



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • April 20, 2017

THE NEWS & OBSERVER

Checkers add Kuokkanen to playoff roster

From staff reports

The Charlotte Checkers on Wednesday received forward Janne Kuokkanen on assignment from the Carolina Hurricanes.

Kuokkanen, 18, completed his junior season on Tuesday when his London Knights team suffered a Game 7 overtime loss to the Erie Otters in the second round of the Ontario Hockey League playoffs. The Hurricanes' second-round draft

choice in 2016, Kuokkanen is eligible to play for the Checkers in the AHL Calder Cup playoffs that begin Thursday against the Chicago Wolves.

Kuokkanen was fourth amongst Knights skaters with 62 points (26 goals, 36 assists) in 60 games in his first North American season. In the playoffs, he led the team with 10 goals and 16 points.



Seven 'Canes to participate in World Championship

Posted 5:22 p.m. yesterday

Seven members of the Carolina Hurricanes will participate in the 2017 IIHF World Championship, to be held from May 5-21 in Paris, France and Cologne, Germany.

Defenseman Noah Hanifin (Boston, MA) will be the Hurricanes' lone representative for the United States, who open group play on May 5 at LANXESS Arena in Cologne against host Germany. Hanifin, a product of the United States National Team Development Program, won gold with Team USA at the 2014 World Under-17 Hockey Challenge and the 2014 U18 World Junior Championship, and has also represented the U.S. at the 2015 World Junior Championship and the 2016 IIHF World Championship.

Forward Sebastian Aho, who played for Finland's men's team at the 2016 IIHF World Championship and at the 2016 World Cup of Hockey, will take the ice for his home country when it opens the tournament against Belarus in Paris on May 5. Markham, Ont., native Jeff Skinner will be

participating in the tournament for the fourth time, as Canada opens play against the Czech Republic on May 5 at AccorHotels Arena in Paris.

Four Hurricanes will wear the blue and gold of Sweden at the tournament. Forwards Victor Rask and Joakim Nordstrom, teammates on Sweden's gold-medal-winning team at the 2012 World Junior Championship, will each be making their debuts at the IIHF World Championship. Forward Elias Lindholm, who won silver medals at the 2012 U18 World Junior Championship as well as the 2013 and 2014 World Junior Championships, will also make his debut with the men's national team. Goaltender Eddie Lack will be representing his country for the first time at any level. Sweden plays its tournament opener against Russia in Cologne on May 5.



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Tweetmail No. 140: In the System, Teases & Binging

by Michael Smith [@MSmithCanes](#) / CarolinaHurricanes.com

April 19th, 2017

Hello and welcome to a weekly feature on CarolinaHurricanes.com in which I take your Twitter questions about the Carolina Hurricanes or other assorted topics and answer them in mailbag form. Hopefully the final product is insightful to some degree, and maybe we have some fun along the way.

Let's get to it.



Michael Smith [@MSmithCanes](#)

Last call for your [#Tweetmail](#) questions this week!



andy veasev [@freeveasev](#)

[@MSmithCanes](#) Any thoughts from the brass on kuokkanen

[1:54 PM - 18 Apr 2017](#)

Yes, actually. I had the chance on Wednesday morning to sit down with Assistant General Manager and Director of Hockey Operations Mike Vellucci this morning to talk Janne Kuokkanen and other Hurricanes prospects who have had solid showings in the Canadian Hockey League playoffs. Despite his two-point night, Kuokkanen and the London Knights were eliminated from the playoffs on Tuesday in a 5-4 overtime loss to Warren Foegele (who scored the game-winning goal) and the Erie Otters. Here's what Vellucci had to say about Kuokkanen:

"He was on fire and had a great playoff series. ... He played really well. He's a smart guy. His hockey sense is off the charts. I don't want to put any pressure on him, but he has a little bit of [Sebastian Aho](#) tendencies. They're both from Finland, they both have very good hockey sense, are good skaters and have a great shot."

One more similarity to note between Kuokkanen and Aho is that they were both high second-round picks. The Canes will be thrilled if they found another Aho through the draft. On Wednesday afternoon, the Hurricanes assigned Kuokkanen to Charlotte, where he'll join the Checkers and give them added forward depth in time for the first round of their playoff series against Chicago.

Stay tuned to CarolinaHurricanes.com for coverage of the Checkers and the Calder Cup playoffs in Charlotte later this week.



Michael Smith [@MSmithCanes](#)

Last call for your [#Tweetmail](#) questions this week!



Matt Peterson [@MattPetersonPE](#)

[@MSmithCanes](#) Are Summerfest dates set yet for this year? [#tweetmail](#)

[2:04 PM - 18 Apr 2017](#)

Yep, dates are indeed set for Summerfest, which centers on Prospects Development Camp and concludes with a Saturday celebration. I won't spoil it just yet, but you'll see a summer-themed "save the dates" - with information about that, the draft party and more - hit our social media channels very, very soon.



Michael Smith [@MSmithCanes](#)

New [#Tweetmail](#) on Wednesday, which means I am in search of your questions. Send them this way, please and thank you.



Pat Clarke [@PatClarke27](#)

[@MSmithCanes](#) Have you seen previews of the new adidas uniforms for next season? Or will you first see them at the Draft? [#Tweetmail](#)

[1:49 PM - 18 Apr 2017](#) · [Carrboro, NC](#)

I can't say much, but this is what I can give you:



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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Yes, I have seen them.

The new Adidas sweaters will be unveiled this summer.

I can't wait.



Michael Smith @MSmithCanes

New [#Tweetmail](#) on Wednesday, which means I am in search of your questions. Send them this way, please and thank you.



Karl Kuekes @K2theArl

[@MSmithCanes](#) What's on the summer binge watch list?

[11:51 PM - 17 Apr 2017](#)

Now that I'm not covering a game at least every other day, there's some time to breathe and catch up on some television that I've missed over the last couple of months.

I finished "24: Legacy" this week. It was fine, but I kept getting the feeling I was watching a cover band. I'm still catching up on this season of "The Americans," and the third season of "Better Call Saul" just began. "Bates Motel" ends soon. That's been an under-the-radar delight to watch transform over its five seasons. On my Netflix to-watch list include the second season of "Love," plus Dave Chappelle's two new comedy specials. And on Amazon, I still need to finish off the last few episodes of the first season of "Goliath." I would also like to catch up on this year's batch of Academy Awards films that I've yet to see.

So, yeah, plenty to keep me busy over the summer.



Michael Smith @MSmithCanes

New [#Tweetmail](#) on Wednesday, which means I am in search of your questions. Send them this way, please and thank you.



J.T. Shepard @J_Monev2917

[@MSmithCanes](#) Can we get a Hockey Haiku for [#HaikuPoetryDay?](#) [#tweetmail](#)

[4:17 PM - 17 Apr 2017](#)

Thus concludes Tweetmail
I hope that you enjoyed it
Please come back next week

Join me next week for more questions and more answers!

If you have a question you'd like answered or you have a suggestion for my increasingly long summer to-watch list, you can find me on Twitter at [@MSmithCanes](#) or drop an email [here](#).





CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • April 20, 2017

Capitals hang on against Maple Leafs to win Game 4, even series

Washington scores four first-period goals, thwarts Toronto comeback

by Dave McCarthy / NHL.com Correspondent

April 19th, 2017

TORONTO -- The Washington Capitals scored four first-period goals in a series-tying 5-4 win against the Toronto Maple Leafs in Game 4 of the Eastern Conference First Round at Air Canada Centre on Wednesday.

The best-of-7 series is 2-2 with Game 5 at Washington on Friday.

T.J. Oshie and Tom Wilson each scored twice, Alex Ovechkin scored, and Braden Holtby made 29 saves for the Capitals, who led 2-0 4:34 into the game.

"We had everyone going. We were putting pucks to the right areas" Oshie said. "We were shooting a little bit more, getting guys to the net, and I think that gave us some more chances. You've got to tip your hat because they kept coming at the end there, but we were able to hold them off."

Trailing 4-2, the Maple Leafs had a 5-on-3 advantage for 1:53 to start the third period but did not score.

"When you have to sit and think about it a little bit, those moments can weigh on you," Capitals coach Barry Trotz said. "It was almost like there was no doubt when we came in the dressing room. They (the penalty kill) were going to get it done; we just had a good feeling about it."

Auston Matthews scored to make it 4-3 with 8:00 left, but Oshie scored 59 seconds later for a 5-3 lead. Tyler Bozak made it 5-4 with 27 seconds left and Toronto using an extra attacker.

"It's nice that we're able to score goals and get ourselves back in the game, but we didn't play near as good as we needed to," Maple Leafs coach Mike Babcock said. "We talked a lot about how the game was going to be today, but it didn't look like any of that sunk in. We weren't good enough, we didn't compete hard enough. I thought they won all the battles and all the races."

Oshie gave the Capitals a 1-0 lead at 2:58 of the first period, and Ovechkin made it 2-0 1:36 later on the power play. The Maple Leafs scored 42 seconds later when Jake Gardiner's point shot deflected off Zach Hyman's skate at the top of the crease and slipped past Holtby's left pad.

Tom Wilson scored at 13:41 and 16:04 to put the Capitals ahead 4-1. He has three goals in the series after scoring seven in 82 regular-season games.

James van Riemsdyk scored a power-play goal at 5:39 of the second period to make it 4-2.

Oshie's goal at 8:11 of the third period was waved off when it was ruled Nicklas Backstrom interfered with goalie Frederik Andersen.

Goal of the game

Backstrom stole the puck at the Maple Leafs blue line and passed to Oshie, who was cutting to the net. Oshie put a

wrist shot through Andersen's legs to restore Washington's two-goal lead.

Save of the game

Maple Leafs forward Connor Brown outraced Capitals defenseman Nate Schmidt to a loose puck in the Capitals zone and swatted a one-handed shot toward the net at 4:20 of the second period. Holtby kicked out his left pad to make a toe save and keep it 4-1.

Highlight of the game

Capitals defenseman Kevin Shattenkirk knocked down a clearing attempt by Morgan Rielly at the blue line and passed to Ovechkin at the top of the left circle, where he one-timed a shot past Andersen's glove.

Unsung performance of the game

Rielly took a wrist shot at 13:26 of the first period that squeezed through Holtby and was rolling toward the goal line until Wilson dove to swat it away and keep the Capitals up 2-1. He scored 15 seconds later.

"Those plays kind of go into slow-mo," Wilson said. "I could see it on his pants and knew with the shape of the puck it's going to fall down. I had time to jump in make a save there."

They said it

"I don't think it was them so much. I think it was more we beat ourselves today. We didn't come to execute, and we didn't talk to each other enough to break out clean and that cost us. We didn't play anywhere close to what we're capable of." -- *Maple Leafs goalie Frederik Andersen*

"When you're a kid you always have big dreams. I was lucky enough to fulfill them. It's a huge privilege. There's a lot of guys that work hard to get to this level and if you get a chance to play an NHL game it's special. A playoff game? Even better." -- *Capitals forward Tom Wilson*

Need to know

Capitals defenseman Karl Alzner missed his second game with an upper-body injury. ... It was Wilson's first multigoal game in 345 NHL regular-season and playoff games.

What's next

Game 5 of the Eastern Conference First Round at Verizon Center on Friday (7 p.m. ET; NBCSN, CBC, TVA Sports 2, CSN-DC)



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • April 20, 2017

Senators shut out Bruins to win Game 4, take 3-1 series lead

Bobby Ryan scores only goal, Craig Anderson makes 22 saves for Ottawa

by Matt Kalman / NHL.com Correspondent

BOSTON -- [Craig Anderson](#) made 22 saves, and [Bobby Ryan](#) scored in the third period to give the Ottawa Senators a 1-0 win against the Boston Bruins in Game 4 of the Eastern Conference First Round at TD Garden on Wednesday.

The Senators lead the best-of-7 series 3-1 with Game 5 at Ottawa on Friday.

Ryan scored his third goal of the series at 5:49 of the third period. He also scored the overtime goal for a 4-3 win in Game 3 on Monday. He had 13 goals in 62 regular-season games.

"When you look at the big picture, this is an opportunity, I've said it before, to wash that season," Ryan said. "I'm trying to focus on contributing now and be in the moment with it. So far, so good. There are a lot of guys in here that are going to contribute in some way down the stretch, and right now the pucks are going in for me, and that could shift. But I'll take it."

The Bruins thought they scored when [Noel Acciari](#) tipped a shot past Anderson at 10:49 of the second period. But Ottawa coach Guy Boucher challenged and it was ruled Boston was offside.

"Obviously it's disappointing when those things happen," Bruins coach Bruce Cassidy said. "We had a tough time scoring, it was a low-scoring game. But the guys on the bench were good. They said, 'Listen, let's be resilient here.' So I don't think it was a huge factor in the game. It might've given them a bit of a life thinking they got a break, but for us, I don't think it deterred us from what we wanted to do."

The Senators outshot the Bruins 8-5 in the third period and held Boston without a shot for 12:58.

"The effort was there. We have to find ways to fight a little bit more in front of the net and around the [dirty] areas," Bruins center [Patrice Bergeron](#) said. "Make it a little harder for their goalie but also getting open, and that's it. Look at the video and work on things and make some adjustments."

[Tuukka Rask](#) made 26 saves for the Bruins, who got defenseman [Colin Miller](#) back from injury but played without three regular defensemen. [Adam McQuaid](#) (upper body) was injured in Game 2, and [Brandon Carlo](#) (upper body) and [Torey Krug](#) (lower body) have not played in this series.

Goal of the game

Ryan snuck behind Bruins defenseman [Charlie McAvoy](#) to score after a slap pass from the blue line by [Erik Karlsson](#). Ryan tucked a backhand past Rask's stick.

"I saw as soon as [[Derick Brassard](#)] got some time there I knew he was going to come to me and I saw that Bobby was over there," Karlsson said. "I tried not to oversell it and fake

like I was going to shoot it, and luckily he made a really good handle on it and stuck with it and pulled it in somehow."

Save of the game

[Brad Marchand](#) had a chance to give the Bruins the lead with 1:47 remaining in the first period when he broke into the Senators zone after a long pass from Bergeron. Anderson sprawled out toward Marchand and blocked a wrist shot with his right hip while on his stomach.

"You know when I was in junior I had Johnny Bower for a day and that was the story," Anderson said. "He said the first time he ever came out sliding into a guy he was nervous, and I was nervous. You know, I'm just glad it worked out."

Highlight of the game

With Rask off for an extra attacker, Boston forward [David Krejci](#)'s slap shot from the right point was blocked and went to [Marchand](#) near the right post. Anderson dove and twice kept the puck out of the net with his glove and froze the play with 1:03 remaining.

Unsung performance of the game

Ottawa blocked 11 shots, including four during Boston's long stretch without a shot on goal. Defenseman [Cody Ceci](#), who led the Senators with three, blocked Krejci's wrist shot with two seconds remaining.

They said it

"I didn't even think about it, but things happen, it was on me, I was offside, so there's nothing you can do, you just have to continue the game." -- *Bruins forward Noel Acciari, whose goal was overturned because he was the player ruled offside after video review*

"He's our best player, and arguably the best player in the world, so you know every night he's going to break open the game somehow, either shooting or making plays like he did tonight." -- *Senators forward Bobby Ryan on defenseman Erik Karlsson*

Need to know

Anderson has four Stanley Cup Playoff shutouts, three with the Senators and one with the Colorado Avalanche (2010). ... Karlsson (five assists) and Ryan (three goals, two assists) have at least one point in each game. ... Ottawa forward [Tom Pyatt](#) sustained an upper-body injury on his first shift and did not return to the game. ... Ottawa is 4-0-0 in Boston this season.

What's next

Game 5 of the Eastern Conference First Round at Canadian Tire Centre on Friday (7:30 p.m. ET; USA, SN, TVA Sports, NESN)



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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Wild shut out Blues in Game 4, avoid elimination

Devan Dubnyk makes 28 saves, Charlie Coyle, Martin Hanzal score

by Louie Korac / NHL.com Correspondent

ST. LOUIS -- Devan Dubnyk made 28 saves for the second Stanley Cup Playoff shutout of his career, and the Minnesota Wild avoided elimination with a 2-0 victory against the St. Louis Blues in Game 4 of the Western Conference First Round at Scottrade Center on Wednesday.

"We just said coming into this game, we need to win one game and this is the only thing that matters is this one game," Dubnyk said. "This was our Stanley Cup. And that's gonna be the same thing on Saturday, because if not, it's over, and we're not gonna think any further ahead than that. It's gonna be the exact same approach on Saturday, and we'll see where the score is when the buzzer ends and move forward."

