s first opening goal of the series and his first-ever NHL playoff goal early in the second period. The euphoria of their 1-0 lead lasted less than a minute for the Leafs though, as sloppy defensive zone play caught up to them and David Krejci tallied an equalizer.

That was Matthews’ moment to strike. Seconds into Toronto’s second power play of the game, Matthews swiftly potted a pass from Johnsson past Tuukka Rask, the weight of countless expectations erupting off him in time with the crowd suddenly chanting his name.

“Just [felt] excitement,” Matthews said of the 2-1 marker. “It’s nice to get one; it’s just another level when you score in the playoffs, especially at home. I’ve said this before, it’s like an earthquake under you. The atmosphere tonight was unbelievable.”

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It was only in response to Kadri’s absence that Johnsson had been moved onto the Leafs’ top power play unit at all, and once Matthews’ mojo was flowing, he wasted no time returning the favour to his winger. On Toronto’s next power play, Matthews poched a puck out to John Tavares, who got it to Johnsson for the Leafs’ second-man advantage goal of the night. They finished the game 2-for-3 in that category.

The score was Johnsson’s first of the postseason as well, and like Matthews, he’d been without a point in the series prior to Monday’s game. In finally finding the back of the net, both players found some much-needed relief going forward.

“That was a beautiful goal [he scored] and a beautiful pass that he gave me,” assessed Matthews. “You get a couple goals like that under your belt and it gives you confidence, you get going. Hopefully it’s just a domino effect and we continue to produce and make plays.”

“[Johnsson] hadn’t been as good here lately, so it was good to see all the details in his game tonight,” added Babcock. “He’s quick, he’s smart, he can be real hard and tonight he had good details in his game. He was rewarded for that.”

Boston’s power play responded to Toronto’s scores, too, and Charlie Coyle used the man advantage to bring the Bruins within one late in the second period. It was on the Leafs to hold the fort from there, and they did — barely. Boston put all its muscle into a final push in the third frame, and that’s when Marner fearlessly stepped in front of two slap shots, refusing to cede an inch of ice.

“It doesn’t matter who you are, when you see a guy like [Marner] sacrifice their body, it just motivates everyone on the bench,” Matthews said.

And Babcock can only hope the feeling will linger among his group well beyond the immediate afterglow of Game 3.

“That’s what you have to do to win,” Babcock said. “Ideally those are contagious — when you see your teammates do it, you’re more likely to do it yourself. That’s laying it on the line when you need to.”

Now that the Leafs have figured out what has to be done, they’re tasked with continuing to execute the same way. Game 1 was a dominating 4-1 victory by Toronto, in the same vein as Monday’s contest, while in Game 2 the Leafs looked sorely outmatched in a 4-1 loss. In both their positive outcomes to date though, the Leafs have held a lead going into the third period, and that’s an encouraging sign for Babcock that his team is maturing, at just the right time.

“You’ve just got to learn to play with a lead and you’ve got to learn to play in the offensive zone with the lead and just keep playing,” he said. “It’s easy to say, you tend to get cautious — you don’t want to get cautious — you tend to get cautious and back up too much. You don’t win like that. It’s just part of the growing up process.”

TAKEAWAYS

At this time last year, Moore was playing on the fourth line of the AHL’s Toronto Marlies as they worked towards winning the franchise’s first-ever Calder Cup championship. The California native has rapidly climbed the organization’s ranks since then, establishing himself as a regular on the fourth line, dressing in his first NHL playoff series and, on Monday, scoring his first NHL playoff goal.

The goal was borne out of Moore’s tenacity around the net, hounding a loose puck behind the Bruins’ defence and putting it underneath Rask on a second-chance opportunity.

With Kadri out of the mix for Toronto, Tyler Ennis subbed back onto the Leafs’ fourth line with Frederik Gauthier and Moore, reuniting what has been a solid trio all season long.

That unit picked up where it left off in the regular season, playing heavy in the offensive zone, cycling the puck well and challenging the Bruins with some good chances. The chemistry that has developed amongst the three forwards made all the difference to their success, each one inherently executing his role whether in breaking out from the defensive zone or finding one another around the net.

The majority of fourth line shifts start on the fly, but Gauthier’s group consistently found a way to have an impact most times they took the ice. They finished with 58 per cent possession.

Frederik Andersen has been the most reliable Leaf through the postseason to date, and as intensity continues to ratchet upwards, Andersen only seems to get calmer.

