



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • April 18, 2019



## How the Carolina Hurricanes reinvented hockey in North Carolina, and what's next

Emily Kaplan

RALEIGH, N.C. -- Smoke from pulled pork and burgers on grills wafted through the parking lots outside PNC Arena. The cars blasted Kanye West and country music. The fans parked some four to five hours before the Carolina Hurricanes dropped the puck for their first playoff game in a decade, and played cornhole, drank beers, and wheeled pigs (yes, real pigs) in wooden wagons.

As center Jordan Staal pulled into his usual parking spot at the arena, he couldn't help but smile.

"I've been waiting a long time for this," Staal said. "It was so cool to see."

Added defenseman Justin Faulk: "We've had a lot of bad years here. It's hard for fans to enjoy the teams that aren't doing well. Except for maybe kids, and the extremely die-hard fans. But if you were here on Monday, it was loud. People were tailgating. It was something to see. That's the way they do sports down here, I guess. And you want to be a part of it, you want to be around it."

The Canes snapped their 10-year playoff drought by finishing fourth in the Metro Division with 99 points. That set up a first-round matchup with the defending Stanley Cup champion Washington Capitals. Though Washington won the first two games, the Canes routed the Caps 5-0 in their first home game of the series, which was as much a statement as it was a celebration for a franchise that has reignited excitement in this community.

"We'd all probably be telling a fib if we said we'd be at this point," general manager Don Waddell said. "Certainly we thought we'd be a playoff-bound team. We felt good about the changes we made to the roster. But to end up with 99 points is probably more than we thought. The biggest thing is gaining respect back with the community. That's a big step we've taken this year. We'd always say, 'Next year is going to be the year, next year...'"

But how did "next year" become "this year," and what comes next for a franchise that seems to have arrived ahead of schedule?

The 2018-19 season was the first full season with Tom Dundon as majority owner. Dundon has become noted in professional sports for his short-lived foray trying to save, and then ultimately folding, the upstart Alliance of American Football league -- reportedly losing \$70 million along the way. He has had much more success with the Hurricanes, where he is intimately involved with day-to-day operations (Dundon is the type of owner who can be seen around the team locker room after a game, and also in meetings with personnel and business folks). Although the Canes are

currently operating a loss, there are a number of encouraging signs.

Waddell says the Canes are up just over 12 percent in attendance year over year. During the final weeks of the regular season with the Canes making a playoff push, Carolina was up 20 percent year over year. Interest, of course, has spiked during the playoffs. Twenty-four hours before Game 4, the cheapest tickets available on the secondary market were nearly \$400 for a pair.

Even more encouraging are the commitments for new business. The Canes are already at \$2.5 million for new business with season-ticket sales for next season. Last year at this point, they were at \$400,000.

"In a market like this, every year you lose 10-12 percent [of season-ticket holders]," Waddell says. "People move out of market, they can't afford it, they're not happy with the way the team performs."

According to the team, last year at this time, the renewal rate for season tickets was 72 percent. This year, they're currently at 91 percent. The new plans sold year over year has been an increase of 262 percent.

When Waddell arrived in Carolina five years ago, there were 5,000 season-ticket holders. Now there are 7,500. Waddell predicts they could add some 2,000 more for next season.

During the 2018-19 season, the Canes had their four highest game-day merchandise sales in franchise history. That includes Whalers Night in December, Bunch of Jerks Night in February, as well as the last two final home regular-season games.

For the first playoff game, merchandise sales are up over 75 percent compared to the last home playoff game in 2009.

Of course the challenge will be sustaining it -- both on and off the ice. The Canes have seen a surge of interest before, and they let it fade away. The arena was just as packed around the time the team won the Stanley Cup in 2006. "Early in my career, this was a really tough building to play in, really loud," said Capitals defenseman Brooks Orpik, a 16-year NHL veteran.

Said Canes center Sebastian Aho: "You heard stories of how great it was. It was definitely different my first two years here, but now I see how great the crowd can be."

The Hurricanes have endeared themselves to the community.

"The fans have responded to a couple of things," Waddell says. "In the beginning of the season, even though we didn't



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win every game, our fans realized we were giving everything we had every night."

The Hurricanes have 12 new players on the roster and a coach, Rod Brind'Amour, who was not only a fan favorite during his playing career but appealed to current players because of his work ethic and relatability. Brind'Amour is humble, if not yet polished as a coach.

In the preseason, Brind'Amour -- nine years removed from his own playing career -- took the same conditioning test the players did. The 48-year-old sheepishly admitted his marks would have been good enough to pass. The legend of Rod the Bod lives on.

"It's hard for us not to have that work ethic instilled in us when, to be honest, our head coach is probably working harder than we are," Faulk says. "In the gym, watching video, we know he's here all day."

Things really took off when the Hurricanes introduced the Storm Surge -- elaborate postgame celebrations after home wins (see our ranking of all 23 of them here). They were a reason for fans to sit in their seats after the game.

"One of our best marketing tools was something our players came up with," Waddell says. "The Storm Surge was 100 percent a player idea, and folks in the community latched onto it."

## Hurricanes likely without Ferland, Svechnikov

ESPN

The Carolina Hurricanes erupted for five goals to beat the Capitals in Game 3, but they will be missing some firepower for Thursday's game.

Coach Rod Brind'Amour said Wednesday that power forward Micheal Ferland is not expected to play with an upper-body injury.

"I would say (he's) still a ways away," he told reporters.

And when Hockey Night in Canada announcer Don Cherry criticized the team as a "bunch of jerks," that only made things better.

"That was just another marketing tool that was gifted to us," Waddell says. "We capitalized on it from a financial standpoint, we've had more than 15,000 'Bunch of Jerks' shirts sold, but the dollars don't mean as much as the value of everyone talking about it; not just locally, but nationally."

And that's how the Canes have become one of the best stories of the NHL season.

Just ask one of the 12 new players: backup goalie Curtis McElhinney, an Ontario, Canada, native who played the past two seasons in the Toronto Maple Leafs organization.

"Compared to Toronto where I was before, it feels like the polar opposite," he says. "Around town, the biggest thing is people honestly don't know who you are. In Toronto it's a little different. But here, you see bumper stickers and T-shirts and driving around neighborhoods you see hockey nets every now and then.

"And then when people find out you are a hockey player, you find out they have been a fan since [the Canes] have been here, and they're so excited to talk. It's a small-town feel, but it's one that makes you feel welcome. I think everybody loves it, and obviously getting to this point changes everything."

For Dundon, Waddell, Brind'Amour and everyone else, they're hoping this is just the beginning of something special.

That news comes after he said Tuesday that 19-year-old forward Andrei Svechnikov is in the concussion protocol after being knocked out in a fight with Alex Ovechkin and is unlikely to be back for Game 4.

Ferland, 26, tried to lay a hit on Washington tough guy Tom Wilson in the first period Monday. He left the game shortly after and did not return.

Svechnikov has three points in the Hurricanes' three playoff games. Ferland hasn't registered a point in the postseason, but he was fourth on the team in scoring with 40 points during the regular season.

# THE NEWS & OBSERVER

## Better late than never for Dougie Hamilton, who has found a home with Hurricanes

By Luke DeCock

Raleigh

There was a sense of tribute to Dougie Hamilton's performance Monday night, scoring a pair of late power-play goals after his friend Andrei Svechnikov had been knocked out, but also a sense of vindication, and not merely for Svechnikov.

For himself.

A season that began with Hamilton lost at times on the ice has evolved into one where he is the Carolina Hurricanes' most dangerous two-way defenseman, an offensive enigma capable of crashing the net on the rush yet still able to partner with Jaccob Slavin on the Hurricanes' top pairing.



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If the Hurricanes are going to beat the Washington Capitals, down 2-1 going into Thursday's Game 4, Hamilton is going to have to be a big part of that. It's a long way from October and November, when Hamilton was snakebit with the puck and struggling with an as-yet undisclosed nagging injury, on the wrong end of too many goals.

His second half, healthy and with his footing under him both on and off the ice, has been a tour de force of playmaking from the blue line, from one end of the ice to the other. He ended up with a career-high 19 goals, 16 of those coming in the final 44 games, and is tied for the team playoff lead with four points in three games – a long way from October and November.

"It was really hard for me," Hamilton said Wednesday. "It's hard when everyone expects stuff of you and you're doing the best with what you have. For me, I just tried to stick with it and keep believing in myself that I'll start feeling better. I'm happy with how I responded to everything and trying to just keep going"

The early struggles took a toll on Hamilton, whose quiet and bookish nature became fodder for an ex post facto whispering campaigns when he was traded, after being a top-10 draft pick, from Boston to Calgary and Calgary to Carolina by age 25. Hamilton was labeled aloof, a loner. The most famous criticism came from a Canadian personality who claimed Hamilton didn't fit in with the Flames because he'd rather visit a museum than go to lunch with his teammates.

That such a charge would be leveled as grave criticism is typical of the insular hockey world, where the frat-boy culture can run strong. Hamilton was a two-time academic player of the year in junior hockey, where some players spend more time in strip clubs than classrooms. His teammates heard the rumors, but shrug at them now. Hamilton still bristles. He has not forgotten.

"People were saying I wasn't fitting in with the team, which was not true," Hamilton said. "I fit in in Boston, had tons of fun there, lots of success. Same as Calgary. Fit in there. Tons of success. Had a lot of fun with the guys. It's not like for me that I'm finally on a team that I can be myself and fit in with guys. Nothing's changed. It's just what people say and the exterior part of it."

His teammates note a different Hamilton reputation, for showing up early and staying late after practices and games. That's how he befriended Svechnikov, who is not only the same kind of rink rat but, at 18, doesn't have a lot of other places to go. There's no question watching Alex Ovechkin knock out Svechnikov in the first period Monday helped inspire Hamilton's performance, but it also wasn't out of character.

With Micheal Ferland injured and headed to free agency and prospect defenseman Adam Fox apparently committed to signing elsewhere, Hamilton may be all the Hurricanes have to show for the draft-weekend blockbuster that sent Elias Lindholm and Noah Hanifin to the Flames, and the way he's playing, that may not be all bad.

"He had a few bumps in the start, I think he would agree with that," Hurricanes center Jordan Staal said. "It goes to show everything that comes along with trades. I've been there. It can be difficult at times for different players. He definitely started feeling comfortable, you could tell, in the second half, started playing his game."

"And the puck was going in for him, too. He was shooting a ton of pucks at the beginning of the season and it wasn't trickling in. He's been ripping them now and they've been finding the twine."

But the blockbuster nature of that trade also placed extraordinary demands on Hamilton, who was expected to score 20 goals and dominate at both ends of the ice (while being anchored to the second power-play unit, which has recently become the de facto first power-play unit).

"I think the expectations on him were different right from the start and it just took him a little time," Hurricanes coach Rod Brind'Amour said. "It's funny, he even said, 'I always play better after Christmas.' I was like, well, we don't want to wait until Christmas. For whatever reason, he has, and we're thankful. He's a huge part of what we're doing."

Maybe, finally, Hamilton has found a home.

"Nothing's changed for me," Hamilton said. "I just try to get comfortable. It's always hard when you're on a new team and you don't know anybody, the staff and the people around, you come in with a reputation and stuff as well. For me, it was just trying to get comfortable and I'm comfortable with everything now."

## Canes' Patrick Brown preps for his first NHL chance in two years

By Joe Giglio

Raleigh

Patrick Brown knew he would be in the playoffs, just not the Stanley Cup playoffs.

Brown, the captain of the Charlotte Checkers, was prepping for the AHL playoffs when he got called up by the Carolina Hurricanes to replace injured rookie Andrei Svechnikov.

Brown, a 26-year-old center from Boston College, got in his car after practice on Tuesday and drove up to Raleigh.

"It wasn't too hard," Brown said.

The Canes are hoping the same can be said for Brown's transition into the simmering pressure-cooker that is this first-round series with the Washington Capitals. The tension has been cranked up with each game and it got a ugly on Monday during the Canes' 5-0 win in Game 3.

Svechnikov, in his first NHL fight, was knocked out by Washington star Alex Ovechkin in the first period and briefly ended up at the hospital on Monday night. Svechnikov is in the NHL concussion protocol and when he will be able to return is unclear.



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Forward Warren Foegele, who scored two goals in Monday's win, will be moved up to Svechnikov's spot on the second line with Jordan Staal and Justin Williams. The Canes are also expected to be without forward Micheal Ferland, who missed the final two periods of Monday's game with an "upper body" injury.

"We lose two forwards that are in your top nine, top six, however you want to look at it, so that's obviously not ideal," Canes coach Rod Brind'Amour said. "Next man up. We've got guys we feel real confident in to be able to at least chip away at what we're missing."

Brown practiced Wednesday on the the fourth line, at left wing, with center Greg McKegg and right wing Saku Maenalanen. All three are familiar with each other from their time with the Canes' minor-league affiliate in Charlotte.

"Brownie is a super-dependable player," McKegg said. "You know what you're going to get every game from him. He's a great guy to have here."

This will be Brown's first NHL action since March 2017 but Brind'Amour has confidence that Brown can handle the playoff pressure.

"Really good character kid, he's their leader down there in Charlotte; has been for awhile," Brind'Amour said. "I just

## Canes in 'must-win' mode for Game 4 with Caps

By Chip Alexander

Raleigh

The Carolina Hurricanes have the Washington Capitals' full attention.

Getting beat 5-0 can do that to a team. Getting beat 5-0 in the Stanley Cup playoffs can't be ignored or forgiven.

In the first two games of their Eastern Conference playoff series, the Caps had their way. They were the defending Stanley Cup champions and played it that way, winning twice in Washington, taking a 2-0 series lead, arriving in Raleigh a loose, confident hockey team.

And then 5-0 happened. The Caps expected PNC Arena to be fully alive in Game 3. They didn't expect to skate into the belly of the beast, facing a red sea of Canes fans and one stoked Hurricanes hockey team.

And from the moment the Caps' Alex Ovechkin knocked out Canes rookie forward Andrei Svechnikov in their fight, in the first period, the Caps found themselves in both an electrically charged and suddenly enraged atmosphere, Canes fans wanting blood, wanting retribution as their team built the lead -- 2-0, 3-0, 4-0, 5-0.

"That was an emotional game for a lot of people in the building," Canes coach Rod Brind'Amour said Wednesday.

The Canes' Warren Foegele was all over the ice, scoring goals, being a pest. Dougie Hamilton was a force on the power play. Jordan Staal at times appeared to be a man among boys, getting in 10 hits. The crowd loved all of it.

"We knew they would make a push and the fans would be cheering and it would be loud," Ovechkin said Wednesday.

expect him to come work hard. He knows how to play the game. It's not going to affect him, this stage and how big a game it is."

Brown played in 14 games for the Canes during the 2016-17 season and has two points in 28 career NHL games.

He was called up in February, as a possible injury replacement, but didn't play. He has had a strong season for the Checkers. Brown had 19 goals and 16 assists in 70 games.

The Checkers have best record in the AHL (51 wins, 110 points) and won their division. They open the playoffs on Saturday at Providence.

"We have a great team — goaltending, defense, offense, everyone contributed — and the results showed," Brown said.

As much as Brown was looking forward to the AHL playoffs, he was ecstatic to get another shot with the Canes.

"It was crazy, just a regular practice day in Charlotte and I got the call," Brown said. "I'm ready to go. I'm hoping to contribute in any way I can."

"It doesn't matter if you win or lose, you have to move forward. It's the playoffs and what's happened has happened."

And so we arrive at Game 4.

After Thursday's game, the Canes will either have tied the series or trail 3-1 going back to Washington for Game 5, which will have an 8 p.m. start Saturday. It's that simple now, that elementary.

Before Game 3, Canes captain Justin Williams called it a matter of "taking care of business" at home. It still is.

"It's never a must-game until it is but it is for us," Brind'Amour said. "Give our best effort -- that's it, that's all we talk about. If it's not good enough it's not good enough, but we know we have to play a certain way to give ourselves a chance against these guys.

"If the bounces don't go your way or something happens, we have another game and that's nice to know. But we're definitely approaching it like we've got to win."

The Canes will have to do it without Svechnikov, sidelined indefinitely with a concussion. Also missing Thursday will be forward Micheal Ferland, who left Monday's game with an upper-body injury and was not at practice Wednesday -- both teams used Tuesday as an off-day.

Forwards Saku Maenalanen, who played in Game 2, and Patrick Brown will go into the lineup on the fourth line centered by Greg McKegg. Brown was recalled Tuesday from the Charlotte Checkers, who are preparing for the start of the AHL Calder Cup playoffs.

"To lose two forwards in your top six, or however you look at it, is obviously not ideal," Brind'Amour said. "But next man up



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and we've got guys we feel real confident in to at least chip away at what we're missing there."

With Svechnikov out, Foegele will move to Jordan Staal's line opposite Williams. He's not out of place, having been the game's first star Monday, having scored four goals in his last five games, including the last two of the regular season.

"He's a very tenacious player, works hard, shoots the puck hard, does all the right things," Staal said. "He's a player who brings a lot of energy. He gets his linemates going, gets everyone fired up."

Foegele, 23, had PNC Arena fired up Monday after scoring the first goal of the game, giving the Canes their first lead in the series. He first forced a turnover in the Caps zone, then later planted himself in front of goalie Braden Holtby, where he got a piece of the puck on a Justin Faulk shot.

Foegele made it 2-0 in the second with a score off the rush, taking a pass from Sebastian Aho and again beating Holtby. Hamilton scored twice on the power play, Brock McGinn added a final goal and the victory was complete as goalie Petr Mrazek earned the shutout.

Foegele made the Canes roster out of training with hard-nosed play and 200-foot hustle. He's relentless in hounding the puck, a sandpaper type of player with an edge to his game that belies his boy-next-door looks. The Stanley Cup playoffs might be the biggest stage in hockey but Foegele said he is enjoying it, relishing it.

"These are the games you've been dreaming about since you were little, these do-or-die games," he said.



## Game 4 Preview: Capitals vs. Hurricanes

Canes look to even series at home

by Michael Smith

2019 Stanley Cup Playoffs game previews are presented by Visit Raleigh.

The Carolina Hurricanes have an opportunity to even their first-round series with the Washington Capitals on home ice in Game 4.

After falling down 2-0 in the best-of-seven slate, the Hurricanes dominated the Capitals in a 5-0 shutout win in Game 3 on Monday.

Lessons from Game 3

The Hurricanes played one of their best and most complete games of the season to earn their first victory of the series in Game 3. The Canes were dominant with the puck and suffocating in all areas of the ice. They struck first, stretched their lead and never afforded the Capitals an opportunity to get back into the game.

It was a well-earned playoff victory, the team's first since May 14, 2009.

"We were relentless. We just kept going at them," said Dougie Hamilton, who netted two power-play goals. "We worked. We had energy. We got on them."

Since the Hurricanes have essentially approached each game in 2019 as a must-win game, the team's attitude wasn't much different heading into Game 3, knowing they wanted to avoid falling in a 3-0 hole.

"We understand it's one game, but it's nice to play the way we played," head coach Rod Brind'Amour said after the game.

Now with the opportunity to hold serve at home and even the series at two before it shifts back to Washington for Game 5, the Canes have discovered the blueprint for playoff success.

"It's never a must-win game until it is, but it is for us. We want to make sure we give our best effort. That's it. That's really all we talk about. If it's not good enough, then it's not good enough," Brind'Amour said after practice on Wednesday. "We know we need to play a certain way to have a chance against these guys. If the bounces don't go your way or something doesn't happen, we have another game, and that's nice to know, but we're definitely approaching it like we have to win."

Filling Holes

The Hurricanes' Game 4 lineup will be missing two critical pieces. Andrei Svechnikov, who scored two goals in the third period of Game 1, was injured in a first-period fight with countryman Alexander Ovechkin in Game 3. The Canes' 19-year-old rookie was helped off the ice, taken to the hospital for further evaluation and subsequently released. He is currently in the concussion protocol and won't return to game action until medically cleared.

"We're going to be real careful. We're always careful," Brind'Amour said on Tuesday. "We're certainly not going to rush him back."



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Micheal Ferland reaggravated an upper-body injury in the first period of Game 3 and did not return. He didn't practice with the team on Wednesday and remains "a ways away," according to Brind'Amour.

Enter Patrick Brown, recalled from Charlotte on Tuesday afternoon, and re-enter Saku Maenalanen, who has been a healthy extra for two of the three games in this series. Both skated on a line centered by Greg McKeeg in practice on Wednesday.

"We lose two forwards who are in the top nine or top six, however you want to look at it. That's obviously not ideal. But, it's next man up," Brind'Amour said. "We've got guys we feel real confident in to be able to at least chip away at what we're missing there. There's nothing much you can do about it. We feel good about the group we have and the players coming in to take those roles."

Brown, who last played in an NHL regular-season game in March 2017, totaled 35 points (19g, 16a) in 70 games with the Charlotte Checkers this season.

"You know what you're going to get out of him. Really good character kid. He's their leader down there in Charlotte and has been for a while," Brind'Amour said. "I just expect him to come work hard. He knows how to play the game."

## AT THE RINK

Monday night was fun. Let's do it again, shall we?

There's a lot going on again for Game 4, including a South Plaza Party kicking the festivities off at 4:30 p.m. Here's a good rundown of everything, and full details are also available.

Giveaway alert! "Raise Up" rally towels are waiting for you on your seat. Make Petey Pablo proud.

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## Capitals confident they'll have response against Hurricanes in Game 4

Must do better job against forecheck, match Carolina's urgency to keep crowd from being factor

by Tom Gulitti

RALEIGH, N.C. -- The Washington Capitals know it's their turn to respond when they play the Carolina Hurricanes in

Game 4 of the Eastern Conference First Round at PNC Arena on Thursday (7 p.m. ET; NBCSN, SN, TVAS, FS-CR, NBCSWA).

Carolina lost the first two games of the best-of-7 series at Washington but pushed back with a 5-0 win in Game 3, the



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Hurricanes' first home game in the Stanley Cup Playoffs since 2009.

"In the playoffs, you kind of make adjustments and there's pushbacks from both teams depending on how the last game or even the last period went, and they won the Game 3 pushback," Capitals forward T.J. Oshie said Wednesday. "Game 4, the momentum is on their side. We've got to find a way to get the momentum back on our side, play physical, play strong, play for each other, block shots. Do all the little things right."

That formula worked well for the Capitals on their way to winning the Stanley Cup last season, and their experience gives them confidence they can do it again.

Even after being outshot 45-18 and looking overwhelmed at times in Game 3, Washington can take control of the series with a win in Game 4 and return home with a chance to advance to the second round by winning Game 5 on Saturday. But the Capitals will have to do a better job of handling Carolina's forecheck and neutralizing the crowd, which fueled the Hurricanes for much of Game 3.

The best way to quiet the crowd would be to score an early goal. The team that scored first has won each of the first three games.

"We knew they were going to make a push," Capitals forward Alex Ovechkin said. "It's a situation when the fans are going to be cheering for you, it's going to be loud and it's good. I think both teams like it, and it was a fun game. Obviously, we lost [Game 3], but with that loss you can win. We're going to try tomorrow to get it in our hands and play much better."

The Hurricanes view Game 4 as an opportunity to build on what they did in Game 3 and even the series. If they can do that after losing the first two games at Washington, they'd put all the pressure on the defending champions heading into Game 5.

"We want to win that game and put maybe a little pressure for them, but we can't think about that," Hurricanes center Sebastian Aho said. "We just have to focus on that game and not on the future and we want to just play a good game."

Although the Hurricanes trail in the series, they've controlled play for two of the first three games with their incessant forecheck, which has forced the Capitals into numerous defensive-zone turnovers. The Capitals were able to make the Hurricanes play catch-up in Game 1 by jumping out to a 3-0 first-period lead and holding on for a 4-2 victory.