Charlie Coyle and Martin Hanzal scored for the Wild, who had three goals in the first three games of the series.

The Blues lead the best-of-7 series 3-1 with Game 5 at Minnesota on Saturday.

"With the two days off, I thought they handled it well among themselves," Wild coach Bruce Boudreau said. "They didn't let themselves get down. They faced some bad times in the last six weeks and they didn't get themselves down. [Heck], it's only one game. They still have a tremendous advantage up three games to one. I think we can play a lot better still than we played tonight. It's going to still be an uphill battle."

Blues goalie Jake Allen made 26 saves.

"It took a little bit for us to get going," Allen said. "They obviously came out hard and played a really good 40 minutes, they played a pretty solid defensive third period. We had a really good push in the third, and it was a little too late."

Coyle made it 1-0 after picking off Allen's pass around the boards and shooting it into an empty net at 16:50 of the first period. It gave the Wild their first lead 2:14:38 into the series.

The Blues thought the play was going to be whistled down for icing. Allen and defenseman Robert Bortuzzo were there near the puck, and when Allen whipped it from behind his net off the side boards, Coyle intercepted it.

"It was one bounce. We're happy to get it," Boudreau said. "They did what they were asked to do on that play. We got a break and we hadn't had too many breaks in the first three games. We'll take any break we can get."

Hanzal scored to give Minnesota a 2-0 lead at 16:41 of the second period.

The goal came after the Blues, who were outshot 11-4 in the first period, came with some of their biggest charges towards the Wild net.

"We started turning it a little bit, but again, details of our game that cost us that one," St. Louis forward Alexander Steen said. "Again, I think throughout the course of the game we were just a second off. We needed to be a little quicker, a little sharper to create the havoc and earn those goals."

Goal of the game

Nate Prosser passed out of the Wild zone to Pominville for a quick lay-off pass at the red line for Hanzal, who built up a burst of speed through the neutral zone. Hanzal gained the blue line, and with Blues defensemen Alex Pietrangelo and Jay Bouwmeester laying back, Hanzal snapped a shot past Allen's blocker from above the faceoff circles. "It was good because it was the first time we've played with a lead," Hanzal said. "It makes them have to make an effort to push back."

Save of the game

Dubnyk, who had faced 16 shots entering the third period, made a save on Blues defenseman Joel Edmundson's shot from the left circle on a rush with 16:45 remaining in the game. "You've just got to try to stay sharp, try to get some puck handles in if you can, and don't force it," Dubnyk said.

Highlight of the game

Despite a rare mistake in the series leading to the first Wild goal, Allen did his best to keep the Blues in the game. Following a Pietrangelo turnover, he made a left-pad save on Nino Niederreiter's shot from the left circle while sliding from his left to right at 7:34 of the second period.

Unsung performance of the game

Defenseman Marco Scandella had four of the Wild's 28 hits, three shots on goal and three blocked shots in 24:22 of ice time, second-most on Minnesota behind Ryan Suter (25:22).

They said it

"We worked hard. We did what we had to do to win. It wasn't always the prettiest of hockey. Again, we did what we set out to do, which was come here and get one. That was the first step." -- *Wild right wing Zach Parise*

"We just came out slow. I thought we were a little casual to start the game, and you know they were taking advantage of it there in the first (period), but we got the pressure on there in the third." -- *Blues captain Alex Pietrangelo*

Need to know

Wild forward Joel Eriksson Ek replaced injured center Erik Haula (upper body) in the Wild lineup. Haula was minus-2 with five shots on goal the first three games of the series. ... The Blues are 2-4 in closeout games the past two seasons.

What's next

Game 5 of Western Conference First Round at Xcel Energy Center on Saturday (3 p.m. ET; NBC, SN, TVA Sports)



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • April 20, 2017

Ducks complete sweep of Flames

Anaheim wins Game 4, advances to Western Conference Second Round

by Aaron Vickers / NHL.com Correspondent

CALGARY -- The Anaheim Ducks became the first team to advance in the Stanley Cup Playoffs when they swept their Western Conference First Round series against the Calgary Flames with a 3-1 win at Scotiabank Saddledome on Wednesday. "It's big. I think any time you can put a team behind you, you definitely want to take advantage of it," Ducks captain Ryan Getzlaf said. "You never want to give life. They're a resilient bunch. They battled right to the end tonight and made us earn it, that's for sure."

Getzlaf, Patrick Eaves and Nate Thompson scored, and John Gibson made 36 saves for the Ducks, who swept a best-of-7 series for the fifth time in their history. They will play the winner of the first-round series between the Edmonton Oilers and San Jose Sharks, which is tied 2-2.

"We obviously got some guys injured now," Gibson said. "I think any time you can get rest and get people healthy, it definitely doesn't hurt."

Sean Monahan scored and Chad Johnson made 20 saves for the Flames, who were eliminated by the Ducks in their previous appearance in the Stanley Cup Playoffs in five games (Western Conference Second Round, 2015).

"It [stinks]," Monahan said. "Getting into the playoffs, it's the most fun to play hockey in the playoffs, and you go out in four [games]. It's not a good feeling. We've got a good team here and we've got to get ready to go for next year."

"Right now and throughout the summer, getting swept in four is going to sting. But coming back next year, this is an exciting team to be on."

Eaves scored on Flames starting goalie Brian Elliott from a sharp angle along the boards just below the hashmarks on the Ducks' third shot of the game to take a 1-0 lead 5:38 into the first period. The goal prompted Flames coach Glen Gulutzan to pull Elliott for Johnson.

Elliott, who finished with two saves, allowed five goals on 27 shots in Game 3 and entered Game 4 with a 3.67 goals-against average and .887 save percentage in three playoff starts.

"As a goalie, you take pride on giving yourself and your team a chance to win every night," Elliott said. "That [goal] off the bat, I still can't explain how it goes under my pad there. I feel bad. I didn't give our guys a chance right off the bat."

Thompson scored on a rebound to make it 2-0 at 6:46. It was the second shot Johnson faced.

Monahan made it 2-1 at 16:07 of the second period, and Johnson stopped Corey Perry's initial shot from the slot and rebound attempt by Chris Wagner two minutes into the third.

Gulutzan pulled Johnson for an extra attacker with 2:39 remaining, but Gibson stopped two shots before Getzlaf scored to make it 3-1 with 6.7 seconds left.

"You learn from things," Getzlaf said. "We have a lot of guys in this room that have been through a lot of things. We have a lot of young guys too that are learning along the way, but

it's our job to settle things down and play the way we did throughout the end of this one."

Goal of the game

During a crease scramble on the power play, Monahan knocked Kris Versteeg's feed out of mid-air and past Gibson. Monahan finished with four power-play goals in the series.

Save of the game

Gibson stopped Dougie Hamilton's point shot at 18:10 and Micheal Ferland's rebound attempt from the slot at 18:11 of the first period with Eaves' holding penalty expiring to preserve the Ducks' 2-0 lead.

Highlight of the game

Gibson got his glove on Versteeg's one-timer with 2:15 remaining and Calgary's net empty. "We expect nothing else from [Gibson]," Getzlaf said. "He's a really good goalie. He's been there all year for us."

Unsung performance of the game

Kevin Bieksa was plus-2 and had two hits while leading the Ducks defense, which is without Sami Vatanen (upper body) and Cam Fowler (lower body), with 21:35 of ice time.

They said it

"I think we just kept getting better and better each game. I think the team that usually gets better, stronger as the playoffs and series goes on, they usually have more success." -- *Ducks goaltender John Gibson*

"You have to tip your hat to the other team sometimes, but we have nothing to be ashamed of. We battled right to the bitter end. As a group, I thought we left everything out there and just came up short." -- *Flames captain Mark Giordano*

"We were able to capitalize on the opportunities that were presented. We had some puck luck, and I thought that in the situations we were presented we took advantage of them." -- *Ducks coach Randy Carlyle*

Need to know

The Ducks have won eight straight games dating back to the regular season. ... The Flames lost each of the first three games of the series by one goal before losing by two (including an empty-net goal) in Game 4. ... Vatanen missed his third straight game.

What's next

Ducks: Western Conference Second Round, TBD

Flames: Season over



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • April 20, 2017



SB NATION
CANES COUNTRY

2017 Calder Cup Playoffs: Charlotte Checkers vs. Chicago Wolves - Matchup Analysis and Series Preview

The Checkers face a solid test in round one, but starting at home should help them get on the right foot.

by [Peter Dewar@pdewar18](mailto:pdewar18) Apr 19, 2017, 5:21pm EDT

With the Charlotte Checkers beginning their playoff run tomorrow night against the Chicago Wolves ([St. Louis Blues](#) affiliate), it's time to take a deeper look into what you might expect from the opponent and the series. The Checkers may have earned the fourth seed in the Central Division by the skin of their teeth, but they're in just the same. The remaining teams all feature 0-0 records and regardless of seeding, the story is yet to be written. On paper, Chicago has certainly had the upper hand against the Checkers. These two teams met eight times in the regular season, with Charlotte posting a 2-1-5 record against the Wolves. Chicago has enjoyed having two of the top four AHL scorers on their regular roster in league MVP [Kenny Agostino](#) (83 pts, 1st) and [Wade Megan](#) (66 pts, 4th), with each having played at least 65 games for the Wolves. Impressively, Agostino was 15 points clear of [Chris Terry](#) (remember him?) in AHL scoring, while Terry's second place and Megan's fourth place were separated by just two points.

The Checkers lack the type of League-leading producers boasted by the Wolves, but are not without some familiar talent of their own. Rookies Andrew Poturalski and [Lucas Wallmark](#) lead Charlotte with 52 and 46 points in 74 and 67 games, respectively, while [Andrew Miller](#) and [Phil Di Giuseppe](#) have also contributed at north of a 0.70 points-per-game clip. Then, of course, [Aleksi Saarela](#) — who is considered day-to-day as he continues to recover from an injury — set the League on fire in his North American debut, scoring six goals and four assists in just nine games during the Checkers' playoff push. They are also going to start the playoffs with [Janne Kuokkanen](#), the Canes' second-round pick from 2016 whose London Knights were eliminated from the OHL playoffs in overtime of Game 7 yesterday. [Kuokkanen was assigned by the Hurricanes to the Checkers this afternoon.](#)

Chicago does have an edge in both facets of special teams play, owning a 20.3% conversion rate on PP and 82.6% penalty kill rate to Charlotte's division-worst 13.1% PP and 80.7% PK. With scorers like Agostino, Megan, and winger [Andrew Agozzino](#) (54 pts, 3rd in team scoring), the Wolves' significant offensive threat becomes even more potent with the man-advantage.

But give Charlotte the edge in goal thanks to the heroics of late addition [Tom McCollum](#), who went an impressive 11-2-3 with a .926% save percentage and a 2.10 GAA as the Checkers chased down the final playoff spot in their division. McCollum, a member of the [Calgary Flames](#) organization who the Checkers picked up on loan from the Stockton Heat in March, has been a revelation, steadying Charlotte's crease after [Michael Leighton](#) was lost for two months with

a lower-body injury. Leighton could return to the Checkers in the next couple of weeks, but the starting job is unquestionably McCollum's to run with.

On the other side of the ice, the Wolves rotated back and forth between a pair of netminders when facing the Checkers. [Ville Husso](#) posted respectable numbers of his own with a .920 save percentage and a 2.37 GAA as he went 13-6-2 on the year. Against the Checkers he was unbeaten, 4-0-0 with a .937 save percentage and a 1.68 GAA. [Jordan Binnington](#), the winning goaltender in Chicago's overtime win on Sunday that put the Checkers into the playoffs, was 2-0-1 against Charlotte this season, posting a .924 save percentage and a GAA of 2.25. His overall numbers didn't quite match Husso, though, with a 16-7-8-3 record, a .911 save percentage and a 2.71 GAA.

The Wolves also come into North Carolina with a bit of a personal connection via three ex-[Hurricanes](#) — forwards [Brad Malone](#) and [Ty Rattie](#) and defenseman [James Wisniewski](#), who joined the team late in the season after playing overseas. Chicago also features the versatile [Vince Dunn](#), a rookie defenseman who finished ninth in AHL scoring among blueliners with 45 points. The Checkers counter on defense with [Jake Chelios](#) (32 pts, 5th in team scoring) and [Haydn Fleury](#), who put up 26 points in his rookie season.

Over the course of the season, each team dealt with the annual AHL adjustment of losing top players to the NHL for periods of time — sometimes even permanently. For the Checkers, that meant having just nine games with former captain [Derek Ryan](#) before he and [Brock McGinn](#) moved up to full time duty in Raleigh early in the year. In Chicago, forward [Ivan Barbashev](#) and defenseman [Brad Hunt](#) made the jump as the team began to find their identity midway through the year. Barbashev now sees time on St. Louis' top line in the [Stanley Cup](#) Playoffs.

To their credit, each team responded with fixes and add-ons being patched on along the way as they ended strong; in March and April, Chicago went 11-6-2 while the Checkers finished 14-4-4.

The two teams also feature the two longest consecutive winning streaks in their division, with Chicago rattling off eight in a row back in late December-early January and Charlotte putting up seven straight through the month of March. [The Checkers' rebound from a rough first half of the year was documented in yesterday's "Year in Review."](#) but surprisingly enough, the Wolves dealt with similar adversity at the outset of the season.



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With just four goals posted in their first three games and zero wins to show for it, the Wolves were in trouble right off the bat. They responded by going 4-0-1 in their next five games as they found their scoring touch, and managed to push aside their awful start as they steadily rose to the top of the division, eventually earning the crown over the Grand Rapids Griffins by one point. Chicago's dominance took a while to manifest, but it seems to have hit at the right time for the Wolves.

As the best-of-5 series begins, look for Charlotte to be jumping early. Their record-setting 27-10-1 mark at

Bojangles' Coliseum will have them feeling confident in hopes of heading into Chicago with a split-series or better. Two wins on home ice would see them needing just one on the road to move on, despite Chicago's confidence in being able to win in Charlotte early in the series.

Your chance to see Charlotte in the first round will be during games one and two of the series, Thursday and Friday night at 7 and 7:15 p.m. at Bojangles Coliseum. We'll be bringing you live coverage from both matchups.

Thursday Stanley Cup Daily: The Flames Burn Out

Anaheim is on to the second round, Minnesota lives to fight another day, and Caps fans exhale.

by **Jake Crouse**, **Brian LeBlanc**, **Brett Finger**, and **Zeke Lukow** Apr 20, 2017, 8:11am EDT

Washington Capitals 5, Toronto Maple Leafs 4 (Series tied 2-2)

The Maple Leafs came into game four with a chance to take a commanding 3-1 series lead, however a slow start doomed Toronto from the start. In just under five minutes the Caps jumped out to a two-goal lead with goals from **Alex Ovechkin** and **T.J. Oshie**. The Leafs tried to claw back in the first period, but back-to-back goals by **Tom Wilson** (!) gave the Caps a 4-1 lead going into the first break.

The Maple Leafs owned both the second and third periods outscoring the Caps 3-1 in the final two periods. The Leafs pulled within one goal with goals from James van Riemsdyk and Auston Matthews. However, **Frederik Andersen** let up a weak five-hole goal to Oshie to put the Caps back up by two. The Leafs pulled within one goal with under a minute left in the game, but couldn't put a second empty-netter past **Braden Holtby**.

Though it's tough to put a win or a loss onto one person, the Leafs have no chance in this series if Andersen has a .815 sv%, which he had last night. The Leafs have to get better goaltending to have a chance to win the series. The Caps were also able to win the first regulation game of the series in large part thanks to Oshie finally getting into the scoring column with two goals. Oshie was a top scorer during the regular season, and the Caps need him to produce to move forward in the playoffs.

The series continues Friday at 7:00 PM at the Verizon Center in Washington, D.C. (The Chris Brown concert originally scheduled for the night has been cancelled, in case you were wondering.) -*Zeke Lukow*

Ottawa Senators 1, Boston Bruins 0 (OTT leads 3-1)

What is usually dubbed a "quiet game" in the regular season -- low scoring, fewer shots overall, non-OT -- is often the most heart-stopping of games in the playoffs. Who will break through first? Who will crack at the worst moment?

