



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • April 18, 2017



Maple Leafs win wild Game 3 in OT

[Tyler Bozak's power-play goal at 1:37 of overtime defeats Capitals, gives Toronto 2-1 series lead](#)

by Dave McCarthy / NHL.com Correspondent

April 17th, 2017

TORONTO -- [Tyler Bozak](#) scored a power-play goal 1:37 into overtime to give the Toronto Maple Leafs a 4-3 win against the Washington Capitals in Game 3 of the Eastern Conference First Round at Air Canada Centre on Monday.

Toronto leads the best-of-7 series 2-1. Game 4 will be played at Air Canada Centre on Wednesday.

[Auston Matthews](#) and [William Nylander](#) each scored his first career Stanley Cup Playoff goal, and [Frederik Andersen](#) made 23 saves for the Maple Leafs.

"It's a lot of emotions," Bozak said. "You just want to be with your teammates and celebrate. Obviously, we've had a lot of ups and downs in this series. Every game is overtime. So those are the most fun games to play definitely, so it's nice that we got rewarded tonight."

[Nicklas Backstrom](#) had a goal and an assist and [Braden Holtby](#) made 24 saves for the Capitals.

The Maple Leafs scored twice in 4:07 to make it 3-3 before the end of the second period. [Nazem Kadri](#)'s shot from the blue line deflected off [Brooks Orpik](#) in front of the net at 15:13 to make it 3-2. Nylander tied the game at 19:07.

[Evgeny Kuznetsov](#) gave the Capitals a 3-1 lead at 5:39 of the second period.

Washington had a two-man advantage for a full two minutes at 6:52 when [Matt Hunwick](#) was called for hooking and [Matt Martin](#) was assessed a double minor for roughing, but the Maple Leafs killed it off.

"We should have scored there, absolutely I think so," Backstrom said. "You have to take advantage of that."

Andersen felt it was a turning point.

"That was phenomenal," Andersen said. "I think it led to us being able to come back."

Toronto killed off another penalty for too many men at 9:48.

The Capitals scored on each of their first two shots to take a 2-0 lead by 4:49 of the first period. Backstrom took a centering pass from [Nate Schmidt](#), who carried the puck deep into the Maple Leafs zone and one-timed a shot past Andersen at 2:43. [Alex Ovechkin](#) scored 2:06 later on a one-timer from the top of the left circle.

Matthews cut the lead to 2-1 at 14:08 when he put his own rebound past Holtby's glove.

Goal of the game

Kadri held the puck along the left wing boards and sent a pass to Bozak in the slot. Bozak redirected the feed past Holtby for the winning goal.

Save of the game

Kuznetsov carried the puck out from behind the goal line and cut across the crease, but Andersen stretched out his right pad to make a toe save at 18:41 of the second period. Nylander scored 39 seconds later to make it 3-3.

Highlight of the game

Shortly after killing off a two-man disadvantage for a full two minutes, Marnier came out of the penalty box and raced towards a loose puck. Holtby came far out of the net and sprawled to poke check the puck away above the right faceoff circle before scrambling back to the net.

Unsung performance of the game

Kadri tied for the Maple Leafs lead with [Zach Hyman](#) with six hits. One of them came against Brooks Orpik the shift before Matthews scored to make it 2-1.

"It was a huge turning point, huge shift from Nazem," Maple Leafs defenseman [Morgan Rielly](#) said. "He's been doing that all year. And it wasn't just one shift from him tonight, he was outstanding all night. But when he goes out there and creates that energy, it can turn a game around. We love it when he's playing like that."

They said it

"We were amped up, to say the least. We had tons of energy. Energy wasn't a problem; we probably should have played longer the other night (in Game 2), but getting to the right spots and stopping there was a bit of a problem so we'll get that sorted out." -- *Maple Leafs coach Mike Babcock on overcoming a bad start*

"I think if you have a short memory, you get over it and move on. [Tuesday], we'll look at stuff and be better as a team. You just have to build on that. You can't dwell too much on the past. We still have plenty of time to create our own future." -- *Capitals defenseman John Carlson*

Need to know

Capitals defenseman [Karl Alzner](#), who has played 540 consecutive regular-season games and 59 in the playoffs, was unable to play because of an upper-body injury. He is



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NEWS CLIPPINGS • April 18, 2017

day-to-day. ... This is the first time since 1951 that Games 1, 2 and 3 of a Maple Leafs playoff series have all gone to overtime.

Predators take 3-0 series lead with OT win

[Kevin Fiala scores at 16:44 to cap two-goal comeback against Blackhawks](#)

by Robby Stanley / NHL.com Correspondent

2:41 AM

NASHVILLE -- [Kevin Fiala](#) scored at 16:44 of overtime to give the Nashville Predators a 3-2 win against the Chicago Blackhawks in Game 3 of the Western Conference First Round at Bridgestone Arena on Monday.

Fiala deked around [Corey Crawford](#) and scored his second goal of the Stanley Cup Playoffs.

"It's just character," Fiala said. "Everybody, when we went in here before the third period, we could feel it. We were going to do it. Everybody believed in it. Everybody was just working hard from the first and last guy, and that's why we did it."

The Predators leads the best-of-7 series 3-0 with Game 4 here Thursday.

Nashville has a 3-0 series lead for the first time in its history.

[Filip Forsberg](#) scored for the Predators to make it 2-1 at 4:24 of the third period. The puck bounced off of the glass behind the net on a shot by [Viktor Arvidsson](#) and back into the slot, and Forsberg shot it past Crawford for his first goal.

Forsberg tied the game 2-2 at 14:08 from the slot.

"I think there's no stop in this group," Arvidsson said. "We were down 2-0 going into the third and we just believed in ourselves and kept battling."

[Dennis Rasmussen](#) gave the Blackhawks a 1-0 lead at 1:05 of the second period on a backhand shot from in front of the net. [Marcus Kruger](#) made the pass from behind the net, and Rasmussen beat [Pekka Rinne](#) for Chicago's first goal of the 2017 playoffs.

Rasmussen's goal ended Rinne's postseason shutout streak at 141:05.

[Patrick Kane](#) gave the Blackhawks a 2-0 lead at 11:15 on the power play. He took a wrist shot from the right faceoff circle that beat Rinne for his first goal. It was Kane's 50th career NHL playoff goal.

"It's tough right now," Kane said. "Let this one sting a little bit tonight. We have two [days] in between, so get rested, come back feeling good. Take it one at a time. I know that's cliché and things you have to say, but at the same time win one game. See what happens after that."

Crawford made 46 saves.

Goal of the game

What's next

Game 4 of the Eastern Conference First Round at Air Canada Centre on Wednesday (7 p.m. ET; NBCSN, CBC, TVA Sports 2, CSN-DC)

Neal made a backhand pass to Fiala below the left faceoff circle, and he slid the puck past Crawford's glove on the backhand.

Save of the game

Crawford made a toe save on Fiala at 13:56 of overtime on a shot from the slot. Neal passed the puck to Fiala in the slot, and Crawford reacted in time to get enough of the puck to keep it out of the net.

Unsung performance of the game

Rinne made a breakaway save on [Nick Schmaltz](#) early in the third period to keep it 2-0. Schmaltz tried to beat Rinne on the forehand on the glove side, but Rinne made the save and moved the puck to [P.K. Subban](#).

Highlight of the game

Forsberg redirected a shot from the point from [Ryan Ellis](#) that Crawford saved. Forsberg gathered the rebound and moved the puck from his backhand to his forehand and beat Crawford.

They said it

"We've got to make them realize that winning that fourth game is the toughest for any team in any series." -- *Blackhawks captain [Jonathan Toews](#)*

"At the time, that was probably the most critical point in the game at 2-0 and a breakaway coming down. It doesn't seem it because we ended up scoring two goals after that. We get to overtime and that's a big win, but if you want to know where the game kind of clicked for us into our favor was that save right there by [Rinne]." -- *Predators coach Peter Laviolette on Pekka Rinne's breakaway save on Nick Schmaltz*

Need to know

Chicago defenseman [Duncan Keith](#) had 32:27 of ice time. Kane had nine shots on goal and 12 shot attempts. Anisimov went 2-for-17 in the faceoff circle. ... The Predators improved to 5-7 in overtime in the playoffs in their history. Nashville had 49 shots on goal and 94 shot attempts.

What's next

Game 4 of Western Conference First Round at Bridgestone Arena on Thursday (8 p.m. ET; NBCSN, SN360, TVA Sports 3, FS-TN, CSN-CH)



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • April 18, 2017

Senators rebound to win Game 3 in OT

Blow big lead against Bruins but go up 2-1 in series when Bobby Ryan scores at 5:43

by Matt Kalman / NHL.com Correspondent

12:22 AM

BOSTON -- [Bobby Ryan](#) scored a power-play goal 5:43 into overtime to give the Ottawa Senators a 4-3 win against the Boston Bruins in Game 3 of the Eastern Conference First Round at TD Garden on Monday.

The Senators lead the best-of-7 series 2-1 with Game 4 here Wednesday.

Ryan scored off a pass from [Kyle Turris](#) 1:05 after Boston forward [Riley Nash](#) was called for roughing Ryan.

[Mike Hoffman](#) scored twice, [Derick Brassard](#) had a goal and an assist, and [Craig Anderson](#) made 17 saves for the Senators, who led 3-0 early in the second period.

Ryan felt a measure of redemption after scoring because it was his miscue that led to a goal by [David Backes](#), Boston's second of the game, in the second period. [John-Michael Liles](#)' chip out of the Boston end bounced over Ryan's stick at the Ottawa blue line, and Backes took the puck to the net and scored.

"[I feel] great especially because I owed one after the gaffe in the second period," Ryan said. "I knew if I stuck with it I'd get a chance eventually, and the guys around me made good plays to get me the puck. It feels incredible."

[Noel Acciari](#) and [David Pastrnak](#) each scored his first career Stanley Cup Playoff goal, and [Tuukka Rask](#) made 28 saves for the Bruins, who played without four of their regular defensemen because of injury.

"It was definitely a terrible start on our part," Boston center [Patrice Bergeron](#) said. "That can't happen this time of year. They took advantage of us not getting the first period we wanted, and we were playing catch-up hockey and definitely did a great job getting back in the game."

Hoffman scored on a breakaway 7:15 into the game to give the Senators a 1-0 lead.

Ottawa went ahead 2-0 when Brassard scored from the top of the crease on the rebound of a Ryan shot at 7:40.

Hoffman scored his second goal on a power play at 3:42 of the second period to put the Senators up 3-0, but the Bruins scored two quick goals to get back in it.

Acciari scored on a tip from the high slot at 6:05 to make it 3-1, and Backes cut the Ottawa lead to 3-2 at 6:47.

Pastrnak scored with a one-timer on the power play at 13:51 of the second to tie it 3-3.

Boston center [David Krejci](#) made his 2017 playoff debut after sitting the first two games with an upper-body injury. He had one shot on goal, one hit and a minus-1 rating in 14:38.

The Bruins were without injured defensemen [Brandon Carlo](#) (upper body), [Torey Krug](#) (lower body), [Adam McQuaid](#) (upper body) and [Colin Miller](#) (lower body).

Defenseman Tommy Cross, 27, made his NHL playoff debut after McQuaid was injured in Game 2. He had an assist, two blocked shots and a plus-1 rating in 13:08.

Krug and Carlo have not played in the series. Miller was injured in Game 1.

Goal of the game

After taking a pass from defenseman [Erik Karlsson](#) from the Ottawa goal line at the Boston blue line, Hoffman went in alone on Rask and showed backhand before dragging the puck to his right with one hand on his stick and tucking it behind Rask to open the scoring.

Save of the game

Backes passed the puck from the right side of the net to David Krejci cutting backdoor, but Anderson made a right-pad save at 10:26 of the third period.

Highlight of the game

Karlsson made a pass from the Ottawa blue line that hit Ryan in stride at the Boston blue line. Ryan drove to the net, made a backhand pass to Turris, and redirected the return feed past Rask to win it.

Unsung performance of the game

Brassard won 18 of 24 faceoffs (75 percent), including 11 of 15 (73 percent) against Bergeron, a three-time Selke Trophy winner.

They said it

"I think it's pretty selfish. You can't make that play, you can't put the refs in that position. Regardless of what happened before it, you can't do it." -- Bruins forward [Riley Nash](#) on his roughing penalty 4:38 into overtime

"It's a mental battle with yourself. That's all that is. Making sure you're giving the guys an opportunity. ... I think it's one of those things where if you dwell on what's happened in the past, you can't be very good in the present." -- Senators goaltender Craig Anderson of refocusing after the Bruins tied the game 3-3 with three straight goals

"I haven't had a good practice in a really long time, but I knew that. I kept things simple in the first period and ... in the second period I felt much better, third period same thing. So it was all right." -- Bruins center David Krejci, who made his 2017 postseason debut after an upper-body injury kept him out the first two games of the series

Need to know

Senators defenseman [Mark Borowiecki](#) missed the game with a lower-body injury sustained in Game 2. He's day to day. Ben Harpur made his NHL playoff debut in Borowiecki's place and was plus-1 in 17:26. ... With Acciari and Cross in drawing into the lineup for Game 3, 11 Bruins have made their NHL postseason debut this series. ... Boston rookie defenseman Charlie McAvoy's assist on Pastrnak's goal was his first NHL point.

What's next

Game 4 of Eastern Conference First Round at TD Garden on Wednesday (7:30 p.m. ET; USA, SN, TVA Sports, NESN)



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • April 18, 2017

Ducks rally, take 3-0 series lead

[Corey Perry scores 1:30 into overtime to defeat Flames](#)

by Aaron Vickers / NHL.com Correspondent

2:43 AM

CALGARY -- Corey Perry scored 1:30 into overtime to help the Anaheim Ducks to a 5-4 win against the Calgary Flames in Game 3 of their Western Conference First Round series at Scotiabank Saddledome on Monday.

The Ducks lead the best-of-7 series 3-0.

Perry threw the puck on net from the boards, and it deflected off [Michael Stone](#) in front and past [Brian Elliott](#).

"You never say never," said Perry, who was plus-5. "You just keep pushing shift after shift, get pucks to the net and we found a way tonight. That's all that matters."

Shea Theodore had two goals, and [Nick Ritchie](#) and [Nate Thompson](#) also scored for the Ducks. [Jonathan Bernier](#) made 16 saves in relief of [John Gibson](#), who was pulled after allowing four goals on 16 shots.

"You find a way to come back like this, it shows a lot of character in our team and it feels good," Thompson said.

Stone, [Sean Monahan](#), [Kris Versteeg](#) and [Sam Bennett](#) scored for Calgary. Elliott made 22 saves.

"Now we have to try and win Game 4," Stone said. "Put this one behind us and move onto the next one. One at a time."

Theodore scored twice after the Ducks trailed 4-1.

He scored his first career Stanley Cup Playoff goal to make it 4-2 with 48.2 seconds remaining in the second period, and Thompson deflected [Hampus Lindholm](#)'s point shot past Elliott at 11:14 of the third. Theodore scored again with 4:21 remaining in the third to make it 4-4.

"Once we started, we got one, two and the third one, I felt like they kind of played a little more back a little bit and we just took charge and stepped our game up," Theodore said. "They came out pretty hard, but I felt like once we got our game back on track we were definitely pretty strong."