## **Foegele embracing more responsibility with Hurricanes entering Game 4**

Rookie forward stepping up in absence of injured Svechnikov, Ferland against Capitals

by Kurt Dusterberg

RALEIGH, N.C. -- Warren Foegele will try to deliver another big offensive game for the Carolina Hurricanes in Game 4 of the Eastern Conference First Round against the Washington Capitals at PNC Arena on Thursday (7 p.m. ET; NBCSN, SN, TVAS, FS-CR, NBCSWA).

Washington played better in Game 2 and grabbed a 2-0 lead in the first period, but Carolina battled back and forced overtime before losing 4-3. In Game 3, Carolina survived an early Washington flurry before taking its first lead of the series on Warren Foegele's deflection goal 9:43 into the first period and kept building from there. The Hurricanes kept the Capitals on their heels for much of the game, holding them without a shot on goal for one stretch of 23:04 that bridged the first and second periods.

"We're hoping it continues the same way," Hurricanes center Jordan Staal said. "We're expecting the same energy from the crowd. ... We're hoping it's going to be the same result, same emotion, same everything. Obviously, they're going to come out with a bigger effort, a bigger challenge for us, but we're hoping for the same stuff."

The Hurricanes' depth will be tested with forwards Andrei Svechnikov (concussion protocol) and Micheal Ferland (upper body) sidelined after they were injured in the first period of Game 3. The Capitals continue to search for the solution to their own injury problem without defenseman Michal Kempny, who had season-ending surgery April 2 to repair a torn hamstring.

Rookie defenseman Jonas Siegenthaler, 21, will make his playoff debut in place of Christian Djoos, who has struggled in the first three games while averaging 7:24 in ice time.

The Capitals also plan to tweak their forward lines. Oshie will move up to right wing on the first line with Ovechkin and Nicklas Backstrom in place of Tom Wilson, who will shift into Oshie's former spot on the second line with Jakub Vrana and Evgeny Kuznetsov. Andre Burakovsky will move up to play left wing on the third line with Lars Eller and Brett Connolly, replacing Carl Hagelin, who will drop to the fourth line with Nic Dowd and Travis Boyd.

Boyd will make his series debut in place of Chandler Stephenson after being a healthy scratch the first three games.

All of that shuffling won't matter for Washington if the Capitals can't match the urgency the Hurricanes played with in Game 3.

"Obviously, we're not happy with the way Game 3 went," Connolly said. "But we're still up 2-1 and we've responded all year, all last season in the playoffs, and we've answered all the same questions, everyone has, a million times. We've been through this. Now it's just a matter of getting the job done and responding."

Foegele is being counted on to fill the void left by injured forwards Andrei Svechnikov and Micheal Ferland. Foegele skated with Jordan Staal and Justin Williams at practice Wednesday after getting three points (two goals, one assist) in Game 3, a 5-0 win that was Carolina's first in the best-of-7 series.

"More responsibility and a little more opportunity as well," Foegele said. "You try to take it and prove the coach made the right decision."



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Svechnikov is out with a concussion following a fight with Capitals forward Alex Ovechkin in Game 3. Ferland is far from a return after a first-period hit on Tom Wilson aggravated an upper-body injury.

"That's obviously not ideal, but next man up," Carolina coach Rod Brind'Amour said. "We've got guys we feel real confident in to at least chip away at what we're missing there."

One of them is Foegele. The 23-year-old rookie and Carolina's third-round pick (No. 67) in the 2014 NHL Draft earned a roster spot in training camp and moved up and down the lineup throughout the season. He finished with 15 points (10 goals, five assists) in 77 games, relying on speed and a knack for winning battles on the forecheck.

"Maybe some puck luck," said Foegele, who scored three goals in his final six regular-season games. "I thought all year I've had chances, but some just didn't go in. Lately they've been going in. I just try to listen to what (Brind'Amour) is preaching, and that's working hard and trying to create chances."

"Looking back at November and December, those were rough months for myself with confidence, with rushing decisions. With games played, you get some experience and you realize you might have more time than you think."

Foegele's three-point game factored into the decision to bump him from the fourth line to a line tasked with shutting down Washington's top forwards.

"It was nice to see that he had a big game for us," Brind'Amour said. "He's had that capability. He had a great start, a great training camp. He showed those signs that he could be an impact player and he was the other night."

Defenseman Calvin de Haan (upper body) practiced Wednesday but is uncertain for Game 4. He hasn't played since March 31.

"He's been close for a little while," Brind'Amour said. "It's definitely going to be his call. He's cleared. We're waiting on him being confident enough to go out there and compete."



## Capitals take 2-1 lead into game 4 against the Hurricanes

By The Associated Press

Washington Capitals (48-26-8, first in the Metropolitan Division during the regular season) vs. Carolina Hurricanes (46-29-7, fourth in the Metropolitan Division during the regular season)

Raleigh, North Carolina; Thursday, 7 p.m. EDT

**EASTERN CONFERENCE FIRST ROUND:** Washington leads series 2-1

**BOTTOM LINE:** The Washington Capitals visit the Carolina Hurricanes in the Eastern Conference first round with a 2-1 lead in the series. The teams meet Thursday for the eighth time this season. The Hurricanes won the previous matchup 5-0. Warren Foegele scored a team-high two goals for the Hurricanes in the victory.

The Hurricanes are 24-13-4 at home. Carolina leads the Eastern Conference recording 34 shots per game while averaging three goals.

The Capitals are 33-14-5 in Eastern Conference play. Washington has scored 274 goals and ranks third in the

Eastern Conference averaging three goals per game. Alex Ovechkin leads the team with 51.

**TOP PERFORMERS:** Sebastian Aho leads the Hurricanes with 30 goals, adding 53 assists and collecting 83 points. Teuvo Teravainen has totaled 7 points over the last 10 games for Carolina.

Ovechkin leads the Capitals with 51 goals, adding 38 assists and totaling 89 points. T.J. Oshie has five goals and six assists over the last 10 games for Washington.

**LAST 10 GAMES:** Capitals: 6-3-1, averaging three goals, five assists, two penalties and six penalty minutes while giving up two goals per game with a .923 save percentage.

Hurricanes: 5-4-1, averaging three goals, five assists, three penalties and seven penalty minutes while giving up two goals per game with a .919 save percentage.

**Hurricanes Injuries:** Micheal Ferland: day to day (upper body), Calvin de Haan: day to day (upper body), Andrei Svechnikov: out (upper body).

**Capitals Injuries:** Michal Kempny: out indefinitely (lower body).



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## Jets, Sharks, Canes favourites on Thursday NHL betting lines

OddsShark Staff

The Winnipeg Jets will be looking to establish their first lead in their opening-round NHL playoff series with the St. Louis Blues when they return home for Game 5 on Thursday as -125 favourites on the NHL betting lines at sportsbooks monitored by OddsShark.com.

After falling to defeat in two dates on home ice, Winnipeg rebounded on the road, tallying a pair of victories at Enterprise Center in St. Louis, capped by a 2-1 overtime win on Tuesday that leaves the series knotted at two games apiece ahead of Thursday night's Blues vs. Jets betting matchup at MTS Centre.

The Jets' success in St. Louis marks the first time they have tallied consecutive victories in 13 games since March 20, and has given the club a huge lift on the NHL series prices, where Winnipeg now sits deadlocked with the Blues with -110 odds.

However, the Jets still have plenty of work to do to advance to the second round for a second straight year. Winnipeg has dropped three straight to St. Louis at home, complicating their overall shaky play on home ice, where they have dropped five straight since March 23.

The Blues sit as +105 underdogs on the odds for Thursday after suffering their first back-to-back defeats in 16 contests.

The club's struggles in Games 3 and 4 put the brakes on a run that saw the Blues claim victory in 11 of 14 contests to close the regular season alongside Winnipeg with 99 points.

But despite losing control of home-ice advantage in the series, the Blues have remained resilient on the NHL futures, pegged as a +1000 wager to raise the Stanley Cup for the first time, and outpacing the Jets, who trail at +1300.

Elsewhere on the Thursday NHL playoff odds, the Vegas Golden Knights take a commanding 3-1 series lead into Game 5 of their clash with the San Jose Sharks as +105 underdogs, while the Carolina Hurricanes aim to even their series with the defending champion Washington Capitals at two games apiece as narrow -125 home chalk.

The Golden Knights have scored early and often while rebounding from a 1-0 series deficit, outgunning the Sharks by a wide 16-6 margin in three straight wins, and are now listed as -1000 favourites on the series prices to bounce San Jose from the playoffs for a second straight year.

The Hurricanes outclassed Washington in a 5-0 win in Game 3 to pay out on -125 odds, but have failed to tally consecutive wins against the Capitals while going 7-14-5 in 26 overall meetings since December 2013, according to the OddsShark NHL Database.



**SB NATION**  
**CANES COUNTRY**

## Carolina Hurricanes vs. Washington Capitals: Game 4 Preview and Storm Advisory

The Hurricanes and Capitals clash in the electric PNC Arena playoff atmosphere for Game 4 in what could be the most pivotal matchup of the series.

By Andrew Ahr

Eastern Conference First Round Game 4

Washington Capitals at Carolina Hurricanes

Thursday, April 18th, 2019 - 7:00 PM ET  
PNC Arena - Raleigh, NC

TV: Fox Sports Carolinas  
Radio: 99.9 The Fan

SBN Opponent: Japers' Rink

The Hurricanes take on the Capitals tonight in Raleigh in the biggest game of the series thus far. With the game score at 2-1 in favor of the Capitals, a win for either side would dramatically shift the series narrative.

Vital Statistics

Category	Hurricanes	Capitals
Record	1-2	2-1
Goals/Game	3.33	2.67



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Category	Hurricanes	Capitals
Shots/Game	34.0	23.0
Faceoff %	55.4%	44.6%
Power Play % (Rank)	23.1% (7)	16.7% (T9)
Penalty Kill % (Rank)	83.3% (T7)	76.9% (10)
ES Corsi For %	62.96%	37.04%
ES PDO	97.6%	102.5%
PIM/Game	13:00	11:00

### Goaltender #1

Category	Petr Mrazek	Braden Holtby
Record	1-2	2-1
Save %	.897	.902
GAA	2.34	3.30

### Goaltender #2

Category	Curtis McElhinney	Pheonix Copley
Record	0-0	0-0
Save %	N/A	N/A
GAA	N/A	N/A

### Game Notes

Game 3 in Raleigh was a sellout. Tonight's will almost certainly be another one, so expect an electric atmosphere again tonight.

The Hurricanes fed off of that atmosphere on Monday night and throttled the Caps, winning by a score of 5-0. The Canes dominated possession, posting a Shot Attempts Percentage of 71.95%.

Petr Mrazek picked up his fourth playoff shutout win. He's only won one NHL game in the playoffs that wasn't a shutout.

Calvin de Haan has been medically cleared to play. It's just a matter of when he feels ready to step in at this point. He participated in a full practice yesterday, and Brind'Amour mentioned that it was his best practice since the injury.

Micheal Ferland and Andrei Svechnikov are both ruled out tonight. Ferland is "not close" to being back, and Svechnikov is in the concussion protocol. Both will most likely miss more time after tonight. Patrick Brown was called up on Tuesday and will likely make his first NHL playoff appearance tonight in response to the two injuries.

### Storm Advisory

Alex Nedeljkovic has been recognized as the AHL's best goaltender!

Tom Dundon was on the Canes Corner Podcast to talk all things Canes, including whether it was his idea for the team to wear their black jerseys in the playoffs. [WRAL Sports Fan]

Justin Faulk was nominated for the King Clancy Trophy by the Hurricanes:

And here's a list of all of the nominees from each team the NHL. [NHL]

The Selke Trophy finalists were also announced yesterday.

One of the best players in the KHL, Nikita Gusev, is excited to join the Golden Knights in their playoff run. [NHL]

### Playoff Storyboard

Here's what happened last night:

The Bruins took on the Leafs in Toronto in Game 4. Just when it looked like the Bruins had ran away with it, the Leafs stormed back to within one goal, but it wasn't enough. The Bruins took the game and evened the series at 2-2. This is going to be a good one.

The Stars dominated the Predators in an extremely one-sided affair as they took down the Predators by a score of 5-1 in front of their home crowd. The series is all knotted up at 2-2.

The Flames had a 2-0 lead, on the strength of goals from old friends Elias Lindholm and Derek Ryan, but the Avalanche roared back. Mikko Rantanen tied the game with 2:50 to go and then won it at 10:23 of overtime, giving the Avs a 3-2 win in Game 4 and a 3-1 lead in the series. The Flames return home for a must-win Game 5, and if the Avs can finish them off, it will be the first time in NHL history that the top seeds in both conferences failed to advance out of the first round.



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## Five Things We Have Learned So Far In The Playoffs

The Canes and Caps have revealed a lot thus far as the series rages on with Game 4 tomorrow.

By Andy House

The Carolina Hurricanes and Washington Capitals are now officially locked into a series. Both teams have drawn blood, and with a pivotal Game 4 at PNC Arena just over 24 hours away, now is a good time to take a look at what we have learned so far in this contentious series.

### 1. The Canes can't afford any more forward injuries

Coming into this series, two of the main weapons the Hurricanes were hoping to unleash on the Capitals were the playoff version of Micheal Ferland, who was a standout in Calgary when they last appeared in the postseason, and the teenager Andrei Svechnikov who had proved to be a significant offensive force in his first NHL season. Now, with those two players either confirmed out or expected to be missing for some portion of the remaining series, the Canes now find themselves unable to handle another injury.

By adding Saku Maenalanen and Greg McKegg consistently to the lineup, plus whatever role Patrick Brown plays in the next few games, the Canes will have a fourth line that leaves something to be desired, but will ultimately ice players who were a significant part of the turnaround that occurred in the absence of Jordan Staal earlier in the year. If one more core player falls out of the lineup, however, they will be forced to bump additional fourth line players into their top-nine forward group. If the Canes hope to create consistent offense, that cannot happen.

### 2. Petr Mrazek is the guy in net

While the Canes' path to success for most of the season involved an alternating of the goalies with Mrazek and Curtis McElhinney, Rod Brind'Amour has made a pretty clear statement in the first three games by remaining with Mrazek in net for each of the contests. Even though Mrazek was not in top form in the initial two losses in D.C., he did make enough crucial saves to keep his team in each game. When Game 3 came around, Brind'Amour returned to the well once again and was rewarded with the first Hurricanes playoff shutout since Cam Ward turned the trick in May 2009 against the Bruins. He will start Game 4, and it would seem that Mrazek is the man in net, barring injury or a particularly poor showing, for the remainder of the series.

### 3. The Capitals are missing Michal Kempny

One of the possible issues that many pointed out for the Capitals entering the series was just how they were going to replace the defensive presence of Michal Kempny. Injured in late March, Kempny played in 71 games and achieved the highest plus/minus on the team (+24) as a go-to defensive blueliner. While the Caps got out to early advantages in the

first two games of the series, his absence was less significant.

But as the matchups adjusted on the road, and the Caps offense didn't provide a cushion that would allow their forwards to be as helpful in the defensive and neutral zones, the loss of Kempny was felt dramatically. John Carlson and Matt Niskanen continue to log even heavier minutes than they did in the regular season, and the bottom pairing continues to prove itself to be vulnerable, if not an outright target. How the Caps can continue to manage such a gaping loss on the back end will largely tell the story of this series and any future series they might play.

### 4. Crowd Support - CHECK

While I don't think many people were surprised that Hurricanes fans flocked to PNC Arena on Monday (and presumably will on Thursday), I do think that there was an expectation that there would be a not insignificant number of Capitals fans who made the drive down from parts of Virginia or elsewhere the D.C. area for a shot at seeing their team on the road within driving distance.

Instead, when the anthem singer got to the part where Caps fans typically yell "O!" in unison, it simply wasn't there.

We all expected a sellout, but what we got was one of the more raucous - and one-sided - crowds any city has seen for a first round matchup in years. Everyone has loved to say that this building rocks when the Canes are good and giving them something to root for, and those fans were proven right in their declaration as fans stood through most of the game as the Canes trounced the defending Stanley Cup Champions.

### 5. This team has one of the strongest bonds we have seen in some time

Obviously, the circumstances surrounding the loss of Andrei Svechnikov due to the concussion protocol raised a red flag for the Canes and their fans. The 19-year-old was out of his depth in a fight with his idol, and his teammates and coaches showed how deeply they care for the kid and just what he has meant to the team in his first season here. In the aftermath of the one of the biggest wins as a group, their thoughts fell to their fallen teammate.

But teams with such a tight bond and a willingness to go the extra mile for the brother on their left and right often times are the teams that make the seemingly impossible come true. While overcoming a 2-0 deficit to the Caps would be by no means be sorcery (just look to Columbus-Tampa for that, wow), it would require this group to collectively dig in and play some of their best hockey as a group. Monday night was a tremendous example of what that looks like. Can they keep that level of effort and execution going forward? It will certainly be a lot of fun to find out.



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## By The Numbers: Playoff Petr

Petr Mrazek has passed the eye test in this playoff series, but many goaltending metrics peg him as below average. What's going on?

By Andrew Ahr

Despite what has appeared to be a solid string of performances in net for the Carolina Hurricanes over the past three games, goaltending metrics peg Petr Mrazek as one of the worst goaltenders thus far in these playoffs. Here's a chart showing playoff goalies and their Goals Saved Above Average (GSAA) through the first two games of the postseason. (Note: Mrazek's GSAA jumped up to -1.77 after Monday's shutout win, but that's still third worst in the NHL).

The eye test has told me that Mrazek has been good, but not necessarily great. He appeared a little jumpy early in the series — the same could be said for the entire team. I really don't think that anyone would argue that he's been significantly below average through the first three games. Without his heroics, the team certainly doesn't get to overtime in Game 2. That's exactly the level of play that is required and expected of a goaltender in the postseason. It seems like he shook off the early postseason nerves relatively quickly, and has only gotten better as the series has progressed.

I think it's fair to say that the first goal of the series was a savable shot. Nicklas Backstrom streaked into the offensive zone and snapped a quick wrist shot from above the slot that beat Mrazek to glove side. The shot was somewhat unexpected and definitely a good one from an elite top line center, but probably savable. We can probably chalk it up to nerves, a screening defenseman, and a really great shot from Backstrom.

Another goal that Mrazek will want back is the game winning one-timer in overtime of Game 2 from just above the dot off the stick of Brooks Orpik. I don't think this goal was

necessarily his fault — the Caps made a great play all around and Brett Pesce was providing a nearly perfect screen with his feet in the blue paint as Mrazek tried to track the pass. But it's ultimately a shot from a non-scoring defenseman from a medium danger area and probably one that Mrazek saves more often than not.

Other than those two shots, I think that Mrazek has been lights out in this playoff series.

Situations like these — when the eye test and goaltending metrics tell two different stories — generally spawn a debate about the validity of the statistics. They shouldn't. Numbers aren't the whole story, and they certainly don't replace the eye test. The two should work in unison to give us a better understanding of the game.

The most compelling argument for the discrepancy between the eye test and Mrazek's underlying numbers in this series is the statistical anomaly that is the Washington Capitals. When you have a wealth of top end finishing talent like Alex Ovechkin, Nicklas Backstrom, and T.J. Oshie (honorable mention goes to offensive superstar Brooks Orpik), you don't need to generate tons of shots in order to score goals. The Capitals' 10.5% shooting percentage was best in the NHL during the regular season, while their Shots Per Game and Shot Attempts Percentage were 22nd and 18th in the league, respectively.

The truth is that the Capitals aren't a perpetually lucky team, and Mrazek isn't playing poorly this series. The Caps are just that good at finishing their scoring chances. It certainly helps to have some of the best forwards in the league who have been making it happen for years. Compile that with the fact that the Capitals have a "been there before" swagger about them that was most evident early on the series (see the Oshie karate kick goal), and what you get is a goaltender who is playing his tail off with subpar metrics.



## Shaya's 10 Thoughts: April 17, 2019

Written by Nicholas Niedzielski

1. The Checkers were already battling injuries and callups leading into their playoff series against the Providence Bruins. After injuries to Micheal Ferland and Andrei Svechnikov in Carolina, the team has now lost their captain Patrick Brown. With Jake Bean, Haydn Fleury, and now Roland McKeown out long term, this Checkers team is going to have a serious battle against a very good Providence

team.

2. This is the most important quote of the week by head coach Mike Vellucci. "Those last two games in Cleveland meant everything to them and meant nothing to us but our guys were still blocking shots and paying the price." Vellucci is exactly right. The Cleveland games had no bearing on the standings for Charlotte whatsoever. When the Monsters turned up the heat, the Checkers put them in their place. I



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have never been around a team that hates to lose like the current Charlotte team does. Granted, it doesn't happen very often, but in the rare occasion of a loss the room is a pall of misery. There's no statistical analysis or advanced stat that measures the will to win and the disgust of losing.

3. Vellucci was named coach of the year this week. I doubt anyone was surprised by the award. Asked about the award this week, Vellucci was quick to deflect the praise. He immediately mentioned his staff of Ryan Warsofsky and Myles Fee helping him each and every day. Vellucci and his staff guided this team to the best record in franchise history with one of the lowest payrolls and losing some quality players along the way. And yet, Vellucci persevered. The man never panics and he's constantly looking for solutions to whatever problems arise. Off the ice, no one has done more to bring a team together and promote the organization in the city than Mike. He understands the business of the game and wants to help grow the team's footprint and fan base. We have been extremely fortunate as an organization to have a man like Mike as our coach the last two seasons and believe me when I tell you, no one wants to win a championship more than him. One more point about Mike--even with all the awards, victories and championships in his professional career, I believe he is most proud of being a father to his kids, which should tell you the kind of man he is off the ice.

4. Roland McKeown's season is on hold with a lower-body injury. Here is why that is such a massive blow to the team -- Roland is the most consistent defenseman this team has maybe ever had. He rarely makes mistakes. He is the efficient, cerebral and quiet defenseman every team needs. He's an NHL defenseman and it's long overdue for someone to give him a chance. Last year, he was +34, one of the league's best. He followed it up this year with more points and a +30 rating. This is a large enough sample size to see what is obvious -- the Checkers are a better team when he's on the ice. It will be strange not to see him out there for Charlotte in the first round.

5. With over 900 NHL games played -- and one single shift with the Charlotte Checkers last year -- Lee Stempniak will dress for Providence in this series. In 20 games played, he has 7 goals and 11 assists for 18 points. Providence is already a deep team up front but a player like Stempniak could shift the balance as a depth forward for the Bruins. Charlotte's defense will have their work cut out for them against a player who has over 200 NHL goals to his credit.

6. Hopefully coming back from injury, Andrew Poturalski, in my estimation, is going to be the most important forward for Charlotte. Andrew was playing his best hockey of the season

before sustaining an injury which probably cost him the record for most points in a single season for the franchise. If the line of Aleksii Saarela, Morgan Geekie and Poturalski stay intact for the team, they will face the burden of having to go against the best line every night for Charlotte to win this series. All three of those players have shined this year and there is no reason to think they'll stop now.

7. I've heard Vellucci say many times that the bigger the game, the better Alex Nedeljkovic plays. This year has been one long display of Nedeljkovic and his brilliance in net. But, right now, the new season begins and as always, goaltending is the center of attention. If what Vellucci says remains true, then Charlotte has a chance to win each and every night no matter who the opponent -- so long as the best goalie in the AHL continues to perform like he did all season. The playoffs could very well be the last in the AHL career of Nedeljkovic and no one wants to win his last game more than Alex. Congrats to him for winning the goalie of the year award but now onto bigger things.

8. Tampa Bay won 62 games this season, tying the record for most in NHL history. They rarely suffered any hardship going into the playoffs. They went up 3-0 in Game 1 and they believed everything was going according to plan. Then the wheels came off and today, one of the most dominant teams in regular season history is wondering where it all went wrong. If the playoffs are the first time a club experiences adversity, you will lack the skills to adapt when needed. Tampa was a paper tiger and when the winds blew unfavorably in their direction, they were whisked away.