The Leafs’ starter came up with some difficult saves midway through the goalless first period, fighting through traffic in front of the net and halting good chances by Charlie McAvoy and Pastrnak.

Andersen effectively controlled his rebounds to the outside early in the game, robbing the Bruins of crucial second chance opportunities. When Toronto’s defensive game deteriorated in the back half of the opening frame, Andersen had the answers with a 15-save showing to close the door on Boston through 20 minutes.

The second period was a more eventful affair, the game opening up at both ends of the sheet. Andersen had done a good job to that point not giving up multiple successive chances to the Bruins, but he couldn’t corral a third rebound off one play that Krejci buried behind him less than a minute after Toronto had taken a lead. And when Coyle scored on the power play, Andersen managed to make the initial save but couldn’t recover his positioning in time to thwart the next shot.

When push came to shove in the third, Andersen shone for the Leafs once again. The save he made late in the frame, sprawling out to halt Krejci first with the shaft and then the nub of his stick, unquestionably saved a goal against for Toronto. In all three games of the series thus far, Andersen has been a stud between the pipes, adding to that success in his 34-save showing on Monday.

At least for now, William Nylander has taken over Kadri’s vacated spot as the Leafs’ third-line centre, and his first outing there showed some promise.

For whatever reason, the increased responsibility at the centre position seems to settle Nylander, and while he doesn’t always generate the same chances offensively, he plays harder defensively. On one sequence in the second period, Nylander blocked a shot, won a puck battle on the boards and transitioned the Leafs back to offence. It’s the kind of competitiveness Babcock called on Nylander for when he made the decision Monday morning to slot him in at centre over the veteran Patrick Marleau, showing Nylander a measure of trust that he could succeed there.
Marleau did share faceoff duties with Nylander (he finished at 71 per cent in the dot while Nylander peaked at 67 per cent), and would end up in the middle at times as well. But the system seemed to suit both players fine, and they had a fine if unremarkable night. As a line, Nylander’s group recorded the lowest possession among Leafs at 38 per cent, but they finished even, with a combined three shots on net.

He’s a fiery, tough-talking, aggressive coach, and that’s how the Blue Jackets played against the Lightning. They gave the Lightning no time and space with the puck.

“At the end of the day, we didn’t see this coming,” Lightning forward Ryan Callahan said.

The Lightning will be compared to the 1970-71 Boston Bruins (taken down by the Montreal Canadiens with Ken Dryden in net) or the 1981-82 Edmonton Oilers (taken out by the Los Angeles Kings the season Wayne Gretzky registered 92 goals and 212 points). But those Bruins and Oilers series both went the distance.

This result has similarity to the 2002-03 Detroit Red Wings being swept by the goaltending of Jean-Sebastien Giguet and play of the Mighty Ducks of Anaheim. However, the Ducks were a No. 7 seed and the Red Wings were not the Presidents’ Trophy winner. Additionally, the Wings had won the Stanley Cup the season before – which this core group with the Lightning has yet to do.

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The reasons why the Blue Jackets won the series: a relentless forecheck, tight defensive play, an improved power play and strong goaltending. Sergei Bobrovsky had a .940 save percentage coming into the series.

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The unthinkable has happened. The Tampa Bay Lightning, winners of a league-high 62 games, have fallen in the first round to the Columbus Blue Jackets, a team that made several all-in trades and finally started to jell late in the season. Columbus defeated Tampa Bay in four games, with the Lightning's only glimmer of hope quickly squashed when they blew a three-goal lead in Game 1.

So, what the heck happened? USA TODAY Sports' NHL staff tries to reflect on what it got wrong about the Lightning, a team it unanimously predicted to win the Stanley Cup.

It's about the Blue Jackets, Kevin Allen: After upsets, the tendency is always to blame the victim. But the Blue Jackets advanced because of their effort, not the Lightning's lack of effort. Only three NHL teams had a lower power play percentage than Columbus in the regular season. But the Blue Jackets went 5-for-10 on the power play. They were disciplined, nearly perfect on the penalty kill and better in the faceoff circle. Goalie Sergei Bobrovsky entered Game 4 with a .940 save percentage. Center Matt Duchene (three goals, seven points) was a force. Down the stretch, the Blue Jackets were transforming themselves into a beastly playoff team and we weren't paying attention.