After surrendering the first goal early in Games 1 and 2, the Flames took a 1-0 lead 2:10 into the first period when Monahan scored his third power-play goal of the series. Versteeg made it 2-0 at 9:18 with the Flames' second power-play goal of the period.

Ritchie made it 2-1 at 15:33 when he drove to the net and scored on a rebound of [Antoine Vermette](#)'s initial shot.

Stone's slap shot 4:34 into the second period gave the Flames a 3-1 lead, and [Mark Giordano](#)'s point shot deflected off Bennett's skate and in for a third power-play goal to make it 4-1 at 8:33.

The goal prompted Ducks coach Randy Carlyle to pull Gibson for Bernier.

"That's why we have two solid goalies," Perry said. "Nothing against [Gibson]. Couple bad breaks, couple power plays. [Bernier] came in and played solid and made some big saves for us."

Goal of the game

Thompson deflected Lindholm's point shot, and the goal stood after a review confirmed his stick was at or below the height of the crossbar when he deflected the puck into the net. "I was a little nervous," Thompson said. "I was just praying a little bit that hopefully the hockey gods would pull through there. It's one of those things where it's not up to me. That's up to them. I'm just glad it went in."

Save of the game

Monahan left the puck for [Micheal Ferland](#) as they crossed into the slot off a rush, and Bernier made a glove save on Ferland's shot 5:05 into the third period to keep Anaheim within two goals. "It's playoffs," Bernier said. "You've just got to keep working, keep doing the right thing and we found a way."

Highlight of the game

Monahan one-timed a pass in the slot by [Troy Brouwer](#) from below the goal line over Gibson's shoulder. Monahan has three goals in the series.

Unsung performance of the game

Ducks forward [Rickard Rakell](#) finished with two assists, including one to help set up Perry's goal, and a plus-3 rating in 17:09 of ice time.

They said it

"We know no matter how many we're down, we can fight our way back and get back on track." --Ducks defenseman Shea Theodore

"It was a good sign from our team because they played really well today. We took a lot of penalties, and they capitalized and they had us on our heels for most of the night. It was a good way to come back." -- Ducks forward Nate Thompson

"I don't think there's going to be any doubts. It's just that it's a tough thing to do at any stage. We're going to have to come together as a group and do it together." -- Flames goaltender Brian Elliott

Need to know

The game-winner was Perry's first playoff goal in 10 games dating to May 30, 2015 against the Chicago Blackhawks. ... Ducks defenseman [Sami Vatanen](#) missed his second straight game because of an upper-body injury. ... The Flames finished 3-for-5 on the power play, and didn't take a penalty in the game.

What's next

Game 4 of Western Conference First Round at Scotiabank Saddledome on Wednesday (10 p.m. ET; CBC, TVA Sports, USA, PRIME)



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NEWS CLIPPINGS • April 18, 2017

Four playoff games decided in overtime Monday

First time in 32 years that many have gone to OT on same day in NHL postseason

NHL.com [@NHL](#)

2:21 AM

Four Stanley Cup Playoff games were decided in overtime Monday, something that hadn't happened since April 10, 1985, according to the Elias Sports Bureau.

The Toronto Maple Leafs, Ottawa Senators, Nashville Predators and Anaheim Ducks all won in overtime in the only four games on the schedule. It's the third time in NHL history four playoff games went to overtime on the same day. The first time was April 11, 1980.

On April 10, 1985, eight games -- all Game 1 of division semifinal series -- were played, and the Philadelphia Flyers

defeated the New York Rangers, the Washington Capitals defeated the New York Islanders, the Edmonton Oilers defeated the Los Angeles Kings, and the Winnipeg Jets defeated the Calgary Flames in overtime.

On Monday, the [Maple Leafs took a 2-1 series lead](#) on the Capitals, the [Senators grabbed a 2-1 lead](#) on the Boston Bruins, the [Predators went up 3-0](#) on the Chicago Blackhawks, and the [Ducks rallied for a 3-0 lead](#) on the Flames with their overtime win.



Notebook: Ending The Playoff Drought

Written by Nicholas Niedzielski

Published: April 17, 2017

For the first time since 2013, there will be postseason hockey in the city of Charlotte.

After a red-hot run down the final few months of the season, the Checkers clinched their playoff berth in Chicago on Saturday, the last day of the AHL's regular season.

"We pushed hard and now we're in it," said head coach Ulf Samuelsson. "We're very excited."

Given where the team is now, it wasn't that long ago that it appeared destined for an early offseason. The Checkers bottomed out on Jan. 4, when their .394 points percentage put them in a tie for last place in the AHL.

That's when things turned around.

"We've had a lot of guys play out of their roles and job descriptions and they stepped up big," said Samuelsson. "Even though we were down we kept our team together and they kept swinging and finally started to put some points on the board. Then the momentum kept building and building."

That momentum would carry the Checkers all the way back up the standings as one of the hottest teams in the league, losing only 10 more games in regulation for the remainder of the season and clawing their way into the postseason for only the third time in franchise history.

"It's a good feeling," said Phil Di Giuseppe. "We were pretty

confident down the stretch and we used that. We pulled it through. The boys are excited. This is my third year here and we hadn't made the playoffs, so it's going to be something special."

Di Giuseppe is one of a group of Carolina prospects who have yet to get a taste of the postseason as a pro. They'll now get the chance thanks to pulling off what no team in four years has done.

"I think the difference is the momentum and the confidence that we have," said Di Giuseppe of what has changed from years past. "This year, going into every game we knew we had a chance. I thought we played like we were more confident than in past years. It's special."

The postseason will present some new challenges to the team across the board, but perhaps most notably for a young team like Charlotte is the addition of even more contests at the end of a grueling 76-game slate.

"Rest is important through the whole season," said Samuelsson. "We spent a lot of time analyzing and looking at days off and travel. And then from our owner Michael Kahn we got some help with our travel. All those things have paid off here at the end. We're going to regroup and take a couple of days to relax and let it sink in, but we're already starting to prepare."

"We had two days off here, but I think the boys will find their



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • April 18, 2017

legs,” said Di Giuseppe. “I think those two months of just winning will help us.”

While their breakneck pace down the stretch to grab a playoff spot has taken a lot out of the team, a positive benefit for the Checkers is that they have essentially been playing playoff-esque games over the last two months.

“We’ve had to keep our focus and we’ve had to play at our best,” said Samuelsson. “Basically we just need to keep playing the way we have over the last couple of months. We’ve been really solid and we’re really happy with a lot of aspects of our game. Playoffs is an opportunity. Everyone starts from scratch.”

All in all, for a team that squeaked into the playoffs on the last day of the season, the Checkers hold themselves as a force to be reckoned with now.

“I just think it’s having that belief in the guys around you that we’re going to pull through,” said Di Giuseppe. “Tommy [McCollum] is going to make a big save for us. Our power play was brutal at the beginning of the year and now every time we get a power play we know we have a chance. I think we have more belief in each other and that’s going to make a difference.”

INJURY UPDATES

For as hot as the Checkers have been over the last few months, it’s easy to forget that they have been missing several high-end pieces to injury.

Now, as they head into the playoffs, they could get some reinforcements.

The trio of Aleksī Saarela, Lucas Wallmark and Danny Kristo were among a handful of players who were on the ice this morning for a quick skate with assistant coach Peter Andersson. Kristo, an established AHL scorer who recorded 10 points in his first 14 games with Charlotte, has missed each of the last eight games for the Checkers, while leading goal scorer Wallmark and newfound sniper Saarela have missed the last four and two contests, respectively.

While he didn’t delve into specifics, Samuelsson seemed positive on the three players’ statuses for this week.

“All three are getting close,” he said. “We’re not sure exactly when they’ll return, but they’re all day-to-day.”

As three of the team’s top scoring threats and two of their top centers, the addition of any of Saarela, Wallmark or Kristo would be a significant boost.

“All of them are tremendous hockey players and we’d be excited to get one of them back,” said Samuelsson. “So

we’re excited and hopefully they’ll become available soon.”

There was a more surprising face on the ice this morning as well, as Michael Leighton strapped on the pads for the first time since undergoing surgery for an injury that has sidelined him since Feb. 17.

While he has yet to rejoin the team for a full practice, the veteran seems to be on the right track.

“Leighton is getting closer,” said Samuelsson. “He’s day-to-day, maybe week-to-week, but he’s getting really close.”

The Checkers are currently in good hands between the pipes, as McCollum has been near flawless since joining the team, helping to spark their run.

“He came in and stabilized our team and has given us a chance to win every night,” said Samuelsson of McCollum. “Our confidence started from the day he got here. We’ve really fed off of his energy and the way he plays.”

Even so, once Leighton is cleared, the Checkers will have a decision to make between the pipes, though picking between two established game changers isn’t a bad problem to have.

“McCollum is obviously going to start Game 1 because we’re not sure if Leighton is going to be ready or not,” said Samuelsson. “But if he is healthy, we have two great goaltenders to choose from.”

HOME ICE ADVANTAGE

The way that the AHL’s first-round playoff format is, the Checkers will get to play Games 1 and 2 on home ice before jetting to Chicago for the remainder of the series.

Given Charlotte’s dominance at Bojangles’ Coliseum this year – a record-breaking 27-10-1 mark at home – those two contests could be a nice boost for the lower-seeded Checkers.

“We’re comfortable at home here,” said Samuelsson. “We’ve got a nice fan base and a good building so we’re turning into a good home team.”

Their opponents have turned in a strong campaign at home this season as well, making it even more important for the Checkers to build themselves some room early on in the series.

“It’s going to be really important to get at least one game if not both here at home to propel us when we play in their building,” said Di Giuseppe. “They have a loud building with those stupid fireworks. So these two games are going to set up the series for us.”

TODAY’S LINKS

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<https://www.nhl.com/news/four-nhl-playoff-games-decided-in-overtime-monday/c-288892918>

<http://gocheckers.com/articles/features/notebook-ending-the-playoff-drought>



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • April 18, 2017

SportScan

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

1060157 Websites

ESPN / Maple Leafs' kiddie corps does it again to favored Capitals

10:53 PM ET

Pierre LeBrun

TORONTO -- Still don't believe in these kids?

Outplayed for the first half of the game on Monday night, the Toronto Maple Leafs rallied for an improbable 4-3 overtime win over the top-seeded Washington Capitals, with Tyler Bozak scoring the winner on a power play 1:37 into the extra session.

Believe it -- the Leafs are up 2-1 in the series after another OT win. Dan Hamilton/USA TODAY Sports

The baby-faced Leafs now lead the series, improbably, two games to one, with Game 4 here at the Air Canada Centre on Wednesday night.

EDITOR'S PICKS

Power Rankings: Penguins, Predators and Blues soar

The Blackhawks are down. And where are the Wild? Meanwhile, Pittsburgh and rookie Jake Guentzel are rocking, while goalies Pekka Rinne and Jake Allen have Nashville and St. Louis singing.

Leafs learning the hard way

The young and untested Toronto Maple Leafs could collapse completely under the weight of the pressure or instead learn to embrace the experience to build on for the future.

Fear not holding back Alex Ovechkin

Despite all the pressure, despite the lofty expectations, despite never having sniffed a Stanley Cup, Washington Capitals superstar Alex Ovechkin is going full speed ahead.

The turning point came during a full, two-minute 5-on-3 power play in the second period for the Caps -- leading 3-1 at the time -- when they failed to connect on several scoring chances. A Caps goal in that moment would have likely put the game away.

Instead, the Leafs came roaring back, finding an extra gear in their speed game and putting the Caps on their heels, especially in the third period, when Washington didn't register its first shot until there was 6:35 left.

The Leafs' Auston Matthews collected a goal and an assist, his first two points of the series -- and, thus, of his career -- in easily his best game.

The real winners on this night? The fans. What a game, and what a series -- three straight overtime affairs and a series that has the look of going the distance.

ESPN LOADED: 04.18.2017

1060158 Websites

ESPN / Nikita Zaitsev returns to Leafs in Game 3 against Capitals

10:12 PM ET

Pierre LeBrun

TORONTO -- Nikita Zaitsev returned to the Maple Leafs' lineup after missing the opening two games of the playoffs with a concussion.

"It's the best time of the year. It's very exciting," Zaitsev said of playing in his first career NHL playoff game. "I feel better every day. I made good progress."

Zaitsev would only feel better later as Toronto took a 2-1 series lead over Washington with a 4-3 overtime victory.

Zaitsev took a hard but clean hit from Nick Foligno of the Columbus Blue Jackets in Toronto's regular-season finale April 9 and has been out since. He skated for a third straight day Monday morning, and Leafs head coach Mike Babcock confirmed the Russian blueliner would be back for Game 3 against the Washington Capitals. The series is tied 1-1.

The timing couldn't be better after the Leafs lost veteran defenseman Roman Polak in Game 2. He suffered a leg injury and is done for the playoffs.

Zaitsev averaged 22:01 minutes per game during the regular season, second only to Morgan Rielly on the Leafs.

ESPN LOADED: 04.18.2017

1060159 Websites

FOXSports.com / Carrie Underwood performed the national anthem prior to Predators playoff game

Pete Blackburn

Apr 17, 2017 at 11:29p ET

The Chicago Blackhawks have one of the best anthem singers in hockey with Jim Cornelian behind the mic, so the pressure was on for the Predators to counter with a strong anthem of their own prior to Game 3 in Nashville.

Luckily, Music City's hockey team has quite a heavy-hitter firmly in their corner.

Surprise! @carrieunderwood came out and rocked the anthem in Nashville. #StanleyCup pic.twitter.com/HQJ8Z9TJC2

— NHL (@NHL) April 18, 2017

The Preds called on country music star Carrie Underwood, who is married to team captain Mike Fisher, to perform the anthem before their first home playoff game on Monday night. Wearing her husband's jersey, Underwood belted the Star Spangled Banner and, unsurprisingly, got a huge ovation from an excited crowd in Nashville.

Chicago headed into Nashville already down two games to nothing and having yet to score a goal in the series, so having a Grammy-award winning artist take the mic in your opponent's building is just a little salt in the wound. That being said, Chicago's anthem still reigns supreme across the NHL.

FOXSports.com LOADED: 04.18.2017



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • April 18, 2017

1060160 Websites

FOXSports.com / The Maple Leafs are embracing 'Dart Guy' and not everyone is happy about it

Pete Blackburn

Apr 17, 2017 at 3:10p ET

It sounds a bit weird to say, but Toronto Maple Leafs fans have no shortage of things to cheer for these days. They've got their excellent batch of rookies — including Auston Matthews, Mitch Marner and William Nylander — as well as a playoff berth and a tight series against the Capitals.

Now, we can add one more thing to the list: "Dart Guy."

That's the nickname affectionately given to 37-year-old Jason Maslakov, an Ontario native and Leafs fan who grabbed the spotlight during Saturday's Game 2 between the Leafs and Capitals. Maslakov made the trek down to Washington D.C. to watch Toronto take care of business and even the series with an overtime win over the Capitals.

Dart Guy instantly became an internet sensation, and it's not hard to see why.

The things we do for our team. #BecauseItsTheCup #StanleyCup
pic.twitter.com/JxtXcy4Bqv

— NHL (@NHL) April 16, 2017

While that may appear to be an ordinary mohawk on top of Dart Guy's painted face, you should look closer. There is magic in the details.

@felixpotvin you know this is on the top of my man's head right
pic.twitter.com/fJHHzr1Axe

— Dan Steinberg (@dcsportsbog) April 16, 2017

Leafs fans almost immediately adopted Dart Guy as an unofficial mascot. If you follow any of them on Twitter, you might notice the photo.

