



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • April 22, 2019

THE NEWS & OBSERVER

Svechnikov doubtful as Canes face elimination game against Caps

By Chip Alexander

The Carolina Hurricanes will go into Game 6 of their playoff series with the Washington Capitals facing a hard truth: a loss will end their season.

"We've been handling pressure pretty good all year," forward Teuvo Teravainen said Sunday. "There have been so many must-wins this season, so it's just another one."

The Canes also will go into Monday's playoff elimination game likely missing rookie forward Andrei Svechnikov, who had hoped to be fully cleared from the concussion protocol and ready to rejoin the lineup. But Svechnikov, injured in a one-sided fight with the Caps' Alex Ovechkin in Game 3, is "highly doubtful" for the game, Canes coach Rod Brind'Amour said Sunday. The same is true for injured forwards Jordan Martinook and Micheal Ferland.

After being whipped 6-0 Saturday in Game 5 in Washington, falling behind 3-2 in the best-of-seven Eastern Conference series, the Canes held a practice on Sunday at PNC Arena. Svechnikov again wore a yellow, no-contact jersey and Brind'Amour said in following the concussion protocol a player can't be cleared to play until he is first cleared and participates in a full-contact practice.

The Canes will not hold a morning skate workout Monday before Game 6, which has a 7 p.m. starting time at PNC Arena.

The Canes have won both playoff games at home while the Caps have swept the three games at Capital One Arena. But injury attrition is taking its toll on the Canes with Svechnikov, Martinook and Ferland, three of their more physical players, now sidelined. Neither Martinook nor Ferland practiced Sunday.

The Canes on Sunday recalled forward Clark Bishop from the Charlotte Checkers of the AHL on an emergency basis. Bishop made his NHL debut and played 20 games for the Canes this season, mostly as the fourth line center.

"You take three guys out of our top nine (forwards) ... and it's the competitive guys you're taking out," Brind'Amour said. "You're asking a lot for call-ups and guys who fill those roles. That's the big challenge we have. But having said that, I still think our other players have to step up and at least be the players they can be."

After beating the Caps 5-0 in Game 3 and following it with a 2-1 win in Game 4 at PNC Arena, the Canes evened the

series. The Caps, the 2018 Stanley Cup champions, appeared a bit flustered, certainly bothered.

But late in Game 4, Canes forward Warren Foegele sent Caps forward T.J. Oshie into the boards. Brind'Amour called it a "nudge" and Ovechkin called it a "dirty play" but Oshie was left with a broken clavicle.

In a flash, the Caps went from flustered to infuriated. Returning home on Saturday for Game 5, taking on a "Win for T.J" mentality, they shoved the Canes to the brink of elimination with the 6-0 detonation.

"You lose a key leader in T.J. Oshie and not one person is going to replace him," Caps coach Todd Reirden said after the game. "Everyone needed to take their game to a different level than it had been at. That means your best leaders have to be even better."

For the Caps, they were. Center Nicklas Backstrom scored the first two goals in a four-point game. Ovechkin finished with a goal and two assists and helping set a physical tone with 11 hits as the Caps looked to wear down the Canes.

"All the things we've done pretty well during the year, it all went away," Brind'Amour said Sunday. "Tough, tough loss."

What now? Can the Canes tilt things back their way back in Game 6 on home ice, or will the Caps march on?

Before the series began, Canes captain Justin Williams, a three-time Stanley Cup winner, said, "At some point somebody's going to give up and say it's too hard, and we've got to make sure it's not us."

But the Canes will need to be better in every area Monday -- at even strength, on the power play, penalty killing, defensive zone, on the forecheck, playing the body. If that's too hard, their season may end.

"I thought guys worked hard tonight but we didn't play our game," Canes defenseman Jaccob Slavin said Saturday. "Our game is a forechecking game and I think they did a good job breaking the puck out against us. If we can't get them hemmed in their zone and let our forwards go to work we're not playing too great."

Canes center Jordan Staal said scoring first again could be critical Monday -- the winning team has scored the first goal in all five games. More so, the home team has won all five games and PNC Arena was full and at full throat in Games 3 and 4.

"Hopefully we can use that to our advantage," Staal said.



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Still a chance for Aho to turn this series around

By Luke DeCock

If Sebastian Aho is the player the Carolina Hurricanes think he can be — think he is, now — then this is the time for him to show that. If he's really a star, it's time for him to be a star. They're about to pay him to be a franchise player, and he needs to be as much of one in game No. 83 as he is in game No. 82.

Throughout this playoff series, having run its course to where the Hurricanes now face elimination, Aho hasn't been anywhere near the dominant, aggressive, attacking player he has shown he can be.

The Hurricanes have done everything possible to get Aho going, pushing for favorable matchups at home, putting Teuvo Teravainen back on his line. Nothing has worked. He scored one goal from behind the goal line, set up another with a nice play at the blue line, and that's about it. There's no time and no space, and he hasn't been able to make any for himself.

Now that the Hurricanes are down to their last stand, down 3-2 to the Washington Capitals and facing what may be their final home appearance of the season in Game 6 on Monday, Aho's about out of time. It's now or never.

"I want to win," Aho said. "To win, it takes all of us to play our best games, if I can score some goals or whatever, obviously I'll be happy, but there's many other things to the game. You have to do it right."

Are you getting frustrated?

"No."

Is it hard to fight against that?

"No."

No one questions Aho's drive or ability or competitiveness, but he hasn't been able to find any space to maneuver. Players of his caliber are expected to find ways to impose themselves on the game, not the other way around.

"I think he has another gear," Hurricanes coach Rod Brind'Amour said. "Obviously, our best players have to be a little more impactful than another night. I don't think he has to be a superstar, that's for sure."

On a team without superstars, he's the closest thing the Hurricanes have. There's no shame in being outplayed by Alex Ovechkin and Nicklas Backstrom, and the Hurricanes don't need Aho to play like they can, but they need Aho to play like he can.

After spending six months answering every possible question about this game — and putting himself in position, with 30 goals and 83 points, for a massive new contract this summer — his postseason performance has raised big new questions: whether he's strong enough to be the same player in the closer checking of the playoffs, and whether his significant international commitments to Finland the past three years, combined with his increased role at center this season, have left him worn down to a nub.

It's not just Aho. The Hurricanes have had too many impact players make too little of an impact. Teravainen and Nino Niederreiter and Justin Williams haven't been any better. The power play, collectively, has been a disaster when it matters most.

But if the Hurricanes are going to pay Aho like a star, and that's where things are headed this summer, they need him to play like one in the spring.

Maybe this is where playing center instead of left wing finally caught up with him, especially in these high-intensity circumstances. If that's the case, that's the Hurricanes' problem as much as it is Aho's. But he still has a chance, Monday and perhaps beyond, to exert an influence on this series before it's too late.

Eric Staal wasn't having the best playoff series of his life through five games against the New Jersey Devils in 2009 as the Hurricanes faced elimination. He had two goals and no assists, his line stagnant. He had to do more, and he knew it.

Staal then scored three goals and added two assists in the next two games, both Carolina wins, including the series-winner on the road in Game 7. The Hurricanes needed him to carry them, and he did. Aho is capable of the same.

Aho, having proven so much this season, suddenly finds himself with everything to prove all over again, and the Hurricanes with everything to lose.

Canes video coaches also feel game pressure in the playoffs

By Chip Alexander

It hasn't happened to the Carolina Hurricanes in the playoffs, not after five games, but the moment still could be coming.

That moment when the Washington Capitals score a goal. When a Caps player appears to be offside before the goal. That moment when the Canes' two video coaches, Chris Huffine and L.J. Scarpace, sense the clock ticking, Canes coach Rod Brind'Amour waiting and a lot at stake.

Or as Scarpace puts it, "The fastest 30 seconds ever."

In the NHL, each team has one coach's challenge that can be used in a game, contesting either goaltender interference or offside, and must be made roughly 30 seconds after a goal is scored.

If a challenge is made for goaltender interference and the initial good-goal call is upheld after review by the NHL Situation Room officials, the challenging team loses its one timeout in a game. But challenge offside and lose the challenge ...

"A terrible feeling," Scarpace said. "It's like putting a pin in your stomach."



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If a challenge for offside is lost, the timeout is lost and a two-minute delay-of-game penalty is called. Imagine the Caps both scoring a goal and then being awarded a power play after an unsuccessful challenge by Brind'Amour. That could decide a game in a series the Caps lead 3-2 after their 6-0 win at Capital One Arena on Saturday.

There was only one coach's challenge in the first five games of the series -- in the first period of Game 2, when the Caps claimed Canes forward Saku Maenalanen interfered with goalie Braden Holtby as Lucas Wallmark scored. That challenge by Caps coach Todd Reirden was denied and the Caps forfeited their timeout in a game they won 4-3 in overtime.

Huffine, a Greensboro native, is in his 19th season with the Hurricanes and was a member of the Canes' 2006 Stanley Cup champions. He handles the pre-scout work, putting together scouting reports that break down the other team's systems, tendencies, power plays, penalty killing, and presenting a pre-scout video for the players.

"Not long, maybe two minutes, four or five clips," Huffine said. "With Rod it's not about the other team. It's about us. From day one it's been about us, video of us, how we do things, what we want to do. He's very positive."

Before coming to the Canes two years ago, Scarpace spent 13 seasons with the University of Michigan hockey program working under legendary Wolverines coach Red Berenson.

During games, Huffine is flagging different plays to be replayed and reviewed during the two intermission breaks and then after the game. Scarpace operates a Hawk-Eye replay system, studying every zone entry for a possible offside call.

When an opposing team is offside on the zone entry and then holds the puck in the zone for, say, 10 or 20 seconds before scoring, that's an easy call. But there are times when a quick stretch pass is made to an attacking player hovering at the Carolina blue line, who then streaks in and scores.

Boom, goal, clock running on a potential challenge.

"You see the pass and you hear the horn sound and it's a terrible feeling," Scarpace said. "You're scrambling to find the best angle of the play. You're trying to get the right angle to make the right call.

"Sometimes, we don't get all the TV replays right away. People at home might be saying, 'Oh, that's clear' but we may not see that angle until late in the process. It can be a little tricky. You then give the best opinion you have."

That happened at Toronto late in the regular season, with the Canes fighting for a playoff spot. The Maple Leafs' William Nylander scored on a breakaway five minutes into the game but the play was challenged by Brind'Amour and Nylander was ruled offside on the entry.

No goal. The Canes went on to win 4-1.

"A big momentum turner," Scarpace said. "That felt good."

The Canes are 3-for-3 on offside challenges this season, Huffine said.

The video coaches, in an office near the locker room, are in constant contact with the bench and assistant coach Jeff Daniels, who wears an ear piece. Goaltending coach Mike Bales, usually seated in the upper level of arenas during games, is the Canes' "eye in the sky" and also has Daniels' ear.

Video monitors are positioned at NHL benches, allowing Brind'Amour and the assistant coaches to quickly check the replays.

"If you have good people around you, it makes the job a lot easier," Brind'Amour said.

An insight into Brind'Amour's style of coaching is at PNC Arena there is no coach's office -- that is, an office reserved for the head coach. There is a coaches' office, with everyone together in one room, including Huffine and Scarpace.

"Our war room," Huffine said. "Roddy's belief and trust in our team (and) staff is one of the reasons for success."

Huffine has been on-board for much of the hockey technology evolution, from the camcorders and VHS tape decks he once used when working with the Greensboro Monarchs of the ECHL to the high-speed, high-definition digital systems in use today.

"Digital and HD revolutionized the game," Huffine said of the technological advances.

It's possible to break down so much video for the players -- Sebastian Aho, for example, might want to see all of his shifts from Game 2 against the Caps. Jordan Staal might like to see all his faceoffs.

The players have watched video on monitors, iPads, laptops. That's changed, too.

"They want to watch everything on their phone," Huffine said, smiling. "They do everything else on their phone. So we send it for them to see on their phones."

He's not going to challenge that.

Five points for the Hurricanes going into Game 6

By Luke DeCock

1. IT'S THE POWER PLAY, STUPID As bad as the Hurricanes were Saturday night, they had four dismal power plays -- generating all of four shots on goal -- and the game was still 1-0 and there for the taking. There's only so much the Hurricanes can do about the Capitals' high-powered power play, but there's almost no route to victory that

includes going 0-for with the man advantage with the game hanging in the balance. The Hurricanes practiced with the same units Sunday; Rod Brind'Amour isn't changing that up at this point.

2. FILL THE PHYSICAL VOID The collective absence of Jordan Martinook, Micheal Ferland and Andrei Svechnikov was telling Saturday, when the Hurricanes missed the



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physical edge any of the three could have provided. (Ferland's absence will loom large in the postmortem of the playoffs, whether the Hurricanes lose Monday or win the Stanley Cup.) Warren Foegele has upped his game in the playoffs, but the Hurricanes need more from someone like Brock McGinn, who is capable of throwing his body around but has been a nonfactor in the series.

3. AN UNLIKELY HERO Trevor van Riemsdyk may have been the Hurricanes' best player Saturday night, not that there was a tremendous pool of candidates. It's a good reminder that it takes some unexpected stars to win a playoff series. For the Hurricanes so far, that's been Foegele and Lucas Wallmark, but it would help if someone else on the bottom two lines stepped forward. You can't expect it. But you would appreciate it.

4. EMPTY THE TANK The Hurricanes spent a month playing must-win games and if Game 3 was figuratively a must-win there's no doubt left about it in Game 6. This series long ago became a battle of attrition, with the Hurricanes missing three top-nine forwards and the Capitals down winger T.J. Oshie and defenseman Michal Kempny. If the Hurricanes can scrape through Monday, there's no telling who will be left for a Game 7, on either side – nor the pressure the Capitals would feel at home.

5. YOUR BEST PLAYERS HAVE TO BE YOUR BEST PLAYERS (AGAIN, STILL, ETC.) The Hurricanes need more from the no-doubt, multi-millionaire NHLers they have left. Aside from Foegele, who started the series on the third line, the five other players on the top two lines have combined for 11 points. Alex Ovechkin and Nicklas Backstrom have 15 for the Capitals alone.

THE ATHLETIC

What can the Hurricanes do about their self-proclaimed 'garbage' power play at this point?

By Sara Civian

WASHINGTON — The Hurricanes know it, their faithful know it, any eyeball subjected to their 6-0 Game 5 loss knows it, every dad that screams "SHOOT IT" from the nosebleeds knows it: Carolina's power play has been a problem — mainly the "first" unit.

Even if it's not outright losing them games, it sure as heck isn't winning them when it has been given ample opportunity to try.

The Hurricanes went 0-for-5 on the power play as Washington took a 3-2 series lead Monday. They failed to capitalize on an early Brett Connolly hooking call at 4:41 in the first when the score was 0-0, an Evgeny Kuznetsov hit-stick on Calvin de Haan at 4:18 into the second when they were only down one, a John Carlson goalie interference call that was gifted to them at 7:56 of the second still down 1-0, a Jonas Siegenthaler hook at 12:02 in the second still down by one, and finally a Nick Jensen hook at 17:29 in the third when they were unsurprisingly down, 6-0.

That's four opportunities to come up with a goal with an extra player on the ice while the game was still in reach. The Canes got six total shots off on the opportunities: Justin Faulk (2), Jacob Slavin (1), Sebastian Aho (1), and two from Dougie Hamilton who is on the second unit.

It's not like the power play was the only reason the Hurricanes dropped this game the way they did. Scoring first and home ice have proved monumental in this series, the Canes are down three of their most physical players — Andrei Svechnikov, Micheal Ferland, Jordan Martinook — in a chippy showdown and the Caps are a great team.

But the power play is the one factor undeniably in their control, and they didn't handle that nearly competently enough.

A lot was said about these missed opportunities following the loss.

First up was captain Justin Williams, never one to mince words.

"They took some (penalties) too, and they scored a couple power play goals. We stunk it up on ours. ... Obviously, the power play is a huge turning point of the game. It sucked and we weren't good enough. We need to do something positive for the team in those situations where we're only down 1-0."

Then came Jordan Staal.

"The PP was garbage tonight. A little bit of panic, not enough execution. I think we had three in a row there that didn't generate anything. That definitely killed us a bit. Special teams is important. They were all in a row at the start, we have to be sharp. They were better on special teams tonight for sure."

Said Slavin: "Obviously the power play wasn't good enough tonight, that's what hurt us there in the second. We had a lot of chances to even up the game and get the momentum our way but we didn't do that tonight. It just wasn't good enough."

Head coach Rod Brind'Amour has seemed to be growing impatient with the first power play unit specifically as it is. You could tell when Hamilton scored a pair from the second unit in the Hurricanes' Game 3 shutout. What is missing from the first unit that the second has at least shown in spurts?

"Shooting the puck," Brind'Amour said. "Our other guys don't want to shoot. Sometimes they go in, but they never go in if you don't shoot it. The first unit if you want to call it that, I don't call it that, they still want to get a little too cute."

The Canes have had 35:58 total power play TOI in Round 1 —that ranks fourth among the 12 teams that have played at least five postseason games. Their Corsi on the power play is 83.33 percent, obviously terrible compared to the Capitals' 96.25 percent. Corsi isn't usually something I take much stock in, but it does paint the picture of the Hurricanes surrendering the puck at the blue line with the man advantage and getting passes broken up — movies we've seen too many times in this series.



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The Caps, who have a generational power play weapon in Alexander Ovechkin, have done more with less on the power play. They've scored six PPG to the Hurricanes' three this series with 34:43 power play TOI. The Hurricanes' three goals have come from Dougie Hamilton (2) and Jordan Staal (1) all on the "second unit."

Getting "too cute" on the power play has been an issue for the "first unit" virtually all season, and issues like this tend to carry over to the playoffs. I have spoken with Aho and Nino Niederreiter about the power play woes exhaustively these past few months and they agree that "being too cute" is the root.

This is proven in the realm of "scoring chances," where the Canes excel at even strength but are among the worst in the playoffs on the power play. They've had 17 to the Caps' 44, and seven to the Caps' 22 "high-danger chances."

The high-danger stuff just isn't a fair fight when Ovechkin is setting up in his office and letting that shot rip as no one else

can, but the number of attempts and effort have always been the Canes' "game." They've had slightly more power play TOI than the Caps, but the Caps have an overall 35-28 shot edge.

It seems everyone in North America is clamoring for Hamilton and Faulk to switch on the first power play unit, and I get wanting to see something different, but that Brind'Amour doesn't consider this the "second unit" is telling. Clearly, he doesn't want to mess with what has actually been working. He could afford to roll out that unit more often, but with Svechnikov out indefinitely the message is as simple and clear as it's ever been.

Shoot it.

"Most teams pretty much know what's coming, they know what you're doing," Brind'Amour said. "You try to tweak things here and there — we've made a few adjustments, they've made a few adjustments. We'll make a few more but at the end of the day it always comes down to executing."



Fialko: How the Canes can recover from a Capitals' crushing

By Jared Fialko, WRALSportsFan multimedia journalist

Raleigh, N.C. — What went wrong in Washington:

- An energized crowd craving eye-for-an-eye retribution in a series where the home team's yet to lose.
- The Capitals netting the first goal, which for the fifth time decided who's victorious.
- A visiting team that didn't do the little things that worked so well all season.

A perfect ice storm that engulfed the Hurricanes.

"It wasn't our best effort which was the hardest part to swallow," says Hurricanes forward Jordan Staal.