9. If Charlotte makes a significant run in the post season, the moment they picked up Tomas Jurco will be remembered as the most important acquisition of the year. Jurco makes a case to return to the NHL next season with every game he plays. I was familiar with his skill, which is amazing, but what opened my eyes was how hard he plays and how badly he wants to win. This was the trade of the season for Charlotte.

10. The broadcast begins on Saturday night at 6:50 PM with a puck drop scheduled for 7:05 PM. The Dunkin' Donuts Center is the most unfavorable in any league I have ever called a game. You virtually have to guess what's happening at the far end of the ice. Despite our best efforts, this will remain unchanged for the broadcasts on Saturday or Sunday. The only thing left to do is complain constantly in order to make myself feel better and to call two great games for Charlotte. Interviews, highlights and special guests are planned. Join us for both games and if you're at American Burger Company for our viewing party Saturday night, make sure you tweet to let us know. See you all in Charlotte on Wednesday night and have a great Easter.



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

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## Checkers vs. Bruins Preview: Part 2 - Forwards

Written by Nicholas Niedzielski

### BY THE NUMBERS

The Checkers possessed one of the league's most dangerous offensive attacks throughout the season, finishing with the fifth-most goals-per-game in the AHL. They scored at least three goals in 53 of their 76 games this season and thrived when they did so, with 45 of the team's 51 wins on the season coming in those situations.

One of Charlotte's biggest strengths up front during the season was their depth of scoring. Five different forwards recorded at least 40 points this season, while eight different forwards notched at least 15 goals.

The Bruins finished lower in the final rankings for offensive production, tying for 19th with an average of three goals per game. Over their last 13 games – as they pushed for the final playoff spot in the division – they scored two or fewer goals six times, but turned it on down the stretch by recording 23 goals over their last six contests.

Providence's offense was less spread out, with their top three scorers standing as the only 40-point scorers on the team.

### WHO TO WATCH

Charlotte may boast strong depth up front, but that's not to say they're without high-end scorers. Andrew Poturalski – whose status for this weekend is unknown – became the second player in franchise history to hit the 70-point mark in a single season, ranking fifth in the league despite a four-game absence to end the year that broke up a 21-points-in-17-games stretch, while Aleksii Saarela became the fourth 30-goal scorer in franchise history thanks to a red-hot finish that saw him light the lamp 14 times over his last 18 games. There's also Julien Gauthier, whose 27 goals eclipsed his entire point total from his rookie campaign, and Martin Necas, who finished strong to pass the 50-point mark while playing most of the season as a teenager.

Providence's biggest offensive threat has come from a midseason acquisition, as veteran Paul Carey joined the club from Belleville and recorded 33 points (22g, 11) in 30 games for the Bruins, while 27-year-old center Jordan Szwarz led the team with a career-high 23 goals. Gemel Smith – who spent all of last season in the NHL with Dallas – was held to just 47 games for Providence this year but managed to rack up 40 points (16g, 24a) along the way. Then there's former Hurricane Lee Stempniak, who signed a deal with Boston in late February. The veteran of over 900 NHL games has stepped into the lineup for Providence and produced, logging 18 points (7g, 11a) through 20 games.

### HEAD TO HEAD

The Checkers and Bruins locked together eight times during the regular season, with Charlotte registering a 4-2-2 record for the series. The series proved to be a tightly contested, low-scoring affair.

Andrew Poturalski led the way for Charlotte's forwards with five points (3g, 2a) in eight games, Morgan Geekie added four points (1g, 3a) over the eight games while Julien Gauthier notched three points (2g, 1a).

For Providence, Carey (2g, 2a) and Trent Frederic (4g, 1a) stood out in smaller four-game sample sizes, while Szwarz (3g, 1a) and rookie Cameron Hughes (1g, 3a) stepped up across the eight-game set.

### KEY FOR CHARLOTTE

"We're going to have to create opportunities off the rush and we're going to have to get net front and shoot the puck," said head coach Mike Vellucci. "All those little things that are good. Providence is good defensively, they have four really good centers down the middle. They play a structured game so we're going to have to match that and outwork them."

## Alex Nedeljkovic Named AHL's Outstanding Goalie For 2018-19

Written by Nicholas Niedzielski

The American Hockey League today announced that the Checkers' Alex Nedeljkovic has won the Aldege "Baz" Bastien Memorial Award as its outstanding goaltender for the 2018-19 season.

In his third professional campaign, Nedeljkovic, 23, posted a 34-9-5 record, giving him at least six more wins than any other goaltender, and also led the league with a 2.26 goals-

against average. The Carolina Hurricanes' second-round pick in 2014 also tied for ninth in the league with a career-best .916 save percentage and tied for third with four shutouts.

A two-time AHL Goaltender of the Month award winner this season (January and March), Nedeljkovic also earned a spot on the league's First All-Star Team last week.



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In addition to leading the league, the native of Parma, Ohio, set single-season franchise records for most wins and lowest goals-against average. Nedeljkovic, who also picked up the win in his first NHL start with the Hurricanes at Vancouver on

Jan. 23, is the Checkers' career leader in wins (73) and shutouts (10).

## TODAY'S LINKS

[http://www.espn.com/nhl/story/\\_/id/26549013/how-carolina-hurricanes-reinvented-hockey-north-carolina-next](http://www.espn.com/nhl/story/_/id/26549013/how-carolina-hurricanes-reinvented-hockey-north-carolina-next)  
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# SportScan

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

1141459 Carolina Hurricanes

Canes' Patrick Brown preps for his first NHL chance in two years

BY JOE GIGLIO

APRIL 17, 2019 04:07 PM

Raleigh

Patrick Brown knew he would be in the playoffs, just not the Stanley Cup playoffs.

Brown, the captain of the Charlotte Checkers, was prepping for the AHL playoffs when he got called up by the Carolina Hurricanes to replace injured rookie Andrei Svechnikov.

Brown, a 26-year-old center from Boston College, got in his car after practice on Tuesday and drove up to Raleigh.

"It wasn't too hard," Brown said.

The Canes are hoping the same can be said for Brown's transition into the simmering pressure-cooker that is this first-round series with the

Washington Capitals. The tension has been cranked up with each game and it got a ugly on Monday during the Canes' 5-0 win in Game 3.

Svechnikov, in his first NHL fight, was knocked out by Washington star Alex Ovechkin in the first period and briefly ended up at the hospital on Monday night. Svechnikov is in the NHL concussion protocol and when he will be able to return is unclear.

Forward Warren Foegele, who scored two goals in Monday's win, will be moved up to Svechnikov's spot on the second line with Jordan Staal and Justin Williams. The Canes are also expected to be without forward Micheal Ferland, who missed the final two periods of Monday's game with an "upper body" injury.

"We lose two forwards that are in your top nine, top six, however you want to look at it, so that's obviously not ideal," Canes coach Rod Brind'Amour said. "Next man up. We've got guys we feel real confident in to be able to at least chip away at what we're missing."

Brown practiced Wednesday on the the fourth line, at left wing, with center Greg McKegg and right wing Saku Maenalanen. All three are familiar with each other from their time with the Canes' minor-league affiliate in Charlotte.

"Brownie is a super-dependable player," McKegg said. "You know what you're going to get every game from him. He's a great guy to have here."

This will be Brown's first NHL action since March 2017 but Brind'Amour has confidence that Brown can handle the playoff pressure.



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"Really good character kid, he's their leader down there in Charlotte; has been for awhile," Brind'Amour said. "I just expect him to come work hard. He knows how to play the game. It's not going to affect him, this stage and how big a game it is."

Brown played in 14 games for the Canes during the 2016-17 season and has two points in 28 career NHL games.

He was called up in February, as a possible injury replacement, but didn't play. He has had a strong season for the Checkers. Brown had 19 goals and 16 assists in 70 games.

The Checkers have best record in the AHL (51 wins, 110 points) and won their division. They open the playoffs on Saturday at Providence.

"We have a great team — goaltending, defense, offense, everyone contributed — and the results showed," Brown said.

As much as Brown was looking forward to the AHL playoffs, he was ecstatic to get another shot with the Canes.

"It was crazy, just a regular practice day in Charlotte and I got the call," Brown said. "I'm ready to go. I'm hoping to contribute in any way I can."

News Observer LOADED: 04.18.2019

1141460 Carolina Hurricanes

Canes in 'must-win' mode for Game 4 with Caps

BY CHIP ALEXANDER

APRIL 17, 2019 03:44 PM

Raleigh

The Carolina Hurricanes have the Washington Capitals' full attention.

Getting beat 5-0 can do that to a team. Getting beat 5-0 in the Stanley Cup playoffs can't be ignored or forgiven.

In the first two games of their Eastern Conference playoff series, the Caps had their way. They were the defending Stanley Cup champions and played it that way, winning twice in Washington, taking a 2-0 series lead, arriving in Raleigh a loose, confident hockey team.

And then 5-0 happened. The Caps expected PNC Arena to be fully alive in Game 3. They didn't expect to skate into the belly of the beast, facing a red sea of Canes fans and one stoked Hurricanes hockey team.

And from the moment the Caps' Alex Ovechkin knocked out Canes rookie forward Andrei Svechnikov in their fight, in the first period, the Caps found themselves in both an electrically charged and suddenly enraged atmosphere, Canes fans wanting blood, wanting retribution as their team built the lead -- 2-0, 3-0, 4-0, 5-0.

"That was an emotional game for a lot of people in the building," Canes coach Rod Brind'Amour said Wednesday.

The Canes' Warren Foegele was all over the ice, scoring goals, being a pest. Dougie Hamilton was a force on the power play. Jordan Staal at times appeared to be a man among boys, getting in 10 hits. The crowd loved all of it.

"We knew they would make a push and the fans would be cheering and it would be loud," Ovechkin said Wednesday. "It doesn't matter if you win or lose, you have to move forward. It's the playoffs and what's happened has happened."

And so we arrive at Game 4.

After Thursday's game, the Canes will either have tied the series or trail 3-1 going back to Washington for Game 5, which will have an 8 p.m. start Saturday. It's that simple now, that elementary.

Before Game 3, Canes captain Justin Williams called it a matter of "taking care of business" at home. It still is.

"It's never a must-game until it is but it is for us," Brind'Amour said. "Give our best effort -- that's it, that's all we talk about. If it's not good enough it's not good enough, but we know we have to play a certain way to give ourselves a chance against these guys."

"If the bounces don't go your way or something happens, we have another game and that's nice to know. But we're definitely approaching it like we've got to win."

The Canes will have to do it without Svechnikov, sidelined indefinitely with a concussion. Also missing Thursday will be forward Micheal Ferland, who left Monday's game with an upper-body injury and was not at practice Wednesday -- both teams used Tuesday as an off-day.

Forwards Saku Maenalanen, who played in Game 2, and Patrick Brown will go into the lineup on the fourth line centered by Greg McKegg. Brown was recalled Tuesday from the Charlotte Checkers, who are preparing for the start of the AHL Calder Cup playoffs.

"To lose two forwards in your top six, or however you look at it, is obviously not ideal," Brind'Amour said. "But next man up and we've got guys we feel real confident in to at least chip away at what we're missing there."

With Svechnikov out, Foegele will move to Jordan Staal's line opposite Williams. He's not out of place, having been the game's first star Monday, having scored four goals in his last five games, including the last two of the regular season.

"He's a very tenacious player, works hard, shoots the puck hard, does all the right things," Staal said. "He's a player who brings a lot of energy. He gets his linemates going, gets everyone fired up."

Foegele, 23, had PNC Arena fired up Monday after scoring the first goal of the game, giving the Canes their first lead in the series. He first forced a turnover in the Caps zone, then later planted himself in front of goalie Braden Holtby, where he got a piece of the puck on a Justin Faulk shot.

Foegele made it 2-0 in the second with a score off the rush, taking a pass from Sebastian Aho and again beating Holtby. Hamilton scored twice on the power play, Brock McGinn added a final goal and the victory was complete as goalie Petr Mrazek earned the shutout.

Foegele made the Canes roster out of training with hard-nosed play and 200-foot hustle. He's relentless in hounding the puck, a sandpaper type of player with an edge to his game that belies his boy-next-door looks. The Stanley Cup playoffs might be the biggest stage in hockey but Foegele said he is enjoying it, relishing it.

"These are the games you've been dreaming about since you were little, these do-or-die games," he said.

News Observer LOADED: 04.18.2019

1141461 Carolina Hurricanes

Better late than never for Dougie Hamilton, who has found a home with Hurricanes

BY LUKE DECOCK

APRIL 17, 2019 03:06 PM

Raleigh

There was a sense of tribute to Dougie Hamilton's performance Monday night, scoring a pair of late power-play goals after his friend Andrei Svechnikov had been knocked out, but also a sense of vindication, and not merely for Svechnikov.



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

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For himself.

A season that began with Hamilton lost at times on the ice has evolved into one where he is the Carolina Hurricanes' most dangerous two-way defenseman, an offensive enigma capable of crashing the net on the rush yet still able to partner with Jaccob Slavin on the Hurricanes' top pairing.

If the Hurricanes are going to beat the Washington Capitals, down 2-1 going into Thursday's Game 4, Hamilton is going to have to be a big part of that. It's a long way from October and November, when Hamilton was snakebit with the puck and struggling with an as-yet undisclosed nagging injury, on the wrong end of too many goals.

His second half, healthy and with his footing under him both on and off the ice, has been a tour de force of playmaking from the blue line, from one end of the ice to the other. He ended up with a career-high 19 goals, 16 of those coming in the final 44 games, and is tied for the team playoff lead with four points in three games – a long way from October and November.

"It was really hard for me," Hamilton said Wednesday. "It's hard when everyone expects stuff of you and you're doing the best with what you have. For me, I just tried to stick with it and keep believing in myself that I'll start feeling better. I'm happy with how I responded to everything and trying to just keep going"

The early struggles took a toll on Hamilton, whose quiet and bookish nature became fodder for an ex post facto whispering campaign when he was traded, after being a top-10 draft pick, from Boston to Calgary and Calgary to Carolina by age 25. Hamilton was labeled aloof, a loner. The most famous criticism came from a Canadian personality who claimed Hamilton didn't fit in with the Flames because he'd rather visit a museum than go to lunch with his teammates.

That such a charge would be leveled as grave criticism is typical of the insular hockey world, where the frat-boy culture can run strong. Hamilton was a two-time academic player of the year in junior hockey, where some players spend more time in strip clubs than classrooms. His teammates heard the rumors, but shrug at them now. Hamilton still bristles. He has not forgotten.

"People were saying I wasn't fitting in with the team, which was not true," Hamilton said. "I fit in in Boston, had tons of fun there, lots of success. Same as Calgary. Fit in there. Tons of success. Had a lot of fun with the guys. It's not like for me that I'm finally on a team that I can be myself and fit in with guys. Nothing's changed. It's just what people say and the exterior part of it."

His teammates note a different Hamilton reputation, for showing up early and staying late after practices and games. That's how he befriended Svechnikov, who is not only the same kind of rink rat but, at 18, doesn't have a lot of other places to go. There's no question watching Alex Ovechkin knock out Svechnikov in the first period Monday helped inspire Hamilton's performance, but it also wasn't out of character.

With Micheal Ferland injured and headed to free agency and prospect defenseman Adam Fox apparently committed to signing elsewhere, Hamilton may be all the Hurricanes have to show for the draft-weekend blockbuster that sent Elias Lindholm and Noah Hanifin to the Flames, and the way he's playing, that may not be all bad.

"He had a few bumps in the start, I think he would agree with that," Hurricanes center Jordan Staal said. "It goes to show everything that comes along with trades. I've been there. It can be difficult at times for different players. He definitely started feeling comfortable, you could tell, in the second half, started playing his game.

"And the puck was going in for him, too. He was shooting a ton of pucks at the beginning of the season and it wasn't trickling in. He's been ripping them now and they've been finding the twine."

But the blockbuster nature of that trade also placed extraordinary demands on Hamilton, who was expected to score 20 goals and dominate at both ends of the ice (while being anchored to the second power-play unit, which has recently become the de facto first power-play unit).

"I think the expectations on him were different right from the start and it just took him a little time," Hurricanes coach Rod Brind'Amour said. "It's funny, he even said, 'I always play better after Christmas.' I was like, well, we don't want to wait until Christmas. For whatever reason, he has, and we're thankful. He's a huge part of what we're doing."

Maybe, finally, Hamilton has found a home.

"Nothing's changed for me," Hamilton said. "I just try to get comfortable. It's always hard when you're on a new team and you don't know anybody, the staff and the people around, you come in with a reputation and stuff as well. For me, it was just trying to get comfortable and I'm comfortable with everything now."

News Observer LOADED: 04.18.2019

1141462 Carolina Hurricanes

Piano man: How Jarmo Kekalainen is playing all the right notes in Blue Jackets' historic run

By Tom Reed Apr 17, 2019 83

COLUMBUS, Ohio — Two months ago, Jarmo Kekalainen acquired an asset he long desired. Maybe not as long as his pursuit of Matt Duchene, but then again it didn't cost him a first-round draft pick, either.

The Blue Jackets general manager bought himself a pre-owned piano from Otterbein University for \$2,500.

What many don't know about Kekalainen is he spent six years at the Kuopio Conservatory in his native Finland, where he studied classical piano. To earn a little walking-around money, the former winger taught lessons to kids. So, he's got at least one thing in common with Mozart.

But unlike the immortal Austrian composer, Kekalainen isn't ready to perform in public. He bought a Kawai digital model instead of his dream piano, a baby grand, because only one of them comes with a headphone jack.

That's right. The NHL general manager who's swung some of the most daring deals in the past four years has stage fright.

"I am not playing in front of anybody until I know I won't miss a note," he said.

Kekalainen has hit all the right ones in helping orchestrate one of the biggest first-round upsets in league history. His Blue Jackets completed a stunning sweep of the Lightning on Tuesday night inside a raucous Nationwide Arena. The executive who went all in at the trade deadline saw his club dispatch the Presidents' Trophy winners, 7-3, to deliver the franchise's first-ever playoff series victory.

The series clincher featured a greatest hits collection of Kekalainen moves and draft choices:

Nineteen-year-old Alexandre Texier, a 2017 second-round pick, scored two goals.

Pierre-Luc Dubois, whom Kekalainen drafted ahead of Jesse Puljujarvi in 2016, collected a goal and two assists.

Seth Jones, acquired in the blockbuster Ryan Johansen deal, contributed a goal and an assist.

Duchene, the biggest of Kekalainen's trade deadline acquisitions, scored his third goal of the series.

Artemi Panarin, whom the general manager refused to deal despite his likely departure this summer, scored an empty-netter to seal the win.



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Sergei Bobrovsky, also retained at the deadline, was outstanding in making 30 saves, including many big ones in the third period as Tampa Bay pressed for the equalizer.

As the final seconds bled from the clock, Kekalainen, assistant general manager Bill Zito and president of hockey operations John Davidson stood in their executive suite, surveying the scenes of joy on the ice and in the stands.

A franchise birthed in 2000 is finally moving on to the second round. There were hugs and tears and jubilant shouts. Dressed in a blue suit and a red tie, Kekalainen walked to the press-box elevator and descended to the event level without saying a word.

But the sense of satisfaction on the face of the first European general manager in NHL history was unmistakable. His deadline gambles are paying off. His team looks as dangerous as any left in the Stanley Cup tournament.

"I've always talked about us wanting to earn the respect of the fans in the city, and this is a good step toward that," Kekalainen told *The Athletic* outside the team's locker room. "But we've also talked about we're not just interested in a first-round victory. The goal is to win the Stanley Cup, and by winning the first round against the best regular-season team in the history of the NHL should give us confidence we can beat anybody.

"But we have to go one step at a time and not get ahead of ourselves. We're going to have a real good opponent, whoever it is."

Matt Duchene, acquired at the trade deadline, has been a catalyst for the Blue Jackets down the stretch and into the playoffs. (Kirk Irwin / Getty Images)

Inside the Blue Jackets locker room, Duchene shared a previously untold story about the seismic events of Feb. 22.

As the trade deadline beckoned, some assumed the club would be both buyers and sellers. Kekalainen had a reputation for keeping one eye toward the future. He's always considered first-round picks the lifeblood of an organization.

So when the GM surrendered his 2019 first-round pick and possibly his 2020 first-round selection to Ottawa for Duchene — a player he's coveted for years — some figured Panarin would be dealt to recoup a few high-end assets.

Three days before the deadline, Duchene was told otherwise.

"I heard Bob and Bread were staying, and it was an all-in thing," Duchene confirmed to *The Athletic*. "That was really exciting to hear."

For all his success at the international level with Team Canada, the playmaking center had appeared in just eight NHL postseason games in his first nine years. He yearns for Stanley Cup glory.

After a slow start with the Blue Jackets, Duchene has been brilliant down the stretch and into the first round. He registered three goals and four assists against the Lightning.

"Jarmo was very complimentary of me on a personal level, and you don't always expect that because it's a business," said Duchene, an unrestricted free agent who will cost the Blue Jackets a 2020 first rounder if he re-signs with the club after July 1. "That was a big honor and very humbling. You want to play well for people who believe in you."

Blue Jackets captain Nick Foligno acknowledges the crowd after his team completed a first-round sweep of the Lightning on Tuesday. (Jamie Sabau / Getty Images)

About an hour after the Feb. 25 trade deadline had passed, Kekalainen's cellphone buzzed. He saw a text message from captain Nick Foligno.

"Thanks," wrote Foligno.

This has been the most trying and emotional season in Foligno's 12-year career. He twice had to leave the team for four-game stretches to care for two of his children who had been hospitalized.

He also spent the entire season having to answer questions about the uncertainty surrounding the futures of Panarin and Bobrovsky and the impact it was having on the team.

Not only did Kekalainen keep both players, but he also added Duchene, winger Ryan Dzingel, defenseman Adam McQuaid and goalie Keith Kinkaid.

Foligno, 31, was overcome with feelings of gratitude.

"Not to get too much into it, but I was so appreciative of the opportunity," Foligno said of Kekalainen's decision to go for it. "I believed in this group and so did he. He wrote back: 'Now, let's go win.' It meant so much to me because you don't get a lot of opportunities (to win the Cup)."

Some questioned the wisdom of mortgaging the future for a group that was no sure bet to capture a playoff round let alone make a deep run. Count me among those who thought it was foolhardy not to trade Panarin at some point during the season.

"We were doing this for the boys in the locker room and for the organization and the fans of Columbus who have been starving for playoff success," Kekalainen said.

As a player, he had one regret. He didn't think he did everything to maximize his career. The day he became Blue Jackets general manager in 2013, Kekalainen vowed he would never let that happen again.

In some ways, he adopted the "safe is death" mantra of John Tortorella before the organization even hired the coach in the fall of 2015. Kekalainen has boldly remade the roster, engineering a series of high-profile trades, culminating in this year's deadline moves.

"Are we going to miss a few draft picks? Yeah, but it's worth it," he said. "With this victory, it's definitely worth it. ... We had a good group here, but we had to add to it to have some success in the playoffs."

In Game 1 of the series, with the Blue Jackets on the verge of being blown out in Tampa, it was Foligno who scored the first goal to rally them from a 3-0 deficit en route to a shocking 4-3 win. Here was the captain doing his part to validate Kekalainen's faith in the team.

Tuesday night, as he walked from the ice toward the locker room, Foligno screamed: "Twenty fucking years coming" in reference to the club's long wait for its first playoff-series triumph.

Standing in front of his stall, the captain gazed across the room at Texier surrounded by reporters. Foligno knew almost nothing of the rookie before Kekalainen opted to promote the babe to the Blue Jackets roster on the final weekend of the regular season. Tortorella immediately put Texier in the lineup.