You're not a real Leafs fan unless you change your profile picture to this...
pic.twitter.com/y9JkuE8Z21

— Justin Fisher (@thejustinfisher) April 16, 2017

How the hell is this website free? pic.twitter.com/llMocw6aaw

— platinum seat ghosts (@3rdPeriodSuits) April 16, 2017

Since the start of Saturday's game, Maslakov has picked up nearly 6,000 followers on Twitter. He's sweeping Leafs Nation, so much so that the team decided to hook him up with tickets to Monday's Game 3 back home in Toronto.

745km to!!! #Dartguy is on the way back home lol.... GO LEAFS GO
pic.twitter.com/yTkEIAQ0bN

— The Maz (@LeafsMaz20) April 16, 2017

But not everyone is pleased with the Leafs' decision to host Dart Guy at the Air Canada Centre on Monday. A blog post on Fansided's Tip of the Tower called the decision "irresponsible" and questioned the message that it sends.

"Since when does a sweaty, over-weight guy with a ciggy in his mouth represent what the Toronto Maple Leafs organization stands for? Since when does the NHL and MLSE encourage and promote life threatening addictions as humorous or cool?"

Other fans echoed the sentiment on Twitter:

Loving the dart guy but I feel like his promotion of smoking is potentially problematic.

— Jordan (@RecyclingBinns) April 16, 2017

Since this is the internet, it shouldn't be surprising that at least one person has taken exception to the idea. Even so, it seems a little silly to

get so worked up over the team embracing a fan who happened to be seen with a cigarette in his mouth.

After all, Dart Guy wasn't explicitly shown smoking that cigarette and, for all we know, he could have kept it unlit the entire time he was in the arena. (Washington's Verizon Center, like most arenas, prohibits smoking at sporting events.)

It seems highly likely that the Maple Leafs and Air Canada Centre would let Maslakov know he's not allowed to light up within the confines during Game 3, especially with him being a guest of the team and the increased media exposure that comes with that.

Also, as Puck Daddy points out, the Maple Leafs have slapped their logo on plenty of alcoholic products over the years, so it's not like promoting "life-threatening addictions" would be particularly new to them, or most other professional sports teams. As for the idea of giving setting up fans who deserve tickets more, the Maple Leafs do that quite a bit, so that high horse is shrinking.

Hockey is fun. The playoffs are fun. Dart Guy might not be a beacon of class or the greatest representation of the Maple Leafs organization, but he is fun. There's nothing wrong with embracing that.

You know, at least until the internet does that thing it always does and digs up all the proverbial skeletons that Dart Guy has in his closet. But until then, light(en) up.

FOXSports.com LOADED: 04.18.2017

1060161 Websites

FOXSports.com / Zach Werenski will miss the rest of the season after taking a puck to the face

Pete Blackburn

Apr 17, 2017 at 12:58p ET

Blue Jackets' defenseman Zach Werenski took a puck straight to the face during Sunday's Game 3 in Columbus, and he did his best to battle through it. He made it further than most of us non-hockey folk would have by getting stitched up and returning to the game sporting a massive, swollen black eye with a gnarly cut underneath.

Werenski eventually had to leave the game once the eye was too swollen to see out of, and the picture he shared after the game was pretty horrific:

Playoff hockey... pic.twitter.com/4GNOLYVECv

— Zach Werenski (@ZachWerenski) April 17, 2017

On Monday morning, the Blue Jackets announced that Werenski's season was over due to a facial fracture.

That season may only be one more game (the Penguins currently lead the Jackets three games to none in their opening-round series) but losing Werenski is a huge blow. The 19-year-old rookie has been tremendous on Columbus' blue line this season.

Zach Werenski is out for the remainder of the season, per John Tortorella.

Watch live: [#CBJ](https://t.co/DPKBmxz5ll)

— ColumbusBlueJackets (@BlueJacketsNHL) April 17, 2017

If it's any consolation, he'll be going out in the good graces of his teammates, coaches and fans. Following Sunday's loss, the perpetually-cranky Blue Jackets coach John Tortorella praised Werenski, saying he has "balls as big as the building."

FOXSports.com LOADED: 04.18.2017

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CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • April 18, 2017

FOXSports.com / Zack Kassian's unlikely ride to Oilers playoff hero

Pete Blackburn

Apr 17, 2017 at 9:51a ET

The NHL's Stanley Cup playoffs are still less than a week old but one of the best stories to this point has been the redemption of Zack Kassian in Edmonton.

The 26-year-old Oilers forward, who has already played on four teams in the league, saw himself labeled a bust and gone public with his battle with alcoholism, has been a force through the first three games of the team's opening-round series against the San Jose Sharks. Once a doubt to ever reach his potential, he's emerging as an unlikely hero on a team that has plenty of well-established talent in the lineup.

Mostly recognized for his grit and tenacity, it's not completely unsurprising that Kassian has been a bit of a wrecking ball early in the series. The winger has been a punishing presence and did his best to inject a ton of energy into Rogers Place during the Oilers' first two home games to start the playoff series, their first in over a decade.

But Kassian has also been a factor in Edmonton's offensive game. Through the first three games, Kassian leads the Oilers with two goals — ahead of Connor McDavid, Leon Draisaitl, Jordan Eberle and everyone else. One of those goals came during Sunday's Game 3, and it was the only one of the game.

The late-game tally gave Edmonton a big win on the road and a series lead, two games to one. After the game, Kassian said he got lucky, but his teammates wouldn't stand for such humility.

"You can't say enough about him right now," said Oilers goalie Cam Talbot. "He's playing on a new level right now."

Lucky or not, it's hard to ignore the impact that Kassian has had on the series to this point, and it's even harder to ignore how good of a story it is.

Kassian's NHL career has been quite the bumpy road to this point. It's easy to forget that the winger was once a first-round pick (13th overall) in 2009, viewed as a potential tough, dynamic power forward who could bruise his way to being a productive NHL player.

Things didn't work out exactly as expected. Flash forward to 2017 and Kassian has bounced around, already on his fourth NHL club. Through parts of seven seasons, he showed flashes of that potential but has yet to put it together on a consistent basis.

His career has been defined by off-ice struggles just as much, if not more so, as his production in the league.

While with the Montreal Canadiens in 2015, Kassian was under the influence when a car he was riding in struck a tree just a few days prior to the season. Kassian, who had just been traded to Montreal in the offseason, wasn't driving the vehicle but he broke his nose and foot in the accident.

Canadiens general manager Marc Bergevin publicly called Kassian out, saying the incident showed a "lack of character and judgment." Shortly thereafter, the forward was suspended without pay and placed in the NHL's substance abuse program.

A few months later, just hours after it was announced that Kassian had completed the program, the Canadiens placed him on waivers. He was told not to report to their AHL affiliate, and a few days later he was traded without ever playing a game for the Canadiens.

That trade destination was Edmonton — a place that didn't exactly hold much love for Kassian. Oilers fans knew Kassian: In 2013, then with the Canucks, Kassian broke the jaw of Oilers forward Sam Gagner with a reckless high stick.

Months later, Kassian solidified his place as enemy to the Oilers when the two teams met again, and he mocked Gagner for wearing a face shield to protect that same jaw he broke.

View post on [imgur.com](#)

Not only was Kassian faced with winning over a fanbase that didn't care for him much, he also recognized it was probably his last shot to prove that he deserved a spot in the league.

He admitted to being an alcoholic and was open and candid about his alcoholism, as well as his sobriety.

"Some days are great, some days are tough," Kassian said earlier this season, via the National Post. "But there are no ifs, and or buts. I've made my mind up. I definitely don't want to go back to the way I was."

For now, he's dishing out big hits like these and earning the cheers of Oilers fans:

I'd be remiss if I didn't point out that both of those hits were arguably illegal and could have been penalized, but neither were — much to the joy of Edmonton's faithful.

That's the first Kassian chant I've heard in this building. Sam Gagner is cringing somewhere

— Ryan Rishaug (@TSNRyanRishaug) April 15, 2017

Maybe Kassian's heightened impact probably isn't sustainable and this is just a particularly high point for a role player. But maybe it's him finally starting to realize his full potential, a glimpse at the player that he was believed to be when he was taken in the first-round.

Regardless, there's no doubt that the Oilers' commitment to Kassian — and Kassian's commitment to himself — is paying off at an absolutely crucial time. And it's hard not to feel good about that.

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1060163 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Bozak's overtime winner sends Maple Leafs fans into delirium

Chris Johnston

April 17, 2017, 10:20 PM

TORONTO — Take a moment and exhale. Feel free to pull out a dart if the urge hits.

Because if you count yourself among the legion of long-sufferers — the paper-bag-wearing, waffle-tossing folks who've repeatedly been punched in the gut by their love of the Toronto Maple Leafs — it simply doesn't get much better than this.

Three games, three overtimes and a 2-1 series lead over the best regular-season team in hockey after Tyler Bozak sent the city into delirium.

"This isn't pressure," Nazem Kadri said Monday night. "This is fun for us."

For fans, this is a little like falling in love.

And this time it's safe to do so even if it's far from guaranteed the fairytale will continue into next week.

However, to anyone who was truly moved by the emotions of a game that devolved into delightful madness — the early panic when Washington went ahead 2-0, the dread of a two-minute 5-on-3 penalty kill, the thrill of the comeback and Bozak's overtime winner — I urge you to take some time to savour whatever it is you're feeling right now.

This is what it's all about.

It won't be too long before a young Leafs team is in a situation resembling these Capitals. When the playoffs will be viewed as Stanley Cup or bust, and gut-wrenching disappointment is forever the bounce of a puck away.

That will be fun, too, but it won't be like this.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • April 18, 2017

This massive, expectation-free civic celebration – with blue and white Matthews, Marner and Nylander sweaters dotting Maple Leaf Square alongside the Gilmours, Domis and Sittlers dug out from the back of a closet.

"It's insane," said Auston Matthews, when asked what his first home playoff game felt like. "You look at the TV up on the Jumbotron and you see the Maple Leaf Square outside. That's something I've never seen before. It's pretty incredible.

"So it's pretty special for a city that is so passionate not only for the hockey team, but for all sports teams. It's a passionate sports city, so it's a pretty big honour to play in one like this."

Play they did.

Toronto overcame a nervous start and goals against on the first two shots of the game. It survived that 5-on-3 penalty kill, not to mention another Capitals power play soon after, before bringing an absolute tidal wave of pressure in the third period.

While the 19,861 hoarse-voiced fans in attendance certainly got their money's worth, most of them didn't really need a seat. It was end-to-end action, hits, goals and chances.

"It was exciting," said Kadri. "(We were) very anxious to drop the puck in our home building, we knew it was going to be an electric atmosphere, and we certainly gave them what they wanted to see."

Things really began to turn after the midway point of the first period, when Nadri twice ran over Brooks Orpik to send a charge through a building that had fallen quiet after the Capitals 2-0 start. That was immediately followed by the first playoff goal of Matthews's career, when he cruised right down Yonge Street in the Washington zone and got rewarded for his second effort.

One thing that has been abundantly clear so far in this series is the Leafs' desire. They look hungry and are doing everything in their power to go out and win it.

As for the Caps? They're talking about bad bounces and trying to escape the narrative of their underachieving past.

And, yet, this Game 3 was really setting up as one you'd expect them to win.

"First of all, I think when we're up 3-1 and then we're giving the game away," said centre Nicklas Backstrom. "They got some lucky goals, but at the same time, that's hockey. So, up 3-1, we shouldn't let them in the game again. But we do."

"They're capitalizing on their moments," added Capitals coach Barry Trotz. "We're not."

It should be noted that the Leafs also generated more offensively, controlling 58 per cent of the shot attempts at even strength. They were not given a serious chance by outsiders in this series, but many are already rethinking their predictions.

"It's a lot closer match than people let on," said Trotz. "It's not David and Goliath."

Anything seems possible now.

The Leafs have guaranteed themselves, at minimum, at least two more home dates this spring. Game 4 goes Wednesday night and a Game 6 will be played here on Sunday, if necessary.

Those hold the promise of more opportunities to chart a course up the mountain after years of stumbling around the desert. There was a delightful moment on Monday after Kadri scored to narrow Washington's lead to 3-2, and Leafs coach Mike Babcock followed by putting his dynamic rookie line out for the final minute of the second period.

Zach Hyman worked the puck free behind the goal with a tenacious forecheck and then Matthews found William Nylander open in front. It took two shots, but he tied the score 3-3 as the building shook around him.

"The playoffs is what we've wanted the whole year," said Matthews. "It's what they've wanted as well."

No matter what happens next, remember that.

This is exactly what you hoped for, and waited for, and dreamed about. And when was the last time the Leafs gave you that?

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 04.18.2017

1060164 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Injured Polak taking on role of cheerleader for Maple Leafs

Chris Johnston

April 17, 2017, 12:14 PM

TORONTO – Win it for Roman.

As far as rallying cries go, this might not be what you expect to hear from the Toronto Maple Leafs. But there was no doubting Roman Polak's incredible popularity among his teammates after he came in Monday morning to speak with them before facing the Washington Capitals in Game 3.

"He's one of the best team guys we have," said defenceman Morgan Rielly. "To lose him at this time of year is tough, for sure. But you just want to be there for him. I mean he's been there for us all year, he's going to continue to be there for us, he was here this morning around the guys.

"It sucks."

Polak suffered a serious injury to his right leg and/or ankle on Saturday night in Washington. Surgery is required and it will end his season.

The injury happened on a freak play: The veteran's leg and ankle got twisted under him while he fell to the ice after taking a hit from Capitals defenceman Brooks Orpik in the second period. He needed assistance to be helped off the ice.

"A guy as tough as him, when you see him on the ice, I don't know if I've ever seen him stay down," said Orpik, who sent Polak a text wishing him luck with the recovery. "When you see him stay down, especially that close to the bench, you know there's something probably not right."

Added Rielly: "You feel for the guy. It's a tough injury. I watched the replay, it's not pretty."

Nikita Zaitsev has recovered from a concussion and will replace Polak in the lineup for Game 3, but his absence may be felt over the long term. He is a physically intimidating defender who went to the Stanley Cup final with San Jose last spring.

The 30-year-old is also one of the few players capable of growing a playoff beard on a young team.

"You never want to see somebody go down like that," said rookie centre Auston Matthews. "Roman's a pretty important part of this team, not only on the ice but off. He's obviously had a lot of experience, especially in these situations.

"You definitely hope for the best as far as recovery and surgery goes."

Teammates knew it was bad when he couldn't stand up using his own strength. This is a guy who famously took a shot to the face in January of 2015 and returned to the same game without a visor after receiving 15 stitches on the outside of his cheek and seven more inside.

"I think we play similar styles," said Orpik. "It sucks missing games at any point in the season, but you play 82 games to set yourself up to play in the playoffs – and you don't always make the playoffs, either – so these are the games that you really look forward to.

"I missed a few (playoff games) last year with a concussion and you feel like you're letting some people down no matter if it's in your control or not."

Polak left Verizon Center in a wheelchair after Game 2 and texted with some teammates on Sunday. He then paid them a visit at Air Canada Centre on Monday morning to offer an encouraging word.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • April 18, 2017

He was said to be fairly upbeat even though usual defence partner Matt Hunwick acknowledged: "I know he's pretty devastated."