"I just didn't think our intensity was there, especially at a time when it's do-or-die," says Hurricanes forward Warren Foegele. "We need to get back on track to what's made us

be successful and that's all of us working hard and playing fast and aggressive."

The obvious cause-of-death for Carolina's Game 5 chances came on special teams. After killing 13 of Washington's last 14 power plays, the wheels didn't just come off, they exploded in a fiery, rubbery mess. Caps converted all three of their final chances on the man-advantage while the Canes went 0-5.

"We just kind of got out of sync," says Staal. "We weren't really executing very well, in general all game. So, that was another part that crept into our special teams."

"Obviously, they were good in their special teams, but we weren't good enough," says Hurricanes center Sebastian Aho. "We didn't battle hard enough there and they'd just win the puck battles."



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Game 6 Preview: Capitals vs. Hurricanes

Canes aim to stave off elimination

by Michael Smith

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

The Carolina Hurricanes are playing for their lives.

The Hurricanes will look to stave off elimination when they host the Washington Capitals in Game 6.

The Canes trail the best-of-seven First Round series 3-2 after getting shut out, 6-0, in Washington on Saturday.

Lessons from Game 5

There's not much to take from Game 5 except that the Hurricanes know they don't want to see a repeat performance.

"We were working hard, but we weren't working hard at the digging in part of it," head coach Rod Brind'Amour said on Sunday. "It was a combination of everything. You almost scrap that game. If we don't get to our game, it's going to look like that."

The Hurricanes surrendered the first goal to the Capitals, a power-play goal from Nicklas Backstrom, and then failed to tie the game with three subsequent power-play chances in the second period. Backstrom struck again shortly after, Brett Connolly stretched the Caps' lead to three nearly two minutes later and that was pretty much that.

"The power play was a huge turning point in the game. It sucked, and we weren't good enough," Justin Williams said after the game. "We need to do something positive for the team in those situations."

Do or Die

The Hurricanes are now faced with the reality of having to win two games in a row, including one on the road, should they look to advance to take on the New York Islanders in the Second Round of the playoffs.

But, the Canes can't afford to look ahead. They have to take it one game at a time, just as their mindset has been for each game in the 2019 calendar year.

"We know what's our situation, but we've been kind of in this situation this year, too," Sebastian Aho said. "We have a lot of faith in our group. We believe."

It's win or stay home for the Hurricanes, who have to rebound from a misfire in Game 5 should they want to force a winner-take-all seventh game.

"I think everyone plays their best with their backs against the wall, and now we're literally there," Brind'Amour said. "I'm pretty confident we'll come out with the best game we have. Is that going to be good enough? We'll see. I certainly would expect to be much better than the other night."

Patching Holes

The Hurricanes' forward corps is walking wounded, and the team is currently without three top-nine, physical forwards.

Micheal Ferland reaggravated an upper-body injury in Game 3 and hasn't skated since.

Andrei Svechnikov was placed into the concussion protocol after fighting Alex Ovechkin in Game 3. Svechnikov has been skating with the Canes - he practiced with the team on Sunday, wearing a yellow, non-contact sweater and a full-face cage - but hasn't been cleared to return to game action just yet.

"My head still hurts," Svechnikov said Sunday. "It depends how I'm going to feel tomorrow."

"We'll see," Brind'Amour said. "I would say highly doubtful."

Jordan Martinook suffered a lower-body injury in Game 4 and was limited to watching practice from the locker room tunnel on Sunday.

"Marty is trying," Brind'Amour said. "His heart's sure in it. I just don't know if his body is going to be able to let him go."

With this trio of forwards expected to remain sidelined for Game 6, the Hurricanes recalled Clark Bishop from Charlotte on Sunday evening. Bishop, who logged 20 games with the Canes this season, will likely join Saku Maenalanen and recent recall Patrick Brown in the lineup.

"You're asking a lot for call-ups and guys to fill those roles," Brind'Amour said. "That's the big challenge we have."

AT THE RINK

Back home! Here's a quick rundown of what you can expect for Game 6. PNC Arena parking lots are set to open at 1 p.m. A South Plaza Party helps kick off the festivities at 4:30 p.m. Doors will open at 5:45 p.m., and the show begins around 6:30 with warm-ups.

Giveaway alert! "Earn It" rally towels are waiting for you on your seat.

Did you know? The 50/50 Raffle is back! The Hurricanes Foundation is awarding non-cash prizes each week from now through early June. The grand prize - half of the cash jackpot - will then be drawn on June 13, and all ticket



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purchasers (including non-cash prize winners) are still eligible to win. Learn more about how you can win big and also raise funds for children's health and educational needs throughout North Carolina.

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Canes Fighting to Stay Alive in Stanley Cup Playoffs

Canes face must-win situation in Game 6

by Michael Smith

For a brief moment, Justin Williams got to breathe.

The Carolina Hurricanes had just punched their ticket to the Stanley Cup Playoffs with a 3-1 win over the New Jersey Devils at home.

The Hurricanes adopted a playoff atmosphere in order to push for the better part of the season and rhythmically climb in the Eastern Conference standings.

They had to in order to finally bring an end to a playoff drought that lasted nine long seasons, and it took a lot of out Williams and the Hurricanes.

"It's felt like every game in the last month has been win or go home. That's what it's really felt like," Williams said after game 81. "We've pushed ourselves as hard as we can."

After five games in their First Round series with the Washington Capitals, it is now win or stay home for the Hurricanes, who face a 3-2 series deficit with Game 6 coming up at PNC Arena on Monday.

It's not an unfamiliar position for the Hurricanes, but now their season is actually on the line.

"I think everyone plays their best with their backs against the wall, and now we're literally there," head coach Rod Brind'Amour said after practice on Sunday. "I'm pretty confident we'll come out with the best game we have. Is that going to be good enough? We'll see. I certainly would expect to be much better than the other night."

"The other night" was a 6-0 drubbing at the hands of the defending Stanley Cup champions in their building on

Saturday. The Capitals capitalized, and the Hurricanes did not.

"We were working hard, but we weren't working hard at the digging in part of it," Brind'Amour said. "It was a combination of everything. You almost scrap that game. If we don't get to our game, it's going to look like that."

A critical factor in why the Hurricanes were never able to establish their game was a trio of injuries to top-nine forwards, none of which is expected to play in Game 6. Micheal Ferland has been sidelined with a nagging upper-body concern since Game 3. Andrei Svechnikov spent a lot of time on the ice Sunday - not that that's anything new - but remained in a yellow, no-contact sweater and a full-face cage.

"My head still hurts," Svechnikov said on Sunday. "It depends how I'm going to feel tomorrow."

"We'll see," Brind'Amour said of Svechnikov's status for Game 6. "I would say highly doubtful."

And then there's Jordan Martinook, who suffered a lower-body injury in the first period of Game 4, only to have to watch Game 5 from the Capital One Arena press box (and make an appearance on the radio broadcast) and take in Sunday's practice from the tunnel just outside of the Canes' locker room.

"Marty is trying," Brind'Amour said. "His heart's sure in it. I just don't know if his body is going to be able to let him go."

Martinook's loss is perhaps underrated. Among a medley of elements missing for the Canes in Game 5, his heart-and-soul approach was conspicuously absent.



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"You miss that energy, for sure," Brind'Amour said. "When you have it, you don't really appreciate it as much, but when it's gone, you notice there's a big hole there."

So, it comes down to Game 6 at PNC Arena, with a partial crowd hopeful to see the hometown team play more hockey in the weeks to come. Game 7 is a different animal, tentatively on the docket for Wednesday in Washington, but

the Hurricanes are approaching this just as they have every other game since the new year: one shift, one period, one game at a time.

"We know what's our situation, but we've been kind of in this situation this year, too," Sebastian Aho said. "We have a lot of faith in our group. We believe."



Capitals eager to close out Hurricanes in Game 6, then think about Trotz

Not looking ahead to potential meeting with Islanders in second round

by Tom Gulitti

ARLINGTON, Va. -- No one has to tell the Washington Capitals who will be waiting for them should they get past the Carolina Hurricanes in the Eastern Conference First Round.

The Capitals lead the best-of-7 series and can end it by winning Game 6 at Carolina on Monday (7 p.m. ET; NBCSN, SN, TVAS, FS-CR, NBCSWA).

Barry Trotz, who coached Capitals to the Stanley Cup last season, warned after receiving his Cup ring Nov. 26, that, yes, they have a great chance to repeat, but to do it, "you'll have to through the (bleeping) Island."

And so it is that the New York Islanders, coached by Trotz after he was unable to agree to a new contract with Washington following last season, would be the next opponent for the Capitals if they're able to eliminate the Hurricanes.

But until the Capitals do, they're wisely putting aside any thoughts of Trotz and the Islanders, who swept the Pittsburgh Penguins in the first round.

"I don't think we're really thinking about that opponent at all right now," Washington coach Todd Reirden said Sunday. "We're trying to get through this one. We know we've got to be at our very best tomorrow to be able to knock this team out because they've been one of the best in the League from the start of the year on for a reason. So, it's going to be a tough out."

Playing without forward T.J. Oshie, who fractured his right clavicle in a 2-1, Game 4 loss at Carolina on Thursday, the Capitals made a strong statement with a 6-0, Game 5 win at home on Saturday.

After allowing the Hurricanes to dictate the style and pace of play through the first four games, the Capitals got back to

their identity as a physical forechecking team and put together a complete effort for the first time in the series.

"We did what we needed to do and just played with a little more jam, little harder, finished more checks, just got back to the way we know how to play," Washington forward Brett Connolly said Saturday. "And no one was happy with the first four games, especially the two games in Carolina. We didn't look anything near what we were capable of, but sometimes that is good to get tested sometimes, and we did that in Carolina, and we are going to have to bring our best there."

"They come extremely hard there in that building."

The Hurricanes have shown throughout this series that they push back when pushed, and the Capitals should expect no different Monday. Although the Capitals are the defending champions and finished first in the Metropolitan Division, the Hurricanes, the first wild card into the Stanley Cup Playoffs from the Eastern Conference making their first postseason appearance since 2009, were probably the better team in the series before Game 5.

Backed by its crowd, Carolina won Games 3 and 4 at PNC Arena by a combined 7-1. The home team has won all five games in the series.

But the Capitals know from experience the importance of being efficient in closing out a series. Last season, they were 4-0 when they had a chance to eliminate their opponent, winning each of those games on the road.

"You have to have that killer instinct and the ability to put teams away," Reirden said. "One of the positives to going through what we did last year was the fact that by eliminating teams earlier it gave us a little bit of extra energy at the end of it. So that's something that we learned from there. But I think also when we play to our identity and forced other teams to make mistakes, and they're in an elimination situation, then those mistakes become magnified."

After dominating Game 5, the Capitals believe they've recaptured the formula that worked so well for them last



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season. If they can play the same way in Game 6, they can be free to think about Trotz and the Islanders.

The alternative is facing the stress and drama of Game 7 at Washington on Wednesday against a scrappy underdog that hasn't shown any signs of being intimidated.

"We are sadly mistaken if we don't think that effort [in Game 5] and more is going to be required to win the elimination game against Carolina tomorrow because they will be the

most desperate we've seen them, and they will be ready to respond from an effort that they weren't happy about," Reirden said. "So we've got to again take our game up another level, and I'll be challenging our players to do that in a difficult building.

"If we can do that, I think we give ourselves a good chance."

Svechnikov doubtful for Hurricanes in Game 6 against Capitals

Forward practiced in non-contact jersey, has missed past two games with concussion

by Kurt Dusterberg

RALEIGH, N.C. -- Andrei Svechnikov is doubtful to play for the Carolina Hurricanes against the Washington Capitals in Game 6 of the Eastern Conference First Round at PNC Arena on Monday (7 p.m. ET; NBCSN, SN, TVAS, FS-CR, NBCSWA).

The 19-year-old rookie forward has missed two games with a concussion sustained in a fight with Capitals forward Alex Ovechkin in the first period of Game 3 on Monday.

Svechnikov practiced Sunday wearing a non-contact jersey, his second straight day on the ice with his teammates. He took part in the morning skate Saturday, also with a non-contact jersey, then went through a conditioning skate; He has yet to participate in a full-contact practice.

"We'll see tomorrow," Svechnikov said about Game 6. "It depends how I feel tomorrow. It feels good. My head hurts a little, but it's all right."

Hurricanes coach Rod Brind'Amour was less optimistic about Svechnikov returning to the lineup for the best-of-7 series, which Carolina trails 3-2.

"I don't know how that's going to go, but I would say highly doubtful," Brind'Amour said. "We'll see. I guess technically we could have a practice (Monday)."

Svechnikov, the No. 2 pick in the 2018 NHL Draft, remained on the ice for 40 minutes after practice wearing a full face

shield. He has three points (two goals, one assist) in the series.

The Hurricanes are without two of their other top-nine forwards. Micheal Ferland has not skated since he was injured by a first-period hit on Capitals forward Tom Wilson in Game 3, and Jordan Martinook did not play in a 6-0 loss in Game 5 after sustaining a lower-body injury in Game 4.

"[Martinook] is trying," Brind'Amour said. "His heart is sure in it. I just don't know if his body is going to let him go. We're going to give it a shot [Monday] and see where we're at. [Ferland] hasn't been on the ice yet, so I can't imagine (he will play)."

Brind'Amour said the injuries have affected the chemistry of the Hurricanes, who sent forward Aleksii Saarela to Charlotte of the American Hockey League on Sunday. He played 9:10 in his NHL debut in Game 5.

"When you take three guys out of our top nine, we were already a little bit thin," Brind'Amour said. "It's the type of guys you're taking out. You're asking a lot for callups and other guys to fill those roles. That's the big challenge we have."

Sebastian Aho (one goal, two assists in the series) is among the players who could add an offensive spark.

"I think he has another gear," Brind'Amour said of the forward. "Obviously, we need him. Our best players probably need to be a little more impactful. He doesn't have to be a superstar, that's for sure."

Hurricanes following Brind'Amour's lead in playoffs

Confident heading into Game 6 against Capitals thanks to coach's straightforward approach

by Tom Gulitti

RALEIGH, N.C. -- Rod Brind'Amour's approach in his first season as coach of the Carolina Hurricanes has been as straightforward as it was during his 20 seasons playing in the NHL.

Brind'Amour rarely minces words, except when he's asked to talk about himself. Never one to take credit, even when he was captain of the Hurricanes' Stanley Cup championship team in 2006, he similarly downplays his role in their turnaround this season.

"The coaching thing is fun, but I always say it's a little overrated," Brind'Amour said. "Your players play."

But the Hurricanes players know Brind'Amour deserves as much recognition as anyone for their transformation from a team that missed the Stanley Cup Playoffs nine straight seasons before he became their coach to the one that had given the defending Stanley Cup champion Washington Capitals all they can handle in the Eastern Conference First Round before a 6-0 loss in Game 5 on Saturday.

The Capitals lead the best-of-7 series 3-2 heading into Game 6 at PNC Arena on Monday (7 p.m. ET; NBCSN, SN, TVAS, FS-CR, NBCSWA).



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"That's what leaders do. They downplay their importance, and that's what Roddy does," Hurricanes captain Justin Williams said. "It's a trickle-down effect. He leads the way and really the players take on the persona of the coach. If the coach is calm, we'll be calm. If he's animated, he's upset, he wants more, we can give him more.

"So I wouldn't downplay anything he does."

Williams was teammates with Brind'Amour for five seasons on the Hurricanes, including when they won the Cup in 2006, and says Brind'Amour the no-nonsense coach isn't much different from Brind'Amour the no-nonsense player. It turns out the formula that helped the 48-year-old total 1,184 points (452 goals, 732 assists) in 1,484 NHL games with the St. Louis Blues, Philadelphia Flyers and Hurricanes, and twice win the Selke Trophy as the League's best defensive forward, also is pretty effective from behind the bench.

"He knows what works, right?" Williams said. "One thing you can't second-guess yourself on is effort. If the effort is there, then your skill will take over."

That's pretty much the Hurricanes' philosophy. They don't have the skill to match Capitals' stars such as Alex Ovechkin, Nicklas Backstrom, Evgeny Kuznetsov and John Carlson, but they rarely get outworked.

That began with the example Brind'Amour set from the first day of training camp.

"The thing about it is his work ethic," Carolina general manager Don Waddell said. "As far as preparing for games, in the gym, everything else, he's never going to ask a player to do something that he wouldn't do himself, and it rubs off on them."

After spending seven seasons as a Hurricanes assistant, Brind'Amour viewed becoming the coach as the natural next step for him when Bill Peters resigned April 20, 2018 and moved on to become the Calgary Flames coach. Brind'Amour even downplayed that, saying last summer, "I felt like it was the time to at least throw my name in the hat and see how it all shakes out."

It's shaken out pretty well.

The Hurricanes went 46-29-7 during the regular season to earn the first wild card into the playoffs from the Eastern Conference and a first-round series with the Capitals, who finished first in the Metropolitan Division for the fourth straight season.

Perhaps the series looked like a mismatch on paper, but the Hurricanes, after losing Games 1 and 2 in Washington,

responded by winning Games 3 and 4 at Carolina by a combined 7-1.

The Hurricanes had confidence they could do it because Brind'Amour instilled it in them.

They will need that confidence again after the Game 5 loss.

"He's been that way all year," Hurricanes defenseman Dougie Hamilton said. "We had to believe in ourselves and believe in our game when it wasn't working at the start. He's got a lot of belief in us and he's the easiest guy to respect."

Brind'Amour always is careful to share any credit he receives with his staff, which includes assistants Dean Chynoweth and Jeff Daniels, goaltending coach Mike Bales and video coaches Chris Huffine and L.J. Scarpace. Brind'Amour has a separate office, but only uses it for individual meetings with players.

Otherwise he prefers to work in the same office with the assistants.

"When you have good people around you, I just find it pretty easy," Brind'Amour said. "It's, 'You take care of that. I'll take care of this. You take care of that.' Then we meet and it just feels like it's not as [difficult]. ... There's other things to head coaching that are very, very important, but there's a lot of it that if you just have good people around you, which I feel like I do, it makes the job a lot easier."

To Brind'Amour, everything is a team effort. That too is a carryover from his playing days and one of the reasons his players want to play so hard for him.

"I was lucky enough to play with Rod, play on his line, and he didn't have to say much," said Fox Sports Carolinas analyst Shane Willis, who was teammates with Brind'Amour on the Hurricanes for three seasons. "He's a modest guy and he was an unselfish player as he is an unselfish coach. That's what players respect."

In Year 1 under Brind'Amour, the Hurricanes have exceeded almost everyone's expectations, except his and theirs. He often says he couldn't ask his players for more than the effort they've given him.

And they're not done yet.

"A new coach in the League, I don't know what I'm doing compared to the other guys, I'm sure, but these guys, they play hard," Brind'Amour said. "If you have that every night, you pretty much have a chance."



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Caps can eliminate Canes; Preds try to stay alive vs. Stars

By STEPHEN WHYNO

Braden Holtby isn't one for grand pronouncements, so when he was asked if a blowout of the Carolina Hurricanes sent a statement, he put the spotlight inside the Washington Capitals' locker room.

"To ourselves, I think," Holtby said, "to show that when we play that way we're going to be real tough to beat."

The Capitals look as if they've found the swagger that led them to winning the Stanley Cup last year and can eliminate the Hurricanes in Game 6 on Monday night, while the Nashville Predators face elimination down 3-2 on the road against the Dallas Stars.

In a first round that has included three series upsets and two division champions already knocked out, the Metropolitan Division champions smell blood, and the Central Division champions just want to stay in the playoffs a few more days.