John Tortorella effect, Jimmy Hascup: Small-sample caveats apply, of course, in a playoff series, but the Blue Jackets' success can't be ignored. Tortorella has coached 104 playoff games, with a Stanley Cup ring on his resume. He demands accountability and full buy-in from his players, which includes a five-man unit on the defensive side. His teams are always physical and never shy about blocking shots and playing a grinding style. The more finesse and skilled Lightning could never get anything going against the Blue Jackets' suffocating, abrasive style.

Lightning's lack of adversity, Mike Brehm: The Lightning clinched the Presidents' Trophy so early there was little to motivate them down the stretch and they rarely dealt with adversity in the regular season. The Blue Jackets, meanwhile, were already in playoff mode just to get into the postseason. Plus, they were a different team from the one that the Blue Jackets went 5-for-10 to clinch the Presidents' Trophy so early there was little to motivate them down the stretch and they rarely dealt with adversity in the regular season. The Blue Jackets were transforming themselves into a beastly playoff team and we weren't paying attention.

Mental toughness, Jace Evans: In picking the Lightning to win the Stanley Cup, I greatly underestimated the mental fragility of this group. The pressure was already on this team before it went and tied a regular-season record for wins, but I thought the Bolts' Stanley Cup Final loss in 2015 and conference final losses in 2016 and 2018 had fortified them. Instead, when adversity hit in the form of the Blue Jackets roaring back from 3-0 down in Game 1, this team panicked and fell apart. They also certainly weren't helped by an injury to Victor Hedman that in hindsight was clearly more serious than anyone let on. He didn't seem himself in the first two games before missing the next two contests.

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1990-91 Chicago Blackhawks
The Blackhawks won their first Presidents' Trophy in 1991 and had four Hall of Famers on their roster, including starting goalie Ed Belfour and his backup, Dominik Hasek. But they were bounced in the first round of the playoffs by the Minnesota North Stars — who, incredibly, qualified for the postseason despite posting a sub-.500 record in the regular season. Chicago lost the series in six games, including a shocking 6-0 loss in Game 5.

1993-94 Seattle SuperSonics
Shawn Kemp and Gary Payton led Seattle to one of its best regular seasons ever in 1993-94. The SuperSonics finished 63-19, then went up 2-0 on the eighth-seeded Denver Nuggets in their best-of-five playoff series, winning the first two games by an average of 17 points. But then it all came crashing down. Seattle proceeded to lose the next three games, and the series, and their terrific season ended with a thud.

2000 New York Yankees (and Oakland Athletics)
It was a rough year for the favorites in the American League Division Series. The Yankees and Athletics had each won 103 games, and New York was in the midst of a historic stretch, having won World Series titles in four of the previous six seasons. But somehow, neither team made it past the first round. The Yankees lost in four games to the then-Anaheim Angels, while Oakland shockingly lost in five to the Minnesota Twins.

2005 Indianapolis Colts
This was supposed to be Indy's year. With Peyton Manning in his prime, the Colts went 14-2, winning an NFL record 12 games in which they never trailed, and then watched their rivals, the New England Patriots, bow out of the playoffs in the divisional round. All they had to do was beat the sixth-seeded Pittsburgh Steelers in their own divisional matchup. Instead, the Steelers jumped out to a 14-0 lead, won 21-18 and went on to win the Super Bowl.

"There's no question we were in a good position with home field and having the bye," Peyton Manning said after the playoff loss in 2005. "At this point, it is hard to swallow."

2006-07 Dallas Mavericks
After reaching the NBA Finals in their previous season, the Mavericks went 67-15 to clinch the No. 1 seed in the Western Conference. Unfortunately for them, that led to a matchup with the "We Believe" iteration of the Golden State Warriors, who had a 42-40 record, in the first round — and a dumbfounding exit after losing in six games.

2009-10 Washington Capitals
The Capitals have a sizable history of playoff heartbreak, but this might have been the worst of the bunch. The winners of the Presidents' Trophy...
and No. 1 seeds in the Eastern Conference, they drew a first-round matchup against the Montreal Canadiens and promptly went up 3-1 in the best-of-seven series before letting it slip away. A pair of one-goal losses in Games 5 and 7 made this flop particularly painful for Washington fans.

2011 Green Bay Packers

Seven teams in NFL history have gone 15-1 or better. The 2011 Packers are the only team that failed to win a playoff game. After cruising through the regular season, including a 13-game win streak to start the year, Green Bay suffered a 37-20 loss to the New York Giants at Lambeau Field to end its season — and its bid to repeat as Super Bowl champs.