Asked what will be missed without his presence in these games, Hunwick replied: "Just his stability."

"You know what you're going to get every night out of him," he said. "Especially come playoff time, his shot-blocking, his physical play, it's perfect come playoff time. It's hard to replace those guys."

"He'll be around. He'll support us and we'll definitely be thinking of him."

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 04.18.2017

1060165 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Believe it: The Toronto Maple Leafs are actually good

Luke Fox

April 18, 2017, 12:31 AM

"Game 3s tend to be jacked up. It should be a show tonight." — Connor Carrick, seeing the future

TORONTO – Smart hockey people keep saying it, and then something new and surprising will happen, and a few more people will join the refrain.

But this? Well, this one converted hordes of 'em. Ovation-giving, towel-whipping, seat-banging, dart-smoking crowds of believers.

The Toronto Maple Leafs are actually good.

"This isn't David and Goliath," said Barry Trotz, head coach of a Presidents' Trophy-winning Washington Capitals team that now trails the final team to slip into the playoffs 2-1 in the series.

"It's not coming easy right now. Three overtime games. Heck of a series. You find out a lot about your guys."

The city of Toronto is still discovering the depth of resolve this Maple Leafs group wields.

#TheLeafsAreActuallyGood

— Tony X. (@soloucity) April 18, 2017

The one-two heavyweight punch of Nicklas Backstrom and Alex Ovechkin popped the Capitals to a 2-0 lead less than five minutes into the Air Canada Centre's first Stanley Cup playoff game in four years. Dart Guy's war paint was still wet. It would've been a fair time to wilt.

Only, these guys don't.

Leo Komarov—the poly-lingual crazy uncle of the checking line—laid a beastly hit on Ovechkin then shutdown-slash-scoring centre Nazem Kadri detonated big, bad Brooks Orpik with his shoulder.

"At that point in time, I had smoke coming out of my ears," Kadri said post-game. "I felt like I had to do something about it. I just tried to lay a clean body check and get the guys going."

Said Morgan Rielly: "We love it when he plays like that."

With fans inside and outside the building still buzzing over the hits, future Calder winner Auston Matthews banged in the first playoff goal of his career on the very next shift: 2-1.

"Those two have been great for us all series, not just on the scoresheet but getting under the opponent's skin," Matthews said. "That was awesome for us to kind of get the momentum off of that shift and score that goal and continued to ride it."

Another, lesser incarnation of the Leafs would not have been able to rally from 2-0 early, let alone 3-1 late in Period 2, which was the score after Evgeny Kuznetsov whipped an acute-angle rebound past Frederik Andersen and flapped like a bird in celebration because Don Cherry needs content.

So when the Capitals, a top-four squad with the man-advantage, were given a full two minutes of 5-on-3 power-play time, one wouldn't blame the non-believers for bracing for pain.

"Obviously, we had to use it," Ovechkin said.

They didn't. And, as per hockey law, when you fail to score 5-on-3, the killing team gets all the momentum.

"That's what won us the game," said Kadri, who, after the Leafs killed another minor penalty, fired a point shot off Orpik's butt and past Holtby.

Dogged forechecking from Zach Hyman and Matthews created William Nylander's tying goal in the waning moments of the second period, and the third was all Toronto, who came at the Caps in waves. The visitors needed 13 minutes and 25 seconds to register a third-period shot.

"On our heels... just on our heels," Washington defenceman Matt Niskanen tried explaining in a hushed tone. "They took it to us."

A bad high-sticking penalty by Lars Eller with 15 seconds left in regulation made it feel like 3-3 Leafs heading into the third overtime game of the series.

Giddy, razzzy "Hoooolt-Beeee!" chants rained like misery used to.

And in a series where every game needs more than 60 minutes and all two-goal leads go to die, the young, confident Maple Leafs entered OT with a fresh sheet and an extra man on the ice.

Tyler Bozak is one of the last remnants of those ugly times the town hardly ever speaks of, the era when, as a whole, the Leafs felt like individuals divided and/or disinterested. He's the one that tipped do-everything Kadri's slap pass in the high slot (a well-rehearsed play) to glory and song.

"That might have been the happiest I've been in my entire career," Kadri said. "This isn't pressure. This is fun for us."

Bozak, the night's hero, was a jumble of emotions.

"You just want to be with your teammates and celebrate," Bozak said.

"We've always believed in ourselves. It's never bad to be in an underdog position. There's a little less pressure, but we put a lot of pressure on ourselves to perform, and we believe in ourselves in here and that's the most important thing."

Funny. All doubt in this squad of kids accustomed to winning comes from outside.

The Capitals repeatedly pay their opponents compliments, as if cushioning a blow they're beginning to fear.

"It's not like we're playing a squirt AA team," the Capitals' John Carlson said.

The last time Trotz was in Toronto, he had a chat with his friend Babcock, whose team was immersed in a three-headed dogfight for a wildcard spot.

"There's no question you're going to be in," Trotz told him. "You're too good of a hockey team."

Babcock wouldn't agree, at least not out loud. Didn't want to jinx it.

Not only are the Maple Leafs in, with two games in the bank, they are—in the immortal words of Bon Jovi—halfway there.

"I thought we gained confidence in Game 1 because we showed we can play. Game 2 was a big confidence-builder," Babcock said.

"Now if you talk to our guys, our guys think they're a good hockey team. They're playing a good hockey team, but I think you gain respect for yourself in the process, and you start believing that maybe you can do this."

Enjoy these two home games cause this is over in 5 for @Capitals

— Mike Modano (@9modano) April 17, 2017

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 04.18.2017

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CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • April 18, 2017

Sportsnet.ca / Momentum-shifting play a key factor in Senators' Game 3 win

Kristina Rutherford

April 18, 2017, 2:09 AM

BOSTON – Bobby Ryan had on his shin pads and skates, but no hockey pants, and he was standing in the hallway outside the visitor's dressing room at TD Garden when goalie Craig Anderson walked by and smacked him on the butt, then turned around and grinned.

Yes, the Ottawa Senators were feeling pretty good Monday night in Boston, even if almost everybody else wasn't.

Minutes earlier, Ryan had hammered home an overtime winner on a power play that came on account of a questionable call, which led to a 4-3 win for the Senators, giving them a 2-1 lead in this first-round series.

"First playoff [overtime winner] for me, so incredible just to get up and see the guys running at you full steam," Ryan said, smiling. "Just incredible."

It really was, and not just the winning goal. Game 3 had everything.

It was a ridiculous 114-foot pass authored by (who else?) captain Erik Karlsson that turned into an assist on the first goal of the game. There was a three-goal lead. There was a blown three-goal lead. There were a lot of hits, some face-washes. Senators defenceman Dion Phaneuf and Boston Bruins winger David Backes had a close-talking conversation during play that lasted a good 20 seconds. The first half was all Senators. The second half was mostly Bruins.

And then there was that penalty call in overtime – on Ryan – that led to Ryan's goal.

"Demoralizing and disappointing," is how Bruins head coach Bruce Cassidy classified the penalty. "There's probably a lot more words, but they called it. So once they call it, it's our job to kill it."

Bruins centreman Riley Nash drew the penalty after exchanging shots with Ryan while they were both down on the ice. Nash caught Ryan in the face, and Ryan's head snapped back.

"I think it was pretty selfish of me," Nash said. "You can't make that play, can't put the refs in that position regardless of what happened before that." He said Ryan "kind of embellished it," but added, "it can't happen. You've got to take that."

Ryan didn't expect a call on the play.

"We got on the fortunate end of one tonight," he said. "We'll take it. We got a little bit of a break, and we bailed ourselves out."

They did. For the second time in a row, Ottawa scored the big one in extra time, this time with a little help from the refs. It was yet another swing in a game full of them, the biggest one coming when the Bruins scored three straight in less than eight minutes.

As Ryan said of the momentum shifts in Game 3: "You can actually feel the ice tilt."

For the first time in this series, a team scored in the first period, and Ottawa did so not once, but twice, silencing (just for a bit) this sold out crowd of 17,565.

It started when Karlsson skated around his own net, stepped just over the goal-line, then floated an airborne pass to the Bruins blue-line – about 114 feet – that landed right on the stick of winger Mike Hoffman, who made a move on the ensuing breakaway and then slid the puck past Tuukka Rask for his first goal of these playoffs.

The pass was straight up unbelievable, and it was Karlsson's first of two assists on the night.

Thirty-five seconds after Hoffman struck, Karlsson quarterbacked another one, this time keeping the puck in and making a pass to Viktor Stalberg down low, which was followed by a pass to Ryan and another to an open Derick Brassard in front. Just like that, it was 2-0 Ottawa.

"That's probably the best 20 minutes I've seen all year from us," said Hoffman.

TD Garden had been raucous, but for a few moments there, after all that, it felt more like a library. On a Bruins power play later in the first period, the team that had the NHL's seventh-best percentage with the man advantage (21.7) could get nothing going, not even a single shot. And so the fans booed.

By the end of the first, shots were 10-3, Ottawa.

Hoffman scored his second of the game a little under four minutes into the second, on the power play, when he one-timed a Chris Wideman pass and sent a laser from the point, off the post, and in.

You could hear a pin drop at the Garden, after that.

But less than three minutes later, it got really loud. This is when the ice tilted.

Bruins defenceman John-Michael Liles sent a point shot through traffic, and centreman Noel Acciari tipped it on the way in. Anderson looked up at the ceiling after that one.

Then came the "Let's go Bru-ins!" chants, and the yellow towels were flung around.

"That's momentum," said Anderson. "We use the crowd in our building in our favour when we made it close...I think that happened tonight, too."

Forty-two seconds after the Acciari goal, the noise in the Garden hit a fever pitch. On a dump-in that bounced around just inside Ottawa's blue-line, Ryan waited for the bouncing puck and it bounced right over his stick. Ryan lost his stick and both gloves trying to block a charging Backes, and Backes had Ryan's stick on his back when he put one past Anderson to bring the Bruins within one.

Boston had scored two goals on just six shots. It was like they'd just woken up: They started hitting everything. And then they made good on a power play chance, just after a two-man advantage had expired, when winger David Pastrnak wired a one-timer past Anderson.

Pastrnak skated toward the boards, put a hand around his ear a la 'I can't hear you!' – even though the crowd was really loud – and the fans continued to go bananas.

"They pushed back, give them credit," said Anderson. "We don't give them a whole lot, but then when we do, it seems to be the breakdown."

It does. The Bruins scored three times on nine shots. And so it had been 3-0, Ottawa, and now it was 3-3, heading into the third.

Ryan says it was pretty calm in the Senators dressing room after the second. "There was a sense that we didn't feel like we let them get away," he said. "Our captain spoke, the right guy said the right message. We went out and we faced adversity whether it was on the ice or off the ice all year long in a lot of different situations, and we responded every time."

Boston had the balance of chances in the third, and Anderson made a massive save on David Krejci, who returned to the lineup for Game 3.

"He had some incredible ones down the stretch," Ryan said, which he expected from Anderson, considering a pretty soft one that snuck past him to make it 3-1. "He's a guy that, that doesn't do anything but anger him," Ryan said. "When he lets one in like that you know he's gonna come back strong."

Ottawa had the momentum in overtime, then came the penalty, then came the goal – from Karlsson to Kyle Turris to Ryan to the back of the net – 5:43 into that extra frame.

Ryan didn't notice, but the rink got really quiet after he scored that one.

As he pointed out, with a smile: "It was loud where I was with all the guys around me."

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1060167 Websites



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • April 18, 2017

Sportsnet.ca / Flames lament 'what if' Game 3 that slipped through their fingers

Ryan Dixon

April 18, 2017, 3:10 AM

CALGARY – It was a laughter that turned into a crier. Now, the Calgary Flames are one defeat from being swept out of the playoffs.

Corey Perry capped a crazy Anaheim Ducks comeback 1:30 into overtime at the Scotiabank Saddledome on Monday night when his centering attempt banked off a couple Flames and wound up in the net for a 5-4 Ducks triumph. It was a stunning final blow in a game that saw Anaheim crawl out of a 4-1 deficit to snatch victory.

Now, thanks in large part to two goals from defenceman Shea Theodore and a three-point night by grinder Nate Thompson, the Pacific Division champs are one win from advancing thanks to a 3-0 series lead.

"A 4-1 game, you gotta close that out," said Flames captain Mark Giordano. "There's no excuses."

There are, of course, reasons when something like this happens and there's no hiding from the reality that goalie Brian Elliott had a large hand in Calgary's undoing.

The Flames appeared to be cruising near the end of the second period, riding power-play goals from Sean Monahan, Kris Versteeg and Sam Bennett, as well as an even-strength marker by Michael Stone to a three-goal cushion that prompted Anaheim coach Randy Carlyle to yank John Gibson in favour of Jonathan Bernier. The shots after 40 minutes were 24-14 in favour of the Flames, but one of the Ducks' last attempts – a sharp-angle floater from Theodore – eluded the glove of Elliott.

In a sombre Flames room, the goalie shouldered much of the blame.

"That's not an easy one, especially personally," he said. "I didn't feel I played very well and I let the team down a little bit.

"I have to own that. It's not an easy thing to do. The guys spotted four goals, we should win a game like that."

While Calgary was still in prime position to do so after 40, there's no doubt Anaheim sprung to life after the goal. In fact, the Ducks nearly made it 4-3 in the dying seconds of the middle frame when Jakob Silfverberg rang one off the post.

"We couldn't seem to make two passes together for the better part the first two periods," said Carlyle. "We got a goal that gave us some life and made us believe that we have a chance."

Based on past precedent, that should not have been the case. Calgary was lights out when it came to closing games in the regular season, posting a league best .971 points percentage in contests it led after two periods.

And for 10 minutes of the third, there was no further indication of an Anaheim threat until Thompson – who was bumped up from the fourth line to the third during the game – tipped home a point shot with a stick video review confirmed was under the league's legal height limit.

Then, with fewer than five minutes remaining, a point shot from Theodore nicked off Bennett and found the net for the equalizer. By that point, the 'C of Red' was full of white knuckles as the home team crumpled.

"We didn't have enough push or drive," said Giordano. "We allowed them to come and a few shots from the point went in. We sort of shelled up a little bit."

The "what if" game will surely be played well into the night in Calgary. Both Monahan and Troy Brouwer had tap-in misses in the second period that inspired face palms and there's no denying Anaheim continues to be on the right end of some fortuitous breaks.

Game 2 was decided on a puck that caromed off Lance Bouma's skate in the high slot and somehow found the net; for most of the time it took to review Thompson's deflection, Twitter was rife with non-partisans saying the goal would come back; Perry's overtime winner kicked off Elliott's stick, plunked Stone in the back of the leg while he battled Thompson on the lip of the crease and went into the net.

A pity party, however, is not something Stone wants any part of.

"I think those bounces are caused by different things that happen before it gets to that point," he said.

Even after all that, redemption seemed at hand for a precious moment in overtime when Johnny Gaudreau slipped behind the Anaheim defence.

"We had a chance there with Johnny," said Calgary coach Glen Gulutzan. "We were a foot away from springing him on a break."

The pass, though, went just past the outstretched stick of the Flames sniper and, only seconds later, the game was over.

And if Calgary can't solve its problems quick, the series soon will be, too.

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 04.18.2017

1060168 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Believe it: The Toronto Maple Leafs are actually good

Luke Fox

April 18, 2017, 12:31 AM

TORONTO – Smart hockey people keep saying it, and then something new and surprising will happen, and a few more people will join the refrain.

