



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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THE NEWS & OBSERVER

Hurricanes have No. 2 pick in draft. What does Dundon want to do?

By Chip Alexander

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Raleigh

The NHL draft lottery was good to the Carolina Hurricanes, landing them the No. 2 pick in the 2018 NHL Draft.

"We're very fortunate," Canes owner Tom Dundon said. "It definitely makes it easier to do what we're trying to do here. Every little thing helps. It's just a little thing, right?"

Reminded that recent No. 2 draft picks include such players as Patrik Laine of the Winnipeg Jets and Aleksander Barkov of the Florida Panthers, impact players who can quickly help transform a franchise, Dundon qualified his comments.

"This isn't about one player," he said. "We'll be thrilled to hopefully get a good player, but there's so much more we need to do to be consistently competitive. It takes a lot more than that.

"But, yes, it's obviously great news. Two is better than 11."

That's where the Hurricanes were slotted in the 2018 draft before the lottery — in the No. 11 position in the first round. But by being a lottery winner Saturday, they jumped into the No. 2 spot behind the Buffalo Sabres, who won the first overall selection, while the Montreal Canadiens will pick third.

It's almost a given the Sabres, badly needing to bolster their defense, will use the top pick on Swedish defenseman Rasmus Dahlin.

"There's zero doubt," Dundon said.

And after Dahlin? There may be no clear-cut No. 2 pick, no one like Laine in 2016 or Sabres center Jack Eichel the year before.

"Now, we have to do the right thing," Dundon said. "We want to know all our options."

Could that mean trading the pick, using it as a bargaining chip?

"I don't know that we'll ever be in a position to say you can rule something out," Dundon said. "It's very unlikely you're going to ever rule anything out with us, I imagine."

That's been the new owner's M.O. so far — an unpredictability. Few would have thought in his first few months he would have fired former general manager Ron Francis, a Hockey Hall of Fame member well-respected throughout the NHL and a Hurricanes legend.

But Dundon sounded like someone who intends to go home to Dallas for the NHL Draft in June prepared to pick a player that can be fit into the Canes' lineup and make a difference as a rookie.

"There are some elite offensive players," he said. "The preliminary feedback we've gotten is we feel good about what's there."

Russian forward Andrei Svechnikov has produced a lot of positive feedback. A 40-goal scorer for the Barrie Colts this season in the Ontario Hockey League, he could be capable of giving the Canes something badly needed — another sniper, an offensive finisher.

Laine has quickly helped the Jets become a playoff team and possible Stanley Cup contender, scoring 36 goals as a rookie in 2016-17 and 44 this season. Tyler Seguin was taken second by the Boston Bruins in 2010 and won a Stanley Cup before being traded to the Dallas Stars, developing into a five-time NHL All-Star forward who scored a career-high 40 goals this season.

The last time the Hurricanes had the second overall pick, in 2003, it was an easy choice. Having drafted goalie Cam Ward the year before, they had their sights on center Eric Staal after the Pittsburgh Penguins took goalie Marc-Andre Fleury.

Three years later, Staal was a 100-point scorer in the regular season and the leading scorer in the playoffs during the Canes run to the Stanley Cup. He would be a team captain, setting franchise records.

The Pens had the No. 2 pick in both 2004 and 2006, bringing in centers Evgeni Malkin and Jordan Staal. In 2005, with the No. 1 pick, they got Sidney Crosby. Quite a fortuitous run.

Rick Dudley, hired Tuesday as the Canes' senior vice president of hockey operations, did a lot of amateur scouting for the Canadiens the past few years and has analyzed the top-end prospects for this year's draft.

"You're getting a player that's going to help you a ton," Dudley said. "At the top, in this draft, there are players who can change a franchise."

A year ago, the Canes had the 12th pick of the first round and took Czech center Martin Necas, a player the Canes scouts had rated in the top 10. Necas made his NHL debut with Carolina early this past season, but returned to the Czech Republic for another year in his country's top pro league and won a championship.