Wednesday night, it was the Senators again stepping up in the third period to take a 1-0 Game 4 victory and a 3-1 series lead. The goal, finished off deftly at the net by **Bobby Ryan** (see: "Game 3 hero" for Ottawa, "Game 3 (insert expletive)" for Boston), was in large part due to the incredible set up by **Erik Karlsson**, who one announcer slipped into comparing to Bobby Orr after the play. (Pro tip: don't

compare **Erik Karlsson** to Bobby Orr, especially during a game in Boston.) Karlsson faked a blue-line shot, turned his stick at the last second and **rifled one right to Ryan breaking at the left of the crease.**

But as much as the one goal wins the game, so does the zero for the Bruins. Craig Anderson made some huge saves on **Brad Marchand**: a flailing dive at the puck two minutes in, and a last-minute, flat-on-back glove save to seal the game. In total, he made 22 saves: good, but not a ridiculous amount. It's the quality of those saves that set his performance apart.

The Bruins did find the back of the net in the second period, but it was overturned on an Ottawa challenge. The puck clearly hadn't crossed the blue line before **Noel Acciari** was across, 20 seconds before the goal was scored.

It's "survival mode" time now for the Bruins, who must try to channel whatever helped them win every matchup with the Senators during the regular season, starting on the road Friday at 7:30 for Game 5. -*Jake Crouse*

Minnesota Wild 2, St. Louis Blues 0 (STL leads 3-1)

The Minnesota Wild still have a long way to go, but they took the first step last night in trying to come back from a 3-0 series deficit with a shutout of the St. Louis Blues at Scottrade Center.

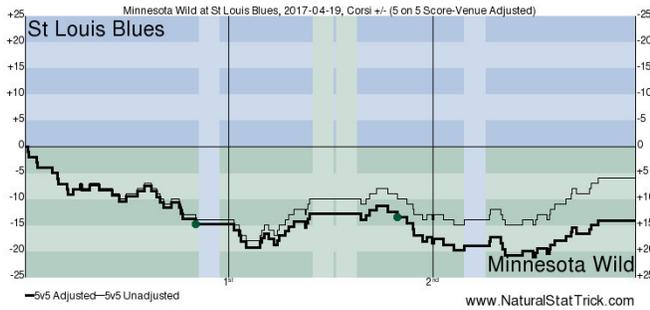
The Wild set the tone early, outshooting the Blues 11-4 and taking a 1-0 lead on Charlie Coyle's second goal of the series with three minutes remaining in the first period. **Martin Hanzal** doubled the Wild's lead at about the same point of the second period, scoring his first career playoff goal to give the Wild the two-goal lead that they wouldn't relinquish.

The rest fell to **Devan Dubnyk**, who looked like the Dubnyk of the first half of the season in recording his second playoff shutout, two years minus a day after his first - which also came against the Blues. He didn't have to be spectacular as the Blues mounted few chances of any significance the rest of the way:



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Jake Allen continued to be solid in the St. Louis net, but he wasn't helped at all by a leaky Blues defense that gave up more than a few breakaways, **including this what-were-they-thinking moment** that required Allen to rob **Eric Staal** midway through the third period.

The Wild head back home to try to keep the series going with Game 5 set for Saturday afternoon at Xcel Energy Center. -Brian LeBlanc**Anaheim Ducks 3, Calgary Flames 1 (ANA wins series 4-0)**

A series of missed opportunities has come to an end for the Calgary Flames as they fell to the Anaheim Ducks on home

ice last night. With the win, the Ducks completed a four-game sweep of the Flames.

Anaheim got off to a fast start on Wednesday, with **Patrick Eaves** finding the back of the net five minutes into the game that prompted Flames coach Glen Gulutzan to pull **Brian Elliott** in favor of Chad Johnson. It didn't much matter; **Nate Thompson** scored on Johnson less than a minute later, and that ended up being enough for the Ducks. Calgary's second-period goal, a power play tally from **Sean Monahan**, was the only one that they could put past a stellar **John Gibson**, recovering from a shaky Game 3 by making 36 saves in the win.

Ryan Getzlaf iced the series with a late empty-net goal in the third period.

This series could have been very different. Countless missed opportunities and a pair of blown leads turned what could've been an upset in favor of the Flames into a very early exit.

The Ducks will now wait for the winner of the **San Jose Sharks-Edmonton Oilers** series. Those two clubs are tied at two games apiece ahead of their Game 5 matchup tonight in Edmonton. -*Brett Finger*

Seven Carolina Hurricanes players to participate at the 2017 IIHF World Championship

Team Sweden will have the distinctive flavor of North Carolina barbecue.

by **Brian LeBlanc@bdleblanc** Apr 19, 2017, 4:10pm EDT

The **Carolina Hurricanes** are out of the playoffs - again - and that means that Canes players are headed overseas - again - to participate in the 2017 IIHF World Championship in Paris and Cologne, Germany.

Seven Hurricanes are going to the tournament, which begins May 5, including four who were selected to play for Sweden.

P	Spelare	Född	CM	KG	L/R	Kontrakt
G	Eddie Läck	1988-01-05	194	85	L	17/18
D	Alexander Edler	1986-04-21	192	97	L	18/19
D	Victor Hedman	1990-12-18	198	101	L	24/25
D	John Klingberg	1992-08-14	186	82	R	21/22
D	Anton Strålman	1986-08-01	184	86	R	18/19
F	Elias Lindholm	1994-12-02	184	87	R	17/18
F	Joakim Nordström	1992-02-25	185	86	L	17/18
F	Victor Rask	1993-03-01	187	91	L	21/22



Mia Läck @mammamialack

This is so cool - finally a dream come true for Eddie - playing for Sweden.

4:39 PM - 18 Apr 2017

Three other players will take part in the tournament as well. Sebastian Aho's season will continue as he joins Finland for the second time in less than a year, after his appearance at the **World Cup of Hockey**, and **Jeff Skinner** (Canada) and **Noah Hanifin** (USA) will also represent their countries.

Three of the four, **Victor Rask**, **Elias Lindholm** and **Joakim Nordstrom**, have represented Sweden at the World Junior Hockey Championship in the past, but this is their first callup to the senior side. **Eddie Läck**, meanwhile, will pull on the *tre kronor* for the first time in his career at any level, eliciting a tweet of pride from Eddie's mom:

Among players not participating in the World Championship are **Teuvo Teravainen** (Finland), who is a pending free agent and likely does not want to risk his contract status, and **Brett Pesce**, **Jacob Slavin** and **Justin Faulk** (USA), the latter of whom was famously left off the World Cup team and may still be smarting from the snub.



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About Last Season: Brett Pesce Performance Review and Grade

From AHL defenseman to NHL regular, Brett Pesce has come a long way in just two seasons.

by Zeke Lukow Apr 19, 2017, 11:03am EDT

Brett Pesce: 2016- 2017 By the Numbers

- Age: 22
- NHL Seasons: 2
- Games Played: 82
- Scoring: 2g-18a-20pts
- Ice Time per Game: 21:12 in all situations, 18:25 ES, 0:37 PP, 2:09 PK
- 5-on-5 Stats: 54.1% CF, 56.8% GF
- Contract Status: Completed the second year of three-year entry-level contract (cap hit \$809,167)

Making the Grade

Brett Pesce was an early season call-up last year, and quickly proved he belonged in the NHL full time. After a successful 69-game rookie season, the main questions heading into the season was whether or not Pesce could avoid a sophomore slump. It's safe to say he did.

While most in the media have singled out Jacob Slavin as the Hurricanes' best defenseman, Pesce has been just as good. Pesce ranked first among defensemen and third among all Hurricanes players in Corsi percentage and ranked second among all Hurricanes in goals for percentage. Pesce and Slavin were paired up for a significant portion of the season and it shows in usage stats. Pesce logged the third most TOI in all situations and on the penalty kill, behind only Slavin and Justin Faulk.

Pesce's numbers are impressive. The combination of high ice time, high Corsi and high goals-for percentages is not typical for a young defenseman, many of whom struggle early in their careers. For a team with a -21 goal differential, it's borderline unthinkable that a defenseman who

statistically plays one-third of the game, almost an entire period 5-on-5, can maintain a 56.8 GF%.

His numbers prove that Pesce is a shutdown defenseman that can handle playing the best of the best. His positioning has improved over last year and has gotten better at how to play when the puck is behind the Canes' net. While the Canes as a team have struggled with those scenarios, Pesce proved to be effective at handling pressure and breaking up plays at the back post by tying up forwards with physical play and an active stick.

Though offensively he is overshadowed by Slavin, Faulk, and Noah Hanifin, Pesce is cementing himself as one of the best defensive players on the team. Paired with Slavin they are a force to be reckoned with and will likely be together for years to come. For this team to be successful in the coming seasons, Pesce will have to continue playing a significant role.



Hurricanes well represented in upcoming 2017 IIHF World Championships

By Peter Koutroumpis 4/20/2017

RALEIGH, N.C. – The Carolina Hurricanes announced on Wednesday that seven players will compete in the 16-team 2017 IIHF World Championship tournament to be played May 5-21 in Paris, France and Cologne, Germany.

Defenseman Noah Hanifin (Boston, Mass.) will suit up for the United States when it opens group play against host Germany at LANXESS Arena in Cologne on May 5.

A product of the United States National Team Development Program (USNTDP), Hanifin won gold with Team USA at the 2014 World Under-17 Hockey Challenge and the 2014 U18 World Junior Championship.

His international resume also includes having represented the U.S. at the 2015 World Junior Championship and the 2016 IIHF World Championship.

Forward Sebastian Aho will play for Finland when it opens the tournament against Belarus in Paris on May 5.

Aho previously represented his home country at the 2016 IIHF World Championship and at the 2016 World Cup of Hockey.

Canada opens play against the Czech Republic on May 5 at AccorHotels Arena in Paris and will include Carolina's leading scorer Jeff Skinner (Markham, Ontario) in the lineup, participating in the tournament for the fourth time in his career.

Four Hurricanes – Victor Rask, Joakim Nordstrom, Elias Lindholm, Eddie Lack – will wear the blue and gold of Sweden at the tournament when it opens play against Russia in Cologne on May 5.

Rask and Nordstrom, teammates on Sweden's gold-medal-winning team at the 2012 World Junior Championship, will each be making their debuts at the IIHF World Championship.



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Lindholm, who won silver medals at the 2012 U18 World Junior Championship as well as the 2013 and 2014 World Junior Championships, will also make his debut with the men's national team.

Goaltender Eddie Lack will be representing his country for the first time at any level.

Notes on Tournament Format: The 16 teams are divided into two groups for the preliminary round. The top-four ranked teams of each group advance to the quarterfinals that will be played cross-over. The first-place team in each preliminary-round group plays the fourth-place team of the other group, while the second-place team plays the third-place team of the other group (1A-4B, 2A-3B, 1B-4A, 2B-3A).

The winning teams advance to the semifinals. Both semifinal games will be played at Lanxess Arena in Cologne. The winning teams of the semifinal games advance to the gold medal game while the semifinal losing teams play for bronze...For all games points shall be awarded as follows: 3 points for the winning team at the conclusion of regulation time; 1 point for both teams at the conclusion of regulation time if the game is tied; an additional point earned for the team winning the game in a 5-minute overtime period, or the shootout if the teams are still tied following conclusion of the overtime period; 0 points for the team losing the game in regulation time.



Revisiting the Canes five preseason questions

Andrew Schnittker, Assistant Sports Editor

The Carolina Hurricanes wrapped up their season last week, finishing outside the playoff picture for the eighth-straight season. Despite some internal growth, the team ended up eight points shy of a wild-card spot. Before training camp, Technician posed [five questions](#) that would be vital to the Canes' season in an attempt to make the playoffs. Let's see how those questions played out.

Will there be a captain, and if so, who?

Following the trade of longtime captain and face of the franchise Eric Staal to the New York Rangers at the 2016 trade deadline, and his subsequent signing with the Minnesota Wild as a free agent last summer, the Canes entered the season without a player wearing the coveted "C" on the front of his jersey. The team seemed in no hurry to do so either, with both general manager Ron Francis and head coach Bill Peters stating as much prior to the season.

There was some speculation that the team would eventually name a captain during the season, but it was eventually confirmed that this would not be the case. The team instead went with a rotating cast of alternates, with forwards Jordan Staal, Jeff Skinner and Victor Rask, along with defensemen Justin Faulk and, before he was traded to the Pittsburgh Penguins at the 2017 trade deadline, Ron Hainsey all wearing the "A" at some point. To hear Francis describe it, the team is in no hurry to name a captain either.

"I don't take that letter lightly at all," Francis said at his deadline day media address. "If we don't feel we have a guy that is capable of wearing that letter, then we're not putting it on somebody. Whether it's this year or next year, until we feel we have the guy that's the right choice, then I'm comfortable not putting the 'C' on somebody."

Despite the playoff miss, the team did not feel a lack of leadership minus a specific captain was an issue this season.

"I don't think so," Skinner said. "I think for me, this year, I was able to be a little bit more a part of that leadership group, and

it's something that I take pride in. I think as you go along, and people talk about the young team in here, I think there's a lot of guys that are leaders. The fact that guys are sort of growing together, guys play for each other; I think you saw that late in the season too. That's a good culture."

While the answer to this all-important question was a no, it does not appear that not naming a captain was a major culprit in the Hurricanes' playoff miss.

Can the team score enough goals?

While there was some improvement in this regard, the answer ultimately ended up being a no here as well, and was definitely one of the major issues that cost the Canes a trip to the postseason. The Canes knew coming into the year that they needed to improve on last year's finish in this regard, when the team finished 27th in the NHL at 2.39 goals per game.

The team did enjoy some nice seasons from individual players, including a career-high 37 goals from Jeff Skinner, a 24-goal, 49-point rookie campaign from Finnish forward Sebastian Aho that saw him rank fifth in a loaded rookie class and a career-high 45 points with 34 assists from Swedish setup man Elias Lindholm.

It was not enough, however. The additions of Aho, fellow Finnish forward Teuvo Teravainen and veteran winger Lee Stempniak did not boost the Canes' offense as much as the team hoped as, despite a jump up to 2.59 goals per game, it stayed in the bottom-third of the league at number 20. Among playoff teams, only the Ottawa Senators ranked below Carolina in goals per game. To make the playoffs next season, the team will have to add some offensive punch and push into the top-half of the league in goal scoring.

Will the goaltending be good enough?

If the answer to the scoring question was a no, then this one is a definitive, resounding no. Poor play from their keepers was the number-one reason the Canes are not playing playoff hockey at the moment. After ranking second-worst in



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the league with a .902 team save percentage last year, the Canes' team save percentage actually dropped a point to .901, though that was good for 26th in the league this season.

Simply put, that won't cut it. The struggles of Cam Ward and Eddie Lack have been well-documented, with Ward posting a .905 save percentage and Lack .902 this year. Francis stated at his exit interview that goaltending will be an area of focus this offseason, and he has already taken the first step in letting go goalie coach David Marcoux. If Francis wants his fourth season as general manager to end in a playoff berth, adding at least one upgrade between the pipes needs to be his top priority this summer.

Will rookies shine again?

Following a strong showing from rookie blueliners Jaccob Slavin, Brett Pesce and Noah Hanifin last year, there was a question of if the Canes would see a first-year player shine again going into this season, with Aho the strongest candidate to do so. He delivered. Ranking fifth in a loaded rookie class with 49 points, the young Finn showed off his considerable talent in his freshman campaign. From his first goal, to his first hat trick, to the many clutch plays he produced, Aho's first season was something to remember.

He was not the only freshman to make his mark, however. Power forward Brock McGinn had a solid rookie season as well, putting up seven goals and 16 points in 57 games, including a strong stretch over a Hurricanes four-game winning streak in mid-January that saw him earn the NHL's third star of the week. McGinn added an element of needed physicality to the Canes' lineup as well. Both he and Aho should be big pieces in the Hurricanes' forward corps moving forward.

Will the Hurricanes make the playoffs?

See questions two and three. Though the team did see some internal improvements and strong individual seasons, poor goaltending and an overall lack of scoring ultimately kept Carolina on the outside looking in for an eighth-straight season. Francis seems to have a plan of action for the offseason and ending that streak. Until the team proves otherwise, the questions about goaltending and scoring will persist, and Francis will need to work toward making the answers to those questions a yes at season's end next year if the Canes want to play past early-April for the first time since 2009.



SERIES PREVIEW: CENTRAL DIVISION SEMIFINALS - CHECKERS VS CHICAGO

Written by Nicholas Niedzielski Published: April 19, 2017

The Calder Cup Playoffs kick off in Charlotte on Thursday night!