"We're still in it," Nashville forward Viktor Arvidsson said. "We haven't lost anything yet, and we can still win two games and move on."

Washington is one win away from the second round and a showdown against former coach Barry Trotz's New York Islanders. The Capitals blitzed the Hurricanes 6-0 on Saturday night, setting the stage for the chance to close them out on the road in Game 6 (7 p.m. EDT, NBCSN).

"You don't know the breaking point for any opposition," coach Todd Reirden said Sunday. "This was a big part of our success last year, that we needed to invest and force the opposition to play a difficult game and eventually if you do it for long enough and you believe in the rest of your systems enough you will break them."

After winning Games 3 and 4 to even the series, the Hurricanes look broken. They're without injured forwards Micheal Ferland and Jordan Martinook, and coach Rod Brind'Amour said it's "highly doubtful" rookie Andrei Svechnikov plays a week after being concussed in a fight with Alex Ovechkin.

It looked from Game 5 as if the Capitals had figured something out about the Hurricanes. Goaltender Petr Mrazek allowed six goals on 28 shots, and now the pressure is on Carolina at home to stem the tide from a playoff-seasoned opponent that knows how to finish series.

"We're going to be desperate," Hurricanes center Jordan Staal said. "It's playoff hockey and yeah, we're facing elimination so we're going to be a desperate team and hopefully we play that way and we compete better than we did last game."

The Predators are banking on that, too, after letting the Stars' top line of Jamie Benn, Tyler Seguin and Alexander Radulov run roughshod over them in Game 5 Saturday afternoon. Benn, Seguin and Radulov combined for more points in that 5-3 game than Nashville's top line of Filip Forsberg, Ryan Johansen and Arvidsson have all series.

But this is not a new situation for the Predators. They went into Winnipeg in the second round last year down 3-2 and forced a Game 7 back at home and will try to do the same this time (8:30 p.m. EDT, CNBC).

"I do think that the experiences that we've been through, they make us a little bit tougher in a situation like this," coach Peter Laviolette said. "We shouldn't be deer in the headlights when a game like this happens."

Even after losing T.J. Oshie for the rest of the playoffs with a broken right clavicle, the Capitals certainly won't be. They advanced in their first opportunity to do so in all four series last year on the way to the first championship in franchise history and have developed something of a killer instinct.

Game 5 provided Washington a blueprint on how to grind down Carolina, and anything close to that will let the defending champion move on.

"We are sadly mistaken if we don't think that effort and more is going to be required to win the elimination game against Carolina," Reirden said. "We've got to again take our game up another level and I'll be challenging our players to do that in a difficult building. If we can do that, I think we give ourselves a good chance."

Capitals take 3-2 lead into game 6 against the Hurricanes

By The Associated Press

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

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

EASTERN CONFERENCE FIRST ROUND: Washington leads series 3-2

BOTTOM LINE: The Washington Capitals visit the Carolina Hurricanes in the Eastern Conference first round with a 3-2 lead in the series. The teams meet Monday for the 10th time this season. The Capitals won the last meeting 6-0. Nicklas Backstrom scored a team-high two goals for the Capitals in the victory.

The Hurricanes are 13-13-2 against Metropolitan Division teams. Carolina leads the league shooting 34.4 shots per game while averaging 3.0 goals.



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The Capitals are 19-7-2 against opponents in the Metropolitan Division. Washington is fifth in the NHL averaging 3.3 goals per game, led by Alex Ovechkin with 51.

TOP PERFORMERS: Sebastian Aho leads the Hurricanes with 83 total points, scoring 30 goals and collecting 53 assists. Dougie Hamilton has five goals and four assists over the last 10 games for Carolina.

Michal Kempny leads the Capitals with a plus-24 in 71 games played this season. Backstrom has eight goals and four assists over the last 10 games for Washington.

LAST 10 GAMES: Capitals: 6-4-0, averaging 2.9 goals, 4.9 assists, 3.2 penalties and 7.3 penalty minutes while giving up 2.4 goals per game with a .920 save percentage.

Hurricanes: 6-3-1, averaging 2.9 goals, 5.2 assists, 3.7 penalties and 8.5 penalty minutes while giving up 2.4 goals per game with a .914 save percentage.

Hurricanes Injuries: Micheal Ferland: out (upper body), Jordan Martinook: out (lower body), Calvin de Haan: out (upper body), Andrei Svechnikov: out (upper body).

Capitals Injuries: T.J. Oshie: out indefinitely (upper body), Michal Kempny: out indefinitely (lower body).



Carolina Hurricanes vs. Washington Capitals: Game 6 Preview and Storm Advisory

The Canes take on the Capitals in Raleigh in a do-or-die Game 6 situation. A win would force Game 7 in Washington, while a loss would end the series and the season.

By Andrew Ahr

Eastern Conference First Round Game 6

Washington Capitals at Carolina Hurricanes

Monday, April 23, 2019 - 7:00 PM ET
PNC Arena - Raleigh, NC

TV: Fox Sports Carolinas, NBCSN
Radio: 99.9 The Fan

The Hurricanes take on the Capitals in the third game of the series at PNC Arena with their season on the line. They will likely have to get it done tonight without three top-9 forwards. Jordan Martinook, Micheal Ferland, and Andrei Svechnikov are all likely out of the lineup tonight with injury.

Vital Statistics

Category	Hurricanes	Capitals
Record	2-3	3-2
Goals/Game	2.40	3.00
Shots/Game	31.2	25.6
Faceoff %	52.3	47.7
Power Play % (Rank)	15.0% (14)	31.6% (4)
Penalty Kill % (Rank)	68.4% (13)	85.0% (3)

Category	Hurricanes	Capitals
ES Corsi For %	60.15%	39.85%
ES PDO	98.6%	101.4%
PIM/Game	10:35	9:24
Goaltender #1		
Category	Petr Mrazek	Braden Holtby
Record	2-3	3-2
Save %	.890	.923
GAA	2.81	2.40
Goaltender #2		
Category	Curtis McElhinney	Pheonix Copley
Record	0-0	0-0
Save %	N/A	N/A
GAA	N/A	N/A
Game Notes		



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- The Hurricanes took a beating in Washington in Game 5 on Saturday night, losing by a score of 6-0. The Canes looked rattled and just couldn't handle what the Caps were throwing at them on home ice.
- The franchise holds a 12-12 record when facing elimination in the playoffs. They have gone 5-1 in their last six elimination games. They own a 4-5 record in Game 6 when trailing in the series.
- Aleksii Saarela made his NHL debut on Saturday night with the Hurricanes after he was called up to address the injuries plaguing the forward corps. He got just north of nine minutes of ice time in Washington. He was reassigned to Charlotte yesterday, and Clark Bishop was recalled on an emergency basis. We will likely see Bishop draw in tonight and make his first NHL playoff appearance.
- Petr Mrazek has been lights out on home ice this series, allowing just one goal in two games, compiling a Save Percentage of .980%. He will

certainly need to be sharp tonight as the Canes take on an experienced Caps team in a game that could end their season.

- ICYMI, it was confirmed that TJ Oshie broke his collarbone in Raleigh on Game 4 and will be out the remainder of the series.

Playoff Storyboard

Here's what happened yesterday.

What year is it? The Bruins went into Scotiabank Arena yesterday and found a way to get it done, pushing the series to a Game 7 for the second year in a row. They will return to Boston for the final matchup of the series on Tuesday night.

As recently as last Tuesday, the Golden Knights were up 3-1 in their series. The Sharks went on to win two straight games to force a Game 7 back in California. The two teams battled it out last night into double overtime, where the Knights ultimately conceded a short-handed goal against on a shot that Marc-Andre Fleury will really want to have back. Another huge Game 7 is coming on Tuesday night.



Capitals Play With More Urgency

By Bob Hoffman

The Washington Capitals opened the 2019 NHL Playoffs against the Carolina Hurricanes and looked confident holding serve at home with a 2-0 series lead. Carolina responded by limiting Washington to one goal over the next two games, knotting the series at two apiece, and knocking out superstar T.J. Oshie in one of the most chippy games in recent history.

With the Canes playing with emotion in front of their boisterous home fans, was Saturday a must win home game for the Caps in order to advance to round two? With the potency the Hurricanes have been playing with in their building, Washington responded with a 6-0 statement victory exhibiting more urgency at Capital One Arena.

The Ovechkin Fight

The highlight of a physical Game 3 in Carolina was Alexander Ovechkin dropping the gloves with 19-year-old Andrei Svechnikov. Ovechkin opened up a can of whoop ass on his fellow countryman by knocking out the rookie and slamming him to the ice. The 6-foot-3, 240-pound winger reminded opponents he can throw hands as well as score.

Svechnikov earned a black eye for his efforts, and afterwards the Hurricanes allowed only 15 shots in a shutout victory. Ovechkin won the battle, Svechnikov won the war. While fighting the Capitals captain is never a good idea, this decision seemed to work in favor of the home team as they responded for their young star by dominating the game after the fight.

Will the Real Kuznetsov Please Stand Up?

Evgeny Kuznetsov was unmanageable at times during the Capitals' 2018 Cup run. His play in particular against the Pittsburgh Penguins was sensational and his 32 points and plus-12 rating put him in the discussion for the Conn Smythe Trophy. Kuznetsov hasn't been terrible boasting five assists in five games in this series, but the Caps need him to start scoring.

Can the Capitals win the series without Kuznetsov having a big game? Carolina has been pestering Ovechkin and with Oshie out of the lineup, #92 needs to take on more of the offensive workload. Caps fans will be hoping for a few of his classic bird celebrations to finish off the Hurricanes Monday night.

Tom Wilson Time

With the dirty play that led to the Oshie loss and the overall physical play exhibited in this series thus far, Tom Wilson set the tone early in Game 5. Wilson showed his ability to take over a game with his toughness as well as improved offensive skills.

If Wilson continues his high energy style, draws more penalties and can put more traffic in front of Hurricanes goalie Petr Mrazek it will be a boost for the Capitals. Ovechkin and Nicklas Backstrom need someone to take the Hurricanes' attention away from them. Fans also rally off of his play and that was key on Saturday to shift the momentum



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in the series. Don't be surprised to see #43 deliver an early big hit and maybe even a clutch power-play tally in Game 6.

Pressure on Todd Reirden

Game 5 was a huge night for Capitals' head coach Todd Reirden. Barry Trotz was masterful in these situations last season at getting the team to perform at their best in the most critical situations.

A first-round exit after being up 2-0 would signal Trotz leaving as the worst mistake owner Ted Leonsis has made during his tenure. Even the Capitals' lackluster road

performance thus far, combined with the Islanders' success, has fans questioning the decision of not paying Trotz to stay. The Caps bounced back from many situations in the Cup run last season and Saturday was a huge win for the first year head coach in these playoffs.

Reirden has the horses and they all have championship experience but this could put even more pressure on the new bench boss to deliver. Will Washington close the series out in six or is a pressure cooker Game 7 in the future in this entertaining series?



Providence Evens Series at One Game Apiece

Written by Nicholas Niedzielski

While last night's first period featured a staggering five goals between the two squads, the Bruins owned the opening frame on Sunday. They capitalized on an early man advantage to break the ice, then tacked on another in the waning moments to nab a two-goal lead through the first 20 minutes of play.

Neither team could gain much traction for most of the middle frame, but the Checkers swung things their way over the final three minutes, with Andrew Poturalski ricocheting a puck in to get the visitors on the board and Dan Renouf busting out a slick wraparound move in the final minute to draw the score even heading into the third.

Both sides got their fair share of chances in the final frame, but a stellar passing play from Providence midway through proved to be the difference, giving the Bruins a lead that they wouldn't relinquish for the remainder of regulation. They

would notch one more via a last-second empty-net goal and skate away with a win, evening the series at one game apiece.

NOTES

Renouf scored just two goals in the regular season, the most recent of which was on Feb. 17 ... Poturalski had his second consecutive multi-point game in the playoffs and fourth in a row going back to the regular season ... Nicolas Roy (3a) and Morgan Geekie (2g, 1a) also have points in each playoff game ... Aleksii Saarela returned to the lineup after making his NHL debut one night earlier ... Defenseman Roland McKeown missed the game due to injury ... Forwards Scott Davidson and Zack Stortini and defensemen Derek Sheppard and Eric Williams were healthy extras.

UP NEXT

The series now moves to Charlotte for Game 3 on Wednesday at 7 p.m.

Clark Bishop Recalled By Carolina

Written by Nicholas Niedzielski

Ahead of their Game 6 matchup in Washington, the Hurricanes have recalled Clark Bishop.

Bishop recorded six points (3g, 3a) in 38 AHL games for the Checkers this season, his third as a pro. The forward also appeared in each of the first two games of Charlotte's first-round playoff series against Providence.

The Newfoundland native made his NHL debut this season and appeared in 20 games for Carolina, notching three points (1g, 2a) along the way.

The Checkers will host the Bruins on Wednesday for Game 3 of their best-of-five first-round playoff series, which is tied at one game apiece.



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SportScan

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

1142235 Carolina Hurricanes

Canes video coaches also feel game pressure in the playoffs

BY CHIP ALEXANDER

APRIL 21, 2019 05:36 PM

Carolina Hurricanes' video coach Chris Huffine sets up two laptops with video feeds to capture game action, as does fellow video coach L.J. Scarpace, left, prior to the Hurricanes' game against the Washington Capitals on Saturday, April 20, 2018 at the Capital One Arena in Washington, D.C. In the back of the room head coach Rod Brind'Amour confers with assistant coach Dean Chynoweth and goaltending coach Mike Bales while the players participate in pre-game skate.

It hasn't happened to the Carolina Hurricanes in the playoffs, not after five games, but the moment still could be coming.

That moment when the Washington Capitals score a goal. When a Caps player appears to be offside before the goal. That moment when the Canes' two video coaches, Chris Huffine and L.J. Scarpace, sense the clock ticking, Canes coach Rod Brind'Amour waiting and a lot at stake.

Or as Scarpace puts it, "The fastest 30 seconds ever."

In the NHL, each team has one coach's challenge that can be used in a game, contesting either goaltender interference or offside, and must be made roughly 30 seconds after a goal is scored.

If a challenge is made for goaltender interference and the initial good-goal call is upheld after review by the NHL Situation Room officials, the challenging team loses its one timeout in a game. But challenge offside and lose the challenge ...

"A terrible feeling," Scarpace said. "It's like putting a pin in your stomach."

If a challenge for offside is lost, the timeout is lost and a two-minute delay-of-game penalty is called. Imagine the Caps both scoring a goal and then being awarded a power play after an unsuccessful challenge by Brind'Amour. That could decide a game in a series the Caps lead 3-2 after their 6-0 win at Capital One Arena on Saturday.

There was only one coach's challenge in the first five games of the series -- in the first period of Game 2, when the Caps claimed Canes forward Saku Maenalanen interfered with goalie Braden Holtby as Lucas Wallmark scored. That challenge by Caps coach Todd Reirden was denied and the Caps forfeited their timeout in a game they won 4-3 in overtime.

Huffine, a Greensboro native, is in his 19th season with the Hurricanes and was a member of the Canes' 2006 Stanley Cup champions. He handles the pre-scout work, putting together scouting reports that break down the other team's systems, tendencies, power plays, penalty killing, and presenting a pre-scout video for the players.

"Not long, maybe two minutes, four or five clips," Huffine said. "With Rod it's not about the other team. It's about us. From day one it's been about

us, video of us, how we do things, what we want to do. He's very positive."

Before coming to the Canes two years ago, Scarpace spent 13 seasons with the University of Michigan hockey program working under legendary Wolverines coach Red Berenson.

During games, Huffine is flagging different plays to be replayed and reviewed during the two intermission breaks and then after the game. Scarpace operates a Hawk-Eye replay system, studying every zone entry for a possible offside call.

When an opposing team is offside on the zone entry and then holds the puck in the zone for, say, 10 or 20 seconds before scoring, that's an easy call. But there are times when a quick stretch pass is made to an attacking player hovering at the Carolina blue line, who then streaks in and scores.

Boom, goal, clock running on a potential challenge.

"You see the pass and you hear the horn sound and it's a terrible feeling," Scarpace said. "You're scrambling to find the best angle of the play. You're trying to get the right angle to make the right call.

"Sometimes, we don't get all the TV replays right away. People at home might be saying, 'Oh, that's clear' but we may not see that angle until late in the process. It can be a little tricky. You then give the best opinion you have."

That happened at Toronto late in the regular season, with the Canes fighting for a playoff spot. The Maple Leafs' William Nylander scored on a breakaway five minutes into the game but the play was challenged by Brind'Amour and Nylander was ruled offside on the entry.

No goal. The Canes went on to win 4-1.

"A big momentum turner," Scarpace said. "That felt good."

The Canes are 3-for-3 on offside challenges this season, Huffine said.

The video coaches, in an office near the locker room, are in constant contact with the bench and assistant coach Jeff Daniels, who wears an ear piece. Goaltending coach Mike Bales, usually seated in the upper level of arenas during games, is the Canes' "eye in the sky" and also has Daniels' ear.

Video monitors are positioned at NHL benches, allowing Brind'Amour and the assistant coaches to quickly check the replays.

"If you have good people around you, it makes the job a lot easier," Brind'Amour said.

An insight into Brind'Amour's style of coaching is at PNC Arena there is no coach's office -- that is, an office reserved for the head coach. There is a coaches' office, with everyone together in one room, including Huffine and Scarpace.

"Our war room," Huffine said. "Roddy's belief and trust in our team (and staff is one of the reasons for success."

Huffine has been on-board for much of the hockey technology evolution, from the camcorders and VHS tape decks he once used when working with the Greensboro Monarchs of the ECHL to the high-speed, high-definition digital systems in use today.



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"Digital and HD revolutionized the game," Huffine said of the technological advances.

It's possible to break down so much video for the players -- Sebastian Aho, for example, might want to see all of his shifts from Game 2 against the Caps. Jordan Staal might like to see all his faceoffs.

The players have watched video on monitors, iPads, laptops. That's changed, too.

"They want to watch everything on their phone," Huffine said, smiling. "They do everything else on their phone. So we send it for them to see on their phones."

He's not going to challenge that.

News Observer LOADED: 04.22.2019

1142236 Carolina Hurricanes

Still a chance for Aho to turn this series around

BY LUKE DECOCK

APRIL 21, 2019 04:23 PM

If Sebastian Aho is the player the Carolina Hurricanes think he can be — think he is, now — then this is the time for him to show that. If he's really a star, it's time for him to be a star. They're about to pay him to be a franchise player, and he needs to be as much of one in game No. 83 as he is in game No. 82.

Throughout this playoff series, having run its course to where the Hurricanes now face elimination, Aho hasn't been anywhere near the dominant, aggressive, attacking player he has shown he can be.

The Hurricanes have done everything possible to get Aho going, pushing for favorable matchups at home, putting Teuvo Teravainen back on his line. Nothing has worked. He scored one goal from behind the goal line, set up another with a nice play at the blue line, and that's about it. There's no time and no space, and he hasn't been able to make any for himself.

Now that the Hurricanes are down to their last stand, down 3-2 to the Washington Capitals and facing what may be their final home appearance of the season in Game 6 on Monday, Aho's about out of time. It's now or never.

"I want to win," Aho said. "To win, it takes all of us to play our best games, if I can score some goals or whatever, obviously I'll be happy, but there's many other things to the game. You have to do it right."

Are you getting frustrated?

"No."

Is it hard to fight against that?

"No."