Necas on Tuesday was named to the Czech team for the IIHF World Championship in Denmark.



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"He's definitely better than 12," Dundon said. "Our internal organization is pretty happy about what's happened with him this year. He'll come back bigger, faster, stronger. Now we have Necas and whoever we get at No. 2."

That is, if the Canes don't decide to trade the pick.

"You have to figure out if someone feels better about being up there than you do," Dundon said. "We'll find out. It's a good problem to have."

He helped get the Canes to the Stanley Cup Finals. Now he's 'embarrassed' to be an alum.

By Aaron Moody

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Jeff O'Neill isn't happy with the status quo within the Carolina Hurricanes franchise where he was a star dating back to its days as the Hartford Whalers.

The "O-Dog" said on TSN's [Jay and Dan](#) show on Monday that he's "embarrassed to be an alumni of the Carolina Hurricanes with what's going on." O'Neill was referring to recent moves within the Hurricanes organization.

The Hurricanes are searching for both a new head coach and a new general manager.

Bill Peters on April 20 announced he was opting out of his fifth year as head coach [to take the position with the Calgary Flames](#). On Monday, the Hurricanes [cut ties with longtime franchise champion Ron Francis](#), whom owner Tom Dundon demoted in March from the general manager position to "president of hockey operations."

O'Neill said when Dundon became the Hurricanes' majority owner in January, he expected Dundon to increase Francis' operating budget, giving him unlimited resources to help

improve the team. Instead, he said, it went the other direction.

"It's embarrassing," O'Neill said on Jay and Dan. "It just seems like they're morphing into the Cleveland Browns of the NHL."

O'Neill, who was drafted by the Whalers as the fifth overall pick in 1994 and, with Francis as captain, helped the Hurricanes reach the Stanley Cup Finals in 2002, also talked about the Hurricanes offering [a fraction of the market rate for a new general manager](#). O'Neill said that some GMs who aren't winning games are making in the range of \$2-3 million, so "why in the hell would I come here for 300 grand," suggesting that the Hurricanes are low-balling the amount it would pay its new general manager.

"People in the industry, they understand once they get a general manager job how difficult it is, and there's only 31 of them, and they generally stay around for a long tenure," O'Neill said. "You know it's bad when people are declining."

When the hosts of the radio show asked O'Neill if he thinks new leadership is trying to implode the franchise to relocate it, he responded, "It certainly seems like they're trying to screw it up. ... It's just garbage."

O'Neill also tweeted on Monday: "Quite a scene in Carolina. Embarrassing."



Struggling Sabres, Hurricanes land top two picks in NHL Draft

Lottery results could rejuvenate once fierce rivals who have each fallen on hard times

[May 2, 2018 Cory Lavalette Article, NHL, Sports](#)

Barrie Colts right wing Andrei Svechnikov is considered by most to be the second-best player available in this summer's NHL Draft. The Hurricanes won the No. 2 overall pick during Saturday's draft lottery. (Courtesy of the Barrie Colts)

RALEIGH — On June 1, 2006, the Carolina Hurricanes and Buffalo Sabres met for Game 7 of the Eastern Conference

Final with a date for the Stanley Cup against the Edmonton Oilers awaiting the winner.

That afternoon, Sabres defenseman Jay McKee was ruled out with an inopportune infected shin, joining fellow blueliners Dmitri Kalinin, Teppo Numminen and Henrik Tallinder on the shelf.

The Hurricanes, as everyone knows, emerged victorious, led by three points from the future Mr. Game 7, Justin Williams.

Eric Staal, in the second year of his NHL career and — thanks to the lockout — third pro season, only managed two



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shots on goal and a minus-2. Still, he finished the Cup-winning season as the Hurricanes' top scorer and an emerging superstar.