The ebullient French forward has been a revelation with his skill and strong play along the wall.

"Look at this Texier kid," Foligno said. "I didn't know anything about him until the series started. Boom, he's in (the lineup) and I'm like 'holy shit,' he's awesome."

"You've got to have big balls," Foligno said of Kekalainen. "I think Torts used that phrase, and I think we do, too. It's just worked well."

The Madison Square goal horn sounded in the dying moments of regulation time April 5. The sellout crowd erupted as Pavel Buchnevich scored the tying goal for the Rangers.

Moments earlier, the Blue Jackets thought they had secured the two points necessary to clinch a playoff berth. In the visitors executive box high above Garden ice, a chair went flying.

"I got up out of my seat (so quickly), the chair went backward," Kekalainen said. "I'm trying to go to the back of the booth so the cameras don't catch me."

"We end up going to a shootout in New York — oh, my God. (If we lose), we have to go to Ottawa and maybe have to win that last game."

The Blue Jackets wobbled after the trade deadline. They endured a 5-7-1 stretch and fell out of playoff position. Panic gripped the fan base. Some wondered whether Kekalainen might fire Tortorella in a desperate act to change momentum.



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Missing the playoffs would have been a disaster. No doubt someone would have paid with their job. Kekalainen remained calm. He stayed loyal to Tortorella as expected and urged the players to compete with more cohesion.

"He believes, he's patient," Davidson said of Kekalainen on Tuesday night. "He has great communication skills when it's needed. Him and Torts love each other."

Panarin caught fire down the stretch, registering three goals and eight assists in the final eight regular-season games. He scored the shootout winner in New York to send the Blue Jackets to the playoffs for a third consecutive season.

The dynamic Russian added two goals and three assists in the first-round win over the Lightning. There's no way the Blue Jackets advance without him.

Kekalainen made the right call to keep the winger no matter where Panarin lands after July 1. The victory over Tampa Bay has elevated the Blue Jackets into a new stratum, rare air that many long-suffering fans thought they'd never be breathing.

Columbus woke up Wednesday morning as a bona fide Stanley Cup contender.

"It's been nerve-racking, I'm not going to lie," the general manager said. "I've tried to act cool about it and I've tried to keep it all inside, but it's been tough."

Bobrovsky finished his media obligations Tuesday night and walked toward the changing room. Before reaching the door, he was stopped by Kekalainen. Goaltender and general manager smiled and shook hands.

There were moments during this crazy season when some thought it best for the Blue Jackets to cut ties with the two-time Vezina Trophy winner. Bobrovsky had left the bench after being pulled from a Jan. 8 loss in Tampa, earning a one-game, team-imposed suspension.

1141596 Washington Capitals

Capitals shake up lineup in search of Game 4 spark

By Samantha Pell April 17 at 4:50 PM

RALEIGH, N.C. — Washington Capitals Coach Todd Reirden tinkered with all four of his forward lines during Wednesday's practice at PNC Arena, a strong sign he plans to change his lineup in hopes of creating an offensive spark for Game 4 of his team's best-of-seven series against the Carolina Hurricanes.

One of the biggest changes Reirden made was moving forward T.J. Oshie to the top line to skate alongside center Nicklas Backstrom and captain Alex Ovechkin. Forward Tom Wilson was moved to the second line with center Evgeny Kuznetsov and forward Jakub Vrana. The Capitals, who lead the series 2-1, have gotten nine points from the top line of Ovechkin, Backstrom and Wilson over the first three games.

Oshie, who has one goal and one assist vs. the Hurricanes, knows the move could create more scoring chances for him.

"I haven't been up to my own personal standard and obviously playing with two world-class players like that shouldn't be too hard to find a way to have success with those guys, so I have to do my part on that line," Oshie said.

In the bottom six, forward Andre Burakovsky was moved up to the third line to skate next to center Lars Eller and forward Brett Connolly, while forward Carl Hagelin joined the fourth line with center Nic Dowd and forward Travis Boyd.

"Every time we've been playing together we've been having success," Burakovsky said of his move up to the third line. "We have a good combination with a little bit of everything on that line. I feel really comfortable playing with those two guys."

Kekalainen stayed the course. Coaches and teammates rallied around the embattled netminder. When the trade deadline passed and both Bobrovsky and his good friend Panarin were still here, the goalie's demeanor changed. He was more at ease. His performance soared.

He's won 14 of his past 17 starts and was a calming presence in the series after a shaky first period in Game 1 against the Lightning.

"I'm happy for the guys in that room," Kekalainen said. "The players and coaches are the ones who deserve the credit. But there's still work to be done. We're not finished here."

The general manager is growing a playoff beard for the first time. He's tried goatees in past seasons, but in keeping with the 2019 theme, he's all in with the whiskers.

The only thing that's suffered in recent weeks is his practice time on the piano. Kekalainen, 52, no longer plays the music of Vivaldi, Chopin and Bach. His conservatory days are long past. Nowadays, it's Billy Joel, Elton John and the Eagles.

"The one bad thing about a baby grand is everyone has to listen to you practice," said Kekalainen, who lives with his wife and two daughters. "With (the digital piano), I can put the headphones on and nobody has to listen to me."

"In the last little while, it's been too nerve-racking to sit down and play. But I'll get back at it."

Blue Jackets fans hope it's not until June.

The Athletic LOADED: 04.18.2019

[The Lightning's sad sweep again shows being the NHL's best team is the worst]

On defense, Jonas Siegenthaler was paired with veteran Brooks Orpik during practice Wednesday, a strong sign he will take Christian Djoos's spot. Djoos had been averaging just 7:24 of ice time this postseason. Reirden said Siegenthaler is someone he feels comfortable with on the penalty kill.

"[He's] a young defenseman that has got size and really good stick detail, understands the game," Reirden said. "He has poise out there in heated situations, and obviously he hasn't played playoff hockey before, but he's a guy that with that added size can make plays under pressure and take a hit to make a play and fend off players a little bit easier. He's strong around the net, so now we have a little bigger guy in that spot."

With all the lineup changes, especially to the forward lines, Reirden emphasized the importance of depth scoring. The Capitals' bottom-six forwards have combined for one goal — an empty-net tally from Eller that came in the Capitals' 4-2 Game 1 win. In comparison, the top two lines have six goals through three games, with Backstrom leading the way with three. Kuznetsov has three assists.

"Depth scoring is important in every series, and it is important during the regular season, and maybe it's just making some adjustments there as well," Reirden said. "I was happy how it looked today in practice, and that was what we were looking for, and maybe that gives some guys a bit of a spark."

While the Capitals' stars have shown up in these Stanley Cup playoffs, production from the third and fourth lines was a key part in the team's ability to win the franchise's first title last season. Last postseason, the Capitals' bottom-six forwards accounted for 23 even-strength goals in 24 playoff games. Earlier in the year, Reirden called the bottom-six production "paramount" for the team's Stanley Cup success.

Connolly was particularly critical of his own play Wednesday. He led the bottom-six forwards during the regular season with 46 points (22 goals, 24 assists).



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • April 18, 2019

[Did the Lightning just complete the most pitiful playoff performance in sports history? There's a case.]

"I don't think me and Lars have played our best these last three games, and Games 1 and 2 were our better games, but we had our chances and didn't convert," Connolly said. "Last game for whatever reason [we] couldn't get anything going, and we are going to have to be better if we want to win the series, and we know that."

Last year's playoff hero, Devante Smith-Pelly, is now with the Capitals' American Hockey League affiliate in Hershey, Pa., after Washington waived him before the trade deadline in late February to clear salary cap space for the acquisition of Hagelin. Smith-Pelly scored seven playoff goals last year, including the game-tying goal in Game 5 of the Stanley Cup finals against Vegas.

While Smith-Pelly still could be recalled, Reirden is looking for in-house solutions first.

"It's a seven-game series, and you go a couple games without scoring, you want to, you know, stop the bleeding as much as you can, but our team is going to need some of that moving forward here if we want to win this series and then go on a deep run," Connolly said. "We know that, and we've proven it in the past. It's just a matter of getting it done."

Washington Post LOADED: 04.18.2019

1141597 Washington Capitals

Seeking improvement across the board, Capitals shake up lineup for Game 4

By Adam Zielonka - The Washington Times - Wednesday, April 17, 2019

RALEIGH, N.C. — After taking their first loss of the Stanley Cup Playoffs, Todd Reirden and the Washington Capitals seek solutions with some new personnel.

Outclassed 5-0 by the Carolina Hurricanes in Game 3 on Monday, the Capitals made a larger collection of starting lineup changes between games than they have in months, hoping to spark a turnaround in Thursday's Game 4 at PNC Arena.

Reirden's lines at Wednesday afternoon's practice subbed Jonas Siegenthaler in for Christian Djoos on the third defensive pairing, as Djoos struggled to get anything going in the first three games of the postseason.

Each forward line was rejiggered, too. T.J. Oshie moved up to the top line in Tom Wilson's place, Andre Burakovsky and Carl Hagelin swapped spots on the third and fourth lines and Travis Boyd was in for Chandler Stephenson on the fourth.

It represents by far the most sweeping shakeup for the Capitals in a while. Reirden called these the tentative starting lines for Game 4.

"It's all combinations I've tried before, so it's not brand-new," the coach said.

That's especially true for Oshie rejoining Alex Ovechkin and Nicklas Backstrom, which as recently as two years ago was Washington's go-to top line. When skating together this regular season, that trio created 15 goals while allowing just 10.

Oshie isn't expecting hat tricks now that he's bumped up, but he is looking forward to skating with Ovechkin and Backstrom again.

"I haven't been up to my own personal standard and obviously playing with two world-class players like that, shouldn't be too hard to find a way to have success with those guys. I gotta do my part on that line, get in, create havoc, create some space for them, get on the forecheck and get to the net. That should bring a little success for us."

If the Capitals want to stay ahead in the series, they'll need more than just the big names to get hot. During last year's Stanley Cup run, 18 different players scored at least one goal. Against Carolina so far, depth scoring has been nonexistent — their only 5-on-5 goals in Games 1 and 2 were scored by Backstrom, Oshie, Tom Wilson and Brooks Orpik.

"Our first top lines have been really good and like you said, we need something from the bottom two too," Burakovsky said. "We've had that in the past in last year's playoff and hopefully we can pick that up tomorrow."

But the biggest concern out of Game 3 was the blue line. Braden Holtby saved 40 shots and still let in five, as the Hurricanes have forechecked aggressively and controlled the puck more throughout the series.

Carolina's first goal Monday was only made possible by Djoos handing the puck to a Hurricane forward in front of Holtby's net. Though it's partly due to the amount of special teams this series has required, which the 24-year-old Swede doesn't play, Djoos only averaged 7:24 on ice per game this series, an absurdly small number for a defenseman.

Though Djoos is no playoff newbie and was a mainstay in the third pairing last postseason, he has been demoted for now and Siegenthaler will make his playoff debut. He played 24 games in 2018-19 while Djoos and Orpik battled injuries.

"(Siegenthaler's) a young defenseman that's got size and really good stick detail," Reirden said. "Understands the game. He has poise out there in heated situations. Obviously he hasn't played playoff hockey before, but he's a guy with that added size that can I'd say make plays under pressure and take a hit to make a play, and fend off players a little bit easier."

Will the unfriendly environment of PNC Arena get to Siegenthaler the way it affected the Capitals as a whole Monday? The Hurricanes are playing their first playoff series in 10 years and their fans came out in full force for Game 3.

Lineup changes only do so much, and the core of the team that won the 2018 Stanley Cup is still in place. For the players who did the dirty work and powered Washington to a title last June, the time to dig deep again has arrived.

"(In the) playoffs, you kind of make adjustments," Oshie said. "There's pushbacks from both teams, depending on how the last game went or even the last period went. They won the Game 3 pushback. Game 4, momentum's on their side. We gotta find a way to get the momentum back on our side."

Washington Times LOADED: 04.18.2019

1141598 Washington Capitals

Ban hockey fights or keep them in place, but don't blame Ovechkin

By Deron Snyder - - Wednesday, April 17, 2019

### ANALYSIS/OPINION:

I'm not a big fan of fighting, not on street corners, in bars, on pay-per-view, or in hockey. But, yeah, I'll watch pro athletes exchange blows on occasion (while ignoring the gratuitous videos of random brawls between random people).

My affection for boxing has waned over the years, and mixed martial arts never completely grabbed me. However, I do understand that tempers can flare and emotions can run hot in the heat of sports where fighting isn't the be-all and end-all.

In hockey, it's a given, a longstanding tradition that players will at times drop their gloves and throw punches.

True confession: In my lifetime, I have visited hockeyfights.com and scrolled through some of the featured bouts. Something about the fact



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that guys are throwing haymakers, keeping their balance, and trying to defend themselves on ice skates — ICE SKATES! — makes hockey fisticuffs a different, more-intriguing breed.

(P.S.: The website asks visitors to declare the winner. Amazingly, in Monday's bout between Washington's Alex Ovechkin and Carolina's Andrei Svechnikov, four jokers called the beatdown a draw. Two other knuckleheads voted for the guy who got knocked the bleep out!)

There's no debating who won that clash. But the sight of Ovechkin — 33 years old and 235 pounds — pummeling the face of Svechnikov — 19 years old and 195 pounds — has re-ignited the timeworn discussion on fighting and its place in the sport.

The headline over a column in a national publication read: "Fighting in the NHL is brutish and outdated and needs to be banned." A columnist in Raleigh, North Carolina, came to the same conclusion: "It's time to end fighting in hockey."

If the league opts to eliminate the practice, fine. But Monday night's main event shouldn't be the deciding factor. That would be a classic overreaction to an unfortunate set of circumstances, a knee-jerk decision fueled by optics, not a clear-headed move based on facts.

Cries to end fisticuffs wouldn't be nearly as loud — if they arose at all — if Svechnikov was 10 years older, 30 pounds heavier and wasn't dropped like a bad habit. It looks like he was already knocked out by a right cross when his head hit the ice, worsening his condition.

Afterward, Carolina coach Rod Brind'Amour told reporters that seeing Svechnikov's injury "makes you sick. I'm still sick to my stomach about it." Along with other critics, he seemed to blame Ovi for engaging with a player who's much younger and lighter.

To those with similar viewpoints, I have a simple retort: Svechnikov's age and weight are irrelevant in this case.

He appeared to be a willing combatant, even the instigator, according to Ovi. The norms were established and proper protocol was followed before the gloves came off. At that point, Svechnikov was just another NHL player, though a foolish one for choosing a heavyweight opponent for his first dance partner.

Sure, Ovechkin could've turned down the invitation. With only four fights in his NHL career, it's likely that he's skated away more than a few times. By the way, that's the smart move for prolific scorers, lest they risk broken hands or too much valuable time in the penalty box.

But Ovi wasn't obligated to give the disrespectful kid a break. On the contrary, some argue that a lesson needed to be delivered. Svechnikov had no business poking at the Great Eight like that, and now he's learned the hard way.

Don't blame Ovechkin for the teenager's brash and bold boneheadedness.

This wasn't a mugging. Nary a sucker punch was thrown. It wasn't one player flying across the ice for a blindside hit on an unsuspecting foe.

This was squaring off, looking the other man in the eye, signaling consent, and seeing what happens. Had the youngster dropped the veteran, the conversation would be totally different, but this fact would remain unchanged:

Fights happen and sometimes players get hurt.

But let's not get carried away. The tradition has been fading for years. According to TSN, there were only 0.2 fights per NHL game this season. Three decades ago, the number was 1.3 fights per game. Fighting is down 68% compared to 10 seasons ago.

The culture has changed organically without the league issuing an outright ban.

Should the NHL take that final step, or continue to leave matters to the players? I don't see anything wrong with either answer, though it wouldn't surprise me if commissioner Gary Bettman wants to keep the option as a bone for diehard, old-school fans.

But until further notice, players should be careful in whom they ask to dance.

And be ready to suffer the consequences.

Washington Times LOADED: 04.18.2019

1141599 Washington Capitals

Capitals to host viewing party at Capital One Arena for Game 4 vs. Hurricanes

By Matthew Paras - The Washington Times - Wednesday, April 17, 2019

During last year's Stanley Cup Playoffs, the Washington Capitals started hosting viewing parties at Capital One Arena for road games as they advanced further in the postseason.

Now, they're back.

The Capitals announced Wednesday that fans can watch Thursday's Game 4 against the Carolina Hurricanes at Capital One Arena — for free.

Doors will open at 6:30 p.m. for the game's 7 p.m. start, which will be broadcast on the jumbotron. Fans should use the F Street entrance to gain admission.

Per the team, beer will also be \$5 from 6:30-7 p.m.

The Capitals also asked fans to RSVP at WashCaps.com.

Washington Times LOADED: 04.18.2019

1141600 Washington Capitals

Capitals make lineup changes after Game 3 debacle

By Brian McNally April 17, 2019 5:44 PM

RALEIGH — Adjustments are the name of the game in the Stanley Cup playoffs. After a 5-0 drubbing by the Carolina Hurricanes on Monday, the Capitals need to make a few.

Washington coach Todd Reirden has made some tweaks to his lineup with Game 4 approaching on Thursday. The Capitals are still in front with a 2-1 series lead, but they know that can change quickly with another performance like Monday's.

Reirden shifted his forward lines around at practice on Wednesday at PNC Arena. T.J. Oshie moves up to the top line to play with Alex Ovechkin and Nicklas Backstrom while Tom Wilson drops to the second line to play with Evgeny Kuznetsov and Jakub Vrana.

Oshie was critical of his own play, but he does have a goal in this series and this seems like a move more to help Kuznetsov and Vrana get more space with Wilson on their line. Shots have been hard to come by in the series for Washington. Kuznetsov does have three assists, but Vrana doesn't yet have a point.

"Playoffs you kind of make adjustments and there's pushbacks from both teams depending on how the last game went — or even the last period went," Oshie said. "And they won the Game 3 pushback. Game 4 momentum is on their side, we have to get it back, play physical, play strong, play for each other, block shots, be better."

So while Reirden flipped his top two right wings, he also flipped his bottom two left wings. Carl Hagelin will play on a revamped fourth line with Nic Dowd and Travis Boyd. Andre Burakovsky moves up to play with Lars Eller and Brett Connolly. The bottom six forwards have just one point in the series — Eller's empty-net goal in Game 1.



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Depth scoring was so critical for Washington in its run to the Stanley Cup last spring. Hagelin kills penalties, but this move only makes sense if they're trying to add to that depth scoring and get the fourth line more ice time. Boyd joins the lineup for the first time this series and is more skilled offensively than Chandler Stephenson, the man he replaces. That theoretically should make it harder for Carolina to match lines the way it wants to.

"You need to forget about it, but also realize what went on," Wilson said. "I think as a group our compete and our effort just wasn't what it needed to be. So you have to use that. You can't just think it's all good."

The blueline had just one change. Rookie Jonas Siegenthaler will make his playoff debut in place of Christian Djoos, who has been on the ice for four of Carolina's 10 goals. Siegenthaler's size and poise under pressure could help there. Djoos is just 170 pounds and has been targeted by Carolina in his limited ice time. But he can always skate the puck out of trouble and that's a question mark with Siegenthaler, who played 26 games in the NHL this season.

"I felt like we wanted the game to come a little easier to us and they ramped up their game," Oshie said. "You could tell with not only the score, but the shots and how the play went. We've got to be better and we will."

Comcast SportsNet.com LOADED: 04.18.2019

1141601 Washington Capitals

D.C. Good Samaritan Tom Wilson nominated for King Clancy Trophy

By Kimberly Cataudella April 17, 2019 3:46 PM

Tom Wilson has been formally recognized for all his good deeds.

The Capitals right-winger was nominated for the King Clancy Memorial Trophy by the Capitals organization for his involvement with Forty Three's Friends, So Kids Can, Top Shelf Teammates as well as other initiatives, some of which he launched himself, according to the Capitals' website.

"He's always one of the first in line to do stuff for charity," said Capitals head coach Todd Reirden at a press conference on Wednesday. "Charity projects, started his own program this last year, just always willing to give back."

This season, Wilson started So Kids Can, in which he donated four tickets per game to Make-A-Wish Mid-Atlantic children across 20 games. Wilson took the recipients in the Capitals locker room following each game for one-on-one interactions.

Nicklas Backstrom and Braden Holtby participate with Wilson in So Kids Can, in which each athlete donates \$50 (during the regular season) and \$100 (during the playoffs) per win to a local nonprofit organization.

This season, the group has been raising money for Heart of America, partnering with Hendley Elementary School to supply them with 75 laptops and 45 tablets. The players surprised the school in November by announcing that Hendley was the recipient of a So Kids Can and Heart of American Foundation makeover.

Since the 2013-14 season, Wilson has been a part of Top Shelf Teammates. Through this, he donated \$10,000 to the Fort DuPont Ice Hockey Club.

Three finalists will be announced on April 23, and the winner will be announced at the 2019 NHL Awards on June 19. The winner will receive \$40,000 to benefit a charities of the winner's choice, and two runners-up will each receive \$5,000 to donate.

All nominees are nominated by their clubs, and the winner will be selected by a committee of senior NHL executives, led by Commissioner

Gary Bettman and Deputy Commissioner Bill Daly, according to the NHL's website.

The selection committee will chose their winner and subsequent finalists by examining the following criteria:

Clear and measurable positive impact on the community

Investment of time and resources

Commitment to a particular cause or community

Commitment to the League's community initiatives (Hockey is for Everyone, Hockey Fights Cancer, Future Goals, Learn to Play, NHL Green, etc.)

Creativity of programming

Use of influence; engagement of others

The last Capital to win the award was Olaf Kolzig for the 2005-06 season. The former goaltender co-founded Athletes Against Autism after learning that his son, Carson, was autistic. Additionally, he worked closely with the Children's Medical Center after coming to D.C. in the late 1990s, purchasing season tickets to give to hospital patients and allowing them to be his special guests at games. He raised over \$650,000 through multiple charity endeavors, all contributing to his receipt of the Memorial Award.

Kolzig is the only Capital to have won the Memorial Award, putting Wilson in the position to be the second.

Comcast SportsNet.com LOADED: 04.18.2019

1141602 Washington Capitals

Capitals host Game 4 watch party at Capital One Arena

By Caroline Brandt April 17, 2019 11:22 AM

The watch parties are back at Capital One Arena.

On Thursday, the Capitals take on the Hurricanes in Game 4 of the 2019 NHL Stanley Cup Playoffs first-round series in Raleigh, N.C., but those who can't make the trip will be able to watch the game at Capital One Arena on the jumbotron with thousands of their closest friends.

The best part? Admission is free and doors open at 6:30 p.m. ahead of the 7 p.m. puck drop. Between that time, fans can enjoy \$5 beers at concession stands around the arena.

The Capitals ask that fans intending to attend the watch party RSVP here.

The Washington Capitals take on the Carolina Hurricanes for Game 4 Thursday, April 18 at 7 p.m. on NBC Sports Washington. You can stream the game by downloading the MyTeams app here.

During last year's Stanley Cup run, Capital One opened its doors for fans to watch every road game and projector screens outside the arena displayed the game for fans to watch along F Street who could not get into the "sold out" arena.

Comcast SportsNet.com LOADED: 04.18.2019

1141603 Washington Capitals

Barry Trotz proves prophetic, he and Islanders await winner of Capitals-Hurricanes

By J.J. Regan April 17, 2019 6:00 AM



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When Barry Trotz, now the head coach of the New York Islanders, received his Stanley Cup ring in November, he issued a few words of encouragement to his former team. And a warning.

"You can do it again too," Trotz said of the Capitals' chances to win a second Stanley Cup, "You'll have to go through the [expletive] Island, okay? But you guys can do it again."