No one questions Aho's drive or ability or competitiveness, but he hasn't been able to find any space to maneuver. Players of his caliber are expected to find ways to impose themselves on the game, not the other way around.

"I think he has another gear," Hurricanes coach Rod Brind'Amour said. "Obviously, our best players have to be a little more impactful than another night. I don't think he has to be a superstar, that's for sure."

On a team without superstars, he's the closest thing the Hurricanes have. There's no shame in being outplayed by Alex Ovechkin and Nicklas

Backstrom, and the Hurricanes don't need Aho to play like they can, but they need Aho to play like he can.

After spending six months answering every possible question about this game — and putting himself in position, with 30 goals and 83 points, for a massive new contract this summer — his postseason performance has raised big new questions: whether he's strong enough to be the same player in the closer checking of the playoffs, and whether his significant international commitments to Finland the past three years, combined with his increased role at center this season, have left him worn down to a nub.

It's not just Aho. The Hurricanes have had too many impact players make too little of an impact. Teravainen and Nino Niederreiter and Justin Williams haven't been any better. The power play, collectively, has been a disaster when it matters most.

But if the Hurricanes are going to pay Aho like a star, and that's where things are headed this summer, they need him to play like one in the spring.

Maybe this is where playing center instead of left wing finally caught up with him, especially in these high-intensity circumstances. If that's the case, that's the Hurricanes' problem as much as it is Aho's. But he still has a chance, Monday and perhaps beyond, to exert an influence on this series before it's too late.

Eric Staal wasn't having the best playoff series of his life through five games against the New Jersey Devils in 2009 as the Hurricanes faced elimination. He had two goals and no assists, his line stagnant. He had to do more, and he knew it.

Staal then scored three goals and added two assists in the next two games, both Carolina wins, including the series-winner on the road in Game 7. The Hurricanes needed him to carry them, and he did. Aho is capable of the same.

Aho, having proven so much this season, suddenly finds himself with everything to prove all over again, and the Hurricanes with everything to lose.

News Observer LOADED: 04.22.2019

1142237 Carolina Hurricanes

Svechnikov doubtful as Canes face elimination game against Caps

BY CHIP ALEXANDER

APRIL 21, 2019 03:58 PM

The Carolina Hurricanes will go into Game 6 of their playoff series with the Washington Capitals facing a hard truth: a loss will end their season.

"We've been handling pressure pretty good all year," forward Teuvo Teravainen said Sunday. "There have been so many must-wins this season, so it's just another one."

The Canes also will go into Monday's playoff elimination game likely missing rookie forward Andrei Svechnikov, who had hoped to be fully cleared from the concussion protocol and ready to rejoin the lineup. But Svechnikov, injured in a one-sided fight with the Caps' Alex Ovechkin in Game 3, is "highly doubtful" for the game, Canes coach Rod Brind'Amour said Sunday. The same is true for injured forwards Jordan Martinook and Micheal Ferland.

After being whipped 6-0 Saturday in Game 5 in Washington, falling behind 3-2 in the best-of-seven Eastern Conference series, the Canes held a practice on Sunday at PNC Arena. Svechnikov again wore a



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yellow, no-contact jersey and Brind'Amour said in following the concussion protocol a player can't be cleared to play until he is first cleared and participates in a full-contact practice.

The Canes will not hold a morning skate workout Monday before Game 6, which has a 7 p.m. starting time at PNC Arena.

The Canes have won both playoff games at home while the Caps have swept the three games at Capital One Arena. But injury attrition is taking its toll on the Canes with Svechnikov, Martinook and Ferland, three of their more physical players, now sidelined. Neither Martinook nor Ferland practiced Sunday.

"You take three guys out of our top nine (forwards) ... and it's the competitive guys you're taking out," Brind'Amour said. "You're asking a lot for call-ups and guys who fill those roles. That's the big challenge we have. But having said that, I still think our other players have to step up and at least be the players they can be."

After beating the Caps 5-0 in Game 3 and following it with a 2-1 win in Game 4 at PNC Arena, the Canes evened the series. The Caps, the 2018 Stanley Cup champions, appeared a bit flustered, certainly bothered.

But late in Game 4, Canes forward Warren Foegele sent Caps forward T.J. Oshie into the boards. Brind'Amour called it a "nudge" and Ovechkin called it a "dirty play" but Oshie was left with a broken collarbone, according to the Washington Post.

In a flash, the Caps went from flustered to infuriated. Returning home on Saturday for Game 5, taking on a "Win for T.J." mentality, they shoved the Canes to the brink of elimination with the 6-0 detonation.

"You lose a key leader in T.J. Oshie and not one person is going to replace him," Caps coach Todd Reirden said after the game. "Everyone needed to take their game to a different level than it had been at. That means your best leaders have to be even better."

For the Caps, they were. Center Nicklas Backstrom scored the first two goals in a four-point game. Ovechkin finished with a goal and two assists and helping set a physical tone with 11 hits as the Caps looked to wear down the Canes.

"All the things we've done pretty well during the year, it all went away," Brind'Amour said Sunday. "Tough, tough loss."

What now? Can the Canes tilt things back their way back in Game 6 on home ice, or will the Caps march on?

Before the series began, Canes captain Justin Williams, a three-time Stanley Cup winner, said, "At some point somebody's going to give up and say it's too hard, and we've got to make sure it's not us."

But the Canes will need to be better in every area Monday -- at even strength, on the power play, penalty killing, defensive zone, on the forecheck, playing the body. If that's too hard, their season may end.

"I thought guys worked hard tonight but we didn't play our game," Canes defenseman Jaccob Slavin said Saturday. "Our game is a forechecking game and I think they did a good job breaking the puck out against us. If we can't get them hemmed in their zone and let our forwards go to work we're not playing too great."

Canes center Jordan Staal said scoring first again could be critical Monday -- the winning team has scored the first goal in all five games. More so, the home team has won all five games and PNC Arena was full and at full throat in Games 3 and 4.

"Hopefully we can use that to our advantage," Staal said.

News Observer LOADED: 04.22.2019

1142238 Carolina Hurricanes

Five points for the Hurricanes going into Game 6

BY LUKE DECOCK

APRIL 21, 2019 03:37 PM

1. IT'S THE POWER PLAY, STUPID As bad as the Hurricanes were Saturday night, they had four dismal power plays -- generating all of four shots on goal -- and the game was still 1-0 and there for the taking. There's only so much the Hurricanes can do about the Capitals' high-powered power play, but there's almost no route to victory that includes going 0-for with the man advantage with the game hanging in the balance. The Hurricanes practiced with the same units Sunday; Rod Brind'Amour isn't changing that up at this point.

2. FILL THE PHYSICAL VOID The collective absence of Jordan Martinook, Micheal Ferland and Andrei Svechnikov was telling Saturday, when the Hurricanes missed the physical edge any of the three could have provided. (Ferland's absence will loom large in the postmortem of the playoffs, whether the Hurricanes lose Monday or win the Stanley Cup.) Warren Foegele has upped his game in the playoffs, but the Hurricanes need more from someone like Brock McGinn, who is capable of throwing his body around but has been a nonfactor in the series.

3. AN UNLIKELY HERO Trevor van Riemsdyk may have been the Hurricanes' best player Saturday night, not that there was a tremendous pool of candidates. It's a good reminder that it takes some unexpected stars to win a playoff series. For the Hurricanes so far, that's been Foegele and Lucas Wallmark, but it would help if someone else on the bottom two lines stepped forward. You can't expect it. But you would appreciate it.

4. EMPTY THE TANK The Hurricanes spent a month playing must-win games and if Game 3 was figuratively a must-win there's no doubt left about it in Game 6. This series long ago became a battle of attrition, with the Hurricanes missing three top-nine forwards and the Capitals down winger T.J. Oshie and defenseman Michal Kempny. If the Hurricanes can scrape through Monday, there's no telling who will be left for a Game 7, on either side -- nor the pressure the Capitals would feel at home.

5. YOUR BEST PLAYERS HAVE TO BE YOUR BEST PLAYERS (AGAIN, STILL, ETC.) The Hurricanes need more from the no-doubt, multi-millionaire NHLers they have left. Aside from Foegele, who started the series on the third line, the five other players on the top two lines have combined for 11 points. Alex Ovechkin and Nicklas Backstrom have 15 for the Capitals alone.

News Observer LOADED: 04.22.2019

1142239 Carolina Hurricanes

What can the Hurricanes do about their self-proclaimed 'garbage' power play at this point?

By Sara Civian Apr 21, 2019

WASHINGTON — The Hurricanes know it, their faithful know it, any eyeball subjected to their 6-0 Game 5 loss knows it, every dad that screams "SHOOT IT" from the nosebleeds knows it: Carolina's power play has been a problem — mainly the "first" unit.

Even if it's not outright losing them games, it sure as heck isn't winning them when it has been given ample opportunity to try.



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The Hurricanes went 0-for-5 on the power play as Washington took a 3-2 series lead Monday. They failed to capitalize on an early Brett Connolly hooking call at 4:41 in the first when the score was 0-0, an Evgeny Kuznetsov hi-stick on Calvin de Haan at 4:18 into the second when they were only down one, a John Carlson goalie interference call that was gifted to them at 7:56 of the second still down 1-0, a Jonas Siegenthaler hook at 12:02 in the second still down by one, and finally a Nick Jensen hook at 17:29 in the third when they were unsurprisingly down, 6-0.

That's four opportunities to come up with a goal with an extra player on the ice while the game was still in reach. The Canes got six total shots off on the opportunities: Justin Faulk (2), Jaccob Slavin (1), Sebastian Aho (1), and two from Dougie Hamilton who is on the second unit.

It's not like the power play was the only reason the Hurricanes dropped this game the way they did. Scoring first and home ice have proved monumental in this series, the Canes are down three of their most physical players — Andrei Svechnikov, Micheal Ferland, Jordan Martinook — in a chippy showdown and the Caps are a great team.

But the power play is the one factor undeniably in their control, and they didn't handle that nearly competently enough.

A lot was said about these missed opportunities following the loss.

First up was captain Justin Williams, never one to mince words.

"They took some (penalties) too, and they scored a couple power play goals. We stunk it up on ours. ... Obviously, the power play is a huge turning point of the game. It sucked and we weren't good enough. We need to do something positive for the team in those situations where we're only down 1-0."

Then came Jordan Staal.

"The PP was garbage tonight. A little bit of panic, not enough execution. I think we had three in a row there that didn't generate anything. That definitely killed us a bit. Special teams is important. They were all in a row at the start, we have to be sharp. They were better on special teams tonight for sure."

Said Slavin: "Obviously the power play wasn't good enough tonight, that's what hurt us there in the second. We had a lot of chances to even up the game and get the momentum our way but we didn't do that tonight. It just wasn't good enough."

Head coach Rod Brind'Amour has seemed to be growing impatient with the first power play unit specifically as it is. You could tell when Hamilton scored a pair from the second unit in the Hurricanes' Game 3 shutout. What is missing from the first unit that the second has at least shown in spurts?

"Shooting the puck," Brind'Amour said. "Our other guys don't want to shoot. Sometimes they go in, but they never go in if you don't shoot it. The first unit if you want to call it that, I don't call it that, they still want to get a little too cute."

The Canes have had 35:58 total power play TOI in Round 1 —that ranks fourth among the 12 teams that have played at least five postseason games. Their Corsi on the power play is 83.33 percent, obviously terrible compared to the Capitals' 96.25 percent. Corsi isn't usually something I take much stock in, but it does paint the picture of the Hurricanes surrendering the puck at the blue line with the man advantage and getting passes broken up — movies we've seen too many times in this series.

The Caps, who have a generational power play weapon in Alexander Ovechkin, have done more with less on the power play. They've scored six PPG to the Hurricanes' three this series with 34:43 power play TOI. The Hurricanes' three goals have come from Dougie Hamilton (2) and Jordan Staal (1) all on the "second unit."

Getting "too cute" on the power play has been an issue for the "first unit" virtually all season, and issues like this tend to carry over to the playoffs. I have spoken with Aho and Nino Niederreiter about the power play woes

exhaustively these past few months and they agree that "being too cute" is the root.

This is proven in the realm of "scoring chances," where the Canes excel at even strength but are among the worst in the playoffs on the power play. They've had 17 to the Caps' 44, and seven to the Caps' 22 "high-danger chances."

The high-danger stuff just isn't a fair fight when Ovechkin is showing up in his office and letting that shot rip as no one else can, but the number of attempts and effort have always been the Canes' "game." They've had slightly more power play TOI than the Caps, but the Caps have an overall 35-28 shot edge.

It seems everyone in North America is clamoring for Hamilton and Faulk to switch on the first power play unit, and I get wanting to see something different, but that Brind'Amour doesn't consider this the "second unit" is telling. Clearly, he doesn't want to mess with what has actually been working. He could afford to roll out that unit more often, but with Svechnikov out indefinitely the message is as simple and clear as it's ever been.

Shoot it.

"Most teams pretty much know what's coming, they know what you're doing," Brind'Amour said. "You try to tweak things here and there — we've made a few adjustments, they've made a few adjustments. We'll make a few more but at the end of the day it always comes down to executing."

The Athletic LOADED: 04.22.2019

1142313 Washington Capitals

After a brief identity crisis, Capitals have seemingly rediscovered their most menacing form

By Isabelle Khurshudyan April 21 at 3:14 PM

Maybe Carolina Hurricanes defenseman Dougie Hamilton thought an icing call was coming as both he and Alex Ovechkin pursued a puck down the ice Saturday during Game 5. But Ovechkin has a different theory about why Hamilton suddenly bailed, leaving a loose puck for Ovechkin to snag and then pass to the front of the net for a Brett Connolly goal. Ovechkin and other Washington Capitals had been tossing the Hurricanes aside all game with crushing hits, so maybe Hamilton just didn't want to be next.

"I think it's that we hit their D," Ovechkin said. "I don't know. He just stopped skating."

Brett Connolly gives the Caps a 3-0 lead after Dougie Hamilton shies away from an Alex Ovechkin hit pic.twitter.com/2xm87iMGwD

— Ian Oland (@ianoland) April 21, 2019

The Capitals have an abundance of skill and speed, but they're also big, from the 235-pound Ovechkin to 6-foot-4, 218-pound Tom Wilson to 6-foot-3, 217-pound defenseman Brooks Orpik. In an NHL that has shifted toward a quick transition game, Washington is a rare hybrid with the personnel to excel at that style while also slowing down an opposing team from establishing it with a bruising forecheck.

Through the first four games of this first-round Stanley Cup playoff series with the Hurricanes, the Capitals had taken more hits than they'd dished out, especially where it concerned Carolina's fleet-footed defensemen. In Saturday night's 6-0 Game 5 victory that gave it a 3-2 series lead, Washington rediscovered its muscle. The Capitals were credited with 48 hits, 14 of those on the Hurricanes' blue-liners.



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"No matter who you are, when you have to keep going back over and over and over and you're getting hit, to break the puck out, I mean it takes a toll," forward Devante Smith-Pelly said. "You saw that in the second and third period. Those guys are playing big minutes, and we're making it hard on them."

[Perspective: Understated as always, Nicklas Backstrom delivers for Capitals in Game 5]

With winger T.J. Oshie sidelined with a broken collarbone, the Capitals recalled Smith-Pelly from the American Hockey League before Saturday's game, and while they were hopeful he could provide the kind of depth scoring he did a year ago — he was a hero of the team's Stanley Cup run with seven goals, equaling his regular season total — the more realistic expectation was that he would provide a physical spark Washington had been missing. He is listed at 223 pounds, and on his first shift, he hit Carolina forward Nino Niederreiter, garnering even more applause from a home crowd that was already happy to see him back.

"We knew we needed more physical investment, particularly on their defensemen," Coach Todd Reirden said. "That was a discussion point for us and something we felt that could give us a better chance to have success — to be able to draw some more penalties, to be able to play in the offensive zone more often, to be able to impose our will. . . .

"You don't know the breaking point for any opposition, but this was a big part of our success last year, that we needed to invest and force the opposition to play a difficult game. Eventually if you do it for long enough and you believe in the rest of your systems enough, you will break them, and that will allow you to get the results you need, which is building your confidence."

The formation of that identity dates from Barry Trotz's first season in Washington five years ago, when he observed that the Capitals had never used their heavy roster as a weapon. He challenged the team to be harder to play against, and then before Washington's second-round series against the Pittsburgh Penguins last year, Trotz called out individuals. The Capitals had been defeated at that stage of the playoffs by that opponent in back-to-back years, and part of the problem was losing too many puck battles to Penguins players who some Capitals towered over, little things that become big in spring and can go a long way to fluster an opponent. That's more critical than chasing hits, which can often pull players out of position.

"It's not always running people over," defenseman Matt Niskanen said this month. "Smashing them into the glass is great — I love it as much as anybody — but even just grinding people, leaning on them, being tough to take the puck off of. That stuff has a cumulative effect, I think. It's frustrating when you're a skating team, for example, and you're always getting bumped and people are taking you off your stride. It takes a lot of energy to get going again. It's frustrating if you're an offensive team and you're exerting a lot of energy just chasing the puck because they have a good cycle game going."

Physicality can separate a player from the puck, or it can generate energy in a home arena. Over the course of a seven-game series, it can wear on a team on multiple fronts — the soreness from repeated checks physically slowing players down while also making them more tentative on the ice out of fear of getting hit. It's something the Capitals feed off, from their biggest players landing the kind of hits that elicit a reaction from the crowd or the bench to their smallest players doing their part by not losing the puck along the wall and being a nuisance that way.

It's what helped win Washington a Stanley Cup last year, and after a brief identity crisis to start this postseason, the Capitals have seemingly rediscovered their most menacing form.

"It's a very clear blueprint that gave us success, and it started right from the beginning of the game, and it was everybody doing it," Reirden said. "That's how it has to be if we're going to get through this team."

Washington Post LOADED: 04.22.2019

1142314 Washington Capitals

Capitals' T.J. Oshie out of playoffs with broken clavicle

By Associated Press April 21 at 1:02 PM

ARLINGTON, Va. — Washington Capitals winger T.J. Oshie is expected to miss the rest of the playoffs after undergoing surgery to repair a broken right clavicle.

The team announced Oshie's surgery Sunday afternoon. Coach Todd Reirden had already called Oshie out indefinitely earlier in the week.

Oshie was injured late in Game 4 at the Carolina Hurricanes on a hit from behind from Warren Foegele. Oshie went right shoulder-first into the boards, and Foegele was given a two-minute minor penalty for boarding.

The 32-year-old had 21 points in 24 games during Washington's run to the Stanley Cup last year. He had 54 points in 69 regular-season games and two points in the first round before being injured.

It's unclear whether Oshie will be ready for training camp, but the Capitals will have to continue in the playoffs without him. They won Saturday and lead their series with Carolina 3-2 with Game 6 on the road Monday and former coach Barry Trotz's New York Islanders waiting in the second round.

Washington Post LOADED: 04.22.2019

1142315 Washington Capitals

Championship mettle now part of Capitals' DNA

By Thom Loverro - - Sunday, April 21, 2019

ANALYSIS/OPINION:

The Capitals — one game away from moving on to the second round of the NHL playoffs and a showdown against former coach Barry Trotz's New York Islanders — are showing what NBC Sports hockey analyst Eddie Olczyk referred to as their "Stanley Cup pedigree."

The Capitals can close out their first-round series Monday in Raleigh, North Carolina, with a Game 6 win after grinding the Hurricanes into the ice 6-0 Saturday at Capital One Arena.