2017-18 Virginia Cavaliers

This is the most recent postseason flop, and also arguably the most shocking. Virginia wasn’t just a No. 1 seed in the 2018 NCAA tournament; It was the top overall seed. And the Cavaliers didn’t just lose to 16th-seeded UMBC, becoming the first No. 1 seed to lose to a No. 16 seed in the history of the event; they got blown out, 74-54. That loss, however, helped set the stage for this year’s comeback, as the Cavaliers returned to the tournament as a No. 1 seed and this time went on to win the national championship.

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USA TODAY / Opinion: Fighting in the NHL is brutish and outdated, and needs to be banned

Nancy Armour, USA TODAY

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Yet another NHL player has been seriously hurt because Gary Bettman insists on fighting a losing game. Carolina Hurricanes rookie Andrei Svechnikov is in the concussion protocol and likely to miss Game 4 of the playoffs Thursday night, an outcome just about anybody could have predicted after watching him get decked by Alex Ovechkin. Svechnikov’s head slammed against the ice after the fight in the first period Monday night, and he spent about 30 seconds on all fours before being helped to his feet and wobbling to the locker room.

“(He) looks normal and said he feels great,” Carolina coach Rod Brind’Amour said Tuesday.

Of course Svechnikov did. What else is a 19-year-old supposed to say when Bettman has made it clear he doesn’t give a damn about his players’ health and safety?

Time and again, the NHL commissioner has refused to acknowledge hockey’s culpability in robbing former players of their memories and motor skills, making them unrecognized to their families and friends in the most severe cases. This despite the ever-growing body of science linking repetitive head trauma to chronic traumatic encephalopathy (CTE) and other neurodegenerative diseases.

Bettman’s stock, belligerent answer is to say there’s no way to know for sure that repetitive head trauma — you know, like what hockey players experience — causes CTE because there’s still no living diagnosis. Therefore, the NHL doesn’t need to do anything or make any changes. Like banning fighting. There’s no reason for what the NHL still quaintly terms “fisticuffs” and everybody, even Bettman, knows it. It’s a relic of a bygone, brutish era when people didn’t know better, and adds no value to the modern game.

“Not really,” Brind’Amour said Tuesday when asked if fighting was still necessary to the NHL. “Probably not.”

Fighting doesn’t make the NHL better, slowing the free flow of the game and disrupting the pace. That’s evident during every Olympics and world championships, where fighting is banned under International Ice Hockey Federation rules and no one complains of missing it.

It also doesn’t make the game safer, as Bettman has claimed before. Not when hockey now is so much faster, and the players so much bigger.

Who could have watched Ovechkin continuing to pummel Svechnikov as the younger and smaller player fell, and thought that was a good way to settle an on-ice dispute? Or an effective deterrent against future dust-ups?

It wasn’t, and it won’t be. It’s an MMA-like sideshow, and a poor one at that.

“If the #NHL was conceived today, would it include fighting? Doubt it.”

Let’s forget about the semantics & weight/height differences & who asked who.... Do we want to see NHL stars like Ovechkin & Svechnikov bare knuckle boxing?

If the #NHL was conceived today, would it include fighting? Contrary to Bettman’s obstinance, hockey has always recognized that hits to the head are dangerous. That’s why there are penalties for high sticking and elbowing.

Banning fighting is simply the logical extension of that, Hall of Famer Ken Dryden told the New York Times last year following the publication of his book, Game Change: The Life and Death of Steve Montador, and the Future of Hockey.

“What we’ve come to understand better, with the force and the frequency of the collisions now, is that the dangerous instrument is not the stick or the elbow, it’s the body as a whole. So you don’t call a penalty for a stick or an elbow and not call one for a shoulder or a fist,” Dryden said.

“It’s not the cause, it’s the effect,” Dryden added. “It’s not whether it’s intentional or accidental. The brain doesn’t distinguish. The brain is affected similarly.”

It won’t help Svechnikov or Montreal’s Paul Byron or any of the countless other players who’ve been injured for no good reason, but fighting’s days in the NHL are numbered.

Last week, researchers at Boston University’s CTE Center announced that brain scans of a small group of living NFL players had shown elevated levels of tau proteins, which cause CTE, in the areas where CTE has typically been found during autopsies. That follows the announcement in 2017 by researchers at UCLA and NorthShore University Health System that an autopsy had confirmed a former NFL player had CTE — just as a brain scan four years earlier had indicated.

Even Bettman won’t be able to deny the science for much longer. The NHL’s fight will be over, and he will have lost.