At the time, it seemed unlikely the Islanders would be much of a factor in the postseason. New York missed the playoffs in 2018 and saw its best player, John Tavares, depart for Toronto over the offseason.

Yet, Trotz's November speech has proven prophetic as the Islanders now await the winner of the Capitals-Carolina Hurricanes first-round series. New York completed a four-game sweep of the Pittsburgh Penguins on Tuesday marking the second consecutive season Trotz has been able to get the better of Mike Sullivan and the Penguins after losing to them in each of the two seasons prior.

The Islanders' victory prevents a fourth consecutive Capitals-Penguins second-round series this season. Sidney Crosby was held to only a single point and no goals in the series as New York's newfound defense suffocated Pittsburgh. The Penguins scored only six goals in four games and only one goal in each of the last three.

Trotz's familiarity with the Penguins is no surprise given that he has coached against them in the playoffs in each of the past four seasons. Obviously he knows the Caps even better after coaching Washington for four seasons from 2014 to 2018. What tricks will he have up his sleeve to slow down Alex Ovechkin and Co.?

The Caps hold a 2-1 series lead against Carolina in what has been a dogfight of a series thus far. While the team cannot begin to look ahead, that may prove difficult knowing such a familiar face is waiting for them in the second round.

What was a funny line in November has now become the truth. If the Caps hope to defend their Stanley Cup title it will mean going "through the [expletive] Island" to get there.

Comcast SportsNet.com LOADED: 04.18.2019

1141604 Washington Capitals

Coach Todd Reirden ready to lean on a Capitals leadership group he considers 'the strongest in the league'

By Chris Kuc Apr 17, 2019

RALEIGH, N.C. — There was no bag skate for the Capitals the day after they had their collective behinds handed to them by the Hurricanes in Game 3 of the Eastern Conference quarterfinals.

Instead of putting his team through the paces, coach Todd Reirden gave the defending Stanley Cup champions the day off Tuesday to "step away from the game." There isn't enough open space in North Carolina for the Capitals to walk off Monday night's disaster. They were dominated at both ends of the ice in a 5-0 Hurricanes victory that wasn't as close as the score indicated.

The Capitals now face a team brimming with confidence and ready to again ride the wave of energy from a home crowd that likely used Tuesday to recover its collective voice and will again be ready to roar in Game 4 on Thursday night at PNC Arena.

All season, Reirden has turned to the Capitals' leadership group to help guide the team when it has encountered adversity. Game 4 will be no exception.

"I rely on our leadership group in all situations," Reirden said Tuesday. "We've got a very strong one that's experienced (and) that has had success. There's got to be two different ways that you hold your team

accountable and that you rally your team. Some comes from the coach and the coaching staff, and the other comes from within. As a coach, you can't spend every waking minute with your players, so you rely on your leadership group, and ours is, I feel, the strongest in the league. I expect them to be a part of our response on Thursday."

Reirden will again look for captain Alex Ovechkin, alternate captains Nicklas Backstrom and Brooks Orpik and veterans T.J. Oshie and Braden Holtby to lead the way as the Capitals look to build on their 2-1 lead in the best-of-seven series.

Those leaders certainly sound as if they know it's their time to shine.

"We have to set the tone right away," Ovechkin said. "We have to dictate the pace of the game and how the game goes."

Said Backstrom: "We've got to play better. We've got to come out and be a little more focused. (Game 3) was just not our style of play. Everything can be better."

Rest assured that Reirden didn't spend Tuesday resting along with the players. The first-year coach said he was prepared to make some adjustments for Game 4.

"Yeah, absolutely," Reirden said. "I thought we made a move in the right direction in Game 2 (and) we were able to execute a little bit better. Going back and looking back at the games, there was some unforced errors by us, as well, in terms of execution with the puck that was able to allow them to generate some offense. And then there are a few other areas that we're going to address (Wednesday) and that we can continue to improve on.

"We're far from a finished product at this point," he continued. "We're just looking to try to get better every day, and we took a step back in some areas in Game 3. I expect us to make those improvements and put forth a better result and a better outcome on Thursday."

The Hurricanes will look to do their own adjusting — if they can find any flaws in their Game 3 performance, that is — but coach Rod Brind'Amour also relies on his players to find another level. Like Reirden, Brind'Amour is in his first season as a head coach and offered a unique take on how influential the man behind the bench can be during games.

"The coaching thing is fun (but) I think it's a little overrated," Brind'Amour said. "Your players play. You get them prepared, your video guy does a ton of work on getting a pre-scout (report), and you take a look at it and say, 'Here's what they're doing and then this is what we have to do.' Then you open the door and you say, 'Go play.' At the end of the day, that's what's happening."

Reirden agreed — to a point.

"At the end of the day, the players have to play," Reirden said. "As a coach, you try to provide them with as much information as possible to give them a chance to have success. I feel that we're fortunate to have good players that are able to accept knowledge and use it positively and negatively to improve them. It's a process that goes hand-in-hand with players.

"I've been fortunate over the last 10 years to watch some players develop, and I feel that it's a combination of the player wanting to get better and there being some coaching as well. That's my stance on it. It's something where (when) you find certain tendencies and some things systematically that you could do differently, you should share it with your players, and it does become a helpful asset to your team having success."

The Athletic LOADED: 04.18.2019

1141617 Websites

The Athletic / Amid talk of boycotts, one league and the NHL's involvement, women's hockey is at a crossroads

By Hailey Salvian and Katie Strang Apr 17, 2019



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For several restless moments in Espoo, Finland Sunday afternoon, there was a dueling sense of confusion and chaos as a video review suspended a celebration for Team Finland in the final game of the IIHF Women's World Championships against Team USA following what appeared to be a title-clinching overtime goal. After more than ten minutes, the goal was waived off, upsetting an already-agitated hometown crowd. That crowd only became more hostile as the Americans prevailed in a shootout.

It was an unpredictable, bizarre game in the annal of women's hockey, and monumentally controversial, with many wondering about the penalty assessed after the OT goal was disallowed and grumbling about the game being decided in a shootout. It was also another unequivocal reminder about the elite skill, passion and thrilling drama that women's hockey has provided on the international scene.

And while all eyes were on the Americans and Finns this past weekend, there's good reason why interest in elite women's hockey should only ratchet up in intensity now that play is done: This point in time marks a critical juncture for the future of the professional women's game, and there is one key question that needs to be answered in the coming weeks and months.

Where will all of these women play next season?

Before the best players in the world disembarked for Finland, there was a shocking development that rocked the professional women's game. On March 31, one of the two women's professional hockey leagues in North America, the Canadian Women's Hockey League, abruptly shuttered. The announcement shocked virtually everyone and prompted ripples of confusion and grief in its aftermath. And considering the important question that has long vexed the sport — is one league the future of women's hockey? —the CWHL's folding took on new meaning.

The announcement signaled a major moment for the sport, with many wondering what will happen next. Players, executives and sponsors may now throw all their resources and efforts into the National Women's Hockey League as a way to see if the last league standing is a viable option. Or, if the NWHL is seen as the last hurdle standing in the way for a completely new league, one with NHL backing, players could take a gamble on that league finally coming to fruition.

And if the latter is the case, could we soon see a scenario in which players band together to boycott or sit out the NWHL to make that happen?

The origins of CWHL, NWHL and #OneLeague

Multiple sources told The Athletic the possibility of a boycott is the most pressing issue for players to consider and discuss in the weeks to come. It's a topic that has sparked debate previously, with certain figures being more vocal about the possibility than others.

But before diving further into that possibility, a brief explainer on both the history of the two leagues, and their critical differences, is important here to add context.

The CWHL was born in 2007, created by a group of players as a parity league, with one central pot of money equally shared between the teams. Since its inception, the CWHL has operated as a not-for-profit league relying on revenue from ticket sales, sponsorships and donations and paying players in nominal stipends.

At the time it folded, the CWHL had six teams, four in Canada — Montreal, Toronto, Markham and Calgary — one in Worcester, Mass., and one in China and, for years, it was the only option women had to play hockey in North America following college.

(Chris Tanouye / The CWHL)

The NWHL came along in 2015, founded by businesswoman Dani Rylan, who saw a lack of opportunities for professional women's hockey in America. In its first season, the league consisted of four teams — Buffalo, New York (since relocated to New Jersey), Connecticut and Boston. It has since added a team in Minnesota.

In contrast to the CWHL, the NWHL is a for-profit league backed by a group of private investors. It was the first women's hockey league to pay

players. Initially, teams ran on a salary cap of \$270,000 with player salaries ranging from \$10,000-\$26,000. However, in its second season, the league ran into financial trouble. Salaries were cut in half to keep the league afloat. Today, \$100,000 is allocated per team to pay players.

Talk of one unified league began gaining traction this past season (with hashtag #OneLeague frequently circulated on Twitter) but when the CWHL ultimately shut down operations, there was little to no foreshadowing the league would suddenly go under.

The chair of the board, Laurel Walzak, has maintained that the decision was based on "good corporate governance" and because the league's model was "no longer financially viable."

Financial documents obtained by The Athletic paint a picture of the finances of the league as of November 2018, just five months before the decision to fold.

According to the documents, the league's budget was around \$3.4-million and the expenses tallied \$3.2 million, leaving around \$200,000 in excess. That's compared to 2017 when the league's budget was only \$1.3 million and only \$76,000 in excess. The increase in budget was mostly due to a lucrative deal the league signed with the Chinese hockey club Kunlun Red Star in 2017-18, which Walzak said accounted for 40 percent of the budget.

Sources have told The Athletic that the league's finances at the end of the 2018-19 season were so strapped that the board members were going to all their top partners and asking for an injection of cash to be able meet player compensation commitments.

NHL deputy commissioner Bill Daly confirmed to The Athletic that the league donated \$100,000 to the CWHL only days after it folded to help offset potential shortcomings and ensure all players got their full stipends and bonuses.

Three days after Walzak and CWHL commissioner Jayna Hefford announced the league would cease operations, Rylan announced on a conference call that the league's board had approved NWHL expansion into Canada, adding teams in Toronto and Montreal for the upcoming season. Some players called the planned expansion "knee jerk" and plan to take their time to weigh their options before the NWHL's free agency begins this summer. The NWHL said in a statement to The Athletic that they want to talk to players and hear their thoughts and that they "respect their desire to consider all of their options."

"The opportunity for professional women's hockey in North America is enormous and the NWHL will work with the players to continue to build the league they deserve," an NWHL spokesperson said. "We expect to have an announcement on some of our plans in the coming weeks."

NHL commissioner Gary Bettman recently weighed in on the CWHL folding and didn't seem surprised. Bettman has been both consistent and emphatic about his skepticism about the financial viability of both the CWHL and NWHL models. He has repeatedly stressed that the NHL, not wanting to big-foot the efforts or impede the business interests of others, would not get involved in women's hockey while either was still in existence. He reaffirmed that stance in a recent radio interview.

"What we have said is that if there's no opportunity for women to play professional hockey we would explore what makes sense or might be appropriate but by the same token I didn't want to be presumptuous or even bully-like by saying we're going to start a league and put them out of business," Bettman said. "I didn't think that's appropriate."

The NHL had previously given each league \$50,000 annually in financial assistance; since the CWHL's shuttering, the NHL has decided to allocate \$100,000 to the NWHL. Bettman said his understanding, from Rylan, is that the NHL's financial contribution now makes them the largest sponsor of the league. Bettman said he told her that "if she is successful, we will not interfere."

Bettman addressing this topic has been a renewed point of interest given recent events, but he's been fielding inquiries on this issue for several years.

The NHL did its homework on creating a women's league

In the fall of 2010, Bettman asked a trusted former colleague at the NBA, Val Ackerman, to execute a "white paper" analysis on the viability of



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professional women's hockey and what the NHL's involvement may look like.

Ackerman, who Bettman hired at the NBA, would go on to become the first president of the WNBA, a post she held until 2005.

She spent the better part of a year executing the analysis — traveling to international tournaments and NCAA games, talking to coaches, executives and players. When she relayed her findings to Bettman in 2011, she had concerns — with the undervaluing of the NCAA Frozen Four, scheduling issues and the lack of exposure on the international scene chief among them. Because of these concerns, she felt the NHL wouldn't be able to help produce a first-rate product, at least at that time.

But much has changed since her report was issued.

"I applaud (the CWHL and NWHL) for allowing players to have post-collegiate opportunities, so I think that it's been this transition period, if you will — the players have some place to go — but I don't think either could do what the NHL is capable of doing," Ackerman told The Athletic. "So for me, based on my experience with the WNBA ... and what I know about the NHL's capability, I think the future of women's pro hockey is the NHL. That's my opinion.

"If anyone's going to do it and make it work, it's going to be them."

Is that something the players want? Depends on who you ask.

Anya Battaglino has fought doggedly for players' rights since becoming executive director of the NWHLPA. A recently-retired pro hockey player herself, Battaglino helped transition players from contract workers to employees, and has pushed for other improvements in the form of increased pay and per diem allowances, more equitable liability structures, and a larger cut of licensing fees for player apparel.

Minnesota Whitecaps

Gauging the temperature of the players, Battaglino isn't positive there would be universal consensus that the NHL, acting as big brother, is necessarily the savior every player prefers. Not everyone believes a league with centralized ownership is the best model, and there are other factors at play as well. Since the CWHL folded, there hasn't been much time to discuss the broader implications on the NWHL with the players and the future of pro hockey overall, giving the timing of the world championships.

Battaglino predicts the current situation could open up a "world of opportunity" for the league and feels the same would be true had the NWHL folded. Battaglino has played in both leagues and simply wants to see women's pro hockey flourish. That means equity, infrastructure and investment from the right people. (Several individuals involved in women's hockey also noted the importance of buy-in from the NHLPA, USA Hockey and Hockey Canada in addition to the NHL.)

"It's not them vs. us. I don't feel that way. I played in the (CWHL) and I loved that league, but either (league) folding opens up the purse strings for the opposite," Battaglino said. "Any person who believes in women's hockey — and they should because it's real AF — is now dialed in, and that's where power comes to women. Because when people are inspired to make that commitment, anyone now has confidence to say, 'All the right players are in one spot.'"

Battaglino's CWHL cohort, Liz Knox, also left the door open for other possibilities.

Knox, who played for Markham during the 2018-19 season, said there has to be solidarity for any endeavor to be successful, but how people define success can have many interpretations. She feels having some sort of broadcasting agreement that would feature games at least on a weekly basis is a must.

"I wouldn't be so confident to say that it necessarily has to be NHL backing," Knox said, though she said that she sensed that a "strong percentage" of now-jobless CWHL players would find an NHL-backed league "very appealing."

One of the most appealing things about the NHL's potential involvement? Most people recognize the NHL becoming involved would mean a vested interest in keeping a women's league afloat. That provides a sense of security.

"You know if the NHL says its willing to do something, they will do it right," said Chelsea Purcell, former general manager of the CWHL's Markham Thunder. "The worst-case scenario for me is, you do it, it fails, OK we tried, let's go back to a different model. I think when you have the opportunity like this, if this is what the players want, and it seems some of them do, as long as we stand together, and speak as one, we will push for whatever the players want and will support them. Really, we want what is best for the players and in my own opinion, an NHL league is the best option right now."

But there are others who want a more nuanced look at what an NHL-backed league would actually look like before throwing support behind it. Emilie Castonguay, a player agent who represents Marie-Philip Poulin, wants to know, for example, how many teams there would be and how many games they would play.

"We must not forget the women's professional league is also a development league for national team players. It is their home between Olympic years. They need to play a lot of games in one season, they need to have parity between the teams, and they also need to get paid. Can the NHL give them all that?" Castonguay wrote in an email to The Athletic. "Question is more do they want to get involved and help the women grow the game on all angles? If they get involved, they need to get the NHL's machine to work for them and more importantly with them. Not just put a bandaid on things because it's the 'right thing' to do. It is hard for the girls to make any decisions when they do not even know what the NHL will be willing to offer them that would be different from the NWHL."

Bettman, in his recent radio appearance, said that if the NHL gets involved, he sees that involvement looking similar to the NBA's relationship to the WNBA.

"If we get involved, we will not have the option of letting it fail," Bettman said. "If that's our responsibility there would be an element of control we would have to be prepared to assume, obviously."

Pressed on whether he felt the NWHL was viable on its own, Bettman responded:

"You'll draw your own conclusions. I don't want to be the one who puts the kibosh and that league. If they can make a go of it, great, if that suits the players' needs."

Will players sit out and wait for the NHL?

"If that suits the players' needs."

That is not a throwaway line by Bettman, who is a shrewd tactician and businessperson. That's a subtle but clear acknowledgement that the players have a good deal of power and leverage at the moment. Which again, resurfaces the question that many people involved in women's hockey have been wondering for months:

Are there players willing to sit out of the NWHL to see an NHL-backed league happen? If so, is it a sizable enough contingent?

The question may seem simple but there is still plenty of nuance and complexity to digest.

"Bettman said if there is women's hockey he won't go and make a league while there is that one league that exists. But then he said we MAY move forward with the women's hockey league. So, the first issue is the other league, and the next is, will the NHL actually do something?" Purcell asked.

"So, I mean, the NWHL could stay in the way and there is women's hockey next year, or they step out of the way and maybe there isn't. So, I get what they are doing, they want to push women's hockey and they want to grow it in the way that they are growing it, and I commend them for that, but I think it needs to come down to we need to do what's best for the players...if the players want it...don't do something that is better for your own investments."

Castonguay said she's hesitant to use the word "boycott" yet, but indicated that things are not rosy between the NWHL and all of its players.

"One thing I know is players signed contracts in the NWHL in the past and got told at one point in the season that they were not going to get



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paid what they signed for. No warning, and very little explanation," Castonguay said. "So I believe there might be a lack of trust there between the league and the players. Can you blame them?"

There have been a few other complicating factors in trying to read the tea leaves about what will happen next. For one, the best players have had a more pressing focus in recent weeks, with the timing of the world championships. Few people have been willing to talk about any potential boycott or strike while the focus has been centered around the tournament. But adding another interesting wrinkle is some NWHL players' concerns about what may happen if they do end up speaking out.

In this past season's version of the NWHL standard player contract, which was recently reviewed by The Athletic, there is a non-disparagement and non-interference clause that read, in part, that a player would not "intentionally or recklessly interfere with the future marketing, solicitation, or business of the Team or the League, including by attempting to destroy or impair the business prospects, value or reputation of the Team, the other NWHL Teams, the League Commissioner or the League."

Many players, according to an industry source, interpreted that as prohibiting them from verbalizing any desire for one unified league during the 2018-19 season and worried that speaking out could result in a breach of contract.

(Three NHL agents asked to review this clause said that, while not entirely atypical for general employment contracts, this was not something they had ever seen in a professional hockey contract before). It should also be noted that all NWHL players are now technically free agents and are not currently bound by this contract.

Asked whether she thought players wanted an NHL-backed league, Purcell said "I think so," but said there may still be dissenters as well.

"I also think there are some players who don't want to run one league under the ground and take that risk. So, it will be interesting trying to get 250 players or 130 players or 50 whatever it may be to all stand with one voice and talk together so... yeah, I don't know."

Knox, however, said she thinks there would be support even if it meant a constriction of teams and the elimination of jobs.

"Talking to girls around the league, I think there's a very inspirational consensus that if that's what we need to succeed as a pro sport, there would be people to support that, (even those) that would be out of jobs," Knox said.

Even before the CWHL folded, Kristen Hagg, general manager of the CWHL's Calgary Inferno, said she saw players beginning to galvanize.

"If I had to guess what is going to happen ... I would guess that the players in both leagues are going to come together, which is something I first saw happening even before our league folded. I thought the players in both leagues were going to come together and say, 'enough of this standoff, we want X, and everybody is going to do what is necessary to make X happen.'"

The NWHL, in Hagg's perspective, is more focused on their own business and running their own league, which she understands, to a degree.

"You want to make your business successful, fine, but it's kind of ignoring what is in the best interest of women's hockey down the road and moving into the future. And I think the players will probably be sick of waiting for something to happen and will come together and say what they want to have happen and everyone else is going to have to adjust to help that happen."

In execution, that could be a bit messy, however, and difficult to predict. Remember that there is not a ton of time to get a plan in place, even if the NWHL also folds and the NHL is open and willing to move forward.

"They (the NHL) are in the middle of their playoffs and it's not that long until next season," Hagg said. "I find it hard to believe they will be able to put something together to start next fall so that means that we need to come up with an interim plan for women's hockey to stay in the key markets and run them in a way that the NHL will want to take over when the time comes."

The players have the power

Sunday's gold medal ceremony in Finland was a surreal scene, with a despondent Finnish team clearly in disbelief and the U.S. team donning victory caps and looking both elated and relieved. Hours earlier, the Canadians captured bronze with a win over Russia.

After the stunning turn of events, the Americans endured questions about the wild, unpredictable end to the tournament. Now, there are a slew of other questions that await those players and others upon their return home.

One source predicted there could be a number of announcements about next year in the weeks to come, and many assume that both the Canadian and U.S. team members will have ample influence over what happens next, setting the tone for the direction and tenor of conversations moving forward.

This would not be the first time that influence is wielded as an instrument for change. In March 2017, the U.S. team banded together to boycott the world championships as they fought for equitable treatment with the men's national team. Ultimately, a new contract was reached with USA Hockey, including increased annual pay and performance bonuses, thereby averting a boycott of the tournament.

Given that experience, some of the game's most elite competitors know their participation is vital and their voice is a critical one for the advancement of the women's game. Whether that means there will be an organized movement in the weeks or months to come remains to be seen, but there's little debate this is a critical juncture for the future of professional women's hockey.

Knox said she sees this as part of a broader conversation that transcends sports and will be impactful for gender equity as a whole.

"This is the climax of a million different steps," Knox said. "This is our moment."

The Athletic LOADED: 04.18.2019

1141618 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Door wide open for Bruins, Maple Leafs survivor with Lightning exit

Chris Johnston |April 17, 2019, 9:50 PM

TORONTO — Every empire crumbles, just not so abruptly.

Imagine how it must have felt for the Boston Bruins and Toronto Maple Leafs to see the Tampa Bay Lightning washed out of the Stanley Cup Playoffs after spending the better part of two seasons playing in their shadow. It was like a crack of light peeking through to signal the start of spring.

"The door's open, I guess," said Leafs forward Zach Hyman.

For one of them, anyway.

No wonder they played Game 4 with the urgency of someone trying to save their pet from a burning building. It was Boston that prevailed despite spending swaths of Wednesday's game under siege at 5-on-5, riding a big performance from their lead dogs and gaining an edge in specialty teams to even up the series 2-2.

Inside the span of 48 hours, the stakes have been raised considerably for two teams vying to become the last one standing in the Atlantic Division.

With due respect to the Columbus Blue Jackets, who stunned the 62-win Lightning with a first-round sweep, there was a burst of excitement to be found in having the Presidents' Trophy winners taken out of the picture.

The Blue Jackets are seen as peers. The Lightning had been titans.



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"They found the formula," Cassidy said of Columbus, which is now awaiting the winner in the second round. "Not too many teams did this year, it wasn't just us. I think a lot of teams would tell you they were a handful."

There is no evidence either Boston or Toronto has yet found a true answer for the other. They played seven games last spring, and appear headed back down that path in a cat-and-mouse rematch.

Still, the Leafs were in possession of a golden opportunity Wednesday — with a chance to push their nemesis to the brink of elimination — but fell behind 2-0 before the seven-minute mark thanks to a sputtering start. Then after clawing back to 2-2, they let David Pastrnak strike twice in 95 seconds and could never get things on an equal footing again.

They brought a massive push, controlling a decided edge in scoring chances (64.5 per cent), shot attempts (62 per cent) and expected goals (60.8 per cent) by the time the buzzer sounded. Those were indicators that they played from behind all night.