That Game 5 performance was so dominant, so confident, that Capitals fans should stop for a moment to savor what it says about this franchise: This is who the Washington Capitals are now — a team whose DNA is defined by a Stanley Cup championship.

That identity will likely diminish with time, but it will never disappear. This may seem obvious, but after 44 years of franchise history — with much of the last several decades defined by choking, not championships — it is worth stepping back and recognizing that the outside world, after last year's championship run, looks at these Capitals differently.

The Capitals think of themselves differently as well.

After squandering a 2-0 lead in the best-of-seven series with back-to-back losses to Carolina — including a tough-to-swallow 5-0 collapse in Game 3 — the Capitals responded with their best hockey in some time to take a 1-0 lead in the opening period on Saturday, then going on to score two in the second and added three more.



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"Tonight, we played some Caps hockey," said Nicklas Backstrom, who has emerged as a scoring machine in the series, with two goals Saturday night and five for the series.

This wasn't always Caps hockey. Nobody knows that better than Backstrom, who has sat in front of his locker season after season, distraught and disappointed when previous versions of the Capitals came up short.

That was then.

Now, in the face of adversity — particularly the loss of T.J. Oshie for the rest of the playoffs — this team now responds with championship mettle.

It's who these Capitals are.

This is who they believe they are inside the Capitals locker room. This is who the NBC broadcasters believe they are — a team with a Stanley Cup pedigree.

Does this guarantee a first-round series win Monday night in Raleigh? Absolutely not. As we have seen with the early exits of the Pittsburgh Penguins and the Tampa Bay Lightning, there are no guarantees in the Stanley Cup playoffs. But no matter the outcome of this series, the view of this team has changed inside and out.

"I thought that was pretty good response," Backstrom said.

It is what these players now expect from themselves, and, based on what Olczyk said, it is what hockey outsiders expect as well.

"We just felt that we really hadn't imposed our will and played the type of physical brand of hockey that we're capable of," Brett Connolly told reporters Saturday night. "We knew we had another level to get to. And that was a real strong point, was how we were able to respond in that aspect because I think it is something that makes our team special, is the ability to be able to execute high-end skill play but still be able to really physically be abrasive on the forecheck and then all over the ice and make it difficult for the opposition.

"So that's much closer to how our identity needs to look."

Identity. Pedigree.

People believe in the Washington Capitals. And they believe in themselves.

A familiar face who helped set the tone for that belief last season was in the building Saturday night for the first time in two months — Devante Smith-Pelly, who was recalled from Hershey Bears after Oshie was sidelined. He, too, spoke of the response of this team after the Hurricanes evened the series.

"We went through the same thing last year, obviously, playing with key guys out," he said. "I wasn't surprised with our response at all. We saw it last year so it was expected."

Now, since it is expected, of course, everyone wants to see it again — including head coach Todd Reirden.

"That should be a pretty clear blueprint of how our game needs to look," Reirden told reporters. "And if we want to have continued success, that's the standard of how it has to be."

It is the new Washington Capitals standard.

Washington Times LOADED: 04.22.2019

1142316 Washington Capitals

T.J. Oshie has surgery for broken clavicle, likely out for playoffs

By Adam Zielonka - The Washington Times - Sunday, April 21, 2019

Washington Capitals forward T.J. Oshie underwent a successful surgery to repair a fractured right clavicle, the team announced Sunday, and he remains out of the lineup indefinitely.

Because the standard length of recovery for such a surgery is in the range of 6 to 12 weeks, Oshie is unlikely to play again this year.

Oshie was injured late in Game 4 of the Capitals' first-round Stanley Cup Playoff series against the Carolina Hurricanes, when he was pushed from behind into the boards by Warren Foegele.

Oshie's bad break is the latest in a long injury history that includes five known concussions and a broken ankle.

The 32-year-old was the Capitals' second-leading goal scorer this year with 25.

The Capitals called up Devante Smith-Pelly from their minor-league affiliate and added him into a reshuffled lineup for Game 5, which Washington went on to win 6-0.

"I'm not sure there's another player that wants to play a game any more than T.J. Oshie on our team," Capitals coach Todd Reirden said before Game 5. "The fact that he's not with us is going to be a tough void to fill, but that just should hopefully push people to get to a different level and have his back, so to speak."

Washington Times LOADED: 04.22.2019

1142317 Washington Capitals

Capitals' bottom-six forwards finally add their piece to winning recipe

By Adam Zielonka - The Washington Times - Sunday, April 21, 2019

For the first time in the Stanley Cup Playoffs, the Washington Capitals pulled everything together at once.

Combine an increasingly physical style with impeccable special teams and great goaltending, then sprinkle in some goals from stars like Alex Ovechkin and Nicklas Backstrom — the Capitals followed every step of their recipe for sustained success in Saturday night's 6-0 win over the Carolina Hurricanes.

Something else was missing from that recipe for the first four games of this first-round series, until Saturday, when Washington's bottom-six forwards finally made their presence felt. Contributions from the third and fourth lines — those that appear on the score sheet and those that don't — are crucial in postseason hockey, and there were examples everywhere in Game 5.

The Capitals didn't have a single even-strength goal from the bottom six for the first four games of the series; Lars Eller potted an empty-net goal in garbage time of Game 1, but for a while that was it. That changed Saturday when Brett Connolly, fresh off his career-best 22-goal, scored the game's third goal on a nice pass from Ovechkin.

Connolly came on for Tom Wilson and scored before the rest of the line change could happen, but it was a third-liner's goal nonetheless.

"I've had a couple chances," Connolly said. "This time of the year you're graded on what goes in, especially for guys who are getting paid to create offense, and it's great to see one go in."

Connolly added that his line — himself, Eller and Andre Burakovsky — had "for sure our best game" of the series. That was best illustrated by



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one long shift in the late stages of the first period. Though it didn't result in a goal, the trio gained some extended offensive zone time with crisp passes, hustle to retain possession on rebounds and Burakovsky playing keep-away with the puck for a while, all of which served to wear Carolina down.

The bottom six can't be discussed without factoring in the return of Devante Smith-Pelly. With T.J. Oshie likely out for the playoffs after needing clavicle surgery, the Capitals had to bump Carl Hagelin up to Oshie's second-line spot and shake up their bottom six to compensate.

Smith-Pelly was called up from the AHL Friday and played his first game for Washington in more than two months. The fan favorite's reputation as a "playoff performer" shone through, as his presence alone fired up the crowd at Capital One Arena and he knocked the Hurricanes around with five hits.

"Certain guys seem to have a knack for being big-game players," coach Todd Reirden said the morning of the game. "What I want him to bring is the energy, his ability to get in on the forecheck. We have not done that nearly enough."

Reirden got his wish, and other players said post-game that they drew on the energy Smith-Pelly provided simply by being there.

"He's been through this before and has got some experience," Backstrom said. "He's a physical guy out there, too, and maybe not easy to play against. That's a good thing to have. We're happy that he's back."

Smith-Pelly skated with Chandler Stephenson and Nic Dowd, a trio with only 20 games of experience together in the regular season, which didn't seem to matter Saturday. They capitalized on a Hurricanes blunder that left Dowd with the puck and an open sheet of ice ahead. Carolina defenseman Dougie Hamilton slashed him as he shot, but Dowd scored on the ensuing penalty shot.

Dowd was happy that Washington's forecheck was better across the board.

"I thought F1 (the first forward to enter the zone) did a good job eliminating their first D-man and then our F2 (second forward) was able to beat their second D to the puck," Dowd said, "and I thought it created some O-zone time."

It's now incumbent on the Hurricanes to bounce back from the Capitals' dominant performance and try to win Game 6 at home to stay alive. But where the Capitals have forward depth, the Hurricanes are running out of options. Three of their usual top-12 forwards have gotten injured during this series, forcing Carolina to play untested players like Patrick Brown and Aleksi Saarela, the latter of whom made his NHL debut — regular season or playoffs — Saturday.

Even without Oshie, the Capitals are healthier, and their depth forwards will need to offer up more performances like Game 5 in order to close out the series and keep advancing.

Washington Times LOADED: 04.22.2019

1142318 Washington Capitals

Devante Smith-Pelly provides nice 'distraction' as Capitals regain spark

By Matthew Paras - The Washington Times - Sunday, April 21, 2019

Devante Smith-Pelly had yet to take the ice, but the Capital One Arena crowd started chanting his name well before warmups. As radio announcer John Walton and Capitals analyst Mike Vogel discussed Smith-Pelly's pending return from the American Hockey League in a pre-game video, persistent chants of "DSP, DSP" broke out.

Those cheers intensified when the 26-year-old was shown on the jumbotron for the first time.

But as happy as fans were to see Smith-Pelly in a Capitals uniform again, the fanfare mattered little compared to what the winger brought to his team in Washington's 6-0 win Saturday over the Carolina Hurricanes.

Days after the Capitals realized T.J. Oshie would be out indefinitely with an upper-body injury, Smith-Pelly rejoined Washington and provided precisely the physicality that was missing over the last two games.

The Capitals now lead the series 3-2 with a chance to advance to the next round on Monday.

"When you go through the situation we went through the last couple of days in terms of losing one of our top players and leaders, you use that as an opportunity that someone has to take advantage of," coach Todd Reirden said. "And for what Devante has gone through this year, a very well liked player in our locker room, it was a nice, I'd say, distraction from us losing a top, top player, top leader on our team."

"Everyone was excited about getting him back into the mix. We felt like not just having him around as a person, but the style of game that he was going to play, we've been lagging in this series."

From his very first shift, Smith-Pelly made his presence felt. He slammed Hurricanes winger Nino Niederreiter into the glass — causing the crowd to give him a standing ovation. It was the first of five hits that Smith-Pelly delivered in the evening.

Exactly two months ago, Smith-Pelly was placed on waivers. The Capitals made the move in order to free up a roster spot ahead of the trade deadline, but they also specifically chose to designate Smith-Pelly after his disappointing season.

Dubbed a playoff hero for scoring seven goals during last year's Stanley Cup run, Smith-Pelly showed up to camp out of shape. He was held out of preseason games until he met the team's conditioning standards. Even when Smith-Pelly eventually returned to the lineup, he saw his role diminished. After he was put on waivers, NHL teams passed on the chance to claim him — setting up a stint with the AHL Hershey Bears.

The move, Smith-Pelly admitted, was hard to handle. The winger said he kept in touch with his teammates, missing them "a lot." He didn't know if he would ever return to the Capitals, adding he tried not to think about it. Logistically, Smith-Pelly said he stayed in a hotel, leaving his apartment and most of his things behind.

"It was good to come home and sleep in my own bed," Smith-Pelly said.

For all his time away, Smith-Pelly played exactly as the Capitals had wanted upon his return. After the win, Reirden said he felt like the Capitals had gotten away from their "physical brand" of hockey in recent days — which was a staple of their game last year. Washington had lost two straight to Carolina, and in general, had been badly outshot in the series.

Smith-Pelly, who played 10:43, helped the fourth line do a better job in maintaining offensive zone time. He had one shot on goal — and even came close to scoring when he almost knocked in a rebound off a shot from Nic Dowd.

But Smith-Pelly didn't have to get into the score sheet to make an impact.

"To be honest, I think we drew a lot from Devo being here," Dowd said. "His first couple shifts, he got the crowd into it. Guys are just excited. It kind of brings a different buzz when you add a new element like that and our crowd was behind us."

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1142319 Washington Capitals



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Todd Reirden on TJ Oshie's surgery: 'It's a tough situation for our team'

By Brian McNally April 21, 2019 2:18 PM

ARLINGTON — Capitals forward T.J. Oshie had a surgical procedure Friday to repair a broken right collarbone and remains out indefinitely.

Oshie was not at Capital One Arena for Washington's 6-0 win in Game 5 of its Stanley Cup playoffs first-round series against the Carolina Hurricanes. He was injured with five minutes to go in Thursday's Game 4 loss in Raleigh when nudged from behind by Hurricanes forward Warren Foegele and slamming hard into the boards near full speed.

"There's not one person who can take T.J. Oshie's spot for all that he is as a human being, player on the ice, off the ice all the stuff that he adds," Capitals coach Todd Reirden said at his media availability on Sunday afternoon. "But what I did notice is that everybody picked their level up last night. And that's what we're going to need going into Raleigh for [Monday]."

That's when Washington, ahead 3-2 in the best-of-seven series, can eliminate Carolina in Game 6. It's something it has done successfully on the road in recent years in Philadelphia (2016), Toronto (2017), Pittsburgh and Columbus (2018). All series the Capitals were up 3-2. In all four they won Game 6.

But they won't have Oshie this time and he is the emotional engine that has helped fuel some of those series-ending performances. There is still no exact timetable for Oshie's return. The Capitals have avoided ruling him out for the season and Reirden artfully dodged a question about whether he'd be ready for training camp.

A broken collarbone usually doesn't take longer than two months to heal barring complications. But that's almost certainly going to be after the playoffs ends even if the Capitals make a repeat run to the Stanley Cup Final. Last year they won it on June 7 in five games against the Vegas Golden Knights.

"I do know that T.J. Oshie is going to do everything he can, and we're not willing to put a timetable on it right now with regard to any time," Reirden said. "Just lots of these things take a different course in terms of how they rehab and don't rehab. I just know that I can tell you about T.J., he's all-in at all times, and that's a great person to have around our room at the very least."

Oshie had 25 goals and 29 assists in 65 regular-season games. He missed 11 of 13 games with a concussion. He had eight goals and 13 assists in the Stanley Cup playoffs last season. He also plays the "bumper" role on the top power-play unit and kills penalties.

Oshie tweeted thanks to fans both before and after Washington's 6-0 win on Saturday. In the third period, periodic "T.J. Oshie!" chants rang from the sellout crowd at Capital One Arena.

"It was nice to see the crowd give [Oshie] a little love," center Nicklas Backstrom said on Saturday.

Added Reirden: "That's obviously a tough loss for us, but we're prepared to go without him as we saw last night. It's a tough situation for our team, but I certainly liked our response last night and was proud of our effort in terms of how we played and how we were playing with him in the back of our mind."

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1142320 Washington Capitals

T.J. Oshie has surgery on injured clavicle

By Zach Brook April 21, 2019 12:47 PM

Caps forward T.J. Oshie underwent surgery on his right clavicle, the team announced on Sunday.

#Caps forward TJ Oshie underwent a successful surgical procedure on his fractured right clavicle. Oshie is expected to be out indefinitely.

— CapitalsPR (@CapitalsPR) April 21, 2019

Oshie was injured in Game 4 of the team's series against Carolina when Hurricanes' forward Warren Foegele cross-checked Oshie in the back, resulting in him being knocked over face-first into the boards, appearing to strike them with his right shoulder and in a large amount of pain.

The team responded in Game 5 back at Capital One Arena, crushing Carolina 6-0 to take a 3-2 series lead.

As the game drew to a close, the fans on deck in the nation's capital, including Redskins' linebacker Ryan Kerrigan, began chanting Oshie's name, and it will give you chills.

They love you, @TJOshie77!

Sound on 🗣️ #ALLCAPS pic.twitter.com/RsJWtnY0mO

— NBC Sports Capitals (@NBCSCapitals) April 21, 2019

The Caps will look to close out the series in Carolina on Tuesday.

Comcast SportsNet.com LOADED: 04.22.2019

1142321 Washington Capitals

Devante Smith-Pelly provided exactly what the Capitals needed on and off the ice in his return to Washington

By J.J. Regan April 21, 2019 6:00 AM

WASHINGTON — On paper, the addition of Devante Smith-Pelly to the Capitals lineup should not have mattered. A team that was held to one goal in its past two games lost its second leading goal scorer from the regular season in T.J. Oshie to injury. To replace him, the team recalled Smith-Pelly from the AHL who had just four goals and four assists in 54 games this season.

But hockey is not played on paper.

Though he did not record a point in Saturday's 6-0 Game 5 win over the Carolina Hurricanes, Smith-Pelly's impact on his line, on his team and on the game was undeniable.

"Good to get Devo back," Brett Connolly said. "I thought he was very good tonight. It gives our team a little different element when he's forechecking and people are aware when he's on the ice and he did a great job."

The day started with an ovation from the crowd at MedStar Capitals Iceplex as Smith-Pelly took to the ice for the morning skate. After scoring seven goals in 24 playoff games last season and becoming one of the playoff heroes that helped lead Washington to its first Stanley Cup, Smith-Pelly has become a fan favorite for the Capitals faithful. That excitement carried over into the game.

Smith-Pelly delivered a hit to Carolina forward Nino Niederreiter on his very first shift which brought the crowd at Capital One Arena to its feet in



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a standing ovation. Chants of “DSP” echoed through the arena in recognition of his return to the team.

“It’s a great feeling,” Smith-Pelly said. “I think all I was doing was down the lane, just cutting off the forecheck and they started chanting. It’s a nice feeling and I’m glad to be back.”

“I think we drew a lot from Devo being here,” Nic Dowd said. “His first couple shifts, he got the crowd into it. Guys are just excited. It kind of brings a different buzz when you add a new element like that and our crowd was behind us.”

Through the first four games of the series, Washington’s bottom-six on offense had been largely invisible. Lars Eller had the only points among those forwards with a goal—an empty-netter in Game 1—and an assist. But it was not just the offensive production, those lines seemed to have little positive impact on the game at all including physically.

“We’ve been disappointed with our lack of physical play, even when we had success here in 1 and 2,” head coach Todd Reirden said. “We just felt that we really hadn’t imposed our will and played the type of physical brand of hockey that we’re capable of.”

The addition of Smith-Pelly to the fourth line added a physical presence to that line that had been lacking throughout the series. The entire team came out with more of a physical edge to it and Smith-Pelly had a lot to do with that. He was credited with five hits in the game, the third most among the team’s forwards, despite getting only 10:43 of ice time.

“I felt great,” Smith-Pelly said. “It’d be hard not to have the adrenaline going coming back and playing my first game.”

You could be forgiven for not noticing the fourth line in any of the prior four games in the series, but you certainly noticed it on Saturday.

The physical tone set by the fourth line and the entire Caps team took its toll on Carolina as the Hurricanes seemed to wear down as the game went on. A 1-0 game at the halfway point turned into a 6-0 win by the end. Instead of dumping the puck into offensive zone and forcing his teammates to chase, Warren Foegele made an ill-advised pass to no one in the neutral zone and Alex Ovechkin took in the other direction leading to a Capitals goal. Later in the period, defenseman Dougie Hamilton stopped skating and yielded to Ovechkin as they were in a footrace for the puck along the boards behind the goal line in Carolina’s defensive zone.

“No matter who you are, when you have to keep going back over and over and over and you’re getting hit, to break the puck out I mean it takes a toll I think,” Smith-Pelly said. “You saw that second and third period. Those guys are playing big minutes and we’re making it hard on them.”

But Smith-Pelly’s impact was not just felt in the game, it was felt long before.

Losing a player like Oshie to injury is about so much more than just losing a talented player. Oshie was called a “heart-and-soul guy” in the wake of suffering a brutal looking upper-body injury in Game 4. Not only is he one of the leaders of the team, but his boundless energy is contagious. There was never a worry if he would be able to get up for a game and he always did his best to get his teammates up for it as well, whether that meant being a personality within the locker room, playing with 100-percent effort, laying a big hit or just pumping up the team with a goofy warm-up tradition.

Losing Oshie from the locker room may be harder to quantify than losing him on the ice, but it may actually be the more damaging loss.