Before Game 1 of the Central Division Semifinals, brush up on the ins and outs of the Checkers and their opponents, the division champion Chicago Wolves.

FORWARDS

Charlotte

Although they lost some big weapons early on this season, the Checkers have been adding more and more kick to their offensive arsenal as the year has progressed, and now they could be slated to have their most dangerous group of forwards in a long time. The rookie duo of Andrew Poturalski and Lucas Wallmark have been the leaders of what proved to be an extremely deep well of offensive production this season for Charlotte. The team boasts established powers at this level (Phil Di Giuseppe, Andrew Miller), talented physical presences (Valentin Zykov, Andrej Nestrasil, Patrick Brown) and more, and now could be poised to gain even more firepower.

While they haven't been cleared to play just yet, leading goal

scorer Wallmark and Danny Kristo, who had 10 points in 14 games this season, have been ruled "probable" for tomorrow's Game 1 by head coach Ulf Samuelsson. In addition, Finnish prospect Alekis Saarela, who had a staggering six goals and 10 points in 9 games this season, is close to returning as well, though Samuelsson dubbed him "day-to-day" and said he "may or may not be available" for Game 1. Add to that Wednesday's assignment of highly-touted prospect Janne Kuokkanen from the junior ranks, and the Checkers could be looking at the option of trotting out a full 12-man lineup of scoring threats.

"We've had a lot of good lineups," said Samuelsson. "We've had a lot of lineups with some less recognizable names that have won games. So I'm not as focused on names as much as I am the level of play we have. We have a deep roster right now, we have a lot of players to choose from, so the competition is very hard."

Chicago

The Wolves' offensive attack has been a force overall throughout the season, finishing the campaign tied for fourth in the AHL in terms of goals per game, and the majority of that production has come from their top-tier talent, which



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includes the league's leading goal scorer (Wade Megan) and MVP (Kenny Agostino).

"They have one of the best top lines in the AHL and they've got the best player in the AHL," said Samuelsson. "We have to play great defense. They will get some chances, but we're going to try to push them in their end as much as possible."

Beyond that line there's Samuel Blais, a rookie out of the QMJHL who has shown a knack for finding the back of the net, racking up 26 goals during his first pro year. But without the likes of Landon Ferraro, Ivan Barbashev and Magnus Paajarvi, the Wolves' depth up front has taken a bit of a hit. They will likely lean on those high-end players, though skaters like Brett Sterling, Jordan Caron and Bryce Gervais can provide a substantial threat if they get going.

DEFENSEMEN

Charlotte

The Checkers, who ended the 2016-17 campaign ranked 12th in the AHL in terms of goals against per game, have been carried down the stretch by the same group of six defensemen – Trevor Carrick, Jake Chelios, Dennis Robertson, Roland McKeown, Haydn Fleury and Philip Samuelsson. That corps has played with the same three pairings in every game since Feb. 21, when the Hurricanes struck a deal with Montreal to send Keegan Lowe to St. John's and acquire Samuelsson. That trade coincided directly with the Checkers' hot streak, as the team picked up points in 20 of 25 games from that point on.

Jake Chelios continues to pace the back end in scoring, while Haydn Fleury has quietly become one of the group's most consistent powers. The rookie has looked stronger and stronger as the season has worn on, and his plus-16 rating during the regular season matched the highest by any skater in franchise history.

Chicago

While their offense garners most of the headlines, the Wolves have put together a solid season defensively, finishing with the eighth-best goals allowed per game average in the AHL. Things have been up-and-down on that end for the Wolves to end the season – they allowed three or more goals in five of the final 10 games of the regular season - but Chicago's defensemen make up for it with some impressive point totals from the blue line. Leading that charge is rookie Vince Dunn, who pumped in 45 points while maintaining a plus-15 rating.

GOALTENDING

Charlotte

If there was one moment that you could point to as the start of the Checkers' rapid ascension, it would be the acquisition of netminder Tom McCollum. Since he was assigned to Charlotte on March 8, the team is 13-2-4, winning nine of 10 at home and picking up a point in eight of nine on the road. The veteran netminder has turned in stellar numbers along the way and helped kickstart his new team.

"Tom arrived here and showed us some stability between the pipes," said Samuelsson. "He gave us confidence and everything started building from there. A lot of players started playing better, we started getting healthier, and our guys

were really aiming to make the playoffs."

Having familiarity with the postseason after several successful Calder Cup Playoff runs with the Grand Rapids Griffins, McCollum is about as good of a goalie as a team could want at this point in the season. And yet, the Checkers' crease situation may still improve from here.

While Samuelsson has held onto his decision to start McCollum in Game 1 on Thursday, the head coach announced after practice on Wednesday that Michael Leighton would dress and be an option going forward. The AHL legend has been out since Feb. 17 with an injury that required surgery to fix. But after rejoining the team for practice this week, Leighton will be ready for game action, thus giving the Checkers a formidable one-two punch in goal.

Chicago

The Wolves' goaltending situation was about as split as it could be during the regular season, with Jordan Binnington shouldering the biggest load of games at 32, followed by Pheonix Copley's 25 appearances and rookie Ville Husso's 22. With Copley being shipped to Hershey at the trade deadline, the tandem of Binnington and Husso will take on the Checkers in round one. Both goalies have put up solid numbers, with Husso's slightly edging those of Binnington, though the latter has picked up the majority of the team's wins this season.

After Copley's departure, Binnington earned seven consecutive starts between the pipes, but since then the duo has split crease time pretty evenly, though Husso ended up playing six of the team's last nine games during the season.

"Playoffs are a new experience," said Samuelsson when asked about facing a rookie goalie in the playoffs. "You really get to judge your players now when the pressure is mounting. You never know how they will react. But you have to know how to react in these situations."

SPECIAL TEAMS

Charlotte

A big storyline this season has been the Checkers' struggles on the man advantage. The team has been buried at the very bottom of the AHL's rankings for the majority of the season and while that's where they would finish the season, the team has seen a dramatic improvement from the unit.

The Checkers have recorded 15 power-play goals in their last 17 games, a 23 percent clip. That run includes power-play goals against four teams who ranked in the AHL's top 13 penalty kills.

"The shot volume is up," said Samuelsson on what is behind his team's improvement. "We're getting the puck to the net more often. Fleury and Philip have good chemistry, they're getting a lot of one-timers off, and we have four guys reacting to the shots. Every shot you get, something great can happen."

Chicago

Helping to boost the Wolves' offensive numbers this season has been a strong power play that finished the year ranked eighth in the AHL with a 20.3 percentage. And just like at



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even strength, their high-end scorers have led the way. AHL MVP Agostino paced the team with 35 points on the man advantage, while his linemate Agozzino earned a team-best 11 of his 18 goals on the man advantage. From the back end, Vince Dunn has been a key cog in Chicago's unit, collecting 16 helpers on the power play.

"They have very good passing skill in that group, so I think our stick work and working together as a group of four in the middle will be big," said Samuelsson. "Making sure we keep the shots on the outside and not the seam plays that the Wolves always try."

The Wolves saw a slight dip on the other end, however, finishing 13th overall in penalty killing, and the Checkers have been able to take advantage of that, converting on four of their 13 man advantages during the two clubs' last four meetings.

3 TO WATCH

Charlotte

- **Andrew Poturalski** – After going through a six-game scoreless drought in late March, his longest of the year, Poturalski returned from his NHL debut with a vengeance, finishing the year with four points in the last five games. The rookie's 52 points this season led the team and ranked third among all league rookies, making Poturalski a nightmare for defenders.
- **Lucas Wallmark** - Wallmark has only played three games for the Checkers since March 26, but not even that absence could keep him from setting franchise records for rookie goal scorers. Armed with a deadly shot from the top of the slot, Wallmark wrapped up his regular season with 11 points in the last 10 games.
- **Phil Di Giuseppe** - Again splitting his time between the NHL and AHL, Di Giuseppe has no problem putting up points at this level. The third-year pro has shown a newfound physicality this season, forcing his way around defensemen and into the offensive zone on several occasions, and has quickly developed chemistry with the players around him, picking up eight points in seven games since returning from his most recent NHL stint.

Chicago

- **Kenny Agostino** – A former fifth-round pick, Agostino exploded this season for an AHL-best 83 points (24g, 59a) in 65 games, earning himself MVP honors. The 6-foot-1 winger has been a consistent force for the Wolves, only failing to record points in consecutive games on two instances, neither of which lasted more than three contests. The bad news for Chicago is that Agostino missed the last three games of the season due to injury, making him a bit of a question mark heading into this series.
- **Wade Megan** - After totaling 34 goals across his first four pro seasons, the 26-year-old Megan made the leap this year, netting 33 goals in 73 games to capture the AHL's goal-scoring title. Centering the Wolves' dominating top line, Megan has tormented teams across the league this season with his quick shot and knack for finding the puck, especially the Checkers, as the Boston University product lit them up for six goals and 11 points in eight games against Charlotte this year.
- **Samuel Blais** - Making the jump to the pro game hasn't slowed down the 20-year-old Blais, as he netted 26 goals this season, good for second on Chicago and second among all AHL rookies. Blais has seen ups and downs this season, as the majority of first-year pros do, but he enters the playoffs on a tear, having recorded a goal in four straight games to end the regular season.

HEAD-TO-HEAD

As divisional foes, the Checkers and Wolves are extremely familiar with each other, having squared off eight times during the regular season. Chicago had the upper-hand in that series, going 6-1-0-1 and picking up at least a point in each of the last seven of those. Nearly all the contests have been closely contested, however, as three were decided by one goal and three more were one-goal games heading into the final five minutes of regulation. As lights-out as he has been during the Checkers' hot run, Tom McCollum has had some trouble with the Wolves, as Chicago handed the netminder his only two regulation losses this season, saddling him with a 3.24 goals-against average over four games. On the other side, Husso and Binnington combined to go 6-0-1 with a 2.12 goals against average versus the Checkers this season.

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CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • April 20, 2017

SportScan

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

1060628 Websites

ESPN / Change in intensity brings Capitals back to series deadlock with Leafs

Pierre LeBrun

TORONTO -- The Washington Capitals roared out of the gates for a second straight game Wednesday night, but this time they hung on for a key Game 4 victory, beating the pesky Toronto Maple Leafs 5-4.

The top-seeded Capitals evened the first-round playoff series at two games apiece.

A four-goal first period saw the Caps dominate the Leafs, but just like in Game 3, the Leafs scratched their way back to make things interesting.

Auston Matthews' third-period goal cut the lead to 4-3 with eight minutes to go, and the Air Canada Centre buzzed with frantic anticipation of perhaps a fourth consecutive overtime game.

EDITOR'S PICKS

Moment of truth for Capitals

The true test of the team's talent and character wasn't supposed to come this early for the Washington Capitals. How they respond to the pressure of needing to win now will be key.

Kids, comebacks, unlikely heroes among playoff surprises

Auston Matthews isn't the only youngster making waves this postseason, which has featured a raft of rallies, shocking potential sweeps and unexpected stars like Blues goalie Jake Allen.

Toronto's turnaround keyed by Leafs' leap of faith

A year ago, the last-place Maple Leafs won the Auston Matthews sweepstakes. Now hockey's former lovable losers are two wins away from knocking off the No. 1 team -- and they ooze confidence.

But T.J. Oshie scored his second goal of the game at 12:59 to give Washington a crucial insurance goal.

Toronto native Tom Wilson scored twice for the Caps, saved a goal and made head coach Barry Trotz look smart for promoting the winger to the third line. Tyler Bozak scored with less than a minute to go to make it close, but this time the Leafs weren't coming back.

Alex Ovechkin scored from his office on a bomb in the opening period, and the Caps now head home in a much better place mentally after opening the series with three consecutive overtimes games, two of which they lost to the No. 8-seeded Leafs.

The Caps were able to aggressively forecheck and force turnovers from the Leafs, which was the kind of thing most people expected to happen. Toronto looked disorganized defensively, especially in the first period, leaving Capitals players uncovered shift after shift. The Caps also tightened up their gap coverage, preventing many Leafs passing plays in transition that had been successful in the opening three games.

ESPN LOADED: 04.20.2017

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ESPN / Columbus Blue Jackets' desperate composure helped them avoid a sweep by the Pittsburgh Penguins

Craig Custance: I liked how the Columbus Blue Jackets maintained their desperation and composure, even when the Pittsburgh Penguins came charging back, something that didn't happen earlier in the series. The defensive pair of Jack Johnson and David Savard drew the assignment of slowing Sidney Crosby, and did a great fantastic job defending and keeping him off the scoresheet. It's just one game, but those Columbus fans deserved something to get excited about.

EDITOR'S PICKS

Face fracture sidelines Blue Jackets' Werenski

Blue Jackets defenseman Zach Werenski will miss the rest of the postseason because of a broken cheekbone, suffered when the rookie took a puck to the face on a shot by the Penguins' Phil Kessel.

Power Rankings: Penguins, Predators and Blues soar

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

Pierre LeBrun: The Jackets looked like a team extra-motivated to not be swept in front of their fans. They really do look like a squad that feeds off that energetic crowd in Columbus. I saw lots of pride on the line there Tuesday night -- look at Boone Jenner's goal celebration after he got the insurance goal. That didn't look like a team that was down 3-zip in a series. The Penguins are going to win this series but I think the Jackets made it clear they're not going down without a fight.

Scott Burnside: I think the fact the Penguins didn't really show up for Game 4 until early in the second period was a benefit to the Blue Jackets, who face the unlikely task of winning four in a row against the defending Stanley Cup champs without top young defenseman Zach Werenski, who is out for the season with facial injuries. This was an angry, testy game and I agree with Craig that when it looked like Pens might storm all the way back from a 3-0 deficit, the Blue Jackets scored early in the third to keep the game in hand. Can they keep that energy and grittiness up on the road in Pittsburgh in Game 5? In some ways Game 4 was a gimme. Now the real work starts.

ESPN LOADED: 04.20.2017

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Sportsnet.ca / Flames unable to get goaltending, luck required to last long

The Ducks topped the Flames 3-1 to sweep them 4-0 and move on to the second round.

Ryan Dixon

April 20, 2017, 2:53 AM

The Calgary Flames were always going to need a bit of goaltending and a little luck to hang with the Anaheim Ducks. Getting neither meant they never really stood a chance.

The Flames became the first team bounced from the 2017 Stanley Cup Playoffs when, on home ice at the Scotiabank Saddledome, they lost Game 4 by a 3-1 count to the Ducks. Patrick Eaves, Nate Thompson and Ryan Getzlaf scored for Anaheim, while Sean Monahan registered the lone Calgary tally. For the Flames, it was the final blow in a stinging sweep at the hands of a club they just can't seem to figure out.

One thing everybody watching the series knew was that Calgary desperately needed a strong performance from goalie Brian Elliott, who opened the door to a big Anaheim comeback in Game 3 with a very weak goal on the glove side. Instead of a bounce-back, they got another back-breaker when, 5:38 into the contest, Eaves swept a harmless-looking shot from the half-wall that somehow squeezed under Elliott and into the net.

"I still can't explain how it goes under my pad there," Elliott said. "I feel bad, I didn't give our guys a chance right off the bat."

He also didn't get an opportunity to atone for the error, as coach Glen Gulutzan — who did not like his team's start in general — opted to pull Elliott in favour of Chad Johnson right away.

"It's definitely a short leash," said Elliott, who never removed his mask while sitting on the bench during the first period. "I'm not saying I deserved a longer one after that. It's tough when you can't go out and redeem yourself."



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Eaves' goal represented the third time in the series Anaheim grabbed the lead in the opening frame. And Johnson had barely settled into the crease when the Ducks came back for more. Corey Perry fired a puck on goal that Johnson stopped, but when Sam Bennett couldn't clear the rebound, Thompson whacked it home for his fourth point in the past two games.

The flat start by the Flames was something Gulutzan sensed coming.

"To be quite frank, I worried about that from the morning skate," he said.

To its credit, instead of crumbling, Calgary pushed back. The Flames took over the game in the middle period, cutting the lead to one when Monahan — for the fourth time in as many outings — netted a power-play marker.

Calgary chased the equalizer in the third, but John Gibson — one game after being pulled — was equal to the task, turning aside 12 shots in the final stanza and 36 overall. With Johnson on the bench, Getzlaf sealed the deal after Anaheim, true to its savvy nature, won some key defensive-zone faceoffs and clogged up shooting lanes as the Flames swarmed.