They never could outrun a couple costly turnovers and a penalty kill that got burned twice.

"I thought we had real good energy tonight. I didn't think we had brain all the time," Leafs coach Mike Babcock said after the 6-4 loss. "We just made some mistakes. We pinched when we shouldn't have, we gave up some opportunities we didn't need to give up that we haven't been doing."

They may come to regret those lapses in execution with a best-of-three left to be played and at least one more win now needed at TD Garden in order to shed the ghost of the organization's 15-year run without a series victory.

There is plenty at stake here.

However, the Leafs aren't the first team to get beaten by Patrice Bergeron and Brad Marchand. That Boston duo delivered a huge response after what had been a relatively quiet series, sharply reversing the run of play against Toronto's Hyman-John Tavares-Mitch Marner line despite playing with Danton Heinen rather than Pastrnak, their regular right-winger.

"Listen, they were ready. They were in the hallway before the game talking about certain plays," said Cassidy. "Those guys are dialled in. They're pros. They're top-end players, they're Stanley Cup champions, so those are not guys you worry about very often."

Even a two-goal night by Auston Matthews, the first of his playoff career, wasn't enough to make up the difference on Toronto's end.

With reflection, they'll find some confidence in nearly completing a three-goal comeback during Game 4 and from the slight edge they've established in the run of play overall. The Leafs can even look to the surprising Blue Jackets sweep for a reminder about the power of possible.

"It goes to show that anything can happen in the playoffs," said Matthews. "It doesn't matter what seed you're in. Or your place. It all comes down to will."

"This is why you play the game," added Leafs defenceman Morgan Rielly. "This is why John [Tavares] came here, this is what we're here to do. We're here to win playoff games, and to win a series, and move on from there."

The Leafs and Bruins are now battling for the chance to face Columbus, and to be the team in possession of home-ice advantage while doing it. They spent the entire season thinking it'd have to be the Lightning and are suddenly faced with a fresh bracket.

Anything can happen in the playoffs.

Pretty cool, huh?

"Yeah, if you're not one of those teams," said Toronto's Ron Hainsey.

One of them will have the door slammed shut in six days or less.

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 04.18.2019

1141619 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Flames now have five-alarm fire facing elimination against Avalanche

Eric Francis | April 18, 2019, 1:35 AM

DENVER – The Calgary Flames have a five-alarm fire on their hands.

Despite another heroic goaltending outing by Mike Smith, the Flames return to Calgary Friday facing the very real possibility another conference champion is about to bite the dust courtesy of a wild-card club.

The Flames allowed a game-tying goal in the final three minutes for the second time in this series, setting up a 3-2 overtime loss and 3-1 series deficit.

This time Colorado's hero was Mikko Rantanen, scoring 9:37 into overtime to cap a late, two-goal comeback that will require even more fortitude from Calgary.

Rantanen's second goal of the game was a one-timer from long-range that beat Smith clean. It came on the Avs' 52nd shot, mere seconds after Colorado killed off an Ian Cole delay of game penalty.

The fourth-straight all-world performance from Smith wasn't enough, even though the Flames managed to bounce back from a horrific beating in Game 3.

Tightening up defensively, limiting time and space for Nathan MacKinnon and playing a more patient game, Calgary broke a scoreless tie on the power play early in the second period when Elias Lindholm's shot bounced off a defender, then goalie Philipp Grubauer and into the net.

It was a fortuitous set of bounces to be sure, but one the Flames make no apologies for. After all, it was a series of unfortunate bounces leading to the late, game-tying goal in Game 2 that turned the series in Colorado's favour.

Derek Ryan made it 2-0 when he buried a Juuso Valimaki rebound in tight past Grubauer to give the Flames breathing room they enjoyed for just over a minute before JT Compher responded.

His second goal of the series came following one of a dozen dandy glove saves by Smith that Compher snapped home as the 37-year-old keeper scrambled to get back into position.

It set up a tense third period in which the Flames blocked endless shots in a brilliantly played game in which the teams traded scoring chances all night long.

A tripping call on Mikael Backlund with three minutes left set up a nifty Rantanen redirection of a brilliant MacKinnon pass.

The Pepsi Center crowd exploded to their feet, still waving white pom poms, while Noah Hanifin was whistled for delay of game for inadvertently firing the puck over the glass. But the Flames managed to kill it off, setting up overtime.

Backlund had the best chance early, as he corralled a rebound at the side of the net and lifted it over Grubauer's pad, only to see the goalie desperately lift his left leg to save the day.

Smith was the biggest reason the Flames got that far, as they were on their heels the final 30 minutes.

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1141620 Websites



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Sportsnet.ca / How the Avalanche are beating the Flames at their own game

Andrew Berkshire April 17, 2019, 2:53 PM

In breaking down the first round series between the Calgary Flames and Colorado Avalanche before it began, the biggest area of concern for the Avalanche that I saw was the Flames' ability to create turnovers in dangerous areas, many of which lead to odd-man rushes.

In fact, in the regular season the Flames were the league leaders in odd-man rushes per 60 minutes at 5-on-5. They were second in controlled entries per 60 overall, second in controlled entries that result in a shot on net, second in controlled entries that result in a scoring chance, and fourth in scoring chances off the rush.

Combining the Avs' lack of defensive prowess in the neutral zone during the regular season with their high turnover numbers, it looked like this was the area Calgary would hang its cowboy hats on to ride to a commanding series win — but the series hasn't played out that way.

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Just like last season when they were given a few days to pre-scout their opponent and game plan for them, the Avs have given the top-seeded team in the West absolute fits.

The Flames won the first game of the series on the back of a phenomenal shutout performance by Mike Smith, which obscured the fact that they didn't look great in it. Since then it's been all Avalanche, who've put together two excellent performances to take the series lead.

It's clear from the way the games have gone that the Avalanche have outplayed the Flames, but how they're doing it is truly impressive.

The Avalanche have cut down the Flames' ability to attack off the rush by a startling degree. Colorado is allowing less than half of the odd-man rushes that the Flames averaged every 60 minutes of the regular season and have cut out about 40 per cent of their chances off the rush overall and passes to the slot. And the amount of clean zone entries that lead to a scoring chance for Calgary have dropped by nearly 60 per cent.

Colorado's utter domination of the Flames in an area that's Calgary's biggest offensive strength isn't just impressive, it's downright shocking. The Avalanche have devised a defensive scheme that not only has limited the Flames' ability to attack off the rush, but is also cutting down their pre-shot movement once the zone is gained.

They've done this without turtling into a defensive shell that has sacrificed their own offence.

In fact, the Avs haven't changed much at all with the puck on their sticks. In the defensive zone, they're actually turning it over more often than in the regular season, with a turnover rate of 17.3 per cent in the playoffs compared to 14.5 per cent over the 82 games preceding it.

Overall they're turning the puck over on 18 per cent of their plays at 5-on-5, which is 0.3 per cent lower than the regular season — so, not statistically significant.

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.

Surprisingly, the Avalanche haven't excelled at stopping the Flames from entering their zone with control — their denial rate at the blue line is just 40 per cent, which is four and a half per cent lower than in the regular season. It's just that once the zone is gained, the Avs aren't giving the Flames any space at all, improving from allowing the fifth-widest gap among all regular season teams to the third-tightest gap of all playoff teams.

That extra pressure is forcing the Flames to shoot from wider angles and from further out off the rush, while the extra pressure being put on Calgary's puck carriers has stymied their deking game as well. In the regular season the Flames were the fifth-most successful team on

average at completing dekes in the offensive zone with a 45.4 per cent success rate — in the playoffs only San Jose has been less successful than the Flames' 35.2 per cent deke success rate.

On top of shutting down all the most impactful ways the Flames create shot quality, the Avalanche have counterattacked by beating them at their own game.

Colorado's increase in odd-man rushes in the playoffs versus the regular season seems modest, but they've generated the second-most of any team in the post-season. And their numbers off the rush against the Flames are absolutely ridiculous.

Every three minutes of 5-on-5 hockey the Avs are getting a scoring chance off a clean zone entry, and their rush chances are nearly double their season average.

Obviously this level of offensive performance isn't sustainable for long, but the Avalanche only need to keep it up for two more games to best the Western Conference's top regular season team.

It might be tempting to give all the offensive credit to Nathan MacKinnon. It's absolutely true that he is a one-man rush scoring chance machine and leads the playoffs in that area, however he's not the only Avs player who has been feasting on the Flames in this series.

While MacKinnon carries the biggest role on the team, Alex Kerfoot has been a revelation early in the series. While he's on the ice the Avalanche are getting 62 per cent of the shot attempts, 57 per cent of the high danger chances, and nearly 86 per cent of the passes to the slot.

Through three games, Kerfoot's line has been a thorn in the side of anyone they're matched up against. In particular they've been trouble for Mikael Backlund's line, which is an excellent trio, but they don't generate as many quality looks as Johnny Gaudreau's line.

Can the Flames rally and adjust to the Avalanche beating them at their own game? Whatever happens in this series, Colorado coach Jared Bednar has to be considered one of the best pre-series preparation coaches in the game right now.

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 04.18.2019

1141621 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Bruins' special teams and lineup trickery sink Maple Leafs in Game 4

Luke Fox April 18, 2019, 12:22 AM

TORONTO — John Tavares, a man in tune with the details, nailed this one.

In those frustrating minutes immediately post-game, when you realize a golden chance to throttle this series 3-1 and give yourself three cracks at vanquishing all those ghosts has slipped through your gloves, Tavares knew this one was on them.

"These games, this time of year, it's very small differences," Tavares said.

A leaky penalty kill.

A missed assignment.

A shrewd lineup tweak by the opposing coach.

A 42-year-old man having enough time to sift a game-winning point shot through a crowd to seal a road victory and keep this tug-o-war humming until at least Easter Sunday.

A Drake curse, perhaps?

Drake in the for Game 4. #StanleyCup pic.twitter.com/QiGrMVKbfK



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

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— Sportsnet (@Sportsnet) April 17, 2019

The Maple Leafs dominated the Bruins at even strength, controlling 62 per cent of the shot attempts — a percentage beefed up by Toronto's superior bottom six — and outshooting their guests 42-31 on the whole.

And yet those tricky, calm Bruins led wire-to-wire, sucking Scotiabank Arena's energy level down to its tepid regular-season setting for prolonged stretches, and bludgeoned the Leafs with their own blunders.

The evening began with the latest chapter in what's shaping up to be an intriguing tête-à-tête between two shrewd bench bosses.

Bruce Cassidy sent his usual monster top line of Brad Marchand–Patrice Bergeron–David Pastrnak to take line rushes during warm-ups, then pulled the ol' switcharoo for puck drop, dropping the creative Pastrnak to the second line and flipping young Danton Heinen up with the Cup winners.

The Perfection Line had been struggling to produce 5-on-5 through three games, and Cassidy informed his troops of the trickery a few hours before game time.

"Moving some pieces around, hopefully it gives us a spark, maybe it makes them think," Cassidy explained, post-win.

"I'm not sure Danton can skate every night at this point in his career against the top line, against the top D, but he certainly does a good job in his spots."

Pastrnak, 22, established himself as a Leaf killer in the 2018 series, but he was struggling to find his rhythm this week. Cassidy felt he needed to do something, anything, to get his three-time 35-goal man fired up.

"Scorers, when they don't score, can get antsy. I'm not saying David was there, but we want to keep him from going there," said Cassidy. Images of the goal-less and eliminated Sidney Crosby and Nikita Kucherov possibly dancing in his head.

"[Bergeron and Marchand] know they haven't been at the top of their game for a few games. Listen: They were ready. They were in the hallway before the game talking about certain plays. Those guys are dialed in. They're pros. They're Stanley Cup champions. Those are not guys you worry about too often."

Cassidy still threw Pastrnak on with the vets after icings and on his fear-inducing power-play, which went a perfect two-for-two. The recharged sniper struck twice. Look out.

"That team thrives on the power play," Mitch Marner said.

Dropping Pastrnak to David Krejci's second line, Bergeron reminds, is a tactic Cassidy has used a handful of times before.

"It's to change the mindset of lines: keep it simple, bring it on net a bit more. It's definitely not a demotion," Bergeron said. "It's all about getting the results."

Although Leafs coach Mike Babcock sloughed off the new look — "I didn't think I was concerned about that one bit," he said — the Big 3 combined for six points and resembled the trio that terrorized the Blue and White a year ago.

"Special teams, obviously, tonight could be a little better on that side of it," said Tavares, who doesn't kill penalties.

Although, not many Leafs do lately.

Boston has now converted on five of its 11 chances with the man-advantage this series (45.5 per cent).

"Our power play hasn't taken a dip. We've been top-five all year," Cassidy said.

Facts.

The only playoff team with a worse penalty kill than Toronto's got swept by Columbus.

"The bottom line is, you can't keep giving power play goals up. Those are just freebies, those two. Not that they didn't make plays or anything like

that, but we weren't in the spots we were supposed to be in," Babcock said.

"We've had pretty good penalty kills since I've been here. Pretty good. But, it isn't good enough right now. The great thing about it is, the series isn't over. So we don't have to live with that number. We can still fix it."

Toronto flies to Boston Thursday to kick off a best-of-three, and Babcock must now steal another one without last change and without a crowd quiet enough to let you think about the small things.

"Well, we have confidence, but it's tied," Morgan Rielly said.

"It's 2-2. They have confidence, too."

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 04.18.2019

1141622 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Coach's Corner: Maple Leafs' Andersen is 'best goaltender in the world'

Sportsnet Staff | @Sportsnet April 17, 2019, 8:32 PM

Second in the playoffs with a .939 save percentage coming into Wednesday night, Toronto Maple Leafs goaltender Frederik Andersen has undoubtedly been one of the top netminders thus far across the league in the post-season.

And to this point, Don Cherry not only thinks the 29-year-old has been good so far, he believes he's been the best — literally.

"I say Andersen is the best goaltender in the world right now," Cherry proclaimed Wednesday night on his Coach's Corner segment during the first intermission in Game 4 of the Leafs' first-round playoff series with the Boston Bruins.

To exemplify his point, Cherry pointed to a clip from midway in the third period of Wednesday's contest that saw Bruins forward Charlie Coyle walk into the slot only to get stone-walled by an aggressive Andersen with his glove to prevent Toronto from going down 3-0.

"I say it right now and look at the shots and look at the score, 2-0, watch as he makes the save there lest it's 3-0 and the game is over."

Andersen's performance has been a major factor in why Toronto's been able to take a 2-1 series lead against Boston, this much is undeniable. The best goalie in the world right now, though? That's probably still up for debate.

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 04.18.2019

1141623 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Jets, Sharks, Canes favourites on Thursday NHL betting lines

OddsShark Staff April 17, 2019, 7:20 PM

The Winnipeg Jets will be looking to establish their first lead in their opening-round NHL playoff series with the St. Louis Blues when they return home for Game 5 on Thursday as -125 favourites on the NHL betting lines at sportsbooks monitored by OddsShark.com.

After falling to defeat in two dates on home ice, Winnipeg rebounded on the road, tallying a pair of victories at Enterprise Center in St. Louis, capped by a 2-1 overtime win on Tuesday that leaves the series knotted



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at two games apiece ahead of Thursday night's Blues vs. Jets betting matchup at MTS Centre.

The Jets' success in St. Louis marks the first time they have tallied consecutive victories in 13 games since March 20, and has given the club a huge lift on the NHL series prices, where Winnipeg now sits deadlocked with the Blues with -110 odds.

However, the Jets still have plenty of work to do to advance to the second round for a second straight year. Winnipeg has dropped three straight to St. Louis at home, complicating their overall shaky play on home ice, where they have dropped five straight since March 23.

The Blues sit as +105 underdogs on the odds for Thursday after suffering their first back-to-back defeats in 16 contests. The club's struggles in Games 3 and 4 put the brakes on a run that saw the Blues claim victory in 11 of 14 contests to close the regular season alongside Winnipeg with 99 points.

But despite losing control of home-ice advantage in the series, the Blues have remained resilient on the NHL futures, pegged as a +1000 wager to raise the Stanley Cup for the first time, and outpacing the Jets, who trail at +1300.

Elsewhere on the Thursday NHL playoff odds, the Vegas Golden Knights take a commanding 3-1 series lead into Game 5 of their clash with the San Jose Sharks as +105 underdogs, while the Carolina Hurricanes aim to even their series with the defending champion Washington Capitals at two games apiece as narrow -125 home chalk.

The Golden Knights have scored early and often while rebounding from a 1-0 series deficit, outgunning the Sharks by a wide 16-6 margin in three straight wins, and are now listed as -1000 favourites on the series prices to bounce San Jose from the playoffs for a second straight year.

The Hurricanes outclassed Washington in a 5-0 win in Game 3 to pay out on -125 odds, but have failed to tally consecutive wins against the Capitals while going 7-14-5 in 26 overall meetings since December 2013, according to the OddsShark NHL Database.

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1141624 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Flames drawing on past adversity, response ahead of crucial Game 4

Eric Francis | @EricFrancis April 17, 2019, 4:05 PM

DENVER — Mike Smith stared right back at his questioner with an edge fully understandable given the situation.

"I think everyone realizes we're not good enough right now — not even close," said the Calgary Flames netminder. "Everyone needs to be better. We played a very good hockey team and from me out no one was very good, and when that happens it's just a recipe for disaster."

Coach Bill Peters agreed.

"We got out-skated in all three games so we've got to get our pace picked up," he said. "Our foot speed definitely has to get to where the NHL is. Right now I don't think we're at that pace."

No, these aren't comments following the Flames' 6-2 embarrassment in Game 3.

They are reactions from a drubbing almost six months earlier when the Flames were humiliated 9-1 against Pittsburgh.

The quotes, reactions and feelings stemming from that game were eerily similar to the ones echoed in a deathly silent Flames dressing room Monday, following a game against Colorado in which they allowed 56 shots.

As the hockey world wonders if the Flames are capable of bouncing back from a 2-1 series deficit and their epic Game 3 beatdown, you can bet they'll use their memorable experience against Sid and Co. to their advantage.

After all, from that night on the Flames emerged as the NHL's second best team, turning a 5-5 record into a 45-20-7 finish as Western Conference champs. They've been here before, and responded brilliantly.

"There are definitely some similarities and I think it's how we respond," said Mark Jankowski after the morning skate ahead of Wednesday's Game 4 at Pepsi Center.

"I think after the Pittsburgh game we responded really well and went on a good stretch there. We looked each other in the eye and looked in the mirror and said we have to be better. We know we can be better."

Back in October, the Flames were significantly better the night after their throttling, losing in overtime against the defending Cup champs before winning the next four.

With nine playoff newbies in the lineup, this Flames club may be short on experience, but consistency has been its hallmark ever since the Penguins punishment.

"This, to me, is like Pittsburgh," agreed assistant GM Craig Conroy, whose club has definitely seen momentum turn to the Avalanche the last two games.

"That was an embarrassing game and, man, I loved how we responded after that game. Whatever mindset they went into after Pittsburgh I'm hoping that can be something they can bring. You have to learn from experience."

Travis Hamonic sees it slightly differently.

"I think we can just fall back on the fact we're a good team," he said.

"The circumstances are different, but as a team we bounce back. These moments are fun."

VALIMAKI IN

Cale Makar made NHL history in Game 3 by becoming the first defenceman to score in a playoff game in which he was making his NHL debut.

The Flames are hoping that by inserting their own No. 8 into the lineup for his NHL playoff debut, a similar magic can be created.

"Vali skates really well so we think he can help us with our transition," said Peters when asked about why he replaced Oscar Fantenberg with the club's prized first rounder.

"He's been in big moments in the world juniors and is a first-round pick and started in the NHL. We expect him to come in and be fearless."

He'll play on the third pairing alongside Rasmus Andersson, bumping T.J. Brodie back up to the top pairing alongside Mark Giordano.

The rest of the lineup and lines remain the same.

MAKAR STILL BEAMING

Makar has decided he won't be sleeping at his parents' home when the Calgary-born Hobey Baker winner returns to Alberta with his club for Game 5 Friday.

"I don't think I'll venture away from the team at this point," smiled the 20-year-old U-Mass grad who had time to dine with his folks Tuesday night in Denver.

"Obviously it's a very special moment for them. They're taking it in a little more than I have."

Since his NCAA career ended Saturday, Makar hasn't had much time to process his signing on Sunday, his NHL debut Monday and the attention he's received throughout.



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"I'm not a guy that tries to seek attention so (Tuesday) was definitely a relaxing day, getting away from everything," said Makar, whose game-winner prompted a flood of e-mails and texts.

"It took me a while to get back to everybody — especially the people who helped you get to this moment."

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1141625 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / A recent history of Tampa Bay Lightning's quiet playoff exits

Rory Boylen | April 17, 2019, 12:53 PM

The Tampa Bay Lightning busted a lot of brackets Tuesday night by losing 7-3 and getting unceremoniously swept aside by the Columbus Blue Jackets.

This was not the biggest upset in NHL history – prior to the cap era days of parity the point differentials between first-round opponents could be cavernous.

Take, for instance, the 1982 series between Wayne Gretzky's Edmonton Oilers and Marcel Dionne's Los Angeles Kings, who finished 48 points behind their first-round opponent. That series included the Miracle on Manchester in Game 3 where the Kings overcame a 5-0 deficit in the third period en route to a 6-5 overtime win. Edmonton won Game 4, but the Kings closed out the upset with a 7-4 win in Game 5 of the best-of-5 series.

But Columbus's win may very well be the biggest upset in the salary cap era. Tampa Bay tied the NHL record with 62 wins in a season and, while the Presidents' Trophy isn't exactly a ringing endorsement come playoff time, at least the 1995-96 Detroit Red Wings (the last team to win 62 in a season) went to the conference final.

A weekly deep dive into the biggest hockey news in the world with hosts Elliotte Friedman and Jeff Marek. New episodes every Thursday.

For a comparably surprising upset in this era, we'll go back to the 2010 first-round series between the Washington Capitals and Montreal Canadiens. With 313 goals, those Capitals were the best offensive team under the salary cap until this year's Lightning eclipsed them with 319 goals. Those Caps were also 33 points better than their first-round opponent (Tampa finished 30 ahead of Columbus) and finished strong, with a 13-2-5 record in March and April. Montreal, meantime, had won just three of their final 11 regular-season games.

With Carey Price watching from the bench, Jaroslav Halak stood on his head, posted a .939 save percentage and led the Canadiens to the improbable win. That Capitals squad, at least up until Tuesday, was the best team to not win the Cup in this era.

And even still, at least that series went the full seven games.

The troubling thing for these Lightning is how they've bowed out of the playoffs in recent seasons. Usually it's happened later than the first four games, but rather than just look at this collapse in a vacuum it's worth examining what's happened to the team in the post-season under Jon Cooper.

This year's exit is by far the worst of the bunch, but it's not the first time they went out with a whimper.

#CBJ sweep the Lightning

Tampa Bay is the 5th team in history to finish with the NHL's best regular season record & get swept in their opening round playoff series, joining

1937-38 Bruins

1928-29 Canadiens

1923-24 Senators

1920-21 St. Pats

— Sportsnet Stats (@SNstats) April 17, 2019

2014: TAMPA SWEEP BY MONTREAL IN ROUND 1

Although 2014 was another tough first-round exit, this was totally different. The Lightning finished second in the Atlantic Division and just one point ahead of their first-round opponent from Montreal. It was also their return to the post-season after two years of missing out.

This was an Olympic year that led to a falling out between Martin St. Louis and general manager Steve Yzerman over the former's disappointment of being left off Team Canada. A year after winning the Art Ross Trophy, St. Louis was dealt to the New York Rangers for a package that included Ryan Callahan, who is still with the team today, and a couple picks – one of which became Anthony Cirelli.