The Sabres returned to the conference final the next season and made trips to the playoffs in 2010 and 2011, but in the 21st century they were never as close to winning their first Cup as 2006.

Carolina also returned to a conference final, in 2009, but that has been the team's only playoff appearance since winning the Stanley Cup 12 years ago.

So it seems fitting that the two franchises' fates were reunited Saturday night at the NHL Draft Lottery.

Buffalo held the best chance at earning the top selection come June 22, having finished last in the league standings. Carolina was a long shot, having been initially slotted to pick 11th overall.

Once the ping pong balls fell into place, though, the former rivals were side by side.

The Sabres got what they couldn't get in 2015 when they had the best odds at picking first and selecting generational talent Connor McDavid. They instead picked second that year and landed Jack Eichel, a star player in his own right who has been unable to pull Buffalo out of its funk.

This time around, they'll get both the extra defenseman they could have used back in 2006 and the once-in-a-lifetime

talent they missed out in 2015: Swedish defenseman Rasmus Dahlin.

While the Hurricanes certainly would have been thrilled with Dahlin, they will happily pick second overall for the first time since they took Staal back in 2003.

Most draft analysts have Russian Andrei Svechnikov, who played for the OHL's Barrie Colts this year, as the best forward in this year's class. He had 40 goals in 44 regular season games this season, earning Rookie of the Year honors in the OHL.

There's also Czech winger Filip Zadina — he also played in North America this year, with the Halifax Mooseheads in the QMJHL — who teamed up with Carolina's 2017 first-round pick, Martin Necas, to star for their country at the World Junior Championships last winter.

And Brady Tkachuk — son of Keith and brother of Flames winger Matthew — is the type of physical menace and scorer not often seen in the NHL anymore. The power forward who turns 19 in mid-September will be the oldest first-time player in the draft and captained Team USA to bronze at the World Juniors.

Any of the three could have the type of impact Staal had in 2005-06 and beyond — perhaps leading Carolina back to the top of the Eastern Conference. Don't be surprised if their old foes in Buffalo — led by Dahlin — are waiting to meet them if they do.



Tweetmail No. 187: Assets, 2nd Pick & Dudley

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

May 2nd, 2018

Hello and welcome to Tweetmail, presented by our friends at [Tijuana Flats](#)! Wear your Canes gear to participating Raleigh locations on Wednesdays throughout the season and receive 50% off any entrée.

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

Let's get to it.

Are you also tired of people overreacting and thinking we are going to trade the 2nd overall pick?

Well, look, here's the thing: you have to at least explore the option, right? Here's a quote from Canes majority owner Tom Dundon at his end-of-season press conference: "It's about getting the most out of those assets."

The second overall pick is an asset, and the Hurricanes want to get the most out of it. So, they will be weighing the option of using the pick versus the option of trading the pick in an attempt to maximize the return.

Personally, I think the Canes should make the pick. Any draft pick is a gamble because you're betting on the long-term projection of a teenager, but at No. 2, you're more than likely getting a player who can have an immediate impact with your club. The Hurricanes need that player, and the Hurricanes can get that player with the second overall pick in this year's draft.

So ...



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Svechnikov or Zadina??

This will be the question of the week from now until the 2018 NHL Draft in Dallas on June 22. We'll do a much deeper dive on potential picks, including both Andrei Svechnikov and Filip Zadina, in June, but here are my initial thoughts - and they're really just that because the No. 2 pick wasn't even on my radar before the draft lottery - on who the Canes should select with the second overall pick.

Of the two players mentioned above, I'd go with Andrei Svechnikov. The Russian-born winger, who clocks in at 6-foot-2 and 188 pounds, is the NHL Central Scouting Service's top-ranked forward. Svechnikov netted 40 goals and recorded 32 assists in 44 games with the Barrie Colts of the Ontario Hockey League in 2017-18.

That sounds like offensive production that the Hurricanes would be downright giddy to have.