"That's a good hockey team over there," said Calgary captain Mark Giordano. "They find ways to win, they're hard to play against, they're big and skilled. Sometimes you gotta tip your hat."

Still, there are moments that will surely stick with Calgary well into the summer. The Flames entered the series with a nearly unfathomable 25-game regular-season losing streak at the Honda Center in Anaheim, yet could very easily have won either of the series' first two contests. A brutal line change allowed the Ducks to tie Game 1 after Calgary had worked to gain a second-period lead, while Game 2 was lost late in the proceedings on a horrible deflection off Lance Bouma's skate and into the net.

In Game 3, Calgary coughed up a three-goal lead and, 90 seconds into overtime, a centring attempt by Perry bounced off Elliott, then defenceman Michael Stone and over the line. In the past 48 hours, numerous Flames shook their head while saying some variation of, "We don't feel we deserve to be in this hole, but here we are."

Even the Ducks acknowledged they were on the right side of some tasty rolls.

"You can't discredit the opposition," Anaheim coach Randy Carlyle said. "They were true to their word in saying they deserved, probably, a better fate in some of those situations. But this is sports and when you're on the winning side, hopefully you've taken advantage of some of the things you were presented with and I think that's the way it worked out for us."

Certainly the series was about more than the capricious fancies of the hockey gods. Anaheim, a team that won the Pacific Division with 105 points, outscored Calgary 9-2 at five-on-five, limiting the Flames to that total despite playing the entire series without top-flight defenceman Cam Fowler and three of four games without another injured blue-liner, Sami Vatanen.

Then there was the goaltending. Elliott finished the series with an abysmal .880 save percentage, while Gibson posted a .926 mark and Jonathan Bernier was perfect in relief in Game 3, allowing his team to hang around long enough to snatch victory. While the discrepancy was stark, the Flames preferred to focus on the work Elliott did all year in helping the team snag the second-last playoff spot in the West.

"The reason why we're here is Moose, to be honest," said Giordano. "Great season by him. It was tough to see that one go in, for sure. We battled hard to get that one for him and we just came up a little bit short again."

Whether or not Elliott, an unrestricted free agent, will be back next year is just one point of uncertainty for the Flames heading into the off-season. But there's little question the organization is trending the right way. A couple years ago, when Calgary bowed out to the Ducks in five games, their presence in the playoffs felt like a bit of an aberration. This time, it seems like the start of a quality run.

"We had some young guys step up, even from two years ago, against a really good team," said Gulutzan.

And tough as it is to swallow right now, the hard-earned wisdom will serve them well down the road.

"It's a learning experience for all of us on how fine the line is between winning and losing in playoffs," Giordano said.

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Sportsnet.ca / Capitals deliver defiant statement in Game 4 win over Leafs

Chris Johnston

@reporterchris

April 19, 2017, 10:08 PM

TORONTO – The scoreboard read 5-4 and the landmines were scattered everywhere.

About the only victory the Toronto Maple Leafs could claim on Wednesday night is that they managed to pack up and leave Air Canada Centre without stepping on any of them.

There were several different ways a Game 4 loss could have been chalked up as an aw-shucks near-miss, from the 19-3 shots advantage over Washington in the third period to the fact they came within a botched 1-on-4 clearing attempt from forcing overtime.

But the Leafs instead took a deeper level of self-reflection and thus avoided lying to themselves about what really happened here.

"For sure, it is a lost opportunity," said head coach Mike Babcock. "It doesn't feel like it – it is. I think Game 1 in their building you could say that, but I didn't feel like that, I just felt that was a confidence builder for our team. You're playing a team, they're the best team in hockey and here you are.

"I thought today was the first time that maybe we weren't scared enough of them and it looked like it because our competition level wasn't good enough."

They had a chance to shove Washington to the edge of a cliff. An opportunity to create one serious pucker in the U.S. capital.

Then they were thoroughly dominated for 39 minutes 53 seconds, and extremely fortunate to only be trailing 4-2 when Lars Eller and Brooks Orpik each took brain-cramp penalties. That offered a lifeline in the form of a lengthy 5-on-3 power play, which helped spark a furious third-period rally that fell short.

However, none of that should mask the gulf between the teams beforehand, when Washington broke free of the mounting doubts around it and built a 44-24 edge in shot attempts at even strength. The Capitals brought pressure and neutral-zone structure.

It almost looked as though the Leafs were stuck in mud.

"We didn't play anywhere close to what we're capable of," lamented goalie Frederik Andersen, who included his own performance in that blunt assessment. "We know that. We know what to do, we know how to play."

Added forward Connor Brown: "When we skate well we're tough to handle and we showed that in the later parts of these last two games. So I think it comes down to giving ourselves a shot and executing right out of the gate."

That would seem to be particularly imperative for Game 5 on Friday night, when the Leafs head into the rocking red Verizon Center trying to find another victory. With the series now down to a best-of-three, they will need to win at least one more time in D.C. to advance.

The good news for Toronto is that these games tend to be like snowflakes. No two are exactly alike.

And the fact they demonstrated no open signs of delusion after Game 4 would suggest there'll be a heightened level of preparation. The Leafs wound up ahead in shots (34-27) and high-danger scoring chances (11-6), and nearly erased 2-0 and 4-1 deficits, but they failed to impose their will on the Presidents' Trophy winners.

Save for a brief scramble in the dying seconds with Andersen on the bench, Washington never had so much as a kernel of doubt placed in its mind.

"Honestly, I thought we played a pretty good 60 minutes," said agitator Tom Wilson, who scored twice in a building where he once dreamed of being a Leaf.



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The challenge on both sides is largely between the ears. There will be adjustments, sure, but execution is paramount in a series where the aggregate score is 14-14 and the total shots are 150-147 in favour of Toronto.

"All we can do is control the way we prepare," said Leafs defenceman Morgan Rielly. "We have confidence that if we play our system and as good as we can, have a good start and do everything we need to do, we'll keep winning games. The players don't change for the most part, the systems don't change (but) the will to win, the drive, the competitiveness can change, the focus (can) change.

"So it's a matter of being on top of all those things."

Mental lapses will become even more costly now.

The Leafs failure to score on a 5-on-3 that spanned 1:53 — just like the Capitals' inability to convert on one that lasted a full two minutes in Game 3 — was a huge blown opportunity. Having four players around a puck and failing to safely clear it with only Andre Burakovsky forechecking was inexcusable.

Especially since it immediately ended up on T.J. Oshie's stick for the game-winner.

"Yeah, I tried to flip 'er up and then fumbled it and then it was in a pile and it was just kind of lost in our feet," said Brown. "That's the way it goes."

It simply wasn't a night where they did enough right to win. Perhaps it's a sign of maturity, or at least a proper mentality, that they so willingly acknowledged that.

"The way I look at this is when you compete at a real high level, lots of things go your way," said Babcock. "When you don't, they don't go your way. Hockey is a fair game. Ninety-nine per cent of the time the team that competes the hardest wins.

"I thought today's game was fair."

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Sportsnet.ca / Craig Anderson gives performance to be proud of in Game 4

Kristina Rutherford

@KrRutherford

April 20, 2017, 12:51 AM

BOSTON — Craig Anderson had already stopped Brad Marchand on one breakaway — it was the first shot he saw all night, in fact.

And so, when a second chance came not long after for the guy who scored 39 times in the regular season, Anderson had one thought.

"Johnny Bower," the Ottawa Senators goalie said, with a huge grin, after his team's 1-0 win on Wednesday.

A story Anderson heard from the four-time Stanley Cup winner back when he played junior explains why Anderson came way out of his net, and when Marchand had his head down, cutting to the middle, Anderson splayed out and poke-checked the puck away, just as Bower told him he'd done once when he was scared on a breakaway.

"I was nervous," Anderson said. "I'm just glad it worked out."

It sure did.

Anderson was spectacular, making 22 saves and pitching a shutout in Game 4, leading the Senators to a third straight win over the Bruins, and a second straight victory at TD Garden to give Ottawa a commanding 3-1 lead in the series.

Captain Erik Karlsson was his usual ridiculous self, Bobby Ryan scored another winner, the Bruins scored one that didn't count, and now the Senators head home with one win to go and three more chances to get it.

"We made the plays when we needed to, and we stuck with it, and obviously Andy played huge for us in net, he really kept us in it going into the third," said Karlsson, who had his fifth assist of the series. "Andy was a rock for us, and probably stole this one for us."

After a scoreless two periods, Ryan struck just under six minutes into the third, deflating this crowd of 17,565, which included Gord Downie, Denna Laing, Mel Gibson and Bobby Orr.

The goal came on account of a beautiful Karlsson pass, which is becoming a customary signature of every game in this series. So, too, is the praise for him that follows every game.

"He's our best player and arguably the best player in the world," Ryan said.

Added head coach, Guy Boucher: "This guy has become something else in every aspect."

On the goal, Karlsson pulled back his stick like he was going to take a slapshot from the point, but then he slapped a pass to Ryan, on the off post. Ryan, the overtime hero a night earlier in this building, handled it, and after a couple whacks he used his long stick to jam it in the net, while goalie Tuukka Rask and captain Zdeno Chara sprawled after it.

Chara was lying partly in the net, face down, after the puck went in.

"Just the perfect pass," Ryan said. He'd almost given up on the chance that puck was headed his direction, too, and charged toward the net to put up a screen. "Karl's got that ability to kind of steer guys with his eyes, and I think he did that a little bit, he opened up five feet for me in there by waiting, waiting, waiting..."

"I got lucky that I stayed, because he put it right on my stick. It was an easy play for me."

Well, kind of. Ryan uses a longer than usual stick (his explanation, with a smile: "Something's gotta make up for slow feet,") and he needed all of it to stretch and bang that puck in.

"I was as relieved as anybody that it crossed the line, just barely," Ryan said.

The Bruins had their chances, but it seemed nothing was going right, aside from the play of Rask, who was spectacular, with 26 saves. Boston got a penalty for too many men with 4:10 to go.

Late in the game, with Rask out of his net — and a whistle break that featured the appropriately selected tune, "Livin' on a Prayer" — Marchand had a great chance on a rebound from the side of the net, but Anderson reached back to shut the door. Again.

Then Marchand looked up at the ceiling, which pretty much explained his night. He had six shots, and two breakaways, but couldn't buy one. Asked if he was feeling frustrated after the game, Marchand's response was: "Yep, what about it?"

"It's frustrating when I had two Grade A chances, and should have capitalized on at least one of them," he said. "So that's tough."

With good goaltending at both ends, Ryan figured his goal would stand up as the winner. "Tonight was one of those games, just felt like there was going to be one goal all night long, and when I got it, I felt like we could lock it down," he said.

There were two goals, though. Sort of. The Bruins' goal — called back, thanks to an offside review — came thanks in large part to rookie defenceman Charlie McAvoy, who made his NHL debut in these playoffs, and had a few good chances.

Centreman Riley Nash bounced a pass off the boards to McAvoy at the blue line, and his slapshot was redirected by Noel Acciari and past Anderson. The 19-year-old McAvoy celebrated with a small fist-pump — the kid acts like he's been here before.

The late offside call prompted stick taps from Senators forwards Mark Stone and Derick Brassard, and boos and chants of "Bulls---!" from the crowd.

So, through 15 shots, Anderson remained perfect.

He was stellar early, and had to be. The first shot he faced Wednesday came when the puck hopped over Karlsson's stick, sending Marchand on his first breakaway of the game, but the Senators goalie shut the door on the five-hole attempt.

Despite outshooting Boston 14-12 in the first, it was the Bruins who had more scoring chances.



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"[Anderson] made some really huge stops for us when we needed him to, when we really weren't there for him," Karlsson said. "That's what we need."

In interviews following the morning skate on Wednesday, Anderson gave a bunch of one-word answers and he blinked a lot, and then he walked away. Who knows what was bugging him, but clearly whatever he was feeling didn't hurt him on the ice.

"It's one of those things where, we're people too, we can have mood swings. This morning I just wasn't feeling it, so I apologize," Anderson said. "That's not a habit. That's not one I want to be proud of."

That Game 4 performance, on the other hand, is a different story.

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 04.20.2017

1060633 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Unlikely hero Tom Wilson becoming a big concern for the Maple Leafs

Luke Fox

@lukefoxjukebox

April 20, 2017, 12:10 AM

TORONTO – The Stanley Cup playoffs prefer their heroes homegrown and unlikely. But not quite like this.

In Game 1, Tom Wilson stretched out a long arm to catch a puck, dropped it, and whipped home the overtime winner for his first-ever post-season goal.

In Game 4, Wilson was a human three-goal swing, the difference in a 5-4 Washington Capitals victory that turns the series into a best-of-three as Dart Guy powders his face for another D.C. roadie.

The wonderful irony here is that Wilson is a born-and-bred Torontonian, a kid who grew up skating local rinks and worshipping the very Maple Leafs he keeps raking this spring.

Darcy Tucker was his guy. All smiles and adrenaline after Wednesday's win, Wilson half-joked that Tucker should quit tweeting "Go, Leafs, go!" and throw him a bone.

"When you're a kid, you always have big dreams. I was lucky enough to fulfill them," said Wilson, after the first two-goal performance of his NHL life.

"It's a huge privilege. There's a lot of guys that work hard to get to this level, and if you get a chance to play an NHL game it's special. A playoff game? Even better."

Playoff time !!

— Tom Wilson (@tom_wilso) April 10, 2017

The majority of Capitals have taken optional skates off this series, understandable given the three OTs. Never Wilson.

On Tuesday, he was one of the few who skated out in Etobicoke on the off-day, one of the fewer who spoke to reporters afterward, and one of the fewest who spoke confidently down 2-1.

He stressed the need for dirty goals and havoc, the creation of urgency. Wilson said the Caps need to erase luck from the equation and take care of business in regulation.

He pointed to the opening of Game 3, when the Caps exploded to leads of 2-0 and 3-1.

"If we're playing like that, I don't think any team can play with us," Wilson asserted. "It doesn't matter if we won the Jennings. It comes down to getting the job done in the playoffs."

"Protect the house. Protect Holts."

Wednesday morning, coach Barry Trotz promoted Wilson to the third line to give Toronto a big body to worry about and jump-start Lars Eller and Andre Burakovsky.

Or, as Trotz put it: "He's Tom Wilson. Everybody knows who Tom Wilson is. That's what he brings."

Then Wilson made all of Wednesday's words and North Toronto dreams real.

With the Capitals up 2-1 in the first frame, crafty Toronto defenceman Morgan Rielly attacked the right flank and quick-snapped a puck that trickled through Braden Holtby's skinny pants.

In the nick of time was Wilson, a six-foot-four, 215-pound life preserver plunging headfirst into the blue paint and swiping the puck away from the possibility of yet another blown two-goal lead.

"Those plays kinda go into slow-mo," the winger recalled. "I could see it on his pants and knew with the shape of the puck it's going to fall down. I had time to jump in and make a save."

After dislodging himself from the twine like a spider's prey escaped, Wilson chugged 200 feet, parked his rear end in front of Toronto's Frederik Andersen and backhand-tipped Lars Eller's shot into the Leafs goal.

For good measure, Wilson scored the next one, too. Within minutes, his Wikipedia page noted his invention of the "Tom Wilson Hat Trick"—when one scores two and saves one in the same game.

As was the case in Game 3, Wilson had a small crew of family screaming red in a sea of blue: Mom, Dad, his brother and brother's fiancée, and Grampy.

"They wished another outcome," Wilson said. "They got it today."

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Thank you for calling North Toronto Arena, home rink of Tom Wilson, No. 43 of the Washington Capitals, now in his fourth year of making the Caps a hard team to play against and adding some offence as well....

Over the past seven days, that offence is a joyous revelation for Washington. A first-round draft pick in 2012, the 23-year-old Wilson has never scored more than seven goals and never less than 133 penalty minutes in a season. He has three in a week, all of 'em biggies.

"Nothing against Wils because he works hard and all that, but he's not as big of a concern as a lot of people on their team," Leafs coach Mike Babcock had fairly, if fatefully, said before the series began.

After Wilson's Game 1 dagger, the social-media backlash from his hometown was so vicious, he considered deleting his Twitter account.

"You catch a lot of flak, but that's just passion," the grinder reasoned, as @tom_wilso lives.

"There's people that like ya. There's people that hate ya. I didn't want to come into Toronto and be liked by the fans."

So add Wilson's name, again, to 2017's growing list of the improbable playoff conquerors.