Bringing in a player as well-liked as Smith-Pelly, however, was exactly what the team needed.

“I think when you go through the situation like we went through the last couple days in terms of losing one of our top players and leaders, you use that as an opportunity that someone’s got to take advantage of,” Reirden said. “From what Devante’s gone through this year, very well-liked player in our locker room. It was a nice, I’d say distraction from us

losing a top, top player, top leader on our team. Everyone was excited about getting him back into the mix. We felt like not just having him around as a person, but the style of game that he was going to play was something we’ve been lacking in the series and that’s the physicality and being able to have puck possession in the offensive zone.”

Smith-Pelly said after the game that he tried not to think about a possible return while he was in Hershey and instead tried to focus just on having an impact for the Bears. While he might not have wanted to think about it, however, it was clear he was ready for the call. Once it came, he certainly made the most of it on Saturday.

Said Reirden, “Definitely he gave us a boost both with how his game was on the ice, but also having him back in our locker room.”

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1142325 Websites

The Athletic / Mark Giordano took ownership of his pro journey from the beginning, all the way to a Norris nomination

By Scott Cruickshank Apr 21, 2019

Maybe it was Hartford. Then again, it could’ve been Philadelphia. No matter — the venue is not the point.

More central to this story is foot support — and what can happen if it is lacking. (Spoiler: Not fallen arches. More like fallin’ dominoes.)

It’s well into the 2004-05 season and Mike Commodore — who, the previous spring, had been skating in the Stanley Cup final — is a regular for the AHL Lowell Lock Monsters. And on this particular road trip — wherever the heck they were — the big defenceman is getting ready for a game when he realizes, to his horror, that the special insoles for his skates have been left behind.

Oh no.

“I’m like, ‘I can’t play without any insoles,’” recalled Commodore, pointing out that, in those days, the in-boot corrective gizmos he favoured weren’t readily available — only some running stores carried them. “So I was going to find a normal pair and just try to make it work.”

Word reached Tom Rowe, who wondered what all the fuss was about. Commodore remembers the Lowell skipper telling him: “You know what? There’s a lot of games. You’re going to end up playing plenty this year. Take the night off.”

The decision cracked open the door for a rookie blueliner, who had been on the verge of another night in the press box.

“Yeah, I was going to be a scratch,” Mark Giordano, smiling, said the other day, “but I got in because of the insoles and played well that night. I stayed in (the lineup) for a while after that, so it was good.”

The way Commodore remembers it, the young defender didn’t miss another game that season.

“It’s funny how it all worked out,” Giordano said. “We laugh about it now.”

Whether or not he temporarily got a leg up from the missing insoles, it is worth a chuckle, given the man’s extraordinary rise — from then to now.

Fourteen years ago as a graduating junior with nearly no options, Giordano had been doing his level best to get accustomed to the pace of professional hockey, while the very real possibility of a demotion to ECHL Las Vegas hung over his head.



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These days, of course, he's a force — captain of the Calgary Flames and, somehow, playing better than ever.

"If somebody told me he'd be that type of player when we had him his first year, I think you'd be surprised," Rowe said from Austria where he coaches Linz in the Erste Bank Eishockey Liga. "But once I got to know him, the character that he has, and how he takes care of himself ... I could go on forever. He's just a quality, quality person and, obviously, a great hockey player.

"It's hard to believe he's 35. My god. It just seems like the other day that I coached him in Lowell. Whoever the scout is who recommended him deserves a lot of credit."

It had been Calgary bird-dog Mike Sands who originally identified the promise of the burly rearguard for Owen Sound in the OHL. From there, Giordano took ownership of his pro journey.

Now he is poised to capture the James Norris Memorial Trophy, which goes to the NHL's top defenceman — and possibly, for the first time since the draft was instituted, to a gentleman who was never selected.

Think about that.

"That would be a pretty good feather in the cap when it's all said and done, if you could say, 'I was the only undrafted player in the history of the NHL to win the Norris Trophy' — that is impressive," Commodore said. "If you had to describe his career in one line, that would sum it up right then and there as well as any one line could."

Since the draft's 1963 debut, the Norris has been won by three players already established in the NHL — Pierre Pilote, Jacques Laperriere, Harry Howell — and by Bobby Orr, who had committed to the Boston Bruins in 1962. The lowest slot of any of the post-draft winners belongs to Rob Blake, selected 70th overall by Los Angeles in 1988.

Giordano — aside from being a sixth-round choice of the Port Huron Beacons in the United Hockey League's 2004 draft — left junior untethered. Now check out the fine print of his fellow short-listers for one of the NHL's most prestigious awards — Victor Hedman, last year's winner, was selected second overall in the 2009 NHL Draft. The other nominee, Brent Burns, was also selected in the first round, 20th overall in 2003.

"He came a long, long way, for sure," Richie Regehr said. "To be one of the top guys in the running for the Norris Trophy? That's a huge credit to him, his family, all his support staff, everyone there, for what he's done. You can't take anything away from him.

"He's done a great job. I'm sure it's taken a lot — a lot — of work."

Regehr would know. He was there from the start.

Undrafted, too, Regehr was preparing to go to the University of Alberta. Giordano, meanwhile, was bound for York University in Toronto. But after attending the Flames' summer camp in 2004, the two hopefuls were offered three-way deals.

"At that point, we had no leverage, so we were, 'OK, yup. Let's take anything that's given to us,'" Regehr said with a laugh. "Just a copy-and-paste contract. It was bare bones — the minimum that you could get in each league."

Flames boss Darryl Sutter's theory — if someone was willing to sign one of those low-budget pacts, they must really want to play. The previous year, Sutter had convinced a couple of other unattached blueliners, Brennan Evans and Deryk Engelland, to agree to similar terms.

Regehr gets it.

"It was a chance," he said. "It did show we were hungry. That was probably a good approach by Darryl."

Proving ground provided, it was left to the players to carve out careers.

But the challenges were especially steep for the two rookies in 2004-05. Not only was the AHL souped up because of the lockout — NHL regulars such as Eric Staal, Patrice Bergeron and Jason Spezza were all there — Lowell had been a shared affiliate.

The arrangement between Calgary and Carolina? Four spots for Flames defenders, four spots for Hurricanes defenders.

"You give it your all," Giordano said, "but you know the writing's on the wall — you're probably going down (to the ECHL)."

Scott Allen, assistant coach and in charge of Lowell's blueline, remembers thinking that Giordano or Regehr — or perhaps even both — could be banished to Las Vegas, then coached by Glen Gulutzan.

But Giordano had already caught the eye of Rowe, who starting asking Allen, employed by the Flames, about the arrival.

"I said, 'Are you sure this guy's a first year? Because he plays like a veteran,'" Rowe said. "He walked into the room and he was very confident, but not cocky. He was very respectful of everybody in the room, of all the guys around him. But he knew he was a good player. He just wanted to establish himself. He knew what he had to do off the ice. You didn't have to babysit him. A very, very easy guy to coach."

Commodore was no different than the coaches — he didn't know any of the newcomers, either. He had not attended the AHL camp, so it wasn't until he got to Lowell that he got introduced to Giordano.

"I'd never heard of him," Commodore said. "At first, I wasn't really sure. He got scratched a few times at the beginning because we had other guys we were going to play and he was an undrafted rookie.

"I remember him being — if I'm being totally honest — a little chunky. I remember thinking, 'This guy could probably lose 10.' But I'd watch him in practice and he actually moved pretty decent for being a couple pounds heavy."

Giordano was a barrel-chested specimen in those days and his strength didn't go unnoticed.

"He was strong. Physically strong," Evans said. "I don't know if his benchpress is still crazy, but he could benchpress a house."

Fearless, too, Giordano didn't hesitate to drop his gloves when challenged, which left an impression on Commodore one night, despite not remembering the combatant's identity. "And it doesn't really matter," he said. "I remember watching the play and Gio lost his marbles on somebody. I'm like, 'Wow. I didn't know he had that in him. That's impressive.' And he did well in the fight. This is blowing him up in my eyes a little bit.

"As the year went on, I'm like, 'This kid's actually pretty decent.' Now, did I think he was going to be the captain of the Flames for however many years it's going to end up being? No. I didn't think he was that good.

"By the end of the year, I was like, 'Man, I think this kid definitely has a shot to play in the NHL.'"

Ample ability — and potential — evident, Giordano finished the season plus-13, with six goals and 10 assists in 66 appearances. Dressing for all 11 of the Lock Monsters' postseason dates, his worth had been duly noted.

According to the head coach, the rookie could move the puck well — rarely muffing an outlet pass — and handle own-zone stress like a 30-something.

"I remember talking to Scott, 'I can't believe this guy wasn't drafted,' given what he had done for us," Rowe said. "It just shows you — if you have good scouts and they're out there pounding the pavement and looking for hockey players, you can still find some kids who definitely slip through the cracks.

"Man oh man, Mark is just an incredible, incredible hockey player."



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Reaching the NHL, however, is never a sure thing.

The following season, the Flames operated their own AHL affiliate, the Omaha Ak-Sar-Ben Knights, and Giordano further asserted himself. He led the squad — including forwards — with 58 points, yet refused to badger the staff about promotions to Calgary.

"He never once pulled me aside and said, 'Hey, what's going on? When am I going to get my shot?' Never," Allen said, who is currently an assistant coach for the Arizona Coyotes. "He stayed the course. It wasn't a panic thing. It was, 'I'm going to get there. And when I get there, I'm going to stay.'"

By then, Allen — assistant to head honcho Ryan McGill that winter in Omaha — had been ready to make the declaration. This lad is going to skate in the NHL.

But what form would that transition take? It was tough to project.

"Is he going to play a hundred games? Is he going to play five seasons? Is he going to have a career?" Allen wondered. "Guys fall into different categories. Is he going to be an in-betweener? Is he going to be a call-up guy? Is he going to be a good American league soldier who your young guys can learn from and who is capable of giving you some games every year in the NHL?"

"Until guys get games under their belt in the National league, you never really know for sure. Some guys can fall flat on their face. And some guys can keep a steady progression."

Giordano played seven times for Calgary that season, 2005-06, then 48 the following season, before bolting to the Russian Super League when Sutter declined to hand him a one-way deal.

He returned to the Flames' fold for 2008-09 — and his career, seemingly free of any ceiling, continued to advance.

"He grew a bunch. He confidence grew a tonne," Regehr said. "I think he made a really, really good decision to go to Moscow. Because his offensive capabilities — it's a puck-possession league — grew so much from that. And his skating got a lot better."

"He was very offensive at the start, then he sort of morphed into everything. He was always a strong, hard-working, down-to-earth kind of guy."

And a guy not afraid to chart a unique path to full-time work in the NHL — one season of Midget AAA, one season of Junior A, two seasons of OHL, parts of three seasons in the AHL and one season in Russia. According to Regehr, that bite-sized developmental pace may have been beneficial in the long run.

"Say you're given something right away without working for it, sometimes you don't appreciate it as much," he said. "Maybe that's helped him in his motivation — 'I'm going to keep going. I want this, I want this, I want this.' Rather than, 'I got it. What do I do now?'"

Giordano has appeared 833 times in the regular season for the Flames. Only Jarome Iginla, whom No. 5 replaced as captain in 2013, has played more games for the club. Including a personal-best 74 points this winter — Giordano's 452 points stake him ninth in franchise history.

"It didn't surprise me at all when they named him captain," Rowe said. "Just because of his leadership — you could see it in him. He's a great guy as you know. His teammates love him."

Added Allen: "He made himself an NHL player by doing what was required. Everybody says they want to play in the NHL, but sometimes it's, 'What are you willing to do? Are you willing to go the extra mile?' He was always one of those guys."

Because even as a 20-year-old getting his first peek at play-for-pay hockey, Giordano had a presence. He carried himself like an experienced hand.

"Yeah, you could tell he took it very seriously," Evans said. "Some guys, maybe it takes a while to get their diet dialed in or maybe they're used to living with billets. But Gio, he was an adamant pro from Day 1."

Said Regehr: "Very down to earth. A humourous guy, a comical guy. Quiet. He wouldn't be running around. He'd walk around. You wouldn't even notice he was in a room till he was talking. Big smile on his face. Big head." (He laughs.) "I really, really enjoyed him. I was pretty close with all those guys ... after we signed those contracts together."

Allen, too, recalls fondly his time with Giordano both on and off the ice. He mentions working with the Florida Panthers a few years back and visiting the Saddledome.

"I hadn't seen Gio for a few years," he said, "and he sent somebody over to the coach's office to come get me. I come down the hallway and he gives me a bear hug. That's the type of guy that he is. That's why he wears the C on that team."

Which sounds an awful lot like a story Evans tells. Toiling for AHL Texas in 2015-16, his team had been in San Jose to face the Barracuda. The Flames also happened to be at the rink that day.

"This speaks to the kind of guy that Gio is," Evans said. "He saw me and came running over and grabbed me, gave me a big handshake and a hug and said, 'Hey, Evvie, how are you?' For a guy that's the captain of the Flames, it was a big deal for him to come over and say hi — that sticks out in my mind."

Commodore, who went on to capture the 2006 Stanley Cup with Carolina, skated in nearly 500 NHL dates. Residing now in Calgary, he can admire his old pal from up close.

"And no, I'm not calling Gio chunky anymore," he said, laughing. "The fact that he's managed to beat Father Time ... I love it. It's fun for me to watch from a totally personal standpoint. I was part of his career for a very, very short period of time — but it was a very interesting time. Because to see where he was? And to see where he is? It really is amazing."

Regehr dressed 20 times for the Flames before departing to Europe where he played 11 seasons, primarily in Germany. Retiring last season, he spent this winter helping to coach the Saskatoon (Midget AAA) Blazers, while keeping an eye on Giordano.

"I love watching him now," Regehr said. "What amazes me — what I appreciate watching him — is how many blocked shots he gets, how good his stick is to take away guys, what kind of shut-down guy he is ... above all those offensive capabilities. Our paths went different ways, but I always had an appreciation of him. He's worked his ass off."

"He's just stuck with it. I don't think he was in a hurry to get to the NHL and that helped him build his game. Now you could say in the same way, he hasn't been in a hurry to get to that Norris Trophy. He's just been going, going, going, and working, working, working. All of a sudden, he's there and everyone's seeing how good he is."

Evans' resume includes two playoff games for the Flames and 13 seasons in the AHL. At 37, he remains active, recently captaining the host Lacombe Generals to the Allan Cup championship.

"If you were to ask me 15 years ago if Gio would be captain of the Flames and possibly winning the Norris Trophy ... he was pretty good, but I don't know if that's what I would have said," Evans said. "He didn't have one crazy year where he just blew the doors off everyone, he just got better and better and better every year. Look at him now — he's still getting better."

"He's one of those guys who can probably play till he's 40 or 50 — who knows? He'll be like Chris Chelios, all tanned-up and playing forever because he's such a hard worker, right? He's a bit of a phenom, the way he trains, the way he takes care of himself."

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The Athletic / Top candidates to fill NHL coaching vacancies, from the big names to the lesser known

By Scott Burnside Apr 21, 2019

As wacky and compelling as the first round of the NHL playoffs have been – and that's plenty wacky – the drama away from the playoffs is just as compelling.

Hall of Famer Steve Yzerman was announced as the new GM of the Red Wings, bringing his hockey journey full circle.

Todd McLellan, one of the most respected coaches in the business, signed on to try and guide the Kings back from the abyss.

Joel Quenneville, the second-winningest coach in NHL history, rejoined old pal GM Dale Tallon in Florida where the Panthers are apparently all-in in an effort to escape years of irrelevance in South Florida.

Alain Vigneault, the third of the 'big three' veteran coaches expected to fill in coaching vacancies this offseason, popped up in Philadelphia and will look to replicate his early successes with the Canucks and Rangers.

Whew.

But in some ways, now is when it gets interesting.

There are still openings in Buffalo, Ottawa, Edmonton and Anaheim. Four teams in various states of disarray, yet safe to say none of these vessels are particularly seaworthy – although Anaheim is slightly more stable, followed by Buffalo and its collection of young talent with a large gap before you get to Edmonton and then Ottawa.

So, who looks to be ready to fill those positions? What kinds of dark horses exist in various outposts in the coaching world?

There remains an intriguing mix of veteran out of work NHL coaches and assistants, plus those coaching in college, minor pro level and Europe.

How will the coaching carousel continue to turn?

Here's a look at who could figure prominently in the four markets still looking to fill a head coaching vacancy.

Former NHL head coaches

Dave Tippett

Current Position: Senior Advisor to Seattle's NHL expansion group

Earlier this season Tippett joined Seattle's expansion group as an advisor and he said he wasn't planning on coaching the Seattle team when it begins play in the fall of 2021, something that was widely rumored. He said, instead, that he was content in the senior management role the group carved out for him. But Tippett subsequently said to The Athletic that you never say never when it comes to coaching and acknowledged there is nothing quite like coaching in the NHL playoffs. Others have reported that perhaps the coaching bug remains very much part of Tippett's psyche. If that's the case, Tippett would go to the front of the class in terms of desirability for a team looking to bring order and structure. Although his teams have always been defensively sound, Tippett is a forward-thinker and, for a team like Anaheim that has many desirable pieces, including top-flight goaltender John Gibson, the turnaround might be accelerated if Tippett decided that coaching was still very much in the cards for him. Likewise, he would be a great fit in Buffalo where the Sabres earlier courted Todd McLellan.

Mike Yeo

Current Position: Idle. Relieved of his duties as Blues coach 19 games into the 2018-19 season

Hard to get a handle on just what Yeo's coaching ceiling might be given the circumstances and roster limitations he faced in Minnesota and St. Louis. Certainly his work after replacing Ken Hitchcock in the latter stages of the 2016-17 season was, well, yeoman, as the Blues went 22-8-2 and defeated Minnesota in the first round. For the first four years of his tenure as an NHL head coach, Yeo, now 45, was the youngest head coach in the league. That experience should put him in a good place should one of these teams come knocking given Yeo's passion. His experiences might put him in good stead in Ottawa given the many challenges facing that team.

Bob Hartley

Current Position: Head coach Avangard Omsk, KHL

Hartley's Avangard Omsk team advanced to the KHL final this season, his first in Russia. While he's not part of the Hockey Canada network of coaches, which is generally helpful in finding employment as an NHL coach, there is no denying Hartley's ability to get results regardless of where he's coached and how much talent he's had at his disposal. He is a former Jack Adams winner as coach of the year and won a Stanley Cup in Denver with the Avalanche. But beyond that he's a coaching lifer. It seems not to matter particularly where he works as long as he works. His work in Calgary after a successful stint coaching in Switzerland is often overlooked but he did get a very ordinary Flames squad to the second round of the playoffs in 2015. On the eve of the NHL playoffs, Hartley seemed quite happy with his Russian coaching adventure and raved about how he and his staff were treated. Would he give that up to jump into the organizational quagmire that is Ottawa? Not sure, even though he'd be an excellent fit for a team that will continue to play with an underdog tag for the foreseeable future – something that fits Hartley's coaching persona.

Marc Crawford

Current Position: Interim head coach Ottawa Senators

Crawford, like Hartley, won a Stanley Cup in Denver with the Avs before less successful stints in Vancouver, Los Angeles and Dallas. But the former Jack Adams winner also enjoyed success in Switzerland and was a part of Guy Boucher's staff when the Senators advanced to within a game of the 2017 Stanley Cup final before beginning their current descent into chaos. Crawford, 58, took over for Boucher this season and would seem a safe choice to remain in that position moving forward. But it's also fair to question whether there was any appreciable change in how the Senators played when Crawford took over – they were 7-10-1 after Crawford took the reins on March 1. It also seems critical to have a completely fresh start with a new president of hockey operations and a new coach in order to move past the misery of the past two seasons.