Zadina is an intriguing option, considering his chemistry alongside Canes top prospect Martin Necas in the World Junior Championship, but Svechnikov has the edge for me in the early going - not that my opinion means anything come draft day.

I'm sure you'll address this on the next CanesCast, but your thoughts on Rick Dudley? Wait, you'll be on vacation! TV's @mikemaniscalco!! Your thoughts?

We for sure will address this on the next #CanesCast - more on that below - but my early impressions are that it's a savvy hire. Dudley, who has spent more than 45 years in professional hockey and 25 years as a senior executive in the NHL, knows the league and seems to have an eye for identifying needs and then identifying talent to fit those needs. He's extremely well-connected in the league. He excels in scouting talent. He's been there, and he's done that. Now, he's ready for a new challenge and after what he called a disappointing year in Montreal, he's ready to win.

"I'm probably not that long for the game anymore, but I'd like my last stop to be a very successful one. My gut tells me this could be," he said. "I hope this is my last stop."

Speaking of Dudley ...

What is Dudley's draft history when he has held a top 5 pick for any previous teams?

This is somewhat of a complicated question to tackle because he's held many a position for many a team, and each team functions a little differently from the next.

With that said, his fingerprints are on a number of draft moves, especially when he served as general manager for four teams. As GM of the Tampa Bay Lightning in 1999, Dudley traded the first overall pick (which Atlanta used on Patrik Stefan) to move down to four and then traded out of the first round entirely (the Rangers picked Pavel Brendl fourth overall, while the Vancouver Canucks picked the Sedin twins at second and third). And, other than the Sedin twins, there wasn't a whole lot to write home about in that first round. The next year, Dudley traded the Lightning's fifth overall pick to the New York Islanders in a package deal that brought Kevin Weekes to Tampa (the Islanders, meanwhile, selected Raffi Torres fifth overall). Dudley then picked Nikita Alexeev three picks later at eight in the 2000 NHL Entry Draft. In 2001, Dudley's final draft with the team, the Lightning selected Alexandr Svitov third overall.

With the Florida Panthers in 2002, Dudley again dealt the first overall pick, swapping spots with Columbus at three; the Blue Jackets selected Rick Nash, while the Panthers took Jay Bouwmeester. Dudley again moved the Panthers from one to three in 2003, when Marc-Andre Fleury went to Pittsburgh at one, Eric Staal went to Carolina at two and Nathan Horton went to Florida at three.

Dudley's contributions with the Blackhawks are tougher to discern because he wasn't the team's general manager, but he's [highly regarded for the work he did](#) in helping to build their 2010 Stanley Cup Championship team.

So, what to take from all of this? I caution against jumping to conclusions based on trades he made some 20 years ago; those were different times and different situations. Rather, what I see is someone who is a trusted hockey mind, and with many years of experience under his belt, he'll no doubt he leaned upon with the Canes.

Will there be another episode of #CanesCast recorded this week? I heard the early working title is "Episode 41: Everything is Happening"

I'd say there is a good chance of both a podcast being recorded this week (just in time for me to skip town) and it being called "Everything is Happening" because that accurately describes what all has transpired as of late.

Stay tuned, [#CanesCast](#) listeners!



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THE ATHLETIC

Much-traveled NHL exec Rick Dudley comes full circle in return to North Carolina

By [Michael Russo](#) May 2, 2018

Rick Dudley is a vagabond, the Mike Sillinger of NHL executives, somebody who has filled out more W-4 forms than anybody you know, who usually doesn't even get a permanent dwelling in the home base of the latest team he's working for, who has racked up, no exaggeration, millions of miles on North America's highways and country roads searching for hockey talent for decades.

So, when the phone rang Tuesday night, Dudley was already chuckling at the question he knew was about to come: "How many organizations have you worked for now, Duds?"

"I don't know. How many are there?" Dudley said, letting loose a hearty laugh. "Should we count affiliations, too?"