That deadline deal itself changed the trajectory for Tampa Bay, but it wasn't the worst omen. Goalie Ben Bishop, who finished third in Vezina voting, became injured near the end of the regular season, so come playoff time Tampa Bay turned to backup Anders Lindback to hold the fort.

Winning it all wasn't the most likely outcome for this team, but there were still reasons to believe they could win a round or two. Steven Stamkos, who missed the Olympics and most of the season to injury, did return for the final 20 regular-season games, scoring eight goals and 17 points. They were the fifth-highest scoring team in the second half and finished the regular season 12-3-2 in their last 17 games, scoring 54 goals.

In Game 1, the Lightning mustered just 16 shots in regulation, but still managed to push it to overtime despite Montreal carrying the play with 35 shots. Dale Weise scored the overtime winner for Montreal. In Game 2 on home ice, the Lightning allowed two second- and third-period goals to trail 4-0 in the final five minutes. Teddy Purcell's goal ended Carey Price's shutout bid, but the Lightning trailed the series 2-0 heading to the Bell Centre.

The Lightning never led in Games 3 or 4, but did mount a third period comeback in Game 4 to recover from a two-goal deficit and tie it up with 13 and a half minutes remaining. But a costly tripping penalty by Cedric Paquette led to a Max Pacioretty power-play marker in the final minute of regulation to seal Tampa Bay's fate.

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.

2015: LOSS TO CHICAGO IN THE STANLEY CUP FINAL

It's a trivial thing to nitpick a team that went all the way to the Stanley Cup Final – you get that far and a bad break here or there could turn the tides against you enough to make a loss inevitable. This was a successful season for the franchise, but again, it's about how they lost.

These Lightning finished second in the Atlantic with 50 wins and 108 points – two shy of Montreal for the division title. There were some key developments for them this season, though, as they finished up with the league's best offence.

Nikita Kucherov, a sophomore, scored 29 goals and 65 points, up from nine and 18 as a rookie. Tyler Johnson, in his second full season, posted a career-best 72 points. UFA signing Anton Stralman was a big addition to the team's weakness on the back end and Bishop, one of three 40-win goalies on the season, was healthy for (most of) the playoff run. We'd find out after that he sustained a groin injury in the conference final, but his play wasn't a negative force in the final.

The Lightning actually had a 2-1 series lead over Chicago, scoring eight goals in the process.

But Tampa Bay never led a game in the series after that. Their offence sputtered as they managed just two goals in Games 4-6, with the power play going 0-for its final six in that span. In the deciding game, the Lightning managed just four shots in the first period and seven in the second while Chicago went on to win the Stanley Cup with a 2-0 victory.



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### 2016: LOSS TO PITTSBURGH IN THE CONFERENCE FINAL

The 2016 playoffs were largely a success for the Lightning once more, getting all the way to the final four teams. But this troubling trend continued.

In this season, Tampa Bay finished second in the Atlantic again with 46 wins and 97 points. And although they drew Detroit, the third seed in the division, in Round 1, the Lightning actually had the sixth-most points in the Eastern Conference.

Kucherov was the team's highest scorer for the first time, while Victor Hedman cracked the top 10 in Norris Trophy voting for the first time (finishing seventh). This team included the likes of Jonathan Drouin and Jonathan Marchessault before they hit their stride in the league, but the Lightning fell from the league's best offence to its 12th with 244 goals. This time, defence and goaltending were much improved, with Tampa finishing as a top-10 team in shots against and Bishop getting voted the runner-up for the Vezina Trophy with a .926 save percentage.

The thing is, when the playoffs got going so did their offence. Through the first two rounds the Lightning scored 30 times in 10 games, which gave them the second-best goals per game rate for any team that won a series. The defence was still humming and allowed less than two goals per game through the first two rounds.

Against the Penguins in the conference final, the Lightning opened with a 3-1 road win in which they were outshot 35-20. Bishop went down to injury and Andrei Vasilevskiy came in for the rest of the series.

The Penguins won the next two games, but then the Lightning fought back. A 4-3 win on home ice was followed by a thrilling 4-3 overtime win in Pittsburgh that Tampa Bay had to overcome 2-0 and 3-2 deficits to accomplish. Heading home for Game 6, it was starting to look promising for Tampa Bay.

But, once again, the Lightning failed to get a lead at all the rest of the series. They fell behind 3-0 in Game 6 and dropped that game 5-2, then fell 2-1 in Game 7 when they were outshot 39-17.

Record For Regular Season Wins

NHL 2018-19 Lightning 62 1st Rd Loss

NHL 1995-96 Red Wings 62 Conf Final Loss

NBA 2015-16 Warriors 73 Finals Loss

NFL 2007 Patriots 16 SB Loss

MLB 2001 Mariners 116 ALCS Loss

MLB 1906 Cubs 116 WS Loss

— Sportsnet Stats (@SNstats) April 17, 2019

### 2018: LOSS TO WASHINGTON IN CONFERENCE FINAL

They say you sometimes have to lose before you can win, so after all these failures as the team was building up its experience, 2018 looked like the season they might finally break through. It followed a season where the Lightning missed the playoffs altogether – due in part to Steven Stamkos' season-ending injury in November – but the 2017-18 version of the Lightning had it all.

First, their 54 wins were, at the time, tied for the fourth-most of the salary cap era. The team mustered 290 goals, which led the league and was the fifth-highest of the salary cap era. Kucherov hit 100 points for the first time, Vasilevskiy led the league in wins and was eighth in save percentage at .920 and Hedman won his first Norris. Brayden Point and Yanni Gourde were the players who burst onto the scene with 60-plus point seasons, while the trade deadline acquisitions of Ryan McDonagh and J.T. Miller from the Rangers was a home run in every way.

Even through the first two rounds of the playoffs, all indications were that Tampa Bay was a runaway train that couldn't be stopped. It took them just 10 games to get through both New Jersey and Boston and they scored at least three goals in eight of those games (and at least four

goals in half of them). Washington, meanwhile, had battled harder to get to the conference final and overcame series deficits in both Rounds 1 and 2.

Tampa Bay was outscored 10-4 in dropping Games 1 and 2, but they scored 11 total goals over the next three games and won all of them. Now on the brink of getting back to the Stanley Cup Final again, what happened next seemed the most unlikely of outcomes.

No one would have predicted, after all this offensive success, that Tampa Bay's goal 33 seconds into the second period of Game 5 would be their last of the series. The rest of the way Washington outscored Tampa Bay 9-0, shutting them out in both Games 6 and 7 to move on to face the Golden Knights.

### 2019: THE BOTTOM FALLS OUT OF AN HISTORIC TEAM

This year's loss was just the latest. After jumping out to a 3-0 lead in the first period of Game 1, and then blowing it to lose in regulation, Tampa Bay never led a game in the series again. In Game 4, with everything on the line, they were down 2-0 before it was four minutes old.

After Tuesday's loss, Cooper was asked if he thought there was a fundamental flaw with the team when it comes to handling adversity in the post-season.

"We're expected to go far this year and we go nowhere. 2015 nobody expected us to go anywhere and we went far, with the same core of players," Cooper said. "You go to a couple conference finals, I can't sit here and say those are bad efforts. It's hard to win in this league. It's hard to do it consistently and the group's found a way to do it."

"It's tough to not be sitting at the end and holding the Stanley Cup, but how many teams have gone through this? They knock at the door, they knock at the door. Look at Washington for example. They had two remarkable years and were bounced in the second round and the year nobody expected them to do anything they won the Stanley Cup. It's crazy how it works."

Sportsnet's Starting Lineup

Burke on Bolts' exit: Utter & complete shock . . . I don't recall a collapse like this

April 17 2019

Audio Player

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And it would be crazy to expect the Lightning to undergo some great overhaul this off-season. There will be tinkering for sure, but with parity being what it is in the NHL, you just have to keep taking your swings with Tampa Bay's core until one day, hopefully, they punch through.

Time will tell if these Lightning are like the San Jose Sharks – a squad that seemed to have everything in place for years and even got to one Stanley Cup Final, but could never win it all – or if they'll eventually put it together for a successful run as Washington did last season.

It's just troubling to see that when Tampa Bay gets knocked out of the playoffs, they tend to do it rather quietly. Tuesday's disappointment that completed a four-game sweep at the hands of the Columbus Blue Jackets will do nothing to quell concerns that they just don't have the right mix, no matter how many stars are in the lineup.

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Sportsnet.ca / Rival WATCH: What they're saying about Jets stealing two road games

Rory Boylen



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • April 18, 2019

When the Winnipeg Jets dropped the first two games of their series against St. Louis at home, Manitobans feared the worst.

The team had been having trouble at 5-on-5 for a while, Connor Hellebuyck had fallen well off his Vezina finalist performance from a year ago and their second-half play already wasn't inspiring a Stanley Cup pick. So heading to St. Louis in a 2-0 hole, the Jets were one of those teams that looked on track to be swept.

But over the past two games, the series has been reset. The Jets doubled the Blues 8-4 on road ice and Kyle Connor's overtime winner in Game 4 sends the series back to Winnipeg all even. Seven of those goals came at even strength, while Hellebuyck has gotten better, topped off with a 32-save performance in Game 4.

So is it the Blues who now have something to be concerned about? Here's what they're saying about the series in St. Louis.

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In the battle of top lines, Winnipeg has edge on the Blues so far — St. Louis Post-Dispatch

Tom Timmermann writes that the biggest reason why Winnipeg has been able to win two in a row on the road to climb back into this first-round series has been the big difference in contribution between the top lines for both teams:

While the Blues have had depth, with 13 players in the regular season in double figures in goals, in the postseason, they have gotten significant contributions from the second and third lines — Tyler Bozak's line may have been their best in Game 4 and maybe throughout the postseason — but the first line has been noticeably quiet. In five-on-five play, O'Reilly's game-winning goal in Game 2 is the only one for that unit, and it was Jay Bouwmeester and Colton Parayko who had the assists on that one.

...

While Tyler Bozak's line and Oskar Sundqvist's line have succeeded in establishing time in the zone regularly, the top line hasn't. And if their job has been to slow down Winnipeg's top line, that hasn't happened. It was the top line that was on the ice when Winnipeg scored the game-winner on Tuesday. Wheeler and Scheifele are both plus-3 in the series, and Connor is plus-1. The Blues' top line are all minus-3.

For Winnipeg, the top line has given the team a spark that has shifted the momentum back in the Jets' favor.

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.

In the end it was a battle of wills — Bleedin' Blue Blog

Looking at all the pros and cons from a St. Louis perspective in their Game 4 loss, Todd Panula sees a couple of factors that have turned the momentum Winnipeg's way:

The Jets have found a way to make the Blues play their game. St. Louis is trying too hard to outwit the Jets and the rest of their game seems to be sacrificed.

Credit also has to go to Hellebuyck. As bad as he was in Game 1 and 2, he has been just as good in Game 3 and 4. He has denied the Blues on some fantastic chances. You can argue he has been lucky on plenty of those, but that is what hockey goaltending is about — position and luck.

This is starting to look like 2013 and 2014 all over again — In The Slot

Lou Korac points out that the Blues have held 2-0 series leads before, only to see them melt away. In 2013 and 2014, they won the first two games against Los Angeles and Chicago in Round 1, then lost the next four in both of those series. And if the Blues keep playing the way they have been and fail to improve their aggressiveness, St. Louis could see a similar conclusion to this series.

It was the kind of game that smelled one, two, three goals tops. This one had 1-0 written all over it. But the Blues' game changed. Why? Nobody knows. But the Jets gained momentum, they were hemming the Blues in their zone, forcing turnovers, Blues skaters weren't getting pucks

clearly out, getting deeper clears, allowing the Jets to recoil and go on the attack again.

"They had some chances. I think we got away from it a bit in the third," Pietrangelo said. "I think both teams controlled parts of the game. It would have been nice to close it out but again, it's an overtime game, it could have gone either way. Have to find a way to regroup for Thursday."

Why get away from it, though?

"Just a little passive, defensive," Pietrangelo said. "I think we're better when we're aggressive."

Berube on #stlblues top line: "They've got to be better. And they know they've got to be better. But it's a tough battle. They're going against the Scheifele line quite a bit. Most of the game. They're a good line. And they're big and they skate." #stlblues

— Lou Korac (@lkorac10) April 17, 2019

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1141627 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / How the Blue Jackets shocked the hockey world and upset the Lightning

Andrew Berkshire April 17, 2019, 5:31 PM

The impossible has happened. If you predicted the Tampa Bay Lightning would lose in the first round, you're probably a fan of the Columbus Blue Jackets or an agent of chaos. If you predicted the Blue Jackets would sweep the top-seeded team in the league, which tied the record for most wins in a season, you were trolling.

Yet here we are, with the Lightning in a state of shock and the Blue Jackets elated, looking like a championship caliber team. So what went wrong here?

Clearly one thing that nearly everyone overlooked, myself included, was that the Blue Jackets were significantly better after their trade deadline acquisitions once those players started to fit into the team structure. There just wasn't enough time in the regular season to get a real grip on what the Blue Jackets would look like once they gelled as a team.

It was easy to see Columbus struggling a bit after the deadline and think there wasn't enough time for them to pull it all together. But when you're wrong you have to own it, and the Blue Jackets have proven a lot of people wrong, so let's get into how they did it.

Looking at the offence each team produced in the series at 5-on-5, it doesn't look like the kind of domination that would produce a 19-8 goal differential over a four-game stretch. In fact, the Lightning had slight advantages in high danger chances and scoring chances on net, produced far more passes to the slot, got more puck movement off the rush, and more East-West puck movement.

Part of the reason for that is they were playing from behind for a majority of the series and pushing in desperation, but based on those statistics you would expect to get rewarded a little more if the series went longer, but that isn't how the playoffs work.

Sergei Bobrovsky's brilliance was staggering as the Blue Jackets closed down the series in Game 4, especially his performance against the ridiculous number of chances the Lightning were able to generate off the cycle.

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To the Jackets' credit, one area they were able to outdo the Lightning was attacking off the rush. The Lightning created a lot of rushes, and moved the puck well on them, but they couldn't get their shots off once they gained the zone and the shots they did get off were mostly from the perimeter.



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Any series that ends in a sweep is going to, in large part, be due to the losing team facing a phenomenal goaltending performance. But let's try to go deeper and find some areas where the Blue Jackets' skaters forced the issue in this series by comparing the Lightning in the playoffs to the Lightning of the regular season.

One of the big narratives in this series was that the relentless Blue Jackets forecheck drove the flow of it and forced the Lightning to dump the puck out more often than they wanted, stopped attempted zone exits, stifled their transition game, and created defensive zone and neutral zone turnovers. By the eye test I would say that is a strong group of assumptions and fits with what I saw while watching this series, but we don't have to assume anything, because luckily, those are all things we can at least partially quantify.

For all of these stats, the lower the percentage, the better, and once again it doesn't look like the results match up to what was happening in the series.

There were absolutely instances where the Blue Jackets' forecheck beat down the Lightning and hemmed them in, but our brains are trained to find patterns, and when we think or are told that something is happening, they work to confirm those assumptions by finding those patterns, sometimes when they aren't really there.

That means when the Blue Jackets did execute excellent forechecking plays, we logged them and remembered them, whereas when the Lightning weathered the incoming forwards and exited the defensive zone with the puck under their control, we don't remember it.

Because of those cognitive biases, when Lightning coach Jon Cooper was interviewed on the bench during Game 4 and said he felt that his team was handling it well, he wasn't completely crazy. It's just that the few times they didn't handle it well, Columbus managed to pounce on Tampa hard and add to their lead or break a tie.

There were areas where the Blue Jackets' defensive scheme legitimately foiled the Lightning, though. For example, the Lightning were the fourth-best team in the regular season at following up a controlled exit with another successful play, whether that was a neutral zone deke, a pass, or carrying the puck across another line. But in the playoffs they were the third-least successful. The Blue Jackets executed a near-perfect neutral zone choke hold on the Lightning that bottled them into attacking lanes they didn't want to take, and forced more time wasting regrouping and resets.

In the defensive zone, the Lightning were forced to compensate for the increased pressure of the Blue Jackets' forecheck by passing laterally more often, kicking the puck between two defencemen while trying to find an outlet path. 40.2 per cent of all Tampa Bay's passes in their own zone in the playoffs were D to D lateral passes, the most in the playoffs and far more than the 35.1 per cent they went for in the regular season.

The fact of the matter is there's no easy answer to why the Lightning were booted so quickly. Losing Victor Hedman and Anton Stralman surely made things a lot more difficult in all three zones, but even with the injuries, the Lightning weren't vastly outplayed, despite how it looked.

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1141628 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Canadiens prospects Primeau, Suzuki taking big steps in development

Eric Engels April 17, 2019, 1:20 PM

It was a two-week period that saw two of the most promising Montreal Canadiens prospects take big steps forward in a year that's already seen both of them grow by leaps and bounds.

One of them, Cayden Primeau, left two years of college eligibility on the table and signed his three-year, entry-level contract with the organization

on Mar. 31. He packed up his gear and joined the American Hockey League's Laval Rocket for a week's worth of experience he deemed "eye-opening" in a telephone interview with Sportsnet on Tuesday. And then, before hopping on a plane to Buffalo to accept the Mike Richter Award as the NCAA's best goaltender for the 2018-19 season, he got a life-changing phone call from Team USA's general manager for this year's world championships, which will take place in Slovakia in May.

"Chris Drury called me I'd say a week ago," Primeau said. "It's crazy to think [I'd get this opportunity], but any time you get to represent your country, it's huge. I wouldn't turn up an opportunity like that ever, so I'm just thankful and really excited. Just playing at that level and experiencing the top players at that level, just practicing with them, it's definitely going to be huge for my summer."

It's an opportunity the 19-year-old will begin preparing for this weekend. Meanwhile, as Primeau was focusing this week on finishing his final classes at Northeastern University, Canadiens prospect Nick Suzuki was in the process of lifting the Guelph Storm out of a 3-0 hole against the London Knights in the Ontario Hockey League Playoffs.

The 13th-overall pick in 2017, who was chosen 186 spots ahead of Primeau, posted his third consecutive 90-plus-point season in the OHL before bringing his game up to another level to help Guelph beat London in the reverse sweep — scoring five goals and adding six assists over the final four games of the series.

World Juniors Team Canada centre Nick Suzuki. (Darryl Dyck/CP)

We caught up with the Storm's general manager and coach, George Burnett, who was blown away with what Suzuki offered to help save his team's season.

"It goes without saying Nick's a guy that can be a game changer and a difference maker," Burnett said. "We quietly challenged our top players. We have a number of them — there's four kids on our team that played in the world juniors and three with Canada and one with the Russians and we have others who have great experience in the post-season—and we asked all those guys to elevate their game in Game 3. Although we lost, I think it might still be one of our best games. We found a way to score some goals and felt better about ourselves despite the loss. Nick is clearly one of the guys who elevated his game and he took charge of the situation and controlled as much as he could through his good play."

It sounds a lot like what Primeau did this season, helping Northeastern to a second consecutive Beanpot championship in February — he was named MVP of the tournament that pits the Boston-based universities against each other — before helping them to a Hockey East Championship in March. In between, he backstopped Team USA to a silver medal at the World Junior Championships.

The Voorhees, N.J., native said he changed his approach coming into this pivotal year.

"Last year was my first year, and I was just trying to figure out college hockey and just trying to give the team the best chance to win," he said. "But this year I really tried to be the reason that we won games. I tried to step up and give myself bigger responsibility."

The numbers were almost identical — Primeau put up a .931 save percentage a year ago and had a .933 this year — but the player emerged as one who was much more prepared for the transition to professional hockey.

The Canadiens were hoping Suzuki would undergo the same process this season. The 19-year-old arrived in the September trade that sent former captain Max Pacioretty to the Vegas Golden Knights for a 2019 second-round pick and Tomas Tatar, and then he was sent back to junior well before final cuts were made at Canadiens camp. The goal was for him to dominate, for him to improve his skating, his shot, and his work habits, and Burnett said he did all of that and more.

"He's not short in any particular area," Burnett added about the player who had 22 goals and 45 points in 30 games before being traded to the Storm from the Owen Sound Attack. "I don't think there's any question he's got a very bright future ahead of him. I think he's understanding. I know how closely the Canadiens are monitoring his progress and communicating with him frequently, and the things we talk about. It's the work and competing for loose pucks, the practice habits — all those



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things that young guys, whether they have great skills like Nick does or not, need to realize are hard to do at the next level.

"The transition to the next level is extremely hard. It's the biggest jump that anyone will ever make and even to the American Hockey League and on to the National League. I think he has a good understanding of his work this summer and the expectations that come with being in a trade like the one he was in last year. No one comes in to Montreal under the radar, so he'll be watched closely and I'm sure he's going to put in a great summer of work in preparation for that challenge, which is the next step on his path."

Suzuki could indeed take that next step with the Canadiens next fall. As for Primeau, with Montreal starter Carey Price in Year 2 of an eight-year, \$84-million contract, he's just working on becoming a better goaltender and excited for the opportunity to play in Montreal or Laval.

"I really just try to go with the flow, just take every day as a new challenge and as it comes and not thinking too far ahead or looking into the past too much," he said. "I've been trying to do that pretty much my whole life, and the last couple of years it's really been exemplified, and that's why I feel like I've been able to grow the past couple of years."

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 04.18.2019

1141629 Websites

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

No one was picking them this year.

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

But the best skaters the last two games were nearly all Jets: the Scheifele-Connor-Blake Wheeler line, defenceman Dustin Byfuglien, winger Patrik Laine.

No one will know until Game 5 on Thursday if the Jets are really back, or whether the last two games were merely another fleeting summit in a season of peaks and valleys. But it has been a while since Winnipeg looked this good.

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

Yes, it is.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

We're guessing the Jets feel even better.

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1141630 Websites

TSN.CA / Leafs' rally falls short as Bruins tie series

Kristen Shilton

TORONTO – The Maple Leafs went into Game 4 of their first-round Stanley Cup playoff series against Boston on Wednesday with a 2-1 series lead, home ice advantage the rest of the way and, with the tilt tied 2-2 in the second period, a looming chance to put the Bruins on life support by winning a third game in the best-of-seven series.



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The veteran-heavy Bruins responded to the mid-game stalemate with three unanswered goals, and then fended off the Leafs' furious comeback attempt that fell just short of forcing overtime.

So when the final buzzer sounded on Toronto's 6-4 loss, the series was knotted 2-2, Boston had recaptured home ice and the Leafs felt there was no one to blame for the turn of events but themselves.

"We just probably made too mistakes at certain points in the game," lamented John Tavares. "We probably didn't have our best start tonight but we gave ourselves a good chance. We just have to do a better job once we got ourselves back in it, locking it down and generate chances. At the end of the day, the W is what matters most, so we look forward to bouncing back."

That's what the Bruins had in mind entering Game 4, desperate to atone for a one-goal loss two nights earlier in Game 3. Bruins coach Bruce Cassidy threw out a curveball right away by breaking up the Bruins' formidable top line of Patrice Bergeron, Brad Marchand and David Pastrnak with the promotion of Danton Heinen into Pastrnak's place.

Through three games of the series, the Bruins' big guns had managed a combined two points at even-strength, and Cassidy's decision to adjust awakened his dormant stars to wreak havoc on the Leafs.

By game's end, Bergeron, Marchand and Pastrnak had amassed four points combined (three goals, one assist) and were all at plus-3, while Toronto's top line of Tavares, Mitch Marner and Zach Hyman had three points together (one goal, two assists) and were all at minus-3.

One of those goals against Tavares and company was Joakim Nordstrom's empty-netter, but despite how the ice appeared to tilt in Boston's favour earlier with the new matchups, Babcock thought it was less what the Bruins did, and more what the Leafs didn't do, that really told the tale.