Michel Therrien

Current Position: Provides media analysis for broadcast outlets in Quebec

Therrien stayed on top of the game and, while he's had opportunities to coach in Europe a la his old pal Hartley, there is still the pull return to the NHL game. Therrien is old school but has a wealth of experience as a head coach at the NHL level in both Montreal, where he had two stints as bench boss, and Pittsburgh, where he took a young Penguins team to the Stanley Cup final in 2008. Could the 55-year-old replicate that success with a young but troubled Oilers team? Certainly he would be a figure commanding immediate respect wherever he gets an opportunity.

Dan Bylsma

Current Position: Assistant coach Detroit Red Wings

Bylsma, 48, succeeded Therrien in Pittsburgh and won the Cup in 2009. The Penguins' best playoff season after that under Bylsma was a trip to the 2013 Eastern Conference final when they were swept by Boston. A two-year tenure in Buffalo turned out poorly for all concerned; although



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the fact that Bylsma's successor with the Sabres, Phil Housley, likewise failed to gain traction suggests this is as much on the team as it is on the coach. Discuss amongst yourselves but Bylsma, also a former Jack Adams winner, is a thoughtful and intelligent coach and has ties to the Anaheim area where he played on the Ducks team that lost in the 2003 Stanley Cup final.

NHL Assistants

Luke Richardson

Current Position: Assistant coach Montreal Canadiens

It wasn't surprising reading that Canadiens players were raving about the work done by Richardson, who joined Claude Julien's staff this season after spending last season as an assistant with the Islanders. What was expected to be a huge black hole for the Canadiens this season – their defensive game – ended up not being that at all as the Habs surprised most by making a valiant effort at a playoff berth. Player after player spoke glowingly about Richardson, who played 1,417 NHL games as a defenseman, praising his calming demeanor, his ability to teach on the fly and his supportive nature. Such are the qualities that would seem to translate easily to being a head coach, especially of a young team in need of a firm but intuitive hand. Richardson's connection to Ottawa is strong having been born in the Canadian capital and having played for the Senators at the end of his career before being an assistant coach with the big club and then head coach with the Senators' AHL affiliate in Binghamton. Given how many good young defensive prospects the Senators have in the system, Richardson's expertise would seem to make him a nice fit for the Senators. Richardson, 50, also played in Edmonton, and his personality and teaching style would seem to be a good fit as well, as the Oilers have a handful of top young defensive prospects looking to push their way onto the big club. One longtime NHL player noted the work done by both Montreal assistants, Richardson and Dominique Ducharme, and how both represented potential head coaching material: "I've watched the impact he's (Ducharme) has had on Claude and on the culture in that Montreal room."

Lane Lambert

Current Position: Associate coach New York Islanders

Lambert, 54, is a longtime associate of Islanders coach Barry Trotz, was part of the Stanley Cup winning coaching staff in Washington last season and moved to Long Island with Trotz in the offseason. Lambert, a native of Swift Current, Saskatchewan, who played 283 NHL games, plays a significant role in game planning and practices, and helped the Islanders' penalty kill, which was instrumental in the team's first-round sweep of the Penguins. One longtime NHL executive named Lambert as one of two top coaching talents ready to take on an NHL team and said he would be a good fit in Edmonton. "They need a defensive system like the Islanders," the former NHL player said. Lambert also has experience running a bench as the head coach with Milwaukee of the AHL. Another former player and NHL executive studied how Lambert and another longtime AHL coach Dean Evason ran their benches and communicated with players. He was very impressed with both and suggested both have NHL head coaching abilities. Evason was part of Bruce Boudreau's staff in Minnesota this season after six seasons as head coach in Milwaukee.

Minor Pro coaches

Sheldon Keefe

Current Position: Head coach Toronto Marlies, AHL

It seems inevitable that Keefe will be an NHL head coach sooner than later. His work with the Marlies is exemplary and he's considered a top young coaching mind. He would seem to be a good fit with any of the four teams looking to fill vacancies. The question is whether Toronto GM Kyle Dubas envisions him behind the Leafs bench at some point, pending what happens to the Leafs in the short term. At just 38 years old, it will take a leap of faith for an NHL GM to entrust a rebuilding team to a first-time NHL head coach with a relatively short resume compared to

some of the other options – although it can be argued that his youth is also one of Keefe's most attractive traits.

Dallas Eakins

Current Position: Head coach San Diego Gulls, AHL

There is a school of thought that Eakins, 52, is the heir apparent to the Anaheim head coaching job vacated when veteran Randy Carlyle was dismissed late in the regular season. Ducks GM Bob Murray coached the final 26 games for what was a lost season for the Ducks, but the feeling is that Eakins learned valuable lessons from his first stint as an NHL head coach in Edmonton, where he rubbed many folks the wrong way with his brash style, and is ready for a second go-round. He is credited with changing the culture in San Diego and helping some of the Ducks' young talent, like Troy Terry and Max Jones, transition from the AHL to NHL. One source close to the Ducks said Eakins would be the safe hire, especially given his knowledge of some of the young talent expected to take on a big burden in returning the Ducks to the playoffs. But would he be the right hire? The source was more non-committal on that front calling him a front-runner for the position but not a lock. The fact the Ducks' job remains unfilled is good news for Eakins whose Gulls are in the AHL playoffs.

Brent Thompson

Current Position: Head coach Bridgeport Sound Tigers, AHL

Thompson is a bit under the radar but has done solid work with the Islanders' top farm team, guiding them to a 43-24-9 record this season and home-ice advantage in the first round of the AHL playoffs. A native of Calgary, the 48-year-old won an ECHL championship and has been with the Isles' top farm team since 2014-15. Thompson was tabbed by one NHL executive and longtime player and scout as a top coaching talent not already in the NHL.

Mike Vellucci

Current Position: Head coach Charlotte Checkers, AHL

Vellucci, 52, holds the titles of assistant general manager and director of player personnel for the Hurricanes but his work in coaching the Canes' top farm team is exemplary, as they were an AHL-best 51-17-8 this season. Vellucci's second as head coach after a long run as coach and GM of the OHL's Plymouth Whalers. One NHL executive said he was surprised that Vellucci hasn't been more sought-after at the NHL level given his track record in Charlotte and his long coaching/managing background. Another former NHL player and executive said Vellucci is interesting because of his management background: "It's an interesting mix, it really is."

Scott Gordon

Current Position: Coach, Philadelphia Flyers organization

Gordon's current status is a bit up in the air with the hiring of Vigneault as Flyers head coach. Gordon coaxed the Flyers back into the playoff discussion before a late-season swoon ended those dreams. But with a 22-12-4 record with the Flyers after coming up from Lehigh Valley in the AHL to replace the fired Dave Hakstol, Gordon shouldered his way back onto NHL radars. He can return to the Phantoms next season, but given his work with some of the young Flyers both in Lehigh Valley and with the big club, a team like Ottawa might be a nice fit for the 56-year-old former netminder.

Outside Professional Hockey

Rikard Gronborg

Current Position: Coach of the Swedish men's national team

The list of European head coaches in the NHL is a pretty short one. Alpo Suhonen coached Chicago for one season, 2000-01, and Ivan Hlinka coached Pittsburgh for a total of 86 games between 2000 and 2002. Language, culture and differing coaching styles all contributed to a virtual wall existing between the NHL and European born and/or trained



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coaches. But if there is one person prepared to break through that wall it could be Gronborg, 50, who has a strong connection to North America, having played at St. Cloud State and coached at the minor pro level before taking on national team duties in Sweden. Gronborg is immensely popular in coaching circles and considered forward thinking. A source close to the Sabres indicated that, when they failed to land McLellan, Gronborg's name was thrown into the mix, especially given the number of top young Swedes on the Sabres' roster, including last June's No. 1 overall pick Rasmus Dahlin. Would it be an outside the box hire for Buffalo GM Jason Botterill or any of the other GMs (assuming Edmonton gets a GM at some point) to hire from outside of North America? Sure. But it does seem like high time that coaches with different perspectives are considered as the NHL game continues to evolve.

Scott Sandelin

Current Position: Head coach University of Minnesota, Duluth, head coach Team USA World Junior Championships

With Hakstol, David Quinn and Jim Montgomery all recently making the jump from Division I college hockey to the NHL without previous NHL head coaching experience, there is definitely a trend developing for NHL clubs to mine college hockey, not just for players but for coaching expertise. "People are watching them closely to see the transition," one former NHL player and executive with a solid understanding of the college coaching ranks said. He wonders if Sandelin, fresh off a second straight national championship with UMD and tabbed to coach at next year's world juniors, will be the next to get that chance. He also mentioned Providence College head coach Nate Leaman as another coach to watch vis a vis NHL openings. "I think he's going to be an NHL head coach," he said of Leaman.

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Sportsnet.ca / Maple Leafs miss chance to end 15-year drought as Bruins force Game 7

Chris Johnston | April 21, 2019, 6:06 PM

TORONTO — History looms in the shadows here.

For as vigorously as the Toronto Maple Leafs want to insist on this being a new team, new year, they can't completely ignore the parallels that have delivered them back to another Game 7 inside TD Garden.

Last year, the Boston Bruins targeted Auston Matthews with their toughest defensive matchups and almost kept the game-breaking centre off the scoresheet entirely during a first-round defeat.

This year, the Bruins have focused their efforts on neutralizing Mitchell Marner and John Tavares, successfully limiting that pair to just an assist apiece during the last three games.

Last year, Boston's power play was an absolute wrecking ball that converted on 33.3 per cent of its playoff chances against Toronto. Following Sunday's 4-2 victory to extend this series to the limit, it's running even hotter at 43.8 per cent.

The most significant changes come in the form of personnel for the Leafs — with Tavares and Jake Muzzin now playing significant roles — and the degree to which Brad Marchand, Patrice Bergeron and David Pastrnak are dictating terms in this series. Toronto has been better at 5-on-5, but less effective with its own man advantage opportunities.

Twelve months on the margin between these teams is even slimmer, but the Leafs are staring a cold reality in the face: Their season will end in the exact same fashion if they don't find a way to win on Tuesday night.

Yet, despite the *deja vu*, they insist the feeling has changed.

"Very different, extremely ...," Connor Brown said after Toronto missed its chance to end this series in six. "We're a very confident group. We were saying it all last year, but now we really believe it to our core."

"We feel as if we're a group that can go deep and we feel that we're a group that wants to be on the ice in big moments and wants to play these big games."

"We won't be timid. We'll be excited and we'll have fun."

They have been ahead three different times in this best-of-seven and let Boston up off the mat each one. Anything can happen in a Game 7 — especially when it's played inside a building so steamy that Marchand suggested they use a tennis ball because the ice is so poor — but Toronto will have serious regrets about letting it get that far if it fails to get the job done here.

The Leafs squandered a massive opportunity with an expectant crowd gathered both inside and outside Scotiabank Arena for the Easter Sunday matinee. They got off to a great start, built a 1-0 lead thanks to Morgan Rielly and then gave up two power-play goals before the intermission.

"Back to the drawing board," Brown said of the penalty kill.

"The bottom line is we have to fix it," said head coach Mike Babcock. "We fixed it before last game in Boston, we did a real nice job. We didn't do it today."

They never fully recovered, getting pinned in their own zone for most of the second period while allowing Jake DeBrusk to make it 3-1, and couldn't undo the damage done with a strong push in the third.

Matthews continued his strong play — scoring for the fifth time in four games, while putting another five shots towards Tuukka Rask — but Toronto's 11-91-16 line couldn't break through while facing a heavy dose of the Zdeno Chara-Charlie McAvoy pairing, and the Marchand-Bergeron-Danton Heinen line.

Marner began this series like he had been shot out of a cannon, drawing high praise from Bruins coach Bruce Cassidy. He's since been circled in red as a serious offensive concern and Boston's done a fantastic job of keeping him on the periphery as the teams have gotten more familiar with each other.

Marner registered one shot in Game 4, none in Game 5 and none in Game 6.

One Leafs player likened the overall play in this series to "ping-pong" because of how it's gone back and forth in predictable fashion with very little sustained momentum from either side. It now looks like last shot will win.

"It's all small details," said Matthews. "Neither team is really making many mistakes and when they do that's when you get opportunities and that's when guys score. Tonight I thought our first five, six minutes was good and then their power play got them going. We didn't really have an answer until the third period."

The Leafs adopted a bunker mentality before Game 6, staying in a local hotel while trying to close out the franchise's first series win since 2004. Now they'll head out on the road looking to set their minds right 363 days after last losing a Game 7 in Boston.

"When we've executed our game plan [against them], we've been able to win and we've been able to take care of the puck and play the way we want to play for 60 minutes," said Brown. "We've been able to have success against these guys."



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"I'm not a big believer of living in the past," said Babcock. "I don't carry a lot of stuff around from the past at all."

The man on the other bench has a longer memory, evidently. Perhaps that comes with being on the right side of the handshake line.

"Let's put on our surprise face," said Cassidy, clapping his hands for emphasis. "Game 7, TD Garden, Boston-Toronto."

Yes, this all feels very familiar.

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Sportsnet.ca / Bruins push Maple Leafs to Game 7: 'Let's put on our surprise face'

Luke Fox | April 21, 2019, 9:32 PM

TORONTO — When the thermostat gets dialed to scorching and the building rumbles like 20 ghosts throwing a rager in your consciousness, and the other side is so close you can see it, one of these teams knows how to keep calm and carry on.

The other, until proven otherwise, is the Toronto Maple Leafs, whose players are so young and whose problems are so old.

How you know this is Brad Marchand's bare feet and the way he strolls into Toronto's post-game press conference room, steps to the podium and fields questions about his three-point, elimination-delaying evening in a T-shirt, team shorts and a backwards snapback like he owns the place.

No socks, no shoes, at your service.

Marchand's two-goal, one-assist Easter Sunday performance raised his facing-elimination totals to six goals and 11 points. They might not all go so far as to deliver such a sartorial face-lick as Marchy, but big-time players show up for big-time games.

To steal a Babcockism, they're comfortable being uncomfortable.

So just as Auston Matthews elevated his team on enemy ice in Game 5, so too did Marchand and Patrice Bergeron in a tension-wrought Game 6, securing a full-value 4-2 victory and home-ice advantage in Tuesday's best-of-one.

When defenceman Torey Krug was asked post-win if recent history gives the Bruins a psychological edge in Game 7, he passed the hot potato.

"It's a question you'll have to go ask over there in their locker room," Krug said.

The Bruins bulled into the city of Toronto's mental china shop as loudly as they left.

David Pastrnak confidently said "we will" bring The Series Where Momentum Died back to TD Garden, and Marchand broke an expensive stick on a Scotiabank Arena wall in his throes of pre-game energy.

As they filed off the ice, silencing the loudest non-Raptors sports crowd we've ever heard assemble here, one by one, the Bruins yelled joyously to no one and everyone as they tossed off their gloves and unsnapped their helmets in the bowels of the rink:

"Yeah!"

Louder.

"Yeah!"

With more authority.

"Yeah!"

Contagious.

Stud defenceman Torey Krug (one goal, nine shots) and chief Leafs irritant Jake DeBrusk (beauty game-winner, knocked Morgan Rielly's helmet off) weren't too shabby either, and the Bruins' defence core as a whole registered 18 shots on net.

"To me it's the best game we've played," coach Bruce Cassidy praised. "More, overall, of our identity.

"We've got as close to [our ceiling] as I've seen in a long time."

So even as the Leafs jumped out with a furious first 10 minutes, John Tavares tipping a post and Rielly slamming an opening goal that felt like a shower, no panic rippled the Bruins bench.

"No sense getting in our heads and playing a poor-me getting down 1-0 early. We knew we had to respond. It's our season on the line," said defenceman Charlie McAvoy, still ramped up post-game. "Our older players lead the way, and we all follow."

A dominant Bergeron went a ridiculous 17-6 in the faceoff dot, eating Leafs penalty killers Zach Hyman and Mitch Marner, both wingers, alive (2-8) and ensuring all the scary stuff happened in Frederik Andersen's end.

"Quick, decisive plays," Krug said. "One or two passes — a shot."

That quicksilver power play went a perfect two-for-two Sunday, just as it went a perfect three-for-three in winning Game 4 in this building and is now clipping along at a gaudy 43.8 per cent.

Buzzing.

"It's time for us to stop having the breakdowns," Connor Brown said. "I don't know if we were too pumped up, but they came in fighting for their lives, and their power-play goals deflated us a little bit."

There will be a meeting about it Monday, ahead of Toronto's own elimination game. Same place, same time.

"Things happen fast," Rielly said. "It's important we meet tomorrow and we talk about what happened tonight and try to fix it."

What the Bruins have in spades — men in their room with rings and the kind of hard miles that age hockey players well — the Leafs have tried to import. Patrick Marleau. Ron Hainsey. Jake Muzzin. John Tavares.

So, this is what Cassidy did. The coach met with his players on the off-day and talked about playing with footspeed and urgency, about using their nasty forecheck to force Toronto into poor passes, about how he wanted his D to activate and not give too much respect to the Leafs' killer stretch pass.

Then Cassidy stepped aside on do-or-die day and let Bergeron, Marchand, Tuukka Rask and Zdeno Chara run the same room they've been steering for a decade.

"We get the vocal leadership from our guys, but we were focused coming into today. We know what's at stake," McAvoy said. "There wasn't a lot that needed to be said. We all knew we needed to play for each other, and we needed to bring it."

For those who shelled out \$2,000 for a last-minute scalper ticket, those who rammed Maple Leaf Square past capacity, and those who ate Easter dinner at the altar of the TV set, it sure would've been nice for Toronto to bring it Sunday.

But they didn't need to bring it. On Tuesday, everyone does.

"We've got a good group that enjoys being together and plans on having a good run," Babcock said. "In order to do that, we've got to go into Boston and win a game."

Sounds simple. Sounds impossible.



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"Game 7. TD Garden. Boston-Toronto," Cassidy said, clapping his hands together twice and rubbing them together.

"Let's put on our surprise face."

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Sportsnet.ca / Coach's Corner: Star players shouldn't kill penalties

Sportsnet Staff | April 21, 2019, 4:53 PM

The Toronto Maple Leafs got burned for two power play goals in the first period of Game 6 against the Boston Bruins, and Don Cherry says he knows why.

"You should not have your stars killing penalties," Cherry said on Sunday's Coach's Corner. "I always had with the Boston Bruins... before the referee put his arm down we had two guys ready to go. That was their job, not to score goals and kill penalties too."

Cherry was specifically referring to Mitch Marner and a play he made on the first Bruins goal Sunday. With a faceoff in the Maple Leafs' end, Marner failed to tie up his man, Brad Marchand, allowing Marchand to fire a quick shot past Maple Leafs goalie Frederik Andersen.

"The golden boy Marner should have had it," Cherry said while a replay of the goal played. "That's his guy... Marchand's taking him out, [Marner] should have stopped and taken him."

The Bruins have feasted on the Maple Leafs' penalty kill all series, converting on seven of 16 attempts through the first period Sunday. Their success rate of 43.8 per cent trails only the Columbus Blue Jackets (50 per cent) for best in the playoffs.

But the Maple Leafs do have one shorthanded goal in the series, scored by Marner in Game 1.