"Yeah, let's do that," the reporter said. "I'll give you a break. Only NHL teams, not minor-league teams."

"Well, affiliations, Vancouver, let's see, L.A., the Rangers. Did I say L.A.?" Dudley said. "Buffalo, back to the Kings, Ottawa, Tampa, then Florida, then Chicago, then Atlanta, Toronto, then Montreal, now Carolina. Not sure how many that is, but there's probably a few I've missed.

"I don't know if you know this, but I've been around a long time, and it's not quite as bad as it seems."

Dudley, 69, is a former Buffalo Sabres and Winnipeg Jets forward and WHA Cincinnati Stingers legend, somebody who'd rack up goals and penalty minutes that would ultimately land him in the Cincinnati Hockey Hall of Fame. He used to coach the Sabres and manage the Ottawa Senators, Tampa Bay Lightning, Florida Panthers and Atlanta Thrashers.

[He spent nearly the past six years working for the Canadiens in various capacities.](#) For him, that's an eternity, and, "I felt like I needed a change."

So on Tuesday, Dudley left the Habs to reunite with his old pal, Don Waddell, once again. Over the course of their careers, both have been each other's bosses in several stops, the last time in Atlanta when Dudley went from assistant GM to GM after Waddell moved upstairs to become team prez.

In Raleigh, Waddell is again the team president on the business side, and, who knows, there's a belief by some out there that he may ultimately become the Hurricanes GM in the near future.

"I don't know who the GM will be. I guess that's a little bit of an unknown, but I wouldn't mind if it's Donny," Dudley told *The Athletic* during a half-hour phone interview late Tuesday. "Whenever he's been my boss, he's been a real good one."

Dudley will come in as the Canes' senior vice-president of hockey operations, the same title he had at the end in Montreal.

We'll get to what that will entail later, but the coolest part of this story is Dudley returning to his roots, the state of North Carolina where this lengthy post-playing hockey career began more than 35 years ago.

In 1981, there was a little blurb in the paper that Dudley was retiring from hockey.

The same day, a fellow named Dave Gusky that Dudley knew from his days playing in Cincinnati called and said he had moved a team to Winston-Salem, N.C., and placed it in something called the Atlantic Coast Hockey League.

"He's like, we've won like three of our last 23 games, I'm bleeding money on this thing, will you come in and help?" Dudley recalled.

Dudley was on the road on his way to Florida anyway, so he said he'd stop in for a couple weeks and give him an honest evaluation.

To the players on the Thunderbirds, Dudley was somebody special, someone who played the sport at the highest level. Dudley enjoyed himself so much, he decided not to leave.

"I realized if I left, not only would that team fold, the league would fold, too, because (Gusky) was about to close up shop and they'd go down to four teams," Dudley said.

So, Dudley came up with a proposition. He'd stay in North Carolina and try to sell the franchise for Gusky. If that didn't work, Dudley would buy the team from him.

Dudley took over the team at the end of the 1981-82 season, and even though the Thunderbirds didn't make the playoffs during a 14-win season, they won most their games down the stretch and suddenly people started showing up after drawing 300 or 400 a game.

Dudley says he purchased the team from Gusky for roughly \$100,000, which included retiring a lot of his debt.

He became owner, GM and coach of the Thunderbirds and eventually president of the ACHL because of name recognition. In that role, Dudley was tasked over and over and over again with saving the league.

It was a ton of work and stress.

He remembers right off the bat having to write checks out of his own pocket covering \$11,000 of various payrolls. He did that for two or three weeks in a row and thought, "This could get very old very quickly."

He did it all, including driving the bus at times. To save a little bit of money, Dudley hired an assistant medical trainer ... with a chauffeur's license.

"We had some hellacious trips, so when he got tired, I would take over," Dudley said of a league with a handful of geographically-nonsensical teams spanning from New York to Alabama. "As the season went on, I started taking over the driving earlier and earlier."