But this? Well, this one converted hordes of 'em. Ovation-giving, towel-whipping, seat-banging, dart-smoking crowds of believers.

The Toronto Maple Leafs are actually good.

"This isn't David and Goliath," said Barry Trotz, head coach of a Presidents' Trophy-winning Washington Capitals team that now trails the final team to slip into the playoffs 2-1 in the series.

"It's not coming easy right now. Three overtime games. Heck of a series. You find out a lot about your guys."

The city of Toronto is still discovering the depth of resolve this Maple Leafs group wields.

#TheLeafsAreActuallyGood

— Tony X. (@solocity) April 18, 2017

The one-two heavyweight punch of Nicklas Backstrom and Alex Ovechkin popped the Capitals to a 2-0 lead less than five minutes into the Air Canada Centre's first Stanley Cup playoff game in four years. Dart Guy's war paint was still wet. It would've been a fair time to wilt.

Only, these guys don't.

Leo Komarov—the poly-lingual crazy uncle of the checking line—laid a beastly hit on Ovechkin then shutdown-slash-scoring centre Nazem Kadri detonated big, bad Brooks Orpik with his shoulder.

"At that point in time, I had smoke coming out of my ears," Kadri said post-game. "I felt like I had to do something about it. I just tried to lay a clean body check and get the guys going."

Said Morgan Rielly: "We love it when he plays like that."

With fans inside and outside the building still buzzing over the hits, future Calder winner Auston Matthews banged in the first playoff goal of his career on the very next shift: 2-1.

"Those two have been great for us all series, not just on the scoresheet but getting under the opponent's skin," Matthews said. "That was awesome for us to kind of get the momentum off of that shift and score that goal and continued to ride it."

Another, lesser incarnation of the Leafs would not have been able to rally from 2-0 early, let alone 3-1 late in Period 2, which was the score after Evgeny Kuznetsov whipped an acute-angle rebound past Frederik Andersen and flapped like a bird in celebration because Don Cherry needs content.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • April 18, 2017

So when the Capitals, a top-four squad with the man-advantage, were given a full two minutes of 5-on-3 power-play time, one wouldn't blame the non-believers for bracing for pain.

"Obviously, we had to use it," Ovechkin said.

They didn't. And, as per hockey law, when you fail to score 5-on-3, the killing team gets all the momentum.

"That's what won us the game," said Kadri, who, after the Leafs killed another minor penalty, fired a point shot off Orpik's butt and past Holtby.

Dogged forechecking from Zach Hyman and Matthews created William Nylander's tying goal in the waning moments of the second period, and the third was all Toronto, who came at the Caps in waves. The visitors needed 13 minutes and 25 seconds to register a third-period shot.

"On our heels... just on our heels," Washington defenceman Matt Niskanen tried explaining in a hushed tone. "They took it to us."

A bad high-sticking penalty by Lars Eller with 15 seconds left in regulation made it feel like 3-3 Leafs heading into the third overtime game of the series.

Giddy, razzzy "Hoooolt-Beeee!" chants rained like misery used to.

And in a series where every game needs more than 60 minutes and all two-goal leads go to die, the young, confident Maple Leafs entered OT with a fresh sheet and an extra man on the ice.

Tyler Bozak is one of the last remnants of those ugly times the town hardly ever speaks of, the era when, as a whole, the Leafs felt like individuals divided and/or disinterested. He's the one that tipped do-everything Kadri's slap pass in the high slot (a well-rehearsed play) to glory and song.

"That might have been the happiest I've been in my entire career," Kadri said. "This isn't pressure. This is fun for us."

Bozak, the night's hero, was a jumble of emotions.

"You just want to be with your teammates and celebrate," Bozak said.

"We've always believed in ourselves. It's never bad to be in an underdog position. There's a little less pressure, but we put a lot of pressure on ourselves to perform, and we believe in ourselves in here and that's the most important thing."

Funny. All doubt in this squad of kids accustomed to winning comes from outside.

The Capitals repeatedly pay their opponents compliments, as if cushioning a blow they're beginning to fear.

"It's not like we're playing a squirt AA team," the Capitals' John Carlson said.

The last time Trotz was in Toronto, he had a chat with his friend Babcock, whose team was immersed in a three-headed dogfight for a wildcard spot.

"There's no question you're going to be in," Trotz told him. "You're too good of a hockey team."

Babcock wouldn't agree, at least not out loud. Didn't want to jinx it.

Not only are the Maple Leafs in, with two games in the bank, they are—in the immortal words of Bon Jovi—halfway there.

"I thought we gained confidence in Game 1 because we showed we can play. Game 2 was a big confidence-builder," Babcock said.

"Now if you talk to our guys, our guys think they're a good hockey team. They're playing a good hockey team, but I think you gain respect for yourself in the process, and you start believing that maybe you can do this."

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 04.18.2017

1060169 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Flashy Oilers fine playing ugly hockey, as long as they win

Mark Spector

April 17, 2017, 8:51 PM

SAN JOSE — This was supposed to be hockey's premier offensive showcase.

Connor McDavid, the Art Ross Trophy winner and the only 100-point player in the NHL this season, against Brent Burns, whose 76 points made him the highest scoring defenceman.

Eight measly goals later, we've got the lowest scoring series of them all. The Oilers, who finished eighth in league scoring this season, and San Jose (19th) have turned a 3-2 league into a 2-1 league, and it's heading south with back-to-back Cam Talbot shutouts.

And you know what's really weird? That the Edmonton Oilers have figured out how to win Games 2 and 3 on the strength of three goals in total is as exciting to their players as it is disconcerting for the rest of the NHL.

"If we'd have mapped out the first three games," began Sharks coach Pete DeBoer, "and said we'd control McDavid and they would take five or six penalties in two of the first three games, I'd have taken that and liked our chances. We didn't take advantage of that — or we haven't to date."

Through three games McDavid has a goal (short-handed) and an assist (power play) and six shots on net. Five-on-five he's been virtually shut down by the Sharks.

That means the "McDavid Moment" — when he grabs a puck at the bottom of the defensive circles, turns it up ice and hits warp speed as he flies over the blue-line and bears down on a panic-stricken defenceman — has been virtually eliminated by San Jose's game plan.

That is to say, ticket prices in Edmonton go up about 40 per cent for playoffs. But now that the post-season has started, the precise elements of the game that justify the already outrageous regular season pricing disappear.

I would argue there is no single play in hockey today that edges a fan to the front of their chair like the "McDavid Moment." That it has all but disappeared is an anomaly that McDavid both accepts and endorses.

As long as his Oilers are winning, of course.

"That's how you want to win. That's how you're going to win games. That's how you're going to win the championship. Everyone has to buy in," he said Monday on the off day in Northern California. "Sure, it would be better if these games were ending 7-6. The fans would love it, but those are coaches' nightmares. Ultimately, this is how it's going to played, and we're fine with that."

He wouldn't prefer it if offence was the key to winning, instead of defence?

"You do anything to win the game," McDavid said. "It doesn't matter if you get three points, no points... It doesn't matter. It's just all about getting the win."

The irony is, long before McDavid arrived in Edmonton his teammates were bucking the trend of which we speak. Players like Jordan Eberle, Ryan Nugent-Hopkins and the departed Taylor Hall played flawed games that good teams preyed upon.

Edmonton was always the team to take the unnecessary chance in a 1-1 game. To cheat offensively for that go-ahead goal, then watch it end up in their own net instead.

"Nuge and I have been here the longest, and we've seen the worst. We've had to tailor our games around playing the right way," said Eberle, whose point production fell a bit this season, though his overall game improved by miles. "This year, Nuge and I are playing against the best lines every night. And we're playing well, doing it the right way. I think (head coach Todd McLellan) finally trusts us. That in itself is progress, that we're thinking like that."

Game 3 of this series stretched into the 50th minute, tied 0-0. Edmonton can play that way now, and win. We've always said, it's only the fans of the losing team that complain about a 1-0 playoff game.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • April 18, 2017

"Look around the league," DeBoer said. "You're seeing Kane and Toews in Chicago going through the same thing. This time of year, you've got to be comfortable playing in tight, 1-0 games. The teams that win, are."

Tape II Tape

Ryan Dixon and Rory Boylen go deep on pucks with a mix of facts and fun, leaning on a varied group of hockey voices to give their take on the country's most beloved game.

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We're still just three games into this thing, and as long as the Oilers run out a top six with players like McDavid, Eberle, Nugent-Hopkins, Milan Lucic and Leon Draisaitl, goals will come.

Just as the 2006 Oilers defeated Detroit in Round 1 by employing a strict trap, should Edmonton advance we might see a more liberated brand of hockey as the playoffs progress.

Or not...

"It's like chess out there," said Eberle. "You're not going to make the big, dramatic move all the time. You move a pawn here, a pawn there... You make the play when you see it, and you make the right one."

We would pose this question: Have you ever paid admission to watch chess?

Exactly.

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1060170 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Ron and Don: Is Nikita Zaitsev actually a terrible defender?

Sportsnet Staff

April 17, 2017, 8:45 PM

Don Cherry doesn't understand what all the fuss is about over Toronto Maple Leafs defenceman Nikita Zaitsev.

Speaking on Coach's Corner Monday, Cherry doesn't think much of Zaitsev's defence and is astonished the Leafs are reportedly giving the 25-year-old a seven-year contract extension.

"Can you imagine people giving me a hard time – Toronto Maple Leafs upset with me – because I said Zaitsev is not a defenceman," Cherry said. "He's minus-22, he leads the whole team in minus and you're worried about getting him back. ..."

"You're gonna give a seven-year contract, ridiculous. The guys on the Marlies are watching this game saying, 'I can't believe they're giving this guy a seven-year contract, [he's] minus-2 and he keeps playing.'"

Zaitsev is in his first season with Toronto, signing a one-year, entry-level deal with the Leafs in May last year after spending eight seasons playing professionally in Russia. He played in all 82 of Toronto's regular-season games this season, tallying up 36 points (four goals, 32 assists).

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1060171 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Maple Leafs alight for Dart Guy: 'He'll be on the big screen'

Luke Fox

April 17, 2017, 1:59 PM

TORONTO – Dart Guy can even make Auston Matthews break his game face.

"I saw him on Twitter a little bit," the Toronto Maple Leafs superstar said of the Toronto Maple Leafs superfan.

"Pretty cool. Interesting face mask and everything. I didn't know they let cigarettes in the building. I think he's coming tonight, so that'll be pretty fun."

True story.

Embracing the Dart Guy phenomenon, the franchise extended an invite to 37-year-old man/meme Jason Maslakow for Game 3 Monday at Air Canada Centre.

A huge thank you to @MapleLeafs for the tickets to the game tomorrow!!! See you there and GO LEAFS GO! #Dartguy

— The Maz (@LeafsMaz20) April 16, 2017

The Sudbury-born, Waterloo-residing Maslakow painted a Maple Leafs logo on his face, shaved his hairdo into a Stanley Cup, dyed his beard blue and drove nine hours with his friends to attend Game 2 of the Maple Leafs–Capitals series at Verizon Center because playoff tickets at ACC ain't cheap.

Maslakow's image was caught on TV, an unlit cigarette poking out his maw.

A couple of overtime periods later, thanks to the power of Photoshop and an excellent Washington Post piece by Dan Steinberg, Dart Guy had become a viral sensation. A Tony X. Leafs Nation could call its own.

Media requests and ticket offers flowed like sweet, dangerous nicotine. Maslakow's Twitter following, which wallowed in the low hundreds, spiked to more than 5,800 by Monday. There's been a call for true Leafs fans to change their avatar to the Dart Guy screengrab.

Toronto's John Derringer, a Q107 morning host, publicly extended an offer to take Dart Guy to Game 4 Wednesday, and there's another offer on the table for Game 5 back in Washington.

I'm thrilled to be taking #Dartman @Leafsmaz20 to Game 4 at ACC. The least I can do for a True Blue #Leafs Road Warrior. #NHLPLAYOFFS pic.twitter.com/jxKkMLE12E

— John Derringer (@JohnDerringer) April 17, 2017

"That's good. I read the thing. He was like, it's too expensive to go to the ACC so he drove down with his buddies," says an approving Brian Boyle. "Good. He'll be on the big screen."

Put on your war paint.

The war paint is going on for @LeafsMaz20. More to come on @570NEWS. #DartGuy #tmTalk pic.twitter.com/Vm8KrFAUfm

— Martin Bauman (@martin_bauman) April 17, 2017

Now comes the beard for @LeafsMaz20. @570NEWS #DartGuy #tmTalk pic.twitter.com/Q6vNq0ETo2

— Martin Bauman (@martin_bauman) April 17, 2017

We could hit peak Dart Guy Monday night, as Dart Guy copycats are expected to be in the building as well. The backlash has already begun, with some fans viewing his 15 minutes of fame as an endorsement of cancer sticks. And generally, the lifespan of these jokes is brief (no more Dart Guy stories from This Guy, promise).

But(t) even if his fame turns to ash in five minutes, Dart Guy is savouring the flicker.

"Being a Leafs fan since I was a kid, it's phenomenal," Maslakow explained to his hometown radio station. "It's absolutely amazing. I mean, who gets free tickets to a Leafs game, let alone two playoff games?"

"I could never imagine that something like this was going to happen. I'm just a passionate fan. I did the makeup and everything and the beard to show my love for the Leafs and my support for the Leafs."

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1060172 Websites



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • April 18, 2017

Sportsnet.ca / Canadiens' Artturi Lehkonen emerging as a player to watch for

Eric Engels

April 17, 2017, 4:00 PM

NEW YORK—Artturi Lehkonen set himself up just high enough in the slot to go unmarked.

There he stood, enjoying the breathing room you rarely get in the Stanley Cup Playoffs, and there he remained just long enough to uncork the shot that gave him the first goal of his playoff career. That marker would give his Montreal Canadiens a lead they never surrendered in their 3-1 win at Madison Square Garden in Game 3 of their series with the New York Rangers Rangers.

You have to wonder how much longer the plucky Finn, who scored 18 goals in the regular season, can continue to fly under the radar in this series, which the Canadiens now lead 2-1.

"He goes quietly about his business," said Canadiens defenceman Jordie Benn on Monday. "He's very good at getting lost on the ice—if you understand that aspect. If you don't keep an eye on him, he's going to end up back door and tapping the puck in.

"He's one of those guys you don't see too much, but when you do see him he's electric out there."

It's an apt description of how Lehkonen, who was drafted 55th overall in 2013, has contributed to Montreal's success thus far.

He's made a subtle but tangible impact in all three games by using his speed effectively on the forecheck, by withstanding the physical punishment of 299 hits thrown between both teams in this series, and by making the type of responsible plays at both blue lines that suggest he's wise beyond his years.

When he did finally emerge from the shadows to score, it was a beautiful wrist shot that kissed the top right corner of the mesh behind Rangers goaltender Henrik Lundqvist.

It's clear that this situation—playing on the world's biggest stage and under its brightest lights—hasn't overwhelmed the 21-year-old rookie.

"I feel comfortable," Lehkonen said after Sunday's game. "I'm just trying to do the best job I can out there and make sure I make the right play at the right time. I'm taking it one game at a time and not getting too far ahead of myself."

That's the mark of maturity.