Zack Kassian, Melker Karlsson, Joel Edmundson, Jake Guentzel, Kevin Fiala, Tanner Glass, Kasper Kapanen... and we're only a week into this sucker.

"It's that time of year. There's some fabulous heroes. Not always the ones you think are going to be there," Trotz said.

"You always love the guy who doesn't get a lot of recognition in the regular season coming up big."

Tom Wilson, a.k.a. Heart Guy.

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Sportsnet.ca / Jack Eichel: 'I want to be a Sabre for a long time'

Sportsnet Staff

April 19, 2017, 7:33 PM

After a report surfaced Wednesday that Jack Eichel would refuse to resign with the Buffalo Sabres if head coach Dan Bylsma isn't fired — something the centreman's agent was quick to deny — Eichel himself spoke out on Wednesday.



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Speaking to The Buffalo News, the 20-year-old vehemently denied the rumours that he's trying to get his coach fired.

"It's frustrating more than anything that I think the wrong message is being put out about me and about our organization and team," he said. "That's why I think my agent did a good job of calling you and putting the right message forward about what my real opinions are because I want to be a Sabre and I want to be a Sabre for a long time and I want to be a part of Buffalo when we win."

Eichel added he isn't one to "point the finger and blame other people," and noted that he felt he'd landed on the same page as Bylsma during his exit interview.

"We go through our meeting, and I thought things went pretty well," he said. "By the end of it, I thought we were on the same page. In terms of hockey specifics, we talked a lot about the team, the play and my play and what he thinks I can do better and what I want to work on in the off-season. I think it was a pretty normal exit meeting, and one that you leave saying I want to work on this stuff and this stuff and be better for next year."

Eichel's frustration in the Q & A is clear: While there had been persistent talk of his supposed unhappiness with Bylsma's system, the Massachusetts native was under the impression that "things were heading in the right direction."

Lest he end up branded a coach-killer, Eichel made a point of stating the obvious: "I'm not on the management side of things. And I've said it before and people take it the wrong way, but I'm also not the coach. Obviously, I speak with them and have a relationship with them, but that's their job. I look at it as that's not my job. My job is to play and try and perform every night."

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Sportsnet.ca / TAKING IT PERSONAL

BY RYAN DIXON

A deadly scorer and battle-tested leader, Joe Pavelski has overachieved by any reasonable measure. But until the San Jose Sharks lift the Stanley Cup, he still has one thing left to prove to himself.

Whether at work or play, it's probably fair to call Joe Pavelski a creature of habit. And if it's a summer Wednesday in Wisconsin, you'll find him on the golf course with his playing partner, Tom Gilbert, likely enduring smack talk from their opponents, Adam Burish and Luke Stauffacher. While all four played NCAA hockey, Pavelski and Gilbert have the placid temperament of people who know their abilities and always feel in control. Burish and Stauffacher, on the other hand, embrace their underdog roll and use any means necessary to even the odds, targeting Pavelski in particular. "Some days we'll try to get him drinking, but that doesn't flap him," says Burish.

With handicaps factored in, things often come down to the wire, meaning Pavelski is frequently teeing off on the 18th hole with six days' worth of bragging rights hanging in the balance. So maybe it's not Sunday at The Masters, but anybody who has a longtime friend like Burish knows he's not the type of guy you want to lose to. With the stakes understood, Pavelski will reach for his driver and let fly. "He's not nervous about going left or right; he doesn't see the water it seems like," Burish says. "He just hits it straight. He's cool and that's just him. He's not a nervous guy."

Right now, Pavelski needs all the steeliness he can summon as he and the San Jose Sharks go back and forth with Connor McDavid and the Edmonton Oilers in a series now knotted 2-2. Composure is certainly one trait that has helped Pavelski exceed all reasonable expectations for a seventh-round draft pick, but despite the calm exterior it's hard to imagine the San Jose Sharks captain becoming one of the league's most effective goal-scorers without incitement from some highly skeptical outside forces. Already firmly established as one of the best in the world at what he does, Pavelski continues to operate as though he has yet to prove his worth, demonstrating the mentality that prompted one former coach to dub him a "self-made superstar." One huge challenge remains, though, and the 32-year-old won't rest until his Sharks finally find the championship formula.

Should San Jose bow out to the on-the-rise Oilers, many will consider it final proof that the long-standing core will never get it done. Of course, 10 months ago, Pavelski and the Sharks came painfully close to balling up

that well-worn narrative and tossing it into the Pacific Ocean. In his first season wearing the 'C,' Pavelski led the 2016 playoffs with 14 goals and San Jose advanced to the Cup final for the first time in franchise history, falling in six games to the Pittsburgh Penguins. "We were right there," Pavelski said on the eve of this year's post-season. "We still believe we have a team that's right there [and] has the foundation to give us that opportunity."

Those building blocks, somewhat infamously, have yet to form the basis of a title-winning team. While there are a few to pick from, the most crushing loss certainly had to come in the blown 3-0 series lead in the first round of the 2014 post-season versus their state rivals, the Los Angeles Kings. Drew Remenda, a former Sharks assistant coach who was providing colour commentary for the team at the time, still carries a clear image of what he saw in San Jose more than an hour after the final siren in Game 7. "Joe Thornton [and] Joe Pavelski were sitting at the table in the players lounge still in their underwear," Remenda says. "They weren't saying anything; they just sat there."

That level of emotional investment is why Thornton was San Jose's captain at the time. And on Pavelski's part, it speaks to why — when the Sharks triggered severe action by missing the playoffs completely the following season — he was the guy who replaced "Jumbo" as the designated leader of the team. In the moment, some assumed the assurances coming out of northern California that it was a "seamless transition" were merely platitudes designed to gloss over a gory situation. The reality, though, is that if Thornton felt any animosity about the decision, it wasn't directed at his close friend Pavelski. And if anyone was well positioned to accept a potentially awkward handoff, it was the man who'd long ago established his place in the Sharks' hierarchy. "Everybody in the locker room knew he was the guy," says Burish, who spent three years with San Jose beginning in 2012. "It wasn't offensive to anybody. Thornton would tell you, deep down, he knew this is Pavelski's team."

STRIKING OIL

Pavelski opened the scoring 15 seconds into the Sharks' 7-0 Game 2 win over Edmonton. He finished the game with a pair of goals and an assist.

That ownership stems from a couple of things, not the least of which is what Pavelski has done on the ice. Since the start of the 2011-12 season, the only players with more goals than the 192 put up by No. 8 are Steven Stamkos (202) and Alex Ovechkin (257). Both of those guys were No. 1 picks. Pavelski was taken 205th overall and the list of skaters in NHL history selected later than that who have more career tallies than Pavelski's 295 is limited to Dave Taylor (431), Henrik Zetterberg (326) and Pavol Demitra (304).

As for his contemporaries, the ones who produce at or near Pavelski's level tend to have conspicuous gifts that can be spotted by someone making their maiden voyage to a rink. But if you took the top 25 goal-scorers in the league, divided them into two teams and dropped the puck, it's hard to imagine many eyes being immediately drawn to Pavelski. Even his accurate, hard shot isn't likely to jump off the page the way an Ovie zinger or a Shea Weber bomb does. The brilliant nuance in Pavelski's approach — industry people marvel at his mind for the game and how he finds quiet spots in the offensive zone like few others — can be lost on observers, especially playing on the west coast, which can leave players under exposed.

To really appreciate Pavelski, it also helps to know what's gone into scoring all those goals. He was the first member of "Jay's Shooting Club," named for former San Jose assistant Jay Woodcroft. It was Woodcroft who spent hours and hours of post-practice time with Pavelski working on the latter's technique, thus inspiring the "self-made superstar" label. In college at Wisconsin, Pavelski would have teammates, including Burish, drop their sticks and gloves, stand behind the goal line and throw pucks he would attempt to knock out of the air. He looked like someone trying to complicate batting practice by doing it in hockey gear. "Joe's one of the top two or three practice players I've been around," says Todd McLellan, former Sharks bench boss and now the coach of the Oilers. "He knows something's going to happen in a game and once we're done all the [regular drills], instead of just flipping pucks in the stands or shooting them off posts, he sets up situations, he gets people to come help and he's improved tremendously because of that."

NOT YOUR AVERAGE JOE

Taken in the seventh-round of the 2003 draft, Pavelski has scored more goals than any skater not named Stamkos or Ovechkin since 2011-12.



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It's fair to assume the omnipresent whispers that Pavelski could only go so far in the game were another driver of his growth. From his earliest days, critics mused about his average size, ordinary skating and the fact he first started gaining attention while playing high school hockey in Wisconsin, which — especially 15 years ago — was viewed as inferior to other brands of the sport. The Minnesota-based scout who found Pavelski, Pat Funk, never wavered in his faith, however, and fumed for six rounds at the 2003 draft when the Sharks called names other than Joe Pavelski. "I think it gives you a pretty quick understanding that nothing is going to be given to you," Pavelski says of being selected so late.

That's just a hint of it, according to Burish. Even back in the Wisconsin days, Burish remembers quietly talking to his buddy about how the school didn't initially want to give Pavelski a full ride and how the latter, in his own subtle way, was irked by that. Burish believes the real source of the burr under Pavelski's saddle has less to do with draft position and more to do with the chatter about limitations. "He still hears that; he's still not fast enough and he still can't do it," says Burish. "[It's] no different than a Patrick Kane, who's still being told he's too small and, 'Gosh you're skinny. What if you were big?'"

"It offends him; it upsets him that he hasn't been able to get over that hump and win a Stanley Cup. He takes it very personally."

It's impossible to know to what degree Pavelski has been powered by a shoulder chip. But whatever the case, he's played the long game to perfection, banging away at the smallest details to figure out how he can squeeze out one more goal here and another there. Some people strike it rich with one brilliant stroke; others build a fortune by constantly trying to turn one dollar into two. "Without the curiosity, without the ability to constantly reinvent himself and improve, I think you [would have seen] a guy who's probably out of the league in three years," says San Jose scouting director Tim Burke, who's well into his third decade with the organization.

CHASING PERFECTION

Pavelski is a notoriously hard-working and adaptive player. "Without the curiosity, without the ability to constantly reinvent himself and improve, I think [he would have been] out of the league in three years," says Tim Burke.

There's some irony in the fact that while Pavelski has faced more questions about his profession than is justified, in other aspects of life, he's the guy people begrudge because everything comes naturally. Burish calls Pavelski the best amateur golfer he's ever seen and McLellan makes specific note of his putting. On the course, the boys call him, "The Truth." When all the former Badgers and Wisconsin natives are doing their off-season workouts, Pavelski often hammers more reps than seems reasonable or beats everyone up the football stadium stairs despite his unassuming stature — which Burish mocks as a "milk bag body." An outdoorsman, Pavelski spends the summers with his wife and son in Madison on Lake Waubesa. Later in the season, he and his friends start going after muskie, referred to as a "10,000-cast fish" because they're so hard to land. "He catches 30 to 50 a summer," grouses Burish. "He's a freak."

While he's yet to land the big one on the ice, Pavelski's demeanour is such that you're unlikely to get a glimpse of how much that affects him. It's a different story with his close friends, though. "I know it bothers him 100 times more than he lets on," Burish says. "It offends him; it upsets him that he hasn't been able to get over that hump and win a Stanley Cup. I don't think he would express it that way, but I know from being around him and talking with him about it that he takes it very personally."

It's hard to imagine a better reason to keep the faith in San Jose.

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TSN.CA / Capitals hold off Leafs to tie series

By Kristen Shilton

TORONTO — It didn't take long for the Toronto Maple Leafs to find themselves in familiar territory on Wednesday night.

Facing the Washington Capitals in Game 4 of the Eastern Conference quarter-finals, Toronto needed a better start than they'd had two days prior, when they let the Capitals jump out to an early 2-0 lead. The Maple Leafs blamed the nervous energy of playing in their own building for that

snafu, and they came back to win in overtime, but the Buds had no excuse when the same scenario unfolded again.

Washington was up by two 4:34 into Game 4, and they dominated the first 40 minutes of play before winning 5-4. Toronto could take some solace in the fact they didn't make it easy on the Capitals, but their biggest push came when it was too little, too late. The series is now tied 2-2.

"I thought today was the first time we weren't scared enough of them," said Mike Babcock. "And it looked like it because our competition level wasn't good enough. You can come back once in a while like we did [in Game 3], but you can't spot the team two goals all the time — [then] they're energized and they're winning all the battles."

The underdog role is one the Maple Leafs have embraced in this series, the plucky bottom seed stepping up to challenge the Presidents' Trophy winners. On the other side, Washington has spent the last couple days bombarded by questions about how they had fallen behind in this series to a team with a fraction of its experience that can bully them with their speed.

Failing to use that speed to their advantage was one of many mistakes that added up to cost Toronto.

"I thought they won all the battles and all the races," Babcock said. "They were quicker. I thought we looked slow and they look fast. We weren't good enough, we didn't compete hard enough. It was real simple."

If overconfidence was a factor for Toronto when they stepped on the ice, the Capitals' stars took it away in a hurry. Their top line of Nicklas Backstrom, Alex Ovechkin and T.J. Oshie were all over the Maple Leafs in the offensive zone and it was Oshie (from the slot) and Ovechkin (from this usual right-circle spot on the power play) who silenced the Air Canada Centre crowd with their first and third goals of the series respectively. Oshie would score again in the third period with what ended up being the game-winning goal, aided by a pair of costly turnovers by the Leafs at their blue line.

After a quiet first game of the series, Washington's best players have been among their best (as has Tom Wilson, who also scored twice in the victory). In the series so far, the visiting team has scored first in each game, and each side has stolen a win in enemy territory. Every contest has been decided by one goal, in regulation or overtime, so coming out of a loss they felt was a "missed opportunity," the Leafs weren't placated by the notion that at least they are managing to keep this thing close.

"We don't think we're hanging with them. We want to be in the driver's seat," said Morgan Rielly. "It's playoffs. I don't think they should be putting us away. It's not about hanging on, and trying to squeak one out, it's about controlling the play...and winning the game."

Failing to do that started with a lack of execution in all three zones, but was also about not taking advantage when they should have. Toronto was down 4-2 to start the third period and had 1:54 of a 5-on-3 power play to start the frame. They put five shots on Braden Holtby, none of which went in.

One game after a 5-on-3 kill was a catalyst for their own victory, being stymied by the Capitals was the beginning of the end for their comeback hopes. For once Toronto actually stayed out of the box, taking just one minor penalty, but converted on only one of their four power play chances.

"I thought we had some pretty good opportunities there. [Holtby] came up big on some saves," said Auston Matthews of the 5-on-3. "You got to credit them with some pretty good structure there but I think you got a five-on-three, fresh ice, down by two goals, that's the time you need to score."

While they're not going head-to-head with the Backstrom line (that task belongs to Nazem Kadri, Leo Komarov and Connor Brown), Matthews' line had dominated the Capitals in Game 3 and they created two of Toronto's four goals on Wednesday. Both Zach Hyman and Matthews were successful by getting to the net and scoring greasy goals past Holtby, an area where the Maple Leafs will need to set up shop to stay alive as the series becomes a best-of-three.

"Before the series [started] you want to have confidence in yourself and what you're able to do," said Rielly. "You want to be able to put yourself in a position where you feel you're able to win games and control the puck and I think over the course of the last couple games we've built that



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confidence. We've earned the right to have that. It's important that in Game 5 we go out there and reestablish that."

Takeaways

Better days ahead? Frederik Andersen has been Toronto's most important player all season, and played extremely well in the series' first two games in Washington. In Game 3 he made enough big stops to see Toronto through, but that wasn't the case on Wednesday. Andersen stopped 22 of 25 shots he faced, posting the third-lowest save percentage of his playoff career in games he played to the end (.815). He seemed to struggle tracking the puck and gave up too many soft goals, like Oshie's second, which was a similar spot (high short-side) as Wilson scored from in Game 1 and Evgeny Kuznetsov scored from in Game 3. That goal came on the Capitals' second shot of the period and 59 seconds after Matthews pulled Toronto to within one with eight minutes left in the frame, and it ended up being the nail in their coffin. Washington did a better job of keeping Toronto to the outside, while the Maple Leafs gave up more quality chances, but Andersen still said after the game, "I wish I could have helped my team a little more and come up bigger when they had chances."