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Sportsnet.ca / Jets go down without much fight as Blues move on to second round

Iain MacIntyre April 20, 2019, 10:21 PM

ST. LOUIS — The Winnipeg Jets' window to win a Stanley Cup isn't closing, but it does get smaller. In time, players may regret more than they did Saturday that they never even made it up to the window sill this season.

After the Jets were eliminated in six games by the St. Louis Blues in the first round of the National Hockey League playoffs — a 3-2 loss that grossly misrepresented how badly the Jets were outplayed in Game 6 — Winnipeg coach Paul Maurice said his team wasn't perfect but tried as hard as it could.

But the imperfections exposed during an inconsistent season that ended badly were too great.

On Saturday, two days after losing pivotal Game 5 by blowing a two-goal, third-period lead on home ice, the Jets were outshot 27-6 through two

periods. They surrendered a goal after 23 seconds on a turnover by top defenceman Dustin Byfuglien.

The Jets lost every line matchup and when they trailed 3-0 halfway through the third period the deficit easily could have been double that were their best player not goalie Connor Hellebuyck. Winnipeg's top offensive players were largely invisible.

Captain Blake Wheeler's hardest shot was the F-bomb he whispered when asked by a Winnipeg reporter after the game about the Jets' failure to conjure their best for an elimination game.

"Please, come on, man," Wheeler said. "This is a tough trophy to win. Maybe our best just wasn't good enough today. And their best was pretty darn good. In situations like that you look for the resolve in your group. You look for how guys fight. And we played until the last whistle. That's the way I see it."

Indeed, Byfuglien's rebound goal that cut the deficit to 3-1 with 7:43 remaining clearly spooked the Blues a little. St. Louis somehow then allowed Bryan Little to score on a shorthanded two-on-one with 38 seconds to go and Hellebuyck on the bench.

But shots finished 36-20. During one 27-minute spell from late in the first period to early in the third, the Jets put one puck on Blues goalie Jordan Binnington. This was the most lopsided one-goal elimination you will ever see.

The momentum generated by the Jets' collapse on Thursday was turbocharged by Jaden Schwartz's goal on the first shift.

Veteran Blue Patrick Maroon said he could feel the series shift, and everyone in the rink could see it.

"We talked about bringing that momentum from the third period of Game 5," St. Louis coach Craig Berube said. "And I think that the guys did. We mentioned it yesterday, talked today about it."

They had good energy and played hard.

"It got a little tighter than we wanted, that's for sure. But for 50 minutes or more we were pretty dominant."

Maurice said: "We didn't have a whole lot of pushback. They sit on (the lead) in the third and that's part of us being able to come back, for sure. I just didn't think we had a whole lot left."

Schwartz, goal-less through the series' first 14 periods, scored the winner in Game 5 with 15 seconds remaining and then threw down a hat trick in Game 6.

His goal at 23 seconds and the second one on a power play at 12:36 of the middle period with Byfuglien in the penalty box for a dodgy roughing call away from the puck, had the whiff of goalie interference. Maurice lost his coach's challenge on the first one, so had no timeout left to appeal the second.

Schwartz dragged the puck around a beached Byfuglien and scored on a two-on-one to make it 3-0 at 3:55 of the third.

"They made it pretty easy on me for the most part," Binnington, the sensational rookie, said of his St. Louis teammates. "We played great and it was fun to watch back there. They were relentless the whole game. The room was excited and positive and believed in each other. That was a great win."

The Jets, who shed 15 points in the standings this season after losing the Western Conference Final last spring, may not be able to scuffle and still make the playoffs next year. They are likely to lose defencemen Tyler Myers and Ben Chiarot to unrestricted free agency, and defenceman Jacob Trouba and wingers Kyle Connors and Patrik Laine are due new, lucrative contracts.

It will be a challenging off-season for Jets general manager Kevin Cheveldayoff.



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"No matter what, it's disappointing," defenceman Josh Morrissey said. "You work hard all year to put yourself into this position going into the playoffs. It's really tough. We fought back at the end of that game and tried our best, but it's disappointing."

"It's painful as hell because you think you're right there," Maurice said. "But you got beat by a team who thinks the exact same thing."

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TSN.CA / Leafs head to Boston for Game 7 after failing to close out Bruins

Kristen Shilton

TORONTO – Somewhere between grabbing an early lead, and a powerful final push to nearly force overtime, the Maple Leafs lost their way on Sunday.

So, instead of eliminating the Boston Bruins in Game 6 of their first-round Stanley Cup playoff series, the Leafs' 4-2 loss will put them right back on a plane bound for Boston, and the decisive Game 7 that awaits.

"I thought we were really ready, we were jumping, big time," said Leafs' coach Mike Babcock. "And then as soon as we had a little adversity, and they scored twice [on the power play], we didn't recover. I don't know if that's the emotions got the best of us, but we couldn't get it back in check."

Chalk it up to another missed opportunity for Toronto, the second time in three games of this series that a bad period and a half has given way to a furious final comeback that falls just short.

When Sunday's game began, Toronto looked exactly like the speedy, tight-checking team that downed Boston in Game 5 to put that team's season on life support. The Leafs controlled the pace and kept Boston off their defence, and by halfway through the frame, Morgan Rielly's point blast through traffic past Tuukka Rask had spotted the Leafs a 1-0 lead.

It was the first and last lead the Leafs would hold all game.

In a span of less than six minutes after that, the Bruins had capitalized on two consecutive power plays to move ahead of Toronto 2-1, while the Leafs were 0-for-2 in the first period on their own power play tries.

The first Boston goal by Brad Marchand materialized from a scrambled face-off, allowing the Bruins' winger to pounce on the puck and deflect it off Leafs defenceman Ron Hainsey, fooling Frederik Andersen with the misdirection. Torey Krug's follow-up goal was off a rebound, but in the end would look like a dagger right to the Leafs' heart.

"Suddenly they were up 2-1 and they got momentum on their side," said Auston Matthews, who scored the other Leafs' goal. "I thought we got in our own way. They were forechecking pretty hard and we weren't able to breakout cleanly there kind of midway through the game."

The Bruins were all over Toronto to start the second period, forcing the Leafs back repeatedly in the middle of the ice and preventing any sustained offensive zone time.

Near the middle of the second, the Leafs were being outshot 19-6, and had gone more than 14 minutes from the first period on without registering a shot on goal.

That was a recipe for disaster, and it was only a matter of time before the Leafs sloppy defensive play caught up to them with Jake DeBrusk's first

goal of the postseason, the final flourish of a two-on-one rush with David Krejci.

"I thought they had one of the best periods they had all playoffs in the second period," said Babcock. "We didn't play fast enough or execute. We weren't as good as we could have been for a stretch of 30 minutes there. They skated way better than we did, and that doesn't happen to us very often."

Toronto retired to its dressing room for the second intermission and talked it out, coming back for the third with what John Tavares deemed to be a "good attitude." And it showed.

The same way Boston brought the game to Toronto in the second was reciprocated by the Leafs with a dominant third.

Matthews finally gave his team a much-needed second life in that frame when he fired his fifth goal of the series past Rask. After failing to get on the scoresheet in Game 1 or Game 2, Matthews has been the Leafs most consistent forward ever since, and his goal in Game 6 was the third time the left-shot has scored from the same right circle spot.

The aggressive play of the Leafs looking for an equalizer after that did feed the Bruins' transition game and offer up a few good scoring chances, but Andersen was terrific between the pipes to give the Leafs every chance to reach overtime. Toronto just couldn't beat Boston once more to make Andersen's hard work in a 37-save performance worthwhile.

"I thought we got going a bit in the third period," acknowledged Babcock. "But in the end I thought this was the best game [Boston's] played and I didn't think we were as good as we could be."

Toronto has about 48 hours to correct that if they want to win the franchise's first playoff series in 15 years. It was just a season ago the script was flipped, and the Leafs were staving off elimination in Game 6 of their first-round series to force a Game 7 in Boston; Toronto led that final game 4-3 in the third period, before losing 7-4.

This iteration of the Leafs, though, is patently against dragging the past into their present. What Toronto knows for sure is it's not ready for the ride to end just yet.

"We like each other, we like our group, we like hanging around, we want to be together," said Babcock. "The only way you get to be together is you play good and execute and win. We have a good group that plans on having a good run and in order to do that, we have to go into Boston and win a game."

"We know how they play. They know how we play," added Rielly. "It just comes down to a commitment to doing it right. We've been together a long time, we know what's going to make us win, it's important we go out and do it."

Takeaways

Special teams on life support

For the first time this series, the Leafs held the Bruins without a power play goal in Game 5, their penalty kill a perfect 3-for-3. But whatever Toronto did well in that effort it promptly forgot about in Game 6.

Toronto went 0-for-2 on the kill Sunday, the second time in three games that Boston has been perfect on the power play. To this point in the series, the Bruins are 7-for-16 on the power play (44 percent), but have had their best success with the extra man in Toronto (5-for-7), compared to going just 2-for-9 on their home ice.

On the other hand, the Leafs have struggled to consistently get their own power play going. Including Sunday's 0-for-3 effort with the extra man, Toronto's 3-for-14 on the series, far off the Bruins' more blistering pace.

Given how special teams have favoured the Bruins in this series, Toronto's attention has to be on staying out of the box and forcing Boston to try and beat them at even-strength.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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Rielly's right on it

During the first period of Game 6, the NHL revealed the finalists for this season's Norris Trophy, and Morgan Rielly wasn't among them. But on Sunday, Rielly played like maybe he should have been.

The blueliner was Toronto's best skater throughout the game, using his skill and speed to pressure the Bruins in the offensive zone and he broke the puck out well from the Leafs' end. In a game where the Leafs struggled to get any pucks on net for long stretches, Rielly was a catalyst for the meager success they did have – when he was on the ice, Toronto led Boston 23-18 in shot attempts through two periods.

Rielly's goal was a long time coming in the series, marking his first in the six games and putting his point total at five, extending his four-game point streak. While so many of his teammates looked stuck in the mud for much of Sunday's contest, Rielly consistently had good jump and was one of the few bright spots for Toronto through a tenuous first 40 minutes.

In the third period, when the Leafs really started to push, Rielly was at the helm again. He ramped up the physicality with a bruising play on DeBrusk, riding the Bruins' winger into the boards as he lost his helmet in the tussle. The play earned Rielly a rousing ovation from the crowd, as he and DeBrusk jawed at each other all the way back to the benches.

It wasn't enough to single-handedly bring the Leafs back, but it was a Herculean effort on Rielly's part to try.

Good one, goalie

The only player on the same level as Rielly throughout Sunday's game was Andersen in net.

Toronto's goalie had to be sharp early as the Bruins got a couple quick strikes on net before the Leafs took over in the early goings of the first. He was seeing the puck well through traffic initially as well, making two big stops on the Bruins' initial power play attempt. Marchand's shot that finally beat Andersen took a turn off Hainsey's skate, and the goalie was a half-second late reacting as the puck trickled by him.

Andersen responded by making two huge glove saves, on Bergeron and then Matt Grzelcyk, to keep the Leafs' deficit at one at the end of the first period.

The goaltender was under siege in the second, turning aside six shots before DeBrusk broke through off a two-on-one play, with Andersen playing too far to his left to get back in time to make the stop.

But despite the goals-against, Andersen was as rock solid as could be expected given how the Bruins controlled the pace of the game and set up shop in Toronto's end at 63 per cent possession through two periods.

The final frame though was Andersen's finest. While Toronto did a better job keeping play in Boston's end, when the Bruins took off on odd-man rushes, Andersen was there to make the improbable saves, including one halfway through the third from in-tight that was especially difficult.

Babcock said it was "disappointing" the Leafs couldn't score one more goal for Andersen and complete the comeback, but Andersen playing so well has to infuse Toronto with confidence ahead of its biggest game of the season.

Andersen finished with 37 saves.

Next up

Toronto travels back to Boston for Game 7 on Tuesday.

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1142332 Websites

USA TODAY / After guarantee, Sharks' Tomas Hertl forces Game 7 vs. Golden Knights with double-OT goal

Jace Evans, USA TODAY Published 11:39 p.m. ET April 21, 2019 | Updated 1:15 a.m. ET April 22, 2019

Following the Sharks' 5-2 win Thursday, which cut their series deficit against the Vegas Golden Knights to 3-2, forward Tomas Hertl made a declaration that the series would be coming back to San Jose for a Game 7.

"We know we have one more game, then come back for Game 7, and I believe it because we're a better team than them," the 25-year-old native of the Czech Republic said to hometown roars after that game.

On Sunday, Hertl delivered on that promise.

In stunning fashion, Hertl scored the game-winner in double overtime while the Sharks were short-handed, sending the series back to San Jose for a winner-take-all showdown on Tuesday.

A little shorthand action from the Ninja Hertl in overtime to force Game 7! pic.twitter.com/v50TVIQ11Q

— NHL on NBC (@NHLonNBCSports) April 22, 2019

Hertl's winner came at 11:17 of the second extra period with Barclay Goodrow in the box for slashing and gave the Sharks a 2-1 win in Game 6 in Las Vegas. NHL PR said Hertl's goal was the first short-handed tally beyond the first overtime in the league's history.

Tomas Hertl of the @SanJoseSharks is the first player in NHL history to score a shorthanded winner in a game that required multiple overtimes. #NHLStats#StanleyCuppic.twitter.com/Wu1qPDqRg5

— NHL Public Relations (@PR_NHL) April 22, 2019

"At first moment when I get it, I was already a little bit tired, I was thinking maybe just dump it in and change, but I saw a little bit of space, so I just take a couple of steps and try shoot it," Hertl said of his overtime goal. "If you don't try you never know, so I tried it and it somehow get through, and for sure huge goal."

HERTL IS CALLING A GAME 7!!! pic.twitter.com/Hbr80Aj5E0

— Sharks on NBCS (@NBCSSharks) April 19, 2019

While he deservedly gets credit for the goal that staved off elimination — after guaranteeing the Sharks would win — San Jose would not have even been in position for Hertl's goal without the stellar play of Martin Jones.

Maligned all season, and even earlier in this series, Jones responded with a sterling 58-save effort.

"To (the Golden Knights') credit, they want to close this out tonight at home and they pushed hard and Jonesy made some big saves," Sharks coach Peter DeBoer said. "I thought we defended well, even though we were on our heels a little bit. I thought it was a gutsy effort on the road in a tough situation by our group and we're still alive."

Logan Couture scored the Sharks' other goal in the waning moments of the first period. On the other side, Golden Knights goalie Marc-Andre Fleury made 27 saves on 29 shots before the overtime winner eluded him.

"Obviously, it's a tough one," said Vegas goal-scorer Jonathan Marchessault. "I felt like we were the better team, but sometimes these games can feel a little tricky. We definitely kept buzzing and kept going. ... Obviously disappointed, I think tonight we should have won, but who cares. Got to go Game 7 and get it done over there."

Hertl, for his part, is looking forward to what's next.



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"Game 7 is the most fun game you can play in the NHL," he said.

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1142333 Websites

USA TODAY / Early winners, losers from NHL playoffs: Just look to the bizarre, unexpected and odd happenings

Kevin Allen, USA TODAY Published 2:29 p.m. ET April 21, 2019 | Updated 3:28 p.m. ET April 21, 2019

The 2019 NHL playoffs are playing out like tales of the unexpected. Upsets. Strange happenings. Odd results. The first round has been as predictable as a tropical storm.

Here are some of the unusual occurrences:

Lightning fizzled: The Tampa Bay Lightning, an NHL record-tying 62-win team, became the first Presidents' Trophy winner to be swept in the first round. The Columbus Blue Jackets, the last wild-card qualifier in the Eastern Conference, didn't just win – they overwhelmed the Lightning.

Bizarre fight: Carolina Hurricanes rookie Andrei Svechnikov grew up idolizing his fellow Russian countryman Alex Ovechkin. But the hero worship probably is gone now after Ovechkin KO'd Svechnikov in a fight during Game 3 of their playoff series. They were unlikely combatants, but the bout seemed even weirder when both players said it was the other guy's idea to fight. Svechnikov sat out Games 4 and 5 with what is believed to be a concussion, but hopes to be back for Monday's Game 6.

Predator names his sticks: Nashville role player Rocco Grimaldi randomly names each of his sticks and April 14 he scored his first NHL goal with a stick named "Frankie." That happened to be his late grandfather's name. Grimaldi's father reminded him after the game that the goal came on the third anniversary of his grandfather's death.

Grimaldi started naming his sticks in the minors. He gets some of his names by visiting nameberry.com, the website expectant parents use for naming babies.

No one can knock Grimaldi's routine: he's currently leading the Predators in playoff scoring with three goals in four games.

Face goal: San Jose Sharks captain Joe Pavelski lost two teeth and needed stitches after teammate Brent Burns' shot hit him in the face and caromed into the net for a goal in a 5-2 win against the Vegas Golden Knights. Pavelski returned to the game after getting some repairs. "Tough as nails," said coach Peter DeBoer.

Blues are a favorite: On Jan. 3, the Blues were in last place in the NHL and now they are among the favorites to win it all. Rookie goalie Jordan Binnington has been the key. Including the regular season and playoffs, he's 28-7-1.

Early exits: Nikita Kucherov, Sidney Crosby, Johnny Gaudreau and Steven Stamkos were all top 10 scorers in the regular season. Kucherov even won the scoring title.

But all of them have already been knocked out of the playoffs. They combined for one goal and cumulative plus-minus of -18 in this first round.

Crazy week for Stevie Y: Steve Yzerman was the architect of the 62-win Lightning team, but he won't be involved in the fallout associated with its playoff implosion. Instead, he accepted the job as Detroit Red Wings general manager. When he stepped down as Tampa Bay's GM last summer, it was assumed he would someday be Detroit's GM. How many respected executives leave one of the NHL's top organizations to take

charge of a rebuilding franchise that has missed the playoffs for three consecutive seasons?

Home ice disadvantage: In the Winnipeg vs. St. Louis series, the road team won the first five games and then the Blues clinched by winning Game 6 at home.

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1142334 Websites

USA TODAY / Philadelphia Flyers take down Kate Smith statue outside arena

Steve Gardner, USA TODAY Published 3:57 p.m. ET April 21, 2019 | Updated 4:47 p.m. ET April 21, 2019

Despite a "long and popular relationship" with Kate Smith, the Philadelphia Flyers have cut ties with the late singer and removed her statue from outside their arena.

The move comes as some of Smith's songs from the 1930s have come under scrutiny in the past week for containing racist language and references.

The New York Yankees have not played Smith's version of "God Bless America" during the seventh-inning stretch this season after the lyrics were brought to the attention of team officials.

The Flyers followed suit Friday by halting the playing of "God Bless America" on the scoreboard and covering the statue of Smith outside the Wells Fargo Center.

On Sunday, the team issued a statement acknowledging some of the lyrics in Smith's songs "are incompatible with the values of our organization, and evoke painful and unacceptable themes," and announcing the statue had been removed.

"The NHL principle 'Hockey is for Everyone' is at the heart of everything the Flyers stand for," said Flyers President Paul Holmgren. "As a result, we cannot stand idle while material from another era gets in the way of who we are today."

Smith singing "God Bless America" has long been a good-luck charm of sorts for the Flyers dating back to when the team won the Stanley Cup in 1974.

However, family members of the singer who died in 1986 say they are "heartbroken" over the recent decisions by the Flyers and Yankees.

Smith's niece, Suzy Andron, told USA TODAY Sports she strongly objected to the characterization of Smith as racist and said she was "saddened that a woman who has been dead for almost 35 years would be attacked in this way."

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