"He just seems to have that personality that not too much fazes him," Canadiens coach Claude Julien said. "He's excited about playing. I've said that before, he's a smart player and he's just reinforcing that statement I made about him by being what he is in the playoffs right now. He's calm, he's cool, he's making good plays and he certainly is playing like a veteran again in the playoffs."

Lehkonen had gained some pedigree in his three appearances at the world junior hockey championship, helping Finland to a gold medal in 2015. He had also collected a lot of valuable experience before coming over to the NHL in September.

"He's a really intelligent hockey player," said Rangers forward Derek Stepan, who played with Lehkonen as a member of the KalPa Kuopio in the Finnish SM-Liiga when the NHL had locked out its players in 2012. "He's got a great wrist shot, and he's got a knack for the net and a lot of skill. But definitely, the thing that stands out is how intelligent and how smart he is on the ice."

Lehkonen showed it in his two seasons with Frolunda of the Swedish League, too. Had it not been for his 11-goal, eight-assist performance in 16 playoff games, which broke a club record held by Daniel Alfredsson and helped his team capture a championship last spring, he might not be thriving as he is today.

There's little doubt he's emerged as a player to watch out for as this series moves along.

"I think we gotta pay attention to their whole group, but we certainly have to pay attention to him," said Stepan. "He's a guy that can shoot, and if you give him room to do it and he's in a scoring area, he's going to make it tough on [Lundqvist]."

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 04.18.2017

1060173 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Injured Polak taking on role of cheerleader for Maple Leafs

Chris Johnston

April 17, 2017, 12:14 PM

TORONTO – Win it for Roman.

As far as rallying cries go, this might not be what you expect to hear from the Toronto Maple Leafs. But there was no doubting Roman Polak's incredible popularity among his teammates after he came in Monday morning to speak with them before facing the Washington Capitals in Game 3.

"He's one of the best team guys we have," said defenceman Morgan Rielly. "To lose him at this time of year is tough, for sure. But you just want to be there for him. I mean he's been there for us all year, he's going to continue to be there for us, he was here this morning around the guys.

"It sucks."

Polak suffered a serious injury to his right leg and/or ankle on Saturday night in Washington. Surgery is required and it will end his season.

The injury happened on a freak play: The veteran's leg and ankle got twisted under him while he fell to the ice after taking a hit from Capitals defenceman Brooks Orpik in the second period. He needed assistance to be helped off the ice.

"A guy as tough as him, when you see him on the ice, I don't know if I've ever seen him stay down," said Orpik, who sent Polak a text wishing him luck with the recovery. "When you see him stay down, especially that close to the bench, you know there's something probably not right."

Added Rielly: "You feel for the guy. It's a tough injury. I watched the replay, it's not pretty."

Nikita Zaitsev has recovered from a concussion and will replace Polak in the lineup for Game 3, but his absence may be felt over the long term. He is a physically intimidating defender who went to the Stanley Cup final with San Jose last spring.

The 30-year-old is also one of the few players capable of growing a playoff beard on a young team.

"You never want to see somebody go down like that," said rookie centre Auston Matthews. "Roman's a pretty important part of this team, not only on the ice but off. He's obviously had a lot of experience, especially in these situations.

"You definitely hope for the best as far as recovery and surgery goes."

Teammates knew it was bad when he couldn't stand up using his own strength. This is a guy who famously took a shot to the face in January of 2015 and returned to the same game without a visor after receiving 15 stitches on the outside of his cheek and seven more inside.

"I think we play similar styles," said Orpik. "It sucks missing games at any point in the season, but you play 82 games to set yourself up to play in the playoffs – and you don't always make the playoffs, either – so these are the games that you really look forward to.

"I missed a few (playoff games) last year with a concussion and you feel like you're letting some people down no matter if it's in your control or not."



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • April 18, 2017

Polak left Verizon Center in a wheelchair after Game 2 and texted with some teammates on Sunday. He then paid them a visit at Air Canada Centre on Monday morning to offer an encouraging word.

He was said to be fairly upbeat even though usual defence partner Matt Hunwick acknowledged: "I know he's pretty devastated."

Asked what will be missed without his presence in these games, Hunwick replied: "Just his stability."

"You know what you're going to get every night out of him," he said. "Especially come playoff time, his shot-blocking, his physical play, it's perfect come playoff time. It's hard to replace those guys."

"He'll be around. He'll support us and we'll definitely be thinking of him."

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1060174 Websites

TSN.CA / Maple Leafs come back, win in OT to take series lead

By Kristen Shilton

TORONTO – Not long ago, the Toronto Maple Leafs were deemed too young, and too inexperienced, to compete with the Presidents' Trophy-winning Washington Capitals in the postseason. But the Maple Leafs came to win, and now they lead the first-round series two games to one after Tyler Bozak's power play strike in overtime propelled them to a 4-3 victory in Monday's Game 3.

All three of this series' games have gone past regulation, the first time that's happened for the Maple Leafs' franchise since the 1933 Stanley Cup Final against Boston. And despite trailing 2-0 less than five minutes into their first playoff game on home ice in four years, Toronto refused to go away, and were rewarded with their second straight victory.

"We can battle, we can compete, we're driven, we're motivated. We want to win," said Morgan Rielly. "We're not going to take anything for granted, we're not going to do anything except work. We believe in ourselves, we believe in our systems, we believe in one another and there is no quit in this team."

Toronto had their work cut out for them after digging a quick hole that could easily have turned into a grave. Their start was about as disastrous as they could have imagined, with two lightning-fast scores given up to Nicklas Backstrom and Alex Ovechkin. Backstrom scored while play was four-on-four, the first time the Capitals have managed a goal at that strength all season.

Toronto looked inept in all three zones, sending passes flying well past their intended targets and losing every battle. Instead of making simple plays with the puck they were flinging stretch passes around haphazardly and got hemmed in their own zone repeatedly.

"There was definitely a sense of uncertainty," Rielly said of the mood on the bench early. "That's always tough; you put yourself behind the eight ball a little bit. There's a little bit of urgency, an anxious feeling going on but I thought we handled it well. We re-grouped between periods and came out strong."

Toronto needed their biggest weapons to set up and counter the attack from Washington's top line, which was rolling around in the offensive zone with ease in the first period. Nazem Kadri and Leo Komarov got the Leafs going with bone-rattling hits on Brooks Orpik and Ovechkin that sparked a response at last from the apprehensive Leafs.

Going into the game, Auston Matthews, William Nylander and Kadri, who were three of Toronto's four leading scorers in the regular season, had accounted for zero points. Each ended up with their first goal of the playoffs to lead Toronto's comeback.

"[Those hits] definitely shifted the momentum for us," said Matthews. "[Kadri and Komarov] have been great for us all series, not just on the scoresheet but playing against the top line all night. It was awesome for us to get the momentum after that shift. We showed a lot of resilience tonight. There was never any doubt in the room."

For all the talk about whether the Maple Leafs would be too drained from Saturday's double-overtime victory, it was Toronto who got the better of the Capitals and played faster as the game wore on. Washington's first shot didn't come until more than 14 minutes into that frame, and the Maple Leafs led 29-9 in shot attempts.

Washington head coach Barry Trotz said after the game this series was never going to be "David vs. Goliath", maintaining the Maple Leafs were too good a club for his group to take lightly, but his players opined there were several "lucky bounces" for Toronto that added up to a win.

Meanwhile Mike Babcock has introduced the concept of "pucker factor" into this series and left the pressures of it firmly on the Capitals' shoulders. His feelings haven't changed as Toronto now sits in the driver's seat.

"If you talk to our guys, our guys think they're a good hockey team," said Babcock. "When you're playing a good hockey team I think you gain respect for yourself and the process and you start believing that maybe you can do this."

The Maple Leafs have made it clear the last week how much they believe in each other, statements easily dismissed as lip service by a team too naive to realize what they were headed for in the postseason. Toronto made a lot of mistakes in Game 3, especially on their back-end. Players were left wide open in the slot in front of Frederik Andersen regularly and they have been plagued by a surprising lack of discipline, yet they survived.

There's a long way to go before an ultimate winner is decided, but the Maple Leafs are, amazingly, in control of the series.

"We've always been confident in here," Bozak said. "It's never bad to be in an underdog position. There's a little less pressure, but we put a lot of pressure on ourselves to perform and we believe in ourselves in here and that's the most important thing."

Takeaways

Just hold on: As impactful as Kadri and Komarov's hits were to getting the Maple Leafs re-engaged, a 5-on-3 penalty kill in the second period may have been their biggest turning point. With Toronto trailing 3-1, Matt Martin was called for laying some shots on Tom Wilson's face; he was assessed an instigating minor and five minutes for fighting. Matt Hunwick had also gotten the gate for a hooking penalty before the fisticuffs, so Toronto had a full two minutes down two skaters to kill off. The Capitals put two shots on goal but were held off by the Maple Leafs' active sticks, a missed opportunity for Washington to put a spike in Toronto's comeback hopes – Babcock acknowledged the game would have been over if Washington had converted. While the penalty kill struggled in Game 2, it answered the bell at the right time. Martin Marincin led the way in shorthanded ice time at 3:42 and Toronto finished 3-for-3 on the kill.

Pick me up: Throughout the season, Toronto has been bailed out time and again by the sensational play of Andersen, and if not for his 47-save performance with their banged-up blue line on Saturday they wouldn't be leading this series at all. But Monday the rest of the team had to pick Andersen up, after those defensive breakdowns helped get him in trouble off the bat. Giving up two goals on the first two shots he faced – a backdoor tap-in by Backstrom, a one-timer from the top of the circle by Ovechkin – put Toronto on pace for a long night. Andersen didn't even make his first save until 9:38 into the game. A shortside strike in the second by Evgeny Kuznetsov, similar to Tom Wilson's overtime-winner in Game 1 but off a Marcus Johansson rebound, was a tricky play but one Andersen should have had. But the Dane came through when necessary, making the big stops Toronto needed to get to overtime. Andersen finished with 23 saves on 26 shots for an .885 save percentage.

Back in action: After missing the first two games of the series with an upper-body injury, Nikita Zaitsev returned to patrol the Maple Leafs' blue line. Already deep into testing their depth on the backend, Toronto needed Zaitsev to round into playoff form quickly, but it took him some time to get in a rhythm. On Backstrom's goal, Zaitsev made a bad read on the coverage and left the centerman alone and couldn't track back in time to stop him from pocketing the puck. He and Jake Gardiner were overmatched by the Capitals' top line, which Zaitsev all but confirmed when he said afterwards it was "the hardest first period of my life." Gardiner ended up seeing some time with Morgan Rielly and Rielly took on more power play and penalty kill minutes than Zaitsev as he was eased back into the pace of play. Zaitsev ended the night minus-two, a team-low.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • April 18, 2017

Next game: Toronto hosts Washington in Game 4 on Wednesday.

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TSN.CA / Low-scoring playoffs an indicator of what's to come

By Frank Seravalli

NEW YORK — Claude Julien has barely had a minute to take a deep breath on the bench.

Ninety-four per cent of the Canadiens-Rangers first round series has been played either tied or with one team holding a one-goal edge, making the margin for error razor thin.

The reason is goals have been at such a premium during these Stanley Cup playoffs - and not just in Montreal or New York.

Through 20 playoff games, heading into Monday night's action, teams have averaged a combined 4.35 goals per game this postseason - more than one goal fewer (5.54) than this regular season.

The sample size remains small, but those numbers make this one of the lowest scoring postseasons in Stanley Cup history. The average combined playoff goals scored per game since 2000 is 5.07, a far cry from this spring's 4.35.

"That's playoff hockey," Julien said Monday. "When you look around, a lot of the games are that way, whether they're 1-0 wins, they're all pretty tight games. I think we've seen a lot of overtime games already."

A lack of goals certainly hasn't meant a lack of excitement.

The slate has featured at least one overtime period every night so far, with seven of 20 games requiring prolongation, as they say in Montréal.

Only one game - Game 2 between Nashville and Chicago - has been a blowout. Three games have essentially been 1-0 games - Sunday night's Oilers-Sharks tilt being the latest - with Game 1 of the Canadiens-Rangers series a 1-0 affair until Michael Grabner's empty-net goal with 1:10 to play. That game at the Bell Centre didn't feature a single breakaway or odd-man rush.

No team scored more than three goals in any of the first eight games of these playoffs.

"It's important to understand that's going to happen," Julien said. "It's important to be ready to handle that properly."

While the sample size may seem small, more than 20 per cent of a typical playoff schedule has been played already - with the first round naturally accounting for the bulk of the games.

When you think Stanley Cup playoffs, you think a ratcheted-down, defence-first struggle. Typically, the drop-off in scoring between the regular season and playoffs is not as pronounced.

Last year, there were 5.42 goals scored per regular season game and 5.25 goals scored in the playoffs.

The interesting thing is that the first 20 games have served as a decent indicator as to how the scoring will play out over the remaining three rounds. Only once in the last five springs has overall playoff scoring increased compared to the first 20 games - and that difference was negligible (4.95 to 5.03 in 2013).

In other words, don't expect to see a boatload of goals between now and mid-June.

The struggle to score is real, but that's what makes it so exhilarating.

"You just try and limit your mistakes, keep rolling and keep the momentum as long as you can," Habs defenceman Jordie Benn said. "There really are no nerves (with so few goals). You want to be on the ice. It's fun to be in those games, how tight they are. You're so into the game you aren't thinking about the score or the clock. You're just rolling, every shift you're out there. It's kind of fun."

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1060176 Websites

TSN.CA / Zaitsev to face stiff test in return

By Mark Masters

TSN Toronto reporter Mark Masters checks in daily with news and notes from Maple Leafs practices and game-day skates. The Leafs and Washington Capitals skated at the Air Canada Centre on Monday morning ahead of Game 3 of their Eastern Conference first-round series.

- Nikita Zaitsev will return to the Leafs lineup on Monday, but will he be able to return to form in his NHL playoff debut? "We'll see tonight," the 25-year-old defenceman said. "Yeah, I don't know so we'll see." Zaitsev hasn't gone through a full practice since taking a heavy hit from Nick Foligno in Toronto's regular season finale on April 9. Will it be a challenge for him to get back up to top speed? "I don't think so," said Mike Babcock. "We're going to find out though. You and I will know at about the same time." The coach isn't easing the Russian rookie back in. Zaitsev was reunited with Jake Gardiner at the morning skate, which was his first on-ice session with teammates since sustaining the upper-body injury (suspected concussion). If Babcock pursues the same matchup he used in the final regular-season meeting between the teams on April 4 then Zaitsev should see a lot of Washington's top line.

VIDEO: @Real_ESPNLeBrun & I on Zaitsev's return, Caps adjustments & Alzner's iron man streak in jeopardy <https://t.co/pUQun2Om3M>

— Mark Masters (@markmasters) April 17, 2017

Zaitsev hopes to get an adrenaline boost from what will be an electric building as playoff hockey returns to Toronto for the first time in four years. "I'm still shocked," said Zaitsev when asked about the atmosphere in the city right now. "My wife sent me a picture of [Maple Leaf] Square on the first game. I was like, 'It's unbelievable.'" Zaitsev hopes his experience in the World Cup semi-final against Canada in September will give him a reference point for what to expect.