Puck play: When Holtby looked shaky making a couple saves in the second period, it appeared to be an opportunity for the Maple Leafs to take advantage of. The only problem was they never had the puck. Their possession numbers were abysmally low, clocking in at 26 per cent by midway through the second period. The strength of their final frame, where they outshot the Capitals 19-3 and dictated much of the play in their zone, helped balance the final total out to 46 per cent - in itself low for a team that was trailing from 2:58 onward. The Capitals pushed so hard to start the game at a pace they couldn't maintain throughout, but they did enough to rattle Toronto and keep them from playing the fast, possession game they wanted to use.

Game of inches: The margin for error in playoffs is razor-thin, and one play can turn the tide on a dime. Trailing by one in the first period, Rielly came frustratingly close to tying the game with a five-hole strike that trickled between Holtby's legs but was stopped at the goal line by the stick of Wilson. It was then that Wilson went barreling down the other way on the next rush and scored to put the Capitals up 3-1. When Wilson scored again, it was because of another mishap involving Rielly. The forward laid a bone-crunching hit on Rielly late in the period, and the blueliner fell to the ice as Andre Burakowsky's skate caught him near the mouth. Rielly was bleeding profusely but no penalty was called and Wilson had a clear path to the net to spot Washington a three-goal lead. Those little shifts in momentum over the course of a game have favoured both sides over the last four contests, and Toronto had its breaks on Wednesday too. When it was 4-2 Capitals in the third period, it looked as though Nate Schmidt had added to their total but the goal was waved off for goaltender interference. Washington challenged, and lost, but it looked like the offending party (Backstrom) was sandwiched into Andersen by Jake Gardiner. Those breaks usually even out in the end.

Super kids: With Hyman's goal, the Maple Leafs became just the second team in the last 25 years of playoffs to have five first-year goal scorers (Matthews, Nylander, Mitch Marner, Kasper Kapanen). The 2007-08 New York Rangers were the other club to accomplish the feat in that stretch. Marner tallied an assist on James van Riemsdyk's goal, giving him three points in his first four NHL playoff games - a total Matthews matched with his own goal (2G, A).

Next game: Toronto travels back to Washington for Game 5 on Friday.

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TSN.CA / McDavid still searching for offence at even strength

By Ryan Rishaug

Some thoughts from TSN Edmonton reporter Ryan Rishaug ahead of Game 5 between the Edmonton Oilers and San Jose Sharks on Thursday night:

- Connor McDavid has played 58:17 at even strength in this series and has been held pointless in that time. About 68 per cent of that has been against the San Jose defensive duo of Marc-Edouard Vlasic and Justin Braun. Oilers coach Todd McLellan has been able to limit that to around 62 per cent on home ice, but it's closer to 75 per cent on the road. McLellan hasn't tried too aggressively yet to get McDavid away from the pairing. We'll see if that changes back on home ice in Game 5.

- McDavid went four games without an even-strength point just once this season (Oct. 30 - Nov. 5), managing just one point over that stretch. He has two points in this series, both on special teams. During the regular season, 71 per cent of McDavid's points came at even strength.

- Leon Draisaitl isn't right. Not sure if it's illness or injury, but he looked sluggish in Game 4. He didn't take part in the team's optional skates on Monday or Tuesday and hasn't done any media lately. He has one shot and zero points in four games. Draisaitl is clearly getting frustrated by the lack of production, but if he's playing, I'd expect him back on Connor McDavid's wing next game.

- The Oilers had a hard time establishing a forecheck in Game 4 and weren't able to create many turnovers in the offensive zone. The San Jose defenders were able to break the puck out with ease. Perhaps adding Juhar Khaira, a good skater who can play with a physical edge, to the lineup could help. David Desharnais has struggled and would be a prime candidate to come out. Khaira has barely played in the last four weeks, but he might have something to contribute if given a chance Matt Hendricks would be the other option if Desharnais is replaced.

- The Sharks wanted to do a better job of using their points to start the offence in the Oiler end, and they did in Game 4. Several goals were generated by Shark players winning puck battles, feeding the points and making a beeline for the net.

- The Sharks were also much better in the faceoff circle, winning several draws that led directly to goals. McDavid lost a draw to Joe Pavelski that led to the game's first goal 15 seconds in. If Draisaitl had been on that line, he would have taken the defensive zone draw. Alternatively, McLellan could have put out Mark Letestu to take the faceoff. Instead he elected to have McDavid line up. The Oilers captain is going to have to improve this area of his game, and that lost draw will motivate him this summer.

- The Oilers have been a good bounce-back team all season. Seldom do they put consecutive ugly games together. Early this season, after a stinker against Buffalo, McLellan caused some controversy by asking the players to move a scheduled day off so they could meet. McLellan felt it was critical to send a message early that poor play was no longer acceptable. Since that time, the Oilers seem to have become a more resilient group. That theory will be tested in Game 5.

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TSN.CA / Komarov, Ovechkin put friendship on hold

By Mark Masters

TSN Toronto reporter Mark Masters checks in daily with news and notes from Maple Leafs practices and game-day skates. The Leafs and Washington Capitals skated at the Air Canada Centre on ahead of Game 4.

- Leo Komarov used to be linemates with Alexander Ovechkin in the KHL where they also became good friends while playing for Moscow Dynamo during the NHL lockout. After regular season games between Toronto and Washington reporters will often see the pair talking to each other, catching up outside the dressing room. But that did not happen after Game 3. "It's nothing you really want to do, because you want to stay focused," Komarov said. "I'm not making friends out there. But what happens on the ice, I think, will stay on the ice." Komarov and linemates Nazem Kadri and Connor Brown have been matched against Washington's top line so far in the series and in Game 3, with the benefit of last change, Mike Babcock was able to get them out against Ovechkin, Nicklas Backstrom and T.J. Oshie most of the time. "Obviously, he's a kind of a rat out there," Ovechkin said of Komarov. "He's trying to get under your skin. For me, it doesn't matter what he's trying to do out there, like to talk to me or do something. I'm trying to concentrate on the different things right now than talk about Leo."

Good friends Komarov, Ovechkin enjoying the battle. WATCH: <https://t.co/loNlqFPv2A> pic.twitter.com/WDAqfGTz1R

— TSN (@TSN_Sports) April 19, 2017

- Kadri believes his line has frustrated the Capitals top forwards so far based on the body language he sees from them on the ice. "Leo's doing a great job," Kadri said. "I mean, he's an agitator. That's what he does best. He gets under everyone's skin. I couldn't imagine playing against somebody like that. It would drive me crazy." Kadri notes that Ovechkin,



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Backstrom and Oshie don't like to engage in trash talk. "They're not big on the verbal altercations, but that's not saying we aren't. That's not going to change our perspective," Kadri said with a grin.

Facing off against a pal in the playoffs is a tricky proposition, but Komarov has embraced it. "It's different," he said. "It's not easy, but I'm kind of enjoying it too, because you want to play good and maybe have something to talk about in the summer too." Komarov and Ovechkin's friendship has survived tough times in the past. In November of 2014, Ovechkin's blind-side hit on Komarov left the Finn with a concussion.

- Ovechkin's ice time dipped noticeably on Monday. Is he hoping to get more minutes in Game 4? "I don't care," he said. "I think I play good minutes. Again, right now it's not about my ice time ... It's time to take, for you guys, a little bit of pressure off us and let us do our job. I think we manage the game well. We have to think about how to score goals and how to get this team to play our way, not their way."

From @markmasters & @Real_ESPNLeBrun: It helps Caps having 'Mr. Game 7' in Game 4 tonight <https://t.co/DXfb8iP6g> #TSNHockey #StanleyCup pic.twitter.com/38nDsvyacT

— TSN Hockey (@TSNHockey) April 19, 2017

- The Capitals got quite the scare at their morning skate when Marcus Johansson collided with Braden Holtby during a drill. The action came to a standstill as Holtby appeared to be in pain and slowly got up. But the reigning Vezina Trophy winner was good to continue and declared himself fine when he met with the media. "It was just a practice play. It happens," he said. "You get hit sometimes. It's hockey." Head coach Barry Trotz came over to check on his star goalie moments after the hit. "I had to sort of catch myself for a second, see if he needed a second or two and he said, 'I'm fine,'" Trotz said. "He was just skating it off and we resumed. Just like anybody, when you're goaltender gets bumped over, your heart stops for a second."

"I sort of had to catch myself for a second." #TSNHockey #StanleyCup <https://t.co/PmDCy4jlqf>

— TSN Hockey (@TSNHockey) April 19, 2017

- Trotz is tweaking his bottom six forward group in an attempt to generate a spark. Tom Wilson and Brett Connolly flipped lines at the morning state. Wilson, a Toronto native who scored the overtime winner in Game 1, skated with Lars Eller and Andre Burakovsky while Connolly slotted in beside Jay Beagle and Daniel Winnik. "You'd like a little more production out of it, no question," Trotz said when asked about the Eller line. "They've had some shifts and some zone time and now they just need to get on the board a little bit." What does Wilson, known for his physical play, bring to that group? "He's Tom Wilson. Everybody knows who Tom Wilson is. That's what he brings," the coach quipped.

From @Real_ESPNLeBrun: It's Round 1 and the moment of truth could already be here for the Capitals <https://t.co/1kjQS9SDec> #TSNHockey pic.twitter.com/ShTtUu8Nh2

— TSN Hockey (@TSNHockey) April 19, 2017

- Lines at Leafs morning skate:

Hyman-Matthews-Nylander

Komarov-Kadri-Brown

van Riemsdyk-Bozak-Marner

Martin-Boyle-Kapanen

Leivo, Fehr

Gardiner-Zaitsev

Hunwick-Rielly

Marincin-Carrick

Smith-Marchenko

Andersen

McElhinney

- Power play units at Leafs morning skate:

Rielly

Bozak-Kadri-Marner

JvR

Gardiner

Matthews-Brown-Nylander

Komarov

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TSN.CA / NHL dealing with spate of spears to the groin

By Frank Seravalli

BROSSARD, Que. - Sometimes, Steve Ott said, these things happen by accident.

Of all the opponents to accidentally spear in the groin, Zdeno Chara would probably not be high on anyone's list. But that's who Ott caught with a crotch shot last October – on the first shift of a game, no less.

"I wasn't out there going 'Oh, I'm gonna spear Chara,'" Ott said, laughing, on Wednesday. "The puck got chipped in. I went to brace myself, my arms were out. He kind of let off. I followed through, thinking I'm pre-bumping, and I speared him right in the [groin]."

A scrum ensued. Ott and Chara were each given two-minute minor penalties for unsportsmanlike conduct. Ott said he apologized and nothing more was made of the incident.

"It wasn't dirty or malicious," Ott said. "I didn't have any intent to hurt him. That's a situation that just happens sometimes."

The same can't be said for every stick to the groin, especially recently. Ott couldn't put his finger on why, but spears to the family jewels appear to be a growing trend – with at least four high-profile cases earning scrutiny in the last month.

That kind of stick work is one of the few on-ice incidents that can make 19,000 fans of both teams groan in unison in an arena.

Why is this happening so often in a sport that prides itself on a "code" and on-ice policing?

"It's hard to say," said Ott, the Canadiens' 14-year NHL pest. "Things happen out there."

Jamie Thomas from TSN 1150 Hamilton drops by to share more of his Sidney Crosby love, and takes a spin around the NHL sharing his thoughts on the Oilers 7-0 loss to the Sharks in Game 4.

Edmonton Oilers forward Leon Draisaitl became the latest to inflict pain on Tuesday night. He pitchforked Sharks forward Chris Tierney in the pants halfway through Game 4, earning a five-minute major and ejection in the process.

The NHL's Department of Player Safety announced Draisaitl will have a supplemental discipline hearing on Wednesday. He may escape with a fine rather than suspension, though the one thing weighing against him is the idea that Draisaitl's dirty play was born of frustration in a lopsided 5-0 game.

That was the second spear below the belt in these playoffs. Canadiens defenceman Andrei Markov stuck Rangers forward Rick Nash where the sun doesn't shine with 25 seconds to play in Game 1 at the Bell Centre. Markov received a 10-minute misconduct on the play.

Earlier this month, Boston's Brad Marchand was suspended for the final two games of the regular season for a deliberate spear to the groin of Tampa Bay's Jake Dotchin. It cost Marchand \$109,756 in fines and a shot at his first career 40-goal season.

On March 21, Sidney Crosby was spared supplemental discipline – and even a penalty – for his jock poke on Buffalo's Ryan O'Reilly from behind.

Crosby said he apologized to O'Reilly, who was his teammate at the recent World Cup of Hockey for Team Canada, saying he didn't mean to catch him in a "terrible spot."

"It looks terrible," Crosby told reporters then. "It's funny for you guys, but for him, not so much. I know him. I've played with him on different teams."



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There's no history there. I wasn't trying to do anything. I tried to put my stick kind of near him and got him in a terrible spot. I told him that. He probably doesn't believe me."

It's difficult to believe because that was at least the sixth time cameras captured Crosby spearing an opponent in the groin, according to videos posted by Yahoo Sports.

There have almost been too many crotch shots to count over the years, from Corey Perry to Crosby to even Ott. Part of the reason they may be on the rise is a realization from players that they may not be as stringently penalized as other deliberate attempts to injure.

For instance, New Jersey's Stephen Gionta sent Ottawa's Mark Borowiecki to the ice writhing in pain in 2015, but only received a fine for his actions.

The NHL's general managers, as stewards of the game, recommended a fine a few years back, followed by a suspension for repeat offenders. That hasn't been enough to deter players, regardless of the code that supposedly exists between them.

"Playing hard out there, burying someone, playing clean, that's one thing," Ott said. "You never want to see a guy get dinged."

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TSN.CA / Oilers' Draisaitl avoids suspension for spear

TSN.ca Staff

Edmonton Oilers forward Leon Draisaitl will not face a suspension for his spear on San Jose Sharks forward Chris Tierney on Tuesday night in Game 4 of their series, the NHL Department of Player Safety announced Wednesday. The German forward will be fined \$2,569.44 for the infraction - the maximum amount allowed under the CBA.

Edmonton's Leon Draisaitl fined \$2,569.44, the maximum allowable under the CBA, for spearing San Jose's Chris Tierney.

— NHL Player Safety (@NHLPlayerSafety) April 19, 2017

The money will go to the Players' Emergency Assistance Fund.

The incident occurred in the second period with the Oilers already down 5-0. Draisaitl raised his stick under the legs of Tierney after the Sharks forward moved the puck behind the Oilers' net.

Draisaitl, 21, was given a five-minute major penalty for spearing and a game misconduct. The Sharks made the score 6-0 on the ensuing power play. Tierney did not return to action.

"Just feel a stick in my groin, so obviously it doesn't feel well at the time," Tierney told the Mercury News after the game. "Just kind of dropped and went to shake it off. Takes a couple minutes to recover from something like that. But felt OK the rest of the game."

The 2-2 series heads back to Edmonton for Game 5 Thursday night.

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TSN.CA / Rielly puts ankle pain aside to help lift Leafs

By Kristen Shilton

TORONTO – Months before the Toronto Maple Leafs were on their way to becoming postseason darlings, Morgan Rielly was hobbling around with bags of ice on his right ankle, willing himself to get back into form.

The high-ankle sprain Rielly suffered on Jan. 17 against the Buffalo Sabres kept him out of action for six games, the only injury absence to date in his four-year NHL career. Toronto was tied for third place in the Atlantic Division at the time, already showing signs of rounding into a potential playoff team well ahead of schedule.

Rielly is supposed to be the Maple Leafs number-one blueliner, and being without him for an extended stretch could have derailed the team's postseason plans. Toronto went 2-3-1 before Rielly was cleared to return.

"The first couple games back it was tough, and then you tweak it over the course of a couple weeks," Rielly said Wednesday. "There are a lot of

different factors [to coming back]. There's the pain factor. There's having all the tape on the ankle and not having the mobility to skate. It takes time."

Now the Leafs aren't just in the playoffs, they're leading the Washington Capitals two games to one in their first-round playoff series ahead of Wednesday's Game 4.

Asked if his ankle is 100 per cent three months after the sprain, Rielly paused before saying no. He quickly noted that no player in the Leafs' dressing room is completely healthy at this point in the season.

"[The ankle] is not really going to have an opportunity to heal until after the season," he said. "Every game you're trying to push it to its limit and it gets banged up and you just deal with it."

The Maple Leafs' blueline has been maligned all season, especially out of the gate. Still new to the top-pairing matchup role, Rielly took the expectation to perform seriously. When Sabres forward William Carrier sent him flying into the boards on Jan. 17 he limped back to the bench, and then tried twice to return to the game before finally exiting for good.