"I thought we were set up good for that [change], to be honest with you. I didn't think I was concerned about that one bit," he said. "I thought our matchups were fine. That, to me, wasn't it. We just made some mistakes. We pinched when we shouldn't have, we gave up some opportunities we didn't need to give up that we haven't been doing [previously]."

That new trend showed up early in Wednesday's game, starting with the Leafs' special teams. Charlie McAvoy scored the game's opening goal barely three minutes into the frame, with five seconds remaining in the Bruins' first power play.

Then the new-look Bergeron line went to work, and Marchand made it 2-0 with a tap-in goal on Frederik Andersen's doorstep.

Nikita Zaitsev should have had Marchand tied up next to the Leafs' net, but right before the goal he blocked a shot with his hand, a stinger that took him temporarily out of the play.

Toronto turned in two failed power play attempts of its own in the first before Zach Hyman finally found the back of the net, tipping a Morgan Rielly shot past Tuukka Rask. Just like Marchand, Hyman capitalized by getting to the net, while too much of the Leafs' opening frame had been fixated on rush chances.

As the Leafs trailed 2-1 to start the second period, Auston Matthews needed just 1:03 to score the equalizer, his second goal in as many games and first of two on the night.

Rask looked shaky trying to make the stop on Matthews, and in the aftermath of his tying goal it felt like Toronto had the Bruins' goalie right where they wanted him.

"That was the message in our locker room, just keep battling and find a way," Matthews said. "There's no quit in this locker room. We gave ourselves a chance, just not enough."

Indeed, just as quickly as the Leafs climbed out of their two-goal hole, they were right back in one, courtesy of Pastrnak.

The Bruins winger scored his first goal of the series minutes after Matthews' strike, beating Marner in a foot race and getting on top of Zaitsev and Jake Muzzin on a rush with Marchand to tip a puck past Andersen. Pastrnak scored again less than two minutes later, this time on the power play.

By the time Zdeno Chara's point blast wound through traffic and beat Andersen early in the third, Toronto was down 5-2 with nothing to lose. So the Leafs pressed hard, finding goals from Matthews and Travis Dermott 90 seconds apart that raised the decibel level in Scotiabank Arena to an ear-splitting pinnacle.

The pushback was ultimately for naught though, and when Nordstrom's empty-netter sealed the Leafs' fate, the night's many missed opportunities came flooding back. Toronto peppered 42 shots on Rask compared to 31 directed at Andersen, won the possession battle at 62 per cent, had the pendulum swing their way late in the game, but somehow it couldn't find a way to close.

"We just have to figure out how to keep a lead, and once we get a couple, just keep pushing," said Dermott. "We had a couple breakdowns after we felt like we had the momentum and lost it and they capitalized pretty quickly. We felt like we had a chance right down to the end."

"I thought we had good energy and, for periods of the game, I thought we played really good," shrugged Babcock. "Too many turnovers in the first period trying to play too high-octane instead of just looking after the puck and playing right like we've been playing. Just got in our way a little bit here in this one."

No amount of moral victories will help the Leafs advance to the second round though, and now in order to win the series they'll have to steal at least one game on the road.

The trick, then, will be to flush these negative outcome as quickly as they can a positive one, and go back to the drawing board.

"That's playoff hockey, have a short memory," said Andersen. "Anything can change the momentum. We almost came back and forced overtime. When we play 60-minute games, we seem to have a little bit more success. We showed when we play at our best, we play in their end and we play with speed. We did a lot of good stuff tonight, too, obviously would have liked a little better ending, but that happens."

### TAKEAWAYS

Penalty kill flatlines

The postseason has not been kind to the Leafs' penalty kill thus far.

Through four games, the Bruins have carved up Toronto's kill with five power play goals in 11 attempts. That 54.5 per cent success rating puts the Leafs dead-last among playoff teams still remaining; for reference, Boston is the second-worst team left in the field with a kill at 70 per cent.

Babcock pointed out after Game 4 that both of the Bruins' power play goals Wednesday were scored on plays the Leafs had just gone over and failed to execute.

"We've got to fix it," Babcock said of the kill. "The bottom line is you can't keep giving power play goals up, those are just freebies, those two. Not that they didn't make plays or anything like that, but we weren't in the spots we were supposed to be in. In the end, you've got to do what you're supposed to do and if their scheme is better, their player executes, then so be it. But, you've got to do what you're supposed to."

For their part, the Leafs went 1-for-3 in Game 4 on the power play and are 3-for-10 overall. Considering how they got the better of Boston at even-strength in Wednesday's outing, and have been strong at 5-on-5 throughout the series, that difference on special teams could end up being a deciding factor before it's all over if the Leafs can't start to compensate more effectively.

When the Leafs' power play is at its best, Toronto plays simple and strikes, without letting Boston agitate them in the neutral zone. That will be a point of emphasis as they strive to make those units more consistent.

Toronto can simplify things on the penalty kill, too, and send pucks out of the zone from below the hashmarks instead of fumbling it looking to make a better play. Too often they're getting caught going for more, and the Bruins are finding ways to keep the heat on.

Freddie not-quite-so-steady

There was an early storm for Andersen to weather in Game 4, and the Leafs goalie briefly looked close to capsizing.



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Boston controlled most of the game's first 10 minutes and put two pucks behind Andersen before the Leafs got their legs moving. There wasn't much Andersen could do when McAvoy's goal banged off the far post and in, but when Marchand potted the Bruins' second score Andersen was caught puck watching and blithely unaware the winger was waiting in the weeds.

Right after Boston went up 2-0, though, Andersen made a huge stop on Charlie Coyle to keep the Leafs' deficit somewhat manageable. And from there, his play picked up as well.

Both Pastrnak goals were aided by defensive lapses by the Leafs, and Andersen was a half-step late on each to make the game-changing stop (although the tip off Marchand's pass was fairly indefensible). Chara's serpentine shot made it past a screened Andersen, but if he'd been able to track it, the save could have made the difference for Toronto's outcome.

Andersen was solid in the final minutes of the game while also getting some help from his posts to keep the Leafs down by only a goal and fighting valiantly for an equalizer.

In the end, Andersen didn't do enough to out-duel Rask, stopping 25 shots for an .833 save percentage. It was the first time in the series Andersen had halted fewer than 30 pucks, and that he had registered a sub-.900 save percentage.

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1141631 Websites

TSN.CA / Communication key as Matthews seeks to be 'more dominant'

Mark Masters

TSN Toronto reporter Mark Masters checks in daily with news and notes on the Maple Leafs. The Leafs and Bruins held optional skates at Scotiabank Arena Wednesday morning ahead of Game 4.

Auston Matthews broke through with a goal and an assist in Game 3, but both came on the power play. At even strength, his line was actually outscored by the David Krejci line 1-0 despite owning an edge in possession. Matthews described it as a "stepping stone" for his group.

So, what's the next level look like for him and linemates Kasperii Kapanen and Andreas Johnsson?

"Just more dominant," Matthews explained, "having the puck even more, creating more offence, being good in our own zone and communicating. I think that's been a big key for us is just communicating in all three zones not just as a line but as a five-man unit and even with Freddie [Andersen], make sure we're talking and being there for each other and having outlets all over the ice."

Mike Babcock believes the Matthews line is trending up.

"He was real good last game," the Leafs coach said of Matthews. "He was real good defensively and then ended up with the puck more. I thought Kappy had his best game in a long time and then Johnny on the power play, but, just in general, was physical so when you go through all three of their games I thought they were a lot stronger and that's important, obviously, for us."

But the Bruins are also pleased to have limited Toronto's superstar centre to zero points in five-on-five play.

"If it starts in his own end we can force him to defend there and expend energy there," said coach Bruce Cassidy. "I think we've done a good job of that, Krejci and [Jake] DeBrusk for the most part. They're a line-rush line that can really hurt you in that area if you don't have numbers or reloading and some level of back pressure and keep him to the outside. He's had a couple good looks even with his one-on-one, two-on-tvos.

He's rung one off the post in our building. We had numbers back, so he's always going to be dangerous there."

matthews comes off the bench and rings one off the post  
pic.twitter.com/kWey5JN0iu

— dylan (@DylanFremlin) April 12, 2019

There's also a chess match playing out with Cassidy trying to limit the time and space Matthews gets in the neutral zone.

"He had some in our building a little bit," Boston's bench boss noted, "they made an adjustment where they stretched our D out and he got underneath, but for the most part we've tried to identify those situations and keep it tight."

On Tuesday, Babcock noted that Matthews isn't as bothered by the pressure to produce this year and the kid from Arizona truly does seem more at ease as we hit the business end of the series.

"You just kind of get more comfortable with it," Matthews said, "and you got so many people around you that can help — teammates, staff, family, friends, you know, when you go about the process and everything that kind of goes with playing in a market like this. I've enjoyed every minute of it. It comes with expectations, but that's something you enjoy and you definitely go with."

Communication key as Matthews aims to be 'more dominant' in Game 4

Auston Matthews had a goal and an assist on the power play in Game 3, but at even strength his line was actually outscored 1-0 by the David Krejci line. Matthews described the performance as a stepping stone to better things and explained what the next level looks like for him and his linemates.

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Matthews made an unusual adjustment on Monday night, changing from his trusty Bauer stick to a Warrior one, but he wasn't interested in providing too many details on his thought process.

"Just switching it up," he said, "that's about it."

Surprising to see such a move at this time of year?

"A little bit," Johnsson said with a smile. "Personally, I probably wouldn't change."

Before scoring on Monday, Matthews had gone six games without a goal, dating back to the regular season.

Matthews not interested in explaining stick change

Auston Matthews changed sticks for Game 2, using the Bauer 2N Pro instead of the Warrior Alpha QX. The Leafs forward wasn't interested in explaining his reasoning for the switch.

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You could argue Boston's top line is facing more pressure than the Matthews line at the moment. After dominating the Leafs in last year's series, Brad Marchand, Patrice Bergeron and David Pastrnak have combined for just one even-strength marker and all three are minus players.

The trio held a line meeting on Tuesday.

"Marshy is the will, Pasta the creativity and Bergy's the all-around," Cassidy said, "so they get together, they've done it all year a little more than some other lines, they want to see, 'What are they doing? How can we counter it?' At the end of the day, once they get a few cues on that, well, 'Now we've got to be better than them, harder on the puck here, beat them to the net there. Willing to shoot it here and get to the second chances.' I think that's what that line has failed to do, to be honest. I don't think they've shot the puck enough. So when they recover it, they're really hard to play against, because they have a really good sense where each other are going."

Did they learn a lot from meeting?

"Yeah, yeah, obviously," Pastrnak said with a toothy grin. "Will keep it to myself ... in this day of hockey you have all these videos and every shift



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you can watch back so it's good, you know, you can learn and see what's open there."

"Toronto's a little more determined with numbers getting back, so those lateral passes are not happening," Cassidy said. "That's a credit to the way Toronto's played, and we have to make the necessary adjustment to find ways to score, and I believe they will."

'The will, the creativity, the all-around': Bruins' top line regroups

The Maple Leafs have shut down the Bruins' top line through the first three games. Head coach Bruce Cassidy sat down with them after Game 3 to try and sort out their scoring woes.

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The addition of Jake Muzzin has changed the dynamic of Toronto's defence adding a physical edge that wasn't there before.

"He played West hockey for a long time," noted Pastrnak. "It's good for them, but we're going to focus on ourselves and we know we have a good team."

Muzzin lays out Pastrnak near the Leafs bench. #LeafsForever  
pic.twitter.com/M16v2qjHvT

— Maple Leafs Hotstove (@LeafsNews) April 15, 2019

Just in general, Toronto's defensive play has impressed the Bruins, who completed their season series with the Leafs back in January.

"We've seen Toronto play a tighter defensive game and we didn't see that as much during the season, little bit more committed to that," Cassidy observed. "So the line rush game has been little each way. So it's up to us to find ways to generate offence with O-zone puck possession. So is that an X's and O's, or is that a motivation to get pucks behind them and have the will to win it and get to the front of the net? I think it's both."

LeBrun: Muzzin has been an absolute workhorse, he knows playoff hockey

Hockey Insider Pierre LeBrun joins Mark Masters to discuss the great job Jake Muzzin has been doing on Patrice Bergeron, and share his thoughts on Bruce Cassidy's decision to keep his top line together despite their struggles in the series so far.

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The Leafs aren't just holding their own physically with the big, bad Bruins, they are actually out-hitting them in the series (114-108). Toronto has even levelled Boston captain Zdeno Chara with a couple bodychecks. Six-foot-one winger Zach Hyman brought the 6-foot-9 defenceman to the ice in Game 3.

What's the key to cutting down Chara?

"Make sure you got your balance and your grounding and then go for the hit," Hyman said. "I think I caught him off guard a little bit, but it's playoff hockey and you can't be scared. You got to go face up against anybody and play your game."

Hyman (6 ft 1 in) taking down Chara (6 ft 9 in)  
pic.twitter.com/xqJjzJ8O2k

— Josh Tessler (@JoshTessler\_) April 16, 2019

Hyman on big Chara hit: 'I caught him off guard ... you can't be scared'

Zach Hyman breaks down his big hit on Zdeno Chara in Game 2 and outlines the importance of physical play in a seven-game series.

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Bruins winger Marcus Johansson practised Tuesday and skated again this morning after missing the last two games due to illness.

"I'm gonna talk to Butchy and discuss it, but I felt good out there now," he told reporters after the morning workout. "I'll prepare as if I'm playing and we'll see what happens."

"He has to have his energy level to be able to help us," Cassidy noted.

Meanwhile, defenceman John Moore is set to return from an upper-body injury sustained on March 25.

"If they feel good, they'll go in," Cassidy said. "They are trending well."

Johansson would likely replace Karson Kuhlman while Moore would take the spot of Steven Kampfer.

□ Marcus Johansson on possibly returning tonight for Game 4: "Felt good out there. I was fine. I'm gonna talk to Butchy and discuss it, but I felt good out there now. I'll prepare as if I'm playing and we'll see what happens." pic.twitter.com/GSZhrLISFF

— Boston Bruins (@NHLBruins) April 17, 2019

While Boston's defensive depth is getting a boost, the Leafs are hoping their third pair can round into form. Travis Dermott (shoulder) and Jake Gardiner (back) missed significant time down the stretch. Dermott only suited up for four games before the playoffs while Gardiner only got into the last two in the regular season.

"Obviously, health is an issue," Babcock admitted. "Now, they're still good players. Are they playing at the level they're both capable of when they're healthy? Probably not. But, they're still good players. We'll take whatever they've got to offer."

Gardiner is averaging 15:48 of ice time in the playoffs, which is down from 21:13 in the regular season. Dermott is averaging 13:30 per game against the Bruins after logging 17:18 per game in the regular season.

Projected Leafs lineup for Game 4:

Hyman-Tavares-Marner

Johansson-Matthews-Kapanen

Marleau-Nylander-Brown

Ennis-Gauthier-Moore

Rielly-Hainsey

Muzzin-Zaitsev

Gardiner-Dermott

Andersen starts

Hutchinson

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1141632 Websites

TSN.CA / 'I would not have guessed Tampa would not have won a game'

3-4 minutes

TORONTO — Bruce Cassidy didn't see it coming.

And quite frankly, neither did many others.

A day after the Tampa Bay Lightning — the Presidents' Trophy winners, a team that tied the NHL record for wins in a season — were swept out of the playoffs in four straight by the Columbus Blue Jackets, members of the Boston Bruins and Toronto Maple Leafs reflected on a result that stunned the hockey world.

"Once you're in, every team has a chance," said Cassidy, Boston's head coach. "I would not have guessed Tampa would not have won a game."

The winner of the Eastern Conference quarterfinal between the Leafs and Bruins, which Toronto led 2-1 heading into Wednesday's Game 4 at Scotiabank Arena, will face Columbus in the second round.



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"It's definitely shocking, but it's playoff hockey," Leafs winger Zach Hyman said. "I don't think Columbus is really an eighth seed. They loaded up at the (trade) deadline. They've got some great players.

"But Tampa set a bunch of records, so it's pretty surprising."

Those records included tying the NHL's mark for victories with 62, and putting up 128 points, fourth-most in league history.

Tampa hadn't played a truly meaningful game in months and were the first team to the quality for the post-season.

They were also the first to head home.

"It's a different game (in the playoffs)," Toronto defenceman Travis Dermott said. "It's kind of crazy to think such a good team in the regular season can go out in four like that.

"You never really would have thunk it."

Leafs centre Auston Matthews said spring hockey comes down to more than just ability.

"It's not what people expected or figured that was going to happen with the regular season they had," he said. "It doesn't matter what seed you're in. Or your place.

"It all comes down to will."

But Toronto head coach Mike Babcock said the parity among teams across the league is such that nothing should really come as a shock in the playoffs.

And he would know.

Despite accumulating 124 points and winning the Presidents' Trophy for the best regular-season record in 2005-06, Babcock's Detroit Red Wings lost in the first round to the Edmonton Oilers. Babcock also swept Detroit in the 2003 playoffs when he was with Anaheim despite his Mighty Ducks finishing 15 points back of the Red Wings in the standings.

"There's not much to pick between us," Babcock said Wednesday morning. "It's hockey, it's hard. Lots of times during the year you think this team's going to win because of the record.

"That's not how it is."

Cassidy, whose club fell to the Lightning in the second round of the playoffs last spring, noted that the Blue Jackets found a way to get inside Tampa's defence, which had an injured Victor Hedman for just two of the four games.

"They were heavy against them," he said. "They found the formula, they get to advance."

The New York Islanders also completed a sweep of the Pittsburgh Penguins on Tuesday, a result somewhat overshadowed by Tampa's ouster.

The Islanders were the higher seed, but to see them send Sidney Crosby, Evgeni Malkin and Co. packing in four straight was another eyebrow raiser.

"It's a crazy start to the playoff year with those two teams going down," Hyman said. "A lot of great players are out pretty early.

"The door's open."

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USA TODAY / Opinion: Lightning must guard against overreaction after epic failure

Kevin Allen, USA TODAY Published 2:19 p.m. ET April 17, 2019 | Updated 6:59 p.m. ET April 17, 2019

The official Tampa Bay Lightning inquisition into their playoff implosion hasn't been scheduled, but fans are already assigning blame.

Coach Jon Cooper for not having the team postseason ready. Top players Nikita Kucherov, Steven Stamkos and Brayden Point for their lack of scoring. Goalie Andrei Vasilevskiy for his .856 series save percentage. General manager Julien BriseBois for not being bold at the trade deadline. Steve Yzerman for stepping down as GM.

Everyone has a favorite scapegoat.

Emotions are still too raw to draw rational conclusions. Nobody can move beyond the disappointment of watching the Lightning post one of the top two regular-season records in NHL history and then fail to win a single game in the first round against a Columbus Blue Jackets team that was the No. 8 qualifier in the Eastern Conference.

Lightning center Steven Stamkos skates away as the Blue Jackets celebrate a third-period goal.

When major upsets occur, two events always follow: overreaction and unwillingness of the losing fan base to accept that the opponent played a significant role in the outcome.

The No. 1 reason why the Lightning are out of the playoffs is that the Blue Jackets played like champions in the first round.

They were relentless, disciplined and moved the puck like a top offensive team. Maybe the question we should be asking isn't why the Lightning weren't as sharp in the playoffs, but rather: Why weren't the Blue Jackets better in the regular season?

When the Lightning do their post-mortem, they will likely conclude it was a confluence of factors that led to their disastrous result.

Coaches will break down their special-teams strategy because they were ranked No. 1 overall in the power play and penalty kill in the regular season and their special teams hurt them badly against the Blue Jackets.

Vasilevskiy didn't play as well as Columbus goalie Sergei Bobrovsky. But Vasilevskiy is only 24, and he's going to improve.

Injuries to defenseman Anton Stralman and Victor Hedman also contributed to the result. Should the Blue Jackets be given credit for shutting down Tampa Bay's top scorers or should we blame the scorers for not figuring out how to break through? Usually, it's a combination of both.

Regardless of what happened in these playoffs, changes were coming. The Lightning are up against the salary cap, and defensemen Stralman, Braydon Coburn and Dan Girardi will become unrestricted free agents. Plus, Point will be a restricted free agent and will be expecting a significant raise from the \$686,667 he earned this year during his entry-level deal.

A trade or two seemed likely. J.T. Miller seems like one possibility to be moved.

The Lightning must guard against overreaction being mistaken as a sound conclusion. In these situations, it's easy to start believing that the mix isn't right or that you can't win with certain players.

The Washington Capitals failed for a number of years despite being a strong regular-season team. But management chose not to overreact. They kept the core group together and made changes around the edge.

How many years did we hear that the Capitals couldn't win with Alex Ovechkin? Right up until the point he was hoisting the Stanley Cup above his head last June.

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# CAROLINA HURRICANES

**NEWS CLIPPINGS • April 18, 2019**

USA TODAY / NHL playoffs: Redoing our Stanley Cup predictions after Lightning's collapse

Kevin Allen, Jimmy Hascup, Mike Brehm and Jace Evans, USA TODAY  
Published 7:51 a.m. ET April 17, 2019 | Updated 8:15 a.m. ET April 17, 2019

We want a redo. Think of it as that college class in which your professor allows you to throw out your worst test grade. Only this time, sure, we want to forget about that poor effort, but also want to try to get it right. We can't sleep at night knowing we failed our final exam.

That's USA TODAY Sports' NHL staff in a nutshell. All four of our panelists chose the Tampa Bay Lightning as the Stanley Cup champions. All four of us were very wrong. The Lightning were swept in four games by the Columbus Blue Jackets in the first round.

Thus, here is what our resubmitted test looks like -- with new Eastern Conference winners, Stanley Cup champions and Conn Smythe nods.

Kevin Allen: East pick - Washington Capitals

Why the Capitals will win the Cup: Nine months ago they were doing keg stands with the Stanley Cup. These guys know what it takes to win it all. They won't be rattled by a loss here or there or any kind of adversity. The Caps can beat you in many different ways. The East was tougher than the West this season and the Capitals found a way to win the Metropolitan and register 104 points. They will be extra motivated to match the Penguins' feat of winning back-to-back championships.

Conn Smythe: Nicklas Backstrom

**BIGGEST POSTSEASON FLOPS:** Lightning aren't alone

Forward Mark Stone has been a key producer since the Golden Knights acquired him at the trade deadline.

Jimmy Hascup: East pick - Columbus Blue Jackets

Why the Vegas Golden Knights will win the Cup: The Golden Knights are a deeper team than last season and they also know what the journey to the Stanley Cup is like after losing in it last season. Mark Stone has been a game-breaking force. He has shown why GM George McPhee traded for and then extended him as he has six goals and 10 points. Marc-Andre Fleury and his playoff experience is the tipping point for me. The other Western Conference heavyweights are not exactly plowing through their first-round series.

Conn Smythe: Mark Stone

Mike Brehm: East pick - Capitals

Why the Capitals will win the Cup: I had Washington losing to the Lightning in the Eastern Conference final, but the Lightning are out and the Atlantic Division powerhouse Boston Bruins might not survive. Not that the Toronto Maple Leafs and Blue Jackets (or the New York Islanders/former Washington coach Barry Trotz in the next round) would be easy opponents, but the Capitals' depth and championship experience should carry them to the Final. I had the St. Louis Blues getting out of the West and losing to the Lightning, but can't see them beating the Capitals, either.

Conn Smythe: Nicklas Backstrom

Jace Evans: East pick - New York Islanders

Why the Islanders will win the Cup: Little has made sense about the Stanley Cup playoffs so far, and the same can be said for this Islanders season. But if defense wins championships, no one does it better than Barry Trotz's team. The Islanders showed their league-best goal prevention in the regular season was no fluke in the first round, limiting the high-powered Penguins to just six tallies in four games while goalie Robin Lehner put up a .957 save percentage. If they can do that against Sidney Crosby and Evgeni Malkin, they can slow anyone.

Conn Smythe: Robin Lehner

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