Leafs D Zaitsev confirms he'll play Game 3: <https://t.co/ILQbj9V2P0> pic.twitter.com/VvW31H9J94

— TSN (@TSN_Sports) April 17, 2017

The Capitals will look to make Zaitsev pay a price in his return to game action. "It doesn't matter who's going to play against him, we have to play physical and don't give him an easy night," said Alexander Ovechkin. "Every time, when you have a chance to hit him or cross-check him or whatever, it doesn't matter, Zaitsev, [Connor] Carrick or whoever, we have to play physical on those D." Washington is hoping Toronto's blueliners will wear down over the course of a series that they readily admit could be long. "They play well, obviously," said Ovechkin. "We respect them and I think they respect us and it's a battle. You never know, maybe it's going to be seven games."

- If the Leafs are going to pull off the upset they will need continued strong play from Gardiner, who logged more than 40 minutes on Saturday picking up an assist in the process. He's the only Toronto defenceman who remains from the 2013 playoff run and believes he's matured a lot since then. "Ovechkin scores a power-play goal the other night, the crowd goes wild and you can barely hear yourself think," Gardiner said, "and the difference between now and then was [in 2013] I would've probably been a little more nervous, now it's just kind of natural." Morgan Rielly, Gardiner's close friend and one-time roommate, laughs when asked if his buddy plays better the less he thinks. "Yeah, that is true," he said. "He's a pretty calculated person. He thinks about everything he does, but oftentimes he can overthink things. But he's been playing outstanding. Whatever he's doing right now it's working."

T.J. Oshie and the Capitals won't be bothered by the Toronto faithful tonight #TSNHockey #StanleyCup <https://t.co/EXFVDzTiCJ>

— TSN Hockey (@TSNHockey) April 17, 2017



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • April 18, 2017

Legend of Dart Guy (@LeafsMaz20) continues to grow as he now has his own custom pin, t-shirts: <https://t.co/q9CgShcN2w>
pic.twitter.com/NCBqNONLy4

— BarDown (@BarDown) April 17, 2017

- The Leafs are hoping to get an emotional boost from the home crowd. "You see the towels out there this morning and you kind of get, you know, pretty excited about that," Gardiner said. "Get the fans going again and I'm sure the city's ready for it and so are we." Ten Leafs players will be playing their first home playoff game on Monday and they have to learn how to harness the energy in a positive way. "Everybody on our team understands how big a deal it is here in Toronto," Babcock said. "We walk around the community and have a real good feel for that. We're just going to focus on doing what we do. We know how big the opportunity is. We've earned it and we're going to do what we can to play right and have the right amount of emotional control. We don't want to be too wired up either." Are the Capitals curious about the atmosphere they'll be walking into on Monday? "I imagine it's going to be the same as everywhere else in playoffs," said T.J. Oshie. "I played in some loud buildings. I'm sure the fans are excited to get playoff hockey back, but there's only so much people can scream."

"We didn't go a lot in the middle of the ice and in front of the net."
#TSNHockey #StanleyCup <https://t.co/PUH6I9vw5I>

— TSN Hockey (@TSNHockey) April 17, 2017

- The Capitals top line, which features Nicklas Backstrom, Ovechkin and Oshie, believes it still has a lot more to give. "We just got to play better as a line," Backstrom noted. "For us, we have to put the pressure on them." Where, specifically, can they improve? "Everywhere," the Swede said. "I think we're not satisfied with anything with our game. We can be better. We want to be better." Ovechkin believes the trio is playing too patient. "We can be better in the offensive zone," the Capitals captain said. "We have pretty good chances, but we just got to use it. If we have a chance to shoot the puck, we have to shoot the puck." Game 3 has been Ovechkin's best playoff game through his career (17 points in 13 career Game 3s).

- Karl Alzner did not take part in Washington's morning skate and will be a game-time decision. The defenceman has played in 599 straight games (playoffs and regular season combined) since April 28, 2010 (Game 7 v Habs). If Alzner can't play Nate Schmidt will draw in.

* Lines at Leafs morning skate:

Hyman-Matthews-Nylander

Komarov-Kadri-Brown

van Riemsdyk-Bozak-Marner

Martin-Boyle-Kapanen

Leivo, Fehr

Gardiner-Zaitsev

Hunwick-Rielly

Marincin-Carrick

Smith[^]-Marchenko

Andersen

McElhinney

[^] Forward Ben Smith practised as a defenceman to balance the numbers

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1060177 Websites

TSN.CA / Maple Leafs need biggest weapons to start firing

By Kristen Shilton

TORONTO – If positive momentum in this playoff series between the Toronto Maple Leafs and Washington Capitals was up for grabs over the first two games, the Leafs seized it with authority in a wild double-overtime victory in Game 2.

But momentum is a curious thing in postseason hockey. It's able to be won and lost in short order.

As the Leafs prepare to play their first postseason game on home ice in four years Monday night, they know that resting on their laurels after stealing a victory in enemy territory would be a mistake.

"It's easy to look at it and say we were better last game," Toronto coach Mike Babcock said. "...Two teams have an opportunity to respond and often it's the team that didn't like the way it went for them that's digging in the hardest. It's very important we elevate and get to another level and up the ante here tonight. Last game doesn't matter anymore."

Toronto managed to even the series while playing with a diminished defence corps that still survived the Capitals' offensive assault for nearly three periods, helped in large part by a terrific 47-save performance from Frederik Andersen.

They won't be as outmatched in that area on Monday, with Nikita Zaitsev returning to the lineup after missing the first two games of the series with an upper-body injury. Shoring up the backend is a huge boost for Toronto; now they need their biggest weapons up front to start firing.

Their fourth line sealed the win on Saturday, with six points tallied between Matt Martin, Brian Boyle and Kasper Kapanen, while Tyler Bozak's line with James van Riemsdyk and Mitch Marner has six between them. Three of the team's regular-season leading scorers (Auston Matthews, William Nylander and Nazem Kadri) have yet to register a point.

Washington's top players had a quiet Game 1, but came alive two nights later, with Nicklas Backstrom and Alex Ovechkin both scoring their first goals of the series. To see those players pick up steam without the Maple Leafs' best forwards following suit could spell trouble.

Masters: Babcock concerned Leafs could be too amped up for Game 3

Leafs Lunch host Andi Petrillo and co-host Patrick O'Sullivan are joined by TSN Maple Leafs reporter Mark Masters to get an update from the Leafs' morning skate.

"I thought [Matthews] and [Zach] Hyman and Nylander were real good last game. I thought Matty had some good looks," Babcock said. "What I've found coaching good teams, sometimes you look at your stars and they have no points. Then they get seven in the next round and 14 in the next round and you forget all about the first round. That's what depth is all about, people picking one another up."

"As a line we created a lot more offence," Matthews said of Game 2. "It's the playoffs. Everything is kind of an investment. Not everything is about goals or assists. It's finishing checks, blocking shots, all the little things that go on that are kind of unnoticed behind the scenes that help your team win."

Case in point: Matthews stepped into the lane in Game 2 to make a critical shot block that left him momentarily hobbled. Toronto has succeeded all season with a whatever-it-takes attitude that extends from the oldest veteran to the youngest rookie.

Washington coach Barry Trotz mentioned in a conference call Sunday he saw a potential for the Maple Leafs to be "worn down" after Saturday's extended action and two players (Jake Gardiner, Morgan Rielly) exceeding 40 minutes of ice time, but Toronto doesn't see that as a one-way street.

"Every time they're going back for the puck, they're going to get hit and it's not going to be easy for them," said Martin of Toronto's physicality. "As the series wears on, that investment – every hit, every time you chase the defence down - makes it harder and harder on them. [The fourth line especially] becomes that much more effective because we start to wear on them more and more."

Another key for Toronto on Monday is discipline. After the Capitals scored two of their three goals on the power play Saturday, the Maple Leafs must practice what they continually preach and stay out of box. Their penalty kill was above average for much of the season, but has faltered more frequently the last few weeks, giving up seven goals on 17 opportunities over the last seven games.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • April 18, 2017

"They're a really skilled team, best in the league. But our team wants to prove we're here to play," Marnier said. "We're not here by luck or anything like that. That's how we need to play – like we deserve to be here. We deserve to be in the same building as them."

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1060178 Websites

TSN.CA / Maple Leafs D Zaitsev to make playoff debut

The Canadian Press

TORONTO — The Toronto Maple Leafs have lost one defenceman to injury and gained another.

Nikita Zaitsev will become the 10th Leaf to make his playoff debut this spring, ready to rejoin the team for Game 3 on Monday night after sitting out the opening two games of a first round series against Washington with a suspected concussion. Zaitsev will replace veteran Roman Polak, who suffered a season-ending injury in Toronto's 4-3 double-overtime win Saturday night.

"I feel better every day," Zaitsev said after the morning skate. "Now I feel good and I'm ready to play."

The 25-year-old will replace Polak on a pairing with Jake Gardiner, a duo that should match up against the Capitals' top line of Alex Ovechkin, Nicklas Backstrom and T.J. Oshie.

The other two pairs will remain intact from Game 2 with Morgan Rielly playing alongside Matt Hunwick and Martin Marincin lining up beside Connor Carrick.

Zaitsev hasn't practised since he was hammered into the boards by Blue Jackets captain Nick Foligno in the Leafs regular-season finale. He managed to skate the last couple of days and declared himself ready to play in Game 3 on Monday morning.

An NHL rookie this season, Zaitsev wasn't sure how he'd fare in his first playoff game — especially off an injury.

"It's always hard to come back (because of the) speed of the games," Zaitsev said. "It doesn't matter — playoffs or regular season. When you come back from injury it takes some time to feel good."

Toronto led the Leafs in minutes played during the regular season

"He's been a real good player for us all year," Leafs coach Mike Babcock said. "He's ultra competitive, moves the puck, good on the penalty kill, good on the power play, so an important guy for us."

Babcock was disappointed for Polak, who was injured in scary fashion over the weekend. He banged knees with Capitals defenceman Brooks Orpik late in the second period then landed awkwardly on his right leg. He howled in pain and had to be helped off the ice.

"It's bad luck," Leafs winger Leo Komarov said. "He's a warrior. He blocks a lot of shots. He plays easy. And he's tough. It's a tough loss."

Polak visited with the group ahead of Game 3.

"Obviously you never want to see somebody go down like that," Leafs centre Auston Matthews said. "Roman's a pretty important part of this team, not only on the ice, but off."

"He's obviously had a lot of experience, especially in these situations."

Toronto will play its first playoff game on home-ice since May 2013.

Leafs used the following lines at Monday's skate:

Komarov-Kadri-Brown

Martin-Boyle-Kapanen

van Riemsdyk-Bozak-Marnier

Hyman-Matthews-Nylander

Rielly-Hunwick

Gardiner-Zaitsev

Marincin-Carrick

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1060179 Websites

TSN.CA / A lack of discipline could doom Calgary

By Travis Yost

The good news if you are a Calgary Flames fan: At no point during the two games down in Anaheim did it feel like your team was overmatched. In fact, there were long spurts in both games where Calgary legitimately looked like the better side.

The bad news: Anaheim still took both games on home ice. Now Calgary, if they are serious about getting back into this series, almost certainly needs to pick up the third and fourth legs to send the series back to Southern California tied.

At 5-on-5, the series has been tight. Both shots (102 to 100) and scoring chances (21 to 15, using the logic at Corsica) are in the Flames' favour. Though the Ducks can reasonably point to the fact that score effects are going to distort some of those numbers, it's pretty much the same story in the 43 minutes the games have been tied.

The numbers above are the biggest reason I thought this series would go the distance. Though Anaheim is a quality team, Calgary has shown itself quite well at evens all season long and, generally, can skate against the Western Conference's elite teams. If you are an underdog team that isn't going to lose on shot or scoring chance volume, you're in a good spot.

But there's a real rub with this team, and that's their incredible adherence to spending time in the penalty box. Poor goaltending is usually the biggest reason why a great 5-on-5 team struggles to win games. The next biggest reason is probably penalty differential.

In the first two games of the series, Calgary has given Anaheim 11 power-play opportunities, or 5.5 per game. That's the second highest rate through two games of the playoffs by a considerable margin, and one off of the dubious lead of the Oilers in their series against the Sharks.

There also hasn't been the offset in terms of power plays generated. Sometimes teams will take a lot of penalties and toe the line, so to speak, drawing as many penalties as they take. That hasn't been the case for the Flames in the playoffs, nor was it the case in the regular season:

Whether or not Anaheim has converted on these opportunities is really neither here nor there (though, for what it's worth, they already have three power-play goals in the series). The way to think about every penalty taken is that it's worth something like 0.2 goals against. By the time you have conceded five penalties, you likely have given up one goal because the average NHL power-play rate is roughly 20 per cent. It's the rule of five.

The problem this postseason so far (and what was also a problem in the regular season) is that despite drawing a lot of penalties, the Flames take far too many, which leaves them running consistently negative differentials. It's doubly frustrating if you subscribe to the theory that Calgary — a fleet-skating, hard-to-defend team — has a talent for drawing penalties. In a perfect world they would be on the power play far more often than their opponents. But the reverse has been true all season long.

I have seen some interesting theories kicked around as to what kind of detrimental impact the Dennis Wideman incident has had on Calgary — there are pretty compelling arguments that officiating has, to some degree anyway, been more aggressive in whistling the Flames for infractions.

Regardless of where you fall on the Calgary conspiracy theory spectrum, there's one point that's incontrovertible — the Flames are continually hurting themselves with their parade to the penalty box. And that's true



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • April 18, 2017

both in the sense that they are gifting their opponents chances to score goals, but also shaving time off of the even-strength game state, where they really shine.

It's a sword that slices both ways, neither of which helps the Flames.

It'll be interesting to see how the whistles fly the rest of the series, especially over the next two games. If the Flames can't make the most of home-ice advantage (also known as home-ice officiating bias), they could be out of the playoffs earlier than anticipated.

Discipline matters. And that's probably true for Calgary more than any team in the league these days.

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1060180 Websites

TSN.CA / McDavid still in tough against Vlasic and Braun

By Ryan Rishaug

Some thoughts from Game 3 of the Western Conference quarter-final between the San Jose Sharks and Edmonton Oilers on Sunday night:

- Zack Kassian was notably less physical in Game 3 (The stats sheet showed three hits as opposed to six from Game 2). He spent less time chasing out of position to make big hits and later told TSN Hockey Insider Darren Dreger that it was a necessary adjustment in a game that was much tighter checking and defensive. He didn't want to make the positional mistake that led to the go-ahead goal. He played a patient game for an aggressive player and it paid off.

- The Sharks are doing an excellent job controlling Connor McDavid so far in this series (no 5-on-5 points and just six shots). He's scored once in three games and added an indirect assist off a shot he took. He's had several strong rushes to the net and made some nice plays that weren't converted, but he has yet to hit top gear for any length of time and that's a victory for the Sharks. Marc-Edouard Vlasic and Justin Braun continue to face him for the bulk of his 5-on-5 minutes and are cutting down his time with the puck playing tight to him. Head coach Todd McLellan hasn't made a significant effort to shield McDavid from that matchup so far.

- Leon Draisaitl played just 3:38 in the second period after McLellan moved him onto Kassian and Drake Caggiula's line (normally averages about 6:20 per period). His feet were a bit sluggish in the early going and when this happens, a move to centre usually remedies it as he has to cover more area in a shift. It also forced him to dump the puck in more. He rarely likes to do this, preferring to make plays at the offensive blue line. Kassian and Caggiula are forecheckers, so Draisaitl kept it simple and got pucks deep, including on the game-winner which began with his dump in. It will be interesting to see if he starts Game 4 back on McDavid's wing, or at centre.