"I was in injury denial," Rielly said. "I remember talking to the trainers and their idea was after the all-star break, we'll see how it is. I was thinking I was going to play the next game and I was just going to have to ice it down or whatever. When reality hits you, and you realize that it's pretty serious."

When Rielly did resume playing on Feb. 2, he was soon facing criticism about his on-ice performance. He was minus-18 over those first 17 games back, with just five assists, while the Maple Leafs went 6-6-5. He repeatedly said his ankle was fine and that it wasn't affecting his play, but later acknowledged he had doubted himself at times during the season.

"When you get hurt...you think you're going to just jump in and be your old self, but that's not the way it works," he said. "There's not a switch. You can't just turn it on and turn it off. You've got to grind. When you come back and it's not as good as you think it's going to be it weighs on you mentally and you get worried."

After a blowout loss to the Florida Panthers on March 14, Rielly and Nikita Zaitsev, who had played together all season, were separated, and Rielly began playing with Roman Polak and Connor Carrick.

Rielly recounted how Polak told him that even though two years had elapsed since his own high-ankle sprain, he could still feel it when he walked up stairs. After being injured in Game 2, Polak had successful right leg surgery on Tuesday and will miss the rest of the postseason, a fate Rielly described as "really tough."

"You hear about [high-ankle sprains] all the time being a tough injury to come back from. You have to put it aside," Rielly said. "The brain drives the body. If you tell yourself you're going to tape it up and go play, it's no longer anything you can lean on. If you're out there playing and you're healthy enough to be out there, then play your best."

That's what Rielly has done so far in these playoffs. He's averaging the second-most ice time for Toronto through three games (29:37), and played just shy of 40 minutes in the double-overtime win in Game 2. So much of the 23-year-old's game is based in his elite skating ability, and while the increased workload isn't exactly helping his ankle, he has no desire to change his role.

"You enjoy the challenge," Rielly said. "You don't want to go out there and just float through; you want to push yourself to be the best you can be. When you're not, you should be motivated to get better."

Leafs coach Mike Babcock has been complimentary of Rielly's performance in his first NHL playoff experience, where he's asked a lot of Rielly and fellow blueliner Jake Gardiner.

Washington was the third-best offence in the regular season, averaging 3.18 goals per game. They also play a physical brand of hockey aimed at wearing down the inexperienced Leafs.

So far, Rielly is standing up to the Capitals' assault, and skating on his off-side beside partner Matt Hunwick hasn't been an issue. He's tallied one goal and two assists with eight shots on goal and has a plus-minus rating of plus-1.

"I think [Rielly] has been as good as he's been since I got here the last two games," Babcock said Sunday. "[Rielly and Gardiner are] playing with confidence, they're competitive, they want to win and they're great people. They're easy to coach."



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TSN.CA / Post 2 Post: Price solid in goal despite loss

By Jamie McLennan

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

Carey Price (4) - The Canadiens netminder was rock solid again on Tuesday night, as both goals he allowed were hard plays to the net that opened him up. Price made big saves on Mats Zuccarello, Chris Kreider, Michael Grabner, Nick Holden, Derek Stepan and JT Miller and as usual, gave his team every chance to win.

Henrik Lundqvist (4) - He was very strong when the game was on the line in the third period, with no chance on the only goal he allowed in the first.

Cam Talbot (2) - His shutout streak ended 15 seconds into the game and San Jose continued to push. Talbot was under siege all night long and San Jose's power play was excellent moving the puck around, scoring twice with the man advantage. He did make big saves on Tomas Hertl, Logan Couture, Joe Pavelski and Brent Burns before being pulled halfway through the game.

Laurent Brossoit (3) - He tried to stop the bleeding, but did not get much help. Kudos to Brossoit for good saves on Burns and Pavelski on the penalty kill.

Martin Jones (5) - Not overly taxed in this game, as he had lots of goal support, forced to make a few big saves on Draisaitl, RNH, Eberle and Maroon.

Can Oilers rebound from statement game by Sharks?

The Sharks stars controlled the game, San Jose scored four power play goals, and in the end, the Oilers were shut out. What does Edmonton have to do to respond to San Jose's statement win? Ryan Rishaug and Darren Dreger have more.

Marc-Andre Fleury (2) - Columbus pushed hard early on, outshooting the Penguins 20-6 at one point. Fleury was too aggressive on a few goals and took himself out of the play to give himself a chance for that second save. He did look solid with some big saves on Brandon Saad, William Karlsson, Boon Jenner and Matt Calvert.

Sergei Bobrovsky (2) - 'Bob' got the win, but he's still allowing at least one bad goal a game. The Blue Jackets need him in regular season form (Vezina form) to get the back into the series.

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TSN.CA / Moment of truth coming earlier than expected for Capitals

By Pierre LeBrun

TORONTO -- It might well happen that after the Washington Capitals win the Stanley Cup, they'll look back and smirk.

They'll reminisce about the first-round scare they got from the young Leafs as being a great teaching moment.

After all, many a Stanley Cup champion has needed to go through adversity in Round 1 before their run truly begins, the rough waters before the smooth sailing.

Perhaps.

But for now, we'll have to live with the reality that the powerhouse Caps, trailing the series 2-1, are facing a defining moment in Game 4 Wednesday against the Toronto Maple Leafs at Air Canada Centre.

Call it an overreaction if you will, but this is it. The Alex Ovechkin-era Capitals, perennial playoff underachievers, need to show us what they're truly made of.

"You're going to see our best game tomorrow," Capitals head coach Barry Trotz said Tuesday.

Expect Ovechkin's ice time to get a boost in Game 4

Head coach Barry Trotz owned up to Alex Ovechkin's limited ice time in Game 3 and said that will change moving forward, while the Maple Leafs were facing a different line of questioning after taking a 2-1 series lead. Mark Masters has more on the differing moods between both locker rooms.

In a series pitting a massively experienced and deeply talented squad versus a wet-behind-the-ears but also very talented team, what's puzzling is that it's the graybeards making more mental mistakes. It's the older team looking like it is lacking confidence, the veteran squad easily rattled by any change in momentum.

Is there just too much riding on this season, which long ago was scripted as the last kick at the can for this roster?

Said a rival Eastern Conference head coach of free agents such as T.J. Oshie, Karl Alzner and Kevin Shattenkirk, "if they don't win it this year, that group is going to be broken up. It seems like they're weighted down. It's almost like they've got to have a come-to-Jesus moment. Maybe it happens with their backs against the wall here. Maybe they get through that and play now. But it seems like that team has the weight of the world on them."

They'll deny it, of course, but the idea that this team, which has about half the roster on expiring contracts, won't be the same again -- win or lose -- that's the real deal.

Alan May: It's full panic mode among Caps fans

OverDrive hosts Bryan Hayes, Jeff O'Neill & Jamie McLennan are joined by CSN Capitals Analyst Alan May to discuss what the reaction in Washington is to the Caps blowing two 2-goal leads and now trailing in the series.

By all accounts, these Capitals like each other. Guys care for each other. They want to win for each other. Is the pressure from within the real burden? Is the pressure there knowing that the clock is ticking on the composition of their team?

The Caps, I'm told, got everything they needed to get off their chest in a closed-door meeting right after Game 3. It's how Trotz likes it: Don't carry it over to the next day. Deal with it right then and there and move on.

And I didn't sense any panic in the Caps on Tuesday. Star goalie Braden Holtby, in his dapper suit and fedora walking out of the rink, hardly looked like an athlete worried sick.

No, these guys still believe.

But that doesn't change that they need to get it done now.

The Caps got off to a terrific start in Game 3, really manhandling the Leafs for the opening 26-27 minutes, before it all fell apart.

"That's the sense of urgency we need for 60 minutes," Caps winger Tom Wilson said Tuesday. "If we're playing like that, I don't think there's any team that can play with us. You see kind of the energy and the execution we put forth. The first 10 minutes of that game, if we can continue to keep that pace up, I don't think they'll be able to play with us. It's on us. We can't get satisfied with a two-goal lead.

"There's big moments -- we were up 3-1, [had a] 5-on-3, stuff like that, a penalty kill in overtime. ... We've got to take care of those moments. If we do that, we're going to give ourselves a good chance. There's bounces, there's a little bit of luck, but we can't leave it up to that."

No, they need to own this series now, or else that window to win everybody has been talking about is going to slam shut weeks before they ever believed possible.

Just six days into their playoffs, the Capitals face their moment of truth.

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TSN.CA / Pacioretty's quiet start raises questions for Habs

By Frank Seravalli

NEW YORK — Wave after wave of questions came and Max Pacioretty bore the brunt of them all in the Montreal Canadiens' cramped dressing room, like usual.



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Game 4 marked a missed opportunity for Montreal - a blown chance to put a skate to the Rangers' throats. The Canadiens knew they were going to get New York's best punch, but they failed to punch back. Rick Nash flat out said the Rangers couldn't go back to Montreal down 3-1 and expect to win.

Yet, the Habs return to La Belle Province all square, with Game 5 on Thursday night at the Bell Centre marking the beginning of a best-of-three series.

"We knew they had their backs against the wall," Alexander Radulov said. "It's going to be a lesson for us, to make sure we come out better in the next one."

For the Canadiens' captain, too, Tuesday night was a teaching moment.

"Lesson learned," Pacioretty said. "We saw their best."

What the Canadiens haven't seen is Pacioretty at his best in this Eastern Conference first round series, a fact he acknowledged.

"It wasn't my best," Pacioretty said after Game 4. "But you know, it's one game at a time, looking to get better."

Radulov, Shea Weber, even \$6 million man Tomas Plekanec have stepped up in big ways for the Habs, but their leading scorer - the player who carried them on his back in the toughest of times this season - has been conspicuously quiet.

After a 67-point regular season, which tied his career-high, Pacioretty has just one assist in these playoffs. He finished eighth in the NHL with 35 regular season goals.

Halfway through Game 4, coach Claude Julien flipped Radulov down to the second line, moving Andrew Shaw to Pacioretty's right side along with usual lineman Philip Danault.

It was more an attempt to spark Pacioretty than anything else.

"There were changes because we wanted certain matchups," Julien explained. "I thought that line created more after that point, so just an in-game decision by me."

Pacioretty, 28, has notoriously been a slow starter in the Stanley Cup playoffs. The most he's ever scored in the first four games of any of his last four postseasons is one goal and one assist.

That means he's finished strong - as the games have gotten tougher. But with a Canadiens team built to win on defence and goaltending, the margin is so thin that without his production, he might not have the luxury to wait to get hot.

Julien said he would reserve judgment on what he's seeing from his top line.

"Those are things that I'll deal with," Julien said. "I need time to look at things. I'm not going to start talking about things I don't really know about right now."

The truth is this first round series, like life, is full of grey matter. Few aspects are black and white. There is nuance to the discussion; it isn't cut and dried.

Both the Rangers and Habs could make a legitimate claim that they should be leading 3-1. Both teams have traded equal stretches of awesome and atrocious play.

When there was uproar about the Canadiens' offence being shutout in Game 1, only one seeing-eye Tanner Glass backhand separated them from New York. And as convincingly as the Canadiens played in Game 2, they needed a Hail Mary tip from Tomas Plekanec to force overtime.

Even on Tuesday night, the Canadiens played undoubtedly their worst collective game of the series, yet they were one Weber shot off the post away from knotting it again in the dying minutes. They also failed to capitalize on at least two breakaways and one partial attempt. It was close, but it wasn't.

Pacioretty's own game in this series mirrors that same complexity.

It's easy to forget that Plekanec wouldn't have forced overtime in Game 2 - and Montreal wouldn't have even dreamed of a 3-1 edge on Tuesday night - without Pacioretty's brilliant strip in the neutral zone and dogged dash to goal line to setup Plekanec. It saved the Canadiens' season.

The criticism comes in that impressive sequence produced Pacioretty's only point of the series. Pacioretty's lack of production is certainly not for lack of effort; in fact, he may be trying to do too much at times.

He explained his gaffe on Nash's game-winner in the second period as thinking the puck was "bouncing out of the zone," where he'd be off to the races. Instead, it was gloved down by Ryan McDonagh and the Habs were quickly in a hole.

In the playoffs, the tally in June won't be about blocked shots and defensive prowess, and all of the little facets Pacioretty brings to the table. No, for a scorer like him, the question comes back to production: Where would the Habs be if Pacioretty produced more than one assist in the first four games?

The captain would hate to be asking himself that all summer long.

"The team that just worries about the next shot is the team that normally ends up on top," Pacioretty said. "We've got to do a better job of sticking with it, sticking with the system, trusting it when you're down. We need to trust that our shots will go in."

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USA TODAY / How Penguins' off-ice staff makes NHL playoffs a fan event

Kevin Allen , USA TODAY Sports Published 5:35 p.m. ET April 19, 2017 | Updated 11 hours ago

PITTSBURGH — Pittsburgh Penguins vice president of communications Tom McMillan remembers during the 2009 Eastern Conference Final seeing two college students carrying a couch up the street toward Mellon Arena, the team's former home.

"It was from their dorm room at Duquesne University," McMillan said. "That's when I knew putting a big screen outside the arena was a great idea."

Other NHL teams station large televisions outside their arena during the playoffs. "(But) it's rather iconic here," McMillan said.

Last year before Game 5 of the Stanley Cup Final, police had to close four roads near the arena to accommodate people watching the game on the big screen outside PPG Paints Arena, now the Penguins' home arena.

"There were actually more people outside the arena than inside the arena," McMillan said.

While the Penguins are trying to become the first Stanley Cup champion to repeat since 1998, their marketing group's objective is to put as much effort into creating a memorable event as the Penguins' show on the ice.

"What we do here is exactly what hockey operations does," said Terry Kalna, senior vice president of sales and broadcasting. "This time of year everyone expects (players) to raise their game, to have a stronger attention to detail, and it's the same for us. Fans and sponsors expect more from us. It's not the regular season anymore."

It's the same story in the other 15 NHL playoff cities. You can never over-hype the Stanley Cup playoffs.

"The atmosphere is going to be there naturally," McMillan said. "But we try to push it a little bit."

The big screen tradition began in 2008 after Penguins marketing vice president James Santilli witnessed a Bassmaster fishing tournament showing the weighing of fish on one outside of Mellon.

"If people will watch fish being weighed on a big screen then they will for watch hockey on a big screen," Santilli told his staff.

The first time the Penguins tried it there were 200 people watching. For Thursday's Game 5 against the Columbus Blue Jackets, fans will begin staking out space at 3 p.m. ET for a 7:30 start. If the Penguins reach the Stanley Cup Final, fans will start showing up at 8 a.m.

"The whole downtown proper is electric," said Penguins season-ticket holder Jackee Ging, who added that the atmosphere around the arena has "gone to a new level."



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Ging said the Penguins have created a new generation of younger fans with their efforts.

Team president David Morehouse has made it his tradition to wander into the crowd to give away two free tickets inside the arena to randomly chosen fans.

As important as the big-screen tradition is, it's only one element of playoff planning. Banners are placed all over the city. In this round, bus trips and plane trips to Columbus were planned. Promotional T-shirts and towels have to be ordered for every game, even though no one knows how many games will be played.

This year, the Penguins worked with Dick's Sporting Goods to have 40,000 "Penguins" yard signs distributed around the area.

Last year, the Penguins gave away 260,000 gold T-shirts during the playoffs. The Nashville Predators, Golden State Warriors and the Cleveland Cavaliers were also giving out gold T-shirts.

"At one point, we had trouble finding enough shirts and we had to overnight them across the country, get them printed and have them here by the time our gates opened," Santilli said. "It wasn't easy."

The Penguins even make sure the opposing owner's suite in Pittsburgh is decorated with his or her team's colors. The opponent's logo will go on cupcakes served in that suite. Kalna said they want them to feel at home.

The Penguins have 150 corporate partners, and Kalna said he knows it's playoff time when "every single partner is totally available to come to whatever you invite them to."

The Penguins have a strong social media presence with more than 2 million followers on Facebook and 1.3 million on Twitter.

"You have to feed off what people tell you," McMillan said. "They tell you whether you have a good idea or not."

Morehouse said he can tell it's playoff time in Pittsburgh when the enthusiasm of the fan base rises.

"You are in a grocery store and all of a sudden people are talking to you about the Penguins," he said. "There is a general elevation of the energy and anticipation."

Kalna said the workload behind the scenes increases three to five times what it is during the regular season. But he's not complaining.

"It's all fun," Kalna said. "Back to the hockey operations comparison, the playoffs are what the players play for and this is what we live for."

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