- Cam Talbot has stopped 39 straight shots, yet hasn't appeared to be spectacular in doing so. Yes, the Oilers have done a good job defensively, but Talbot has been steady and composed giving up few second chance rebounds. When he's dialed in, he doesn't need to be diving around much and doesn't make as many highlight reels.

- Patrick Maroon hasn't been very effective through three games. The Sharks defence are quick at retrieving pucks in their own end and Maroon hasn't been able to impose himself physically on the forecheck the way he normally does. The Braun/Vlasic blanket that's been thrown on McDavid is the same one Maroon is having to fight through and he hasn't been able to generate much offence so far. (no points and six shots)

- Darnell Nurse and Matt Benning found themselves under fire a lot more in Game 3 than in Game 2 and got into some trouble with long shifts. Nurse had four shifts in the second period that were over a minute long, along with two that were over 100 seconds. The long change proved to be problematic.

Game 4 in San Jose is on Tuesday. Get all your updates on this series from myself and TSN Hockey Insider Darren Dreger on SportsCentre, Tim Hortons That's Hockey and TSN.ca.

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1060181 Websites

TSN.CA / Kassian scores in third, Oilers beat Sharks to take series lead

The Canadian Press

SAN JOSE, Calif. — San Jose prepared for Oilers star Connor McDavid. Now they need to figure out how to stop Zack Kassian.

Zack Kassian scored the only goal and Cam Talbot made 23 saves for his second straight shutout as Edmonton downed the San Jose Sharks 1-0 on Sunday in Game 3 of their Western Conference quarter-final series.

Kassian intercepted a weak clearing attempt by Sharks defenceman Dave Schlemko, then slid a backhand shot past goalie Martin Jones to break a scoreless tie at 10:45 of the third period.

"You can't say enough about him right now," Talbot said of Kassian. "He's playing at a new level. I think he's picked up his game. That's what we need in the playoffs. Your top guys get marked pretty hard. We need secondary scoring and he's giving it to us right now."

The Oilers now lead the best-of-seven set 2-1. The series continues with Game 4 Tuesday night in San Jose.

Kassian, who also had the game-winner Friday night in Edmonton in Game 2, was quick to share credit with linemate Leon Draisaitl for Sunday night's lone goal.

"He skated hard He didn't stop skating," Kassian said. "He made (Schlemko) make a play. I saw he was looking for a long pass and I just tried to get in the way. Lucky for me I got a stick on it and tried to settle it down and shot it on net."

Draisaitl started the game at wing on a line with McDavid, but Edmonton coach Todd McLellan adjusted his lines in the second period, moving Draisaitl to centre on Kassian's line.

That move was a reaction to the fact Sharks centre Joe Thornton returned to the San Jose lineup after missing five games with a knee injury. That made the Sharks stronger down the middle, McLellan said, and helped them dominate the first period.

"So we moved a few things around. It was not a demotion by any means for Leon," McLellan said. "In fact, I whispered in his ear that it was a promotion because his responsibility level had to go way up."

The Oilers held their own in a scoreless opening period against a Sharks team determined to show their lacklustre performance in Game 2 was an aberration.

While outshot 13-6 and outhit 32-14 over the first 20 minutes, Edmonton came away with two strong scoring chances of its own with McDavid in the middle of both, setting up Patrick Maroon on the doorstep at 7:28 and Mark Letestu on the power play at 19:15.

In the second period, the Sharks threatened early with Talbot coming up big on consecutive shots by San Jose forwards Jonas Donskoi and Tomas Hertl. But after that, it was the Oilers, who outshot San Jose 12-4 in the middle period, applying the pressure.

Talbot acknowledged that back-to-back shutouts in the playoffs felt great.

"But the job's not done yet," Talbot said. "We came in, got home-ice advantage back but it would be nice to come in and play another job like that on Tuesday."

The Edmonton goalie, who has only faced 39 shots in earning the two shutouts, said that he has tried to stay focused by playing the puck and helping out his defencemen a little bit more than usual.

"Just stay engaged in the game is the biggest thing," Talbot said.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • April 18, 2017

The Oilers were helped by the fact San Jose continued to struggle on the power play, even with Thornton back in the lineup, going 0 for 2 and falling to 1 for 14 in the series.

McLellan, returning to the city where he coached the Sharks for five seasons, played down any special significance the victory might have had for him.

"It's sure not about me, I can tell you that much. Everybody moves on," the coach said, adding later: "It's about the guys who have ice packs on their ankles and blocking shots. They're tired, they're sore."

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TSN.CA / Post 2 Post: Another perfect night for Talbot

By Jamie McLennan

Each night during the Stanley Cup Playoffs, TSN Hockey analyst and former NHL goaltender Jamie McLennan provides his Post 2 Post rankings for every goaltender in action.

Cam Talbot (5) - He was rock solid early on as San Jose had its usual first period push. He made 13 saves, with incredible ones on Joe Thornton and Joel Ward (twice), Timo Meier and Melker Karlsson. Another dominant game for him with back-to-back shutouts.

Martin Jones (4) - He was poised early on with solid saves on Ryan Nugent-Hopkins, Connor McDavid and Zack Kassian. The only goal he gave up went five-hole - the fourth goal that's beaten him there in this series. Jones gave the Sharks every chance to win, but they couldn't beat Talbot.

Jake Allen (5) - Allen was brilliant again with another 40-save effort, with big saves on Chris Stewart, Ryan Suter, Martin Hanzal and Nino Niederreiter. He continues to dominate the series.

Devan Dubnyk (4) - Dubnyk played a good game, but he's just not getting the goal support because Jake Allen is stealing games at the other end. He made big saves on Alex Steen, Jaden Schwartz, Colton Parayko and Vladimir Tarasenko.

Carey Price (4) - He was solid early on with big saves on Jimmy Vesey, J.T. Miller and wasn't tested again until deep into the third period, when he made a massive save on Jesper Fast.

Henrik Lundqvist (4) - The King was the only reason this game wasn't out of control. Lundqvist made big saves on Andrei Markov, Torrey Mitchell, Alexander Radulov and Brendan Gallagher early on, with no help from his team. He was hung out to dry again.

Canadiens run Rangers out of their own building

The Canadiens jumped on the Rangers early and never looked back as New York's poor home play came back to bite them. The TSN Hockey panel breaks down Montreal's win and explains why Alexander Radulov has elevated his game to another level.

Marc-Andre Fleury (3) - A tough start for him, but he stuck with it and battled back. It was a very active game for him, with lots of traffic and scrambles that he ended up handling well. He made big saves on Brandon Dubinsky and Josh Andersen in OT to keep it tied.

Sergei Bobrovsky (2) - There were lots of active plays off the boards and Bobrovsky allowed two goals against because of that. He had big saves on Sidney Crosby, Connor Sheary and Jake Guentzel, but the speed of the Penguins and the top line have given him trouble all series long.

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TSN.CA / Maple Leafs' speed game is twisting Capitals into knots

By Pierre LeBrun

TORONTO -- How are the Toronto Maple Leafs doing it?

The hockey world is buzzing in the wake of the underdog, baby-faced Leafs arriving home with a road split with the powerhouse Washington Capitals ahead of what should be a madhouse at the Air Canada Centre for Game 3 Monday night.

I asked a few NHL coaches to break down just how the Leafs are hanging in after a pair of overtime games with heavily favored Washington.

"Speed, quickness," began a Western Conference head coach over the phone Sunday. "Quickness on puck movement, quickness on the forecheck, quickness on the puck protection; they're giving them fits. They're using their quickness in every zone to disrupt Washington's game.

"Listen, Washington is a great hockey club, but they're not the quickest team in the league," he added. "And the Maple Leafs are using the quickness they have, they have a lot of foot speed and they're using it. They're constantly putting pressure on Washington all over the ice. Toronto is so well-coached as far as puck support that Washington can't get it stopped in the offensive zone -- Toronto exits too quickly. Everything they're doing, from play without the puck and play with the puck; it's got quickness in it and it's really giving Washington a challenge."

An Eastern Conference head coach echoed that speed is the difference.

"[The Caps are] a structured team, they're experienced, they've got moxie, and I think they're heavy, probably the heaviest team in the East," said the coach over the phone. "But the speed factor has given them problems, like it did with Pittsburgh last year, where there's no time and space."

Why can't Capitals take advantage of undermanned Leafs D?

The Leafs earned a split in Washington despite playing without Nikita Zaitsev and losing Roman Polak midway through Game 2. Pierre LeBrun explains why the high-octane Capitals offence has struggled to exploit Toronto's blue line. Plus, why Toronto's success in the series isn't as shocking as it may seem on paper.

Another Eastern Conference head coach, via text message Sunday, said the Leafs were doing a "disciplined job of getting pucks in and making Wash's D have to go back for pucks. They are dumping intelligently to areas where their speed is forechecking! Using five guys on the forecheck [their weak-side D is going down the wall hard] creates o-zone time, makes Washington's studs play in their zone. Which sucks for them."

In the meantime, when the Caps have broken through with scoring chances, Leafs goalie Frederik Andersen has been dynamite. A Western Conference GM said before the series that Andersen would need to put up a .940 save percentage for the Leafs to have a chance at the upset. Andersen has stopped 88 of 94 shots for a .936 save percentage. Close enough.

"The scary thing is in the 3rd and OT of Game 2, he was getting better and better, and it looked easier," the second Eastern Conference coach said via text. "He has been the best player in the series -- not even close."

Added another Western Conference head coach via text message Sunday: "Both teams [are] depending on outstanding skill levels and competing hard, but what it comes down to for me is a combination of Andersen making point-blank saves and Washington not capitalizing on chances."

But why isn't Washington taking more advantage of the Leafs' Achilles' heel, their blue-line corps?

Babcock calls Polak's injury 'unfortunate', confident with team's depth

Maple Leafs coach Mike Babcock talks about how unfortunate Roman Polak's injury is, but why he's confident in the team's depth going forward. Babcock also discusses how he's hoping Kasperii Kapanen's



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • April 18, 2017

Game 2 performance will give the rookie confidence heading into Game 3, and how the team feels with the series shifting to Toronto.

"It's not the weakest part of their game if you don't get them to stop" moving by slowing down the play, said the first Western Conference coach. "It's their puck support -- there's always someone in the vicinity helping them out. Their puck support to get themselves out of trouble has been terrific. Washington can't get their game unloaded on them because of that Leafs' quickness. Just watch how quick Toronto's D gets the puck in the hands of the forwards right away. So, Washington's size and ability to protect the puck just hasn't been a major factor yet."

Added the first Eastern Conference head coach: "We haven't really seen Washington hem the Leafs into their zone that much; like, make Toronto defend for a long period of time. I've been surprised so far that we haven't seen Washington possess the puck more and make Toronto defend. It's almost been like a track meet. A lot of Washington's offense so far has been [power play] or rush plays as opposed to long, strong, heavy shifts that probably I think would give Toronto trouble."

The coach then paused and said the really surprising thing is that the Leafs aren't just hanging in against the Presidents' Trophy winners.

"I think Toronto has really dictated the series," he said. "The series has gone, so far, to Toronto's strengths: speed, up and down. The Leafs are dictating how the games are played."

And, finally, the kids are showing their lessons learned.

"The other thing with the Leafs, I would say, is that they had to play a lot of mature hockey towards the end of the year and it's showing up now," said the first Western Conference coach. "They got a lot of maturity in their game now and it's showing up. It's making for a great series because of it."

It's actually not that shocking, said a third Eastern Conference head coach.

"I think Toronto right now is the third-most talented team in the East," the coach said Sunday over the phone. "Now, they're young, but who cares? That was a tough draw for Washington. Outside of Pittsburgh and Washington, to me the Leafs are the third-most talented group in the East. Their D aren't great, but they're all good skaters and they can gap well the way [coach Mike Babcock] likes to gap. As a forward group, boy, I would put them up with anybody. They can go depth for depth up front with Washington. They're one of the few teams that can go line for line with Washington."

"I know when we played them, I thought Toronto was a matchup nightmare because you couldn't match them line for line," added the Eastern coach. "So, to me, what's happened so far in that series of how representative of how close they are. I expect the Leafs to be an Eastern Conference final team a year from now."

A year from now? The Leafs are giving their fans plenty to believe in -- and the Caps fits -- in the here and now.

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1060184 Websites

USA TODAY / A Maple Leafs playoff upset? It's not as crazy as you might think

Kevin Allen , USA TODAY Sports Published 9:40 a.m. ET April 17, 2017 | Updated 15 hours ago

The three-star selection of the Toronto Maple Leafs' impressive start to the playoffs has to be awarded to team president Brendan Shanahan, general manager Lou Lamoriello and coach Mike Babcock.

Regardless of how their first-round series against the Washington Capitals plays out, it is clear the Maple Leafs have more reason to be optimistic than they have known in decades. Toronto hosts the Capitals on Monday night with the series tied at 1-1.

The "Shanapan" rebuilding effort is ahead of schedule to the point that it is not unthinkable that they could pull off an upset in this series.

The Maple Leafs are not anywhere near where the ruling triumvirate wants them to be, but they are far more advanced than they should be. This is a skilled and spunky group, a collection of players who believe they can win every night.

This has been going on in Toronto since November. After winning only two of their first nine games, the Maple Leafs went 6-2-0 through mid-November. In December and January, they surged with a 9-1-1 record. They closed the regular season 12-5-1 to finish 40-27-15 (95 points).

Does that sound like a team in the midst of a rebuild?

It's not surprising that the Maple Leafs have shown the skill to compete against the Presidents' Trophy-winning Capitals. The surprise is that their general lack of playoff experience doesn't seem to be a factor.

The Maple Leafs aren't showing the tentativeness you would expect for a franchise making its second playoff appearance in 12 years.

Nor are they just all about rookie Auston Matthews, who led the way with 40 goals and 69 points during the regular season, and is the foundation on which this team is being built.

The 19-year-old hasn't recorded a point in the first two games of the playoffs, and the Maple Leafs have played evenly with the Capitals, with both games decided in overtime.

Shanahan made the right call on hiring Lamoriello and Babcock, and Lamoriello has made the right personnel decisions.

The offseason trade for goalie Frederik Andersen (.936 save percentage in two playoff games) has given the Maple Leafs a steady presence in net. Acquiring veteran playoff performer Brian Boyle (primary assist on game-winning goal in Game 2) at the deadline showed the Maple Leafs weren't resigned to being a good story. The organization has done well in developing its young players in the American Hockey League.

Lamoriello and Babcock also made correct decisions on who to keep and who to ship out entering the season.

When they took over, it was unknown whether Nazem Kadri or Jake Gardiner or James van Riemsdyk would be part of the rebuild. Today all of them are thriving. Kadri has become a scoring, shutdown center, while Gardiner has become a more dependable heavy-minute defenseman. Van Riemsdyk, who has a goal and assist in the playoffs, has provided reliable offense.

Babcock's influence can't be overstated. He has changed the Maple Leafs' culture. Babcock is known as the king of preparation. No one prepares a team to play quite like him. He gets in players' heads and forces them to believe they can be better than they really are.

This Maple Leafs' team isn't fully developed, yet they play with a swagger of a successful team. It's a mixture of cockiness and confidence that will eventually carry this team deep into the playoffs.

That isn't expected to happen this season, but it's no longer crazy to think that it could. That's the difference between this Maple Leafs team and other Toronto teams of the past.

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