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Longtime hockey coach John Torchetti, a former winger whom Dudley drafted first overall in the ACHL free-agent draft in 1984, used to stay up until all hours of the night talking to Dudley while he drove. They became tight, with Torchetti even working at Dudley's old sub shop in Winston-Salem.

"All of a sudden, he'd be like, 'it's 2 o'clock in the morning, Torch, you've got to get to bed. You have a game tomorrow,'" Torchetti said. "You'd forget he was your coach."

Dudley rebranded the team from the Winston-Salem Thunderbirds to the Carolina Thunderbirds, and they turned the corner. He coached them to three league championships and one other final appearance in four years. During that stretch, Carolina went 196-58-12 in the regular season and led the league in attendance. Not a shock since Dudley would eventually coach the IHL San Diego Gulls to a pro hockey-record 62 wins.

Dudley has long been a workout fiend, somebody who still at nearly 70 years old can bench 300 pounds.

Torchetti said Dudley was way ahead of his time in the early '80s, particularly bringing NHL-like systems and practice habits to that level of minor-league hockey and putting in a weight room.

Torchetti played for Carolina seven years, the first two with Dudley, where they won titles.

"I remember before my second year, he asked me up to his office, and I thought I was in trouble," Torchetti said. "I walk in, and he's sitting behind his desk wearing this purple fuchsia shirt that's ripped in the sleeves and the chest. He's curling, like a preacher curl bar with 25 pounds on each side.

"And he's just jacked. And as he's curling, he goes, 'I want to talk to you about your role this year.' I'm like, OK. He says, 'You're not going to be on a line this year. You're going to be a rover.' I go, 'Duds, I scored 44 goals last year, we won the championship.' He looks at me, ... and he does 10 more curls. Just pumping iron, pumping iron. He finally goes, 'You'll score more this way. You're not going to be on a line. You're going to rove from line to line. What do you think?' I'm 19 years old, pretty intimidated at this scene. He does 10 more curls, again says, 'What do you think?' I wanted to say, 'You're insane?'

"But I trusted the guy. So I roved from line to line. And he turned me into a (51)-goal scorer and we won another championship."

During Dudley's reign as ACHL head honcho, the league constantly went from good shape to bad shape. It ranged from five to eight teams, "but if we dropped to five, we were in big jeopardy because if we got to four, the league would essentially be done."

He recalls one time a man named Robert Bailey, who made millions inventing the Buck Stove, wanted Dudley to come to Spruce Pine, N.C., to run a hockey school in a new rink he built.

"I had to explain that I was coach, GM, owner of the Thunderbirds and ran the league, so I didn't have a lot of free time to run a hockey school," Dudley said. "Nevertheless, the

guy begged for me to come, so I drove to Spruce Pine, a town of 2,000 people in the middle of nowhere, a beautiful, remote area. I turn the corner in my car, and there's this great, big, brand new ice rink on top of a mountain, really.

"I left there without running the hockey school, but he decided to put a team there – the most unusual professional hockey team in the history of the world."

Dudley got Don Luce to coach the Pinebridge Bucks, but after one year, Bailey wanted out.

"I spent from 10 a.m. to 4 a.m. one night convincing him to spend another year in the league because if he backed out, Utica (Mohawk Valley) would want out because they didn't want to be in a four-team league," Dudley said. "And we couldn't have a three-team league. I convinced him to spend another year in the league, and he did it more for me than anything else.

"The truth is, if that doesn't happen, there would be no East Coast Hockey League ... ever because the Atlantic Coast Hockey League would have ceased to exist in 1985.

"From there, all of a sudden, we got in good markets and the Atlantic Coast League eventually became the ECHL (in 1988). So many times that league could have gone one way or the other and somehow we managed to pull it together."

Players in the ACHL were call-up guys for leagues like the AHL and IHL, and a lot of teams just didn't know how to operate.

"So he was our coach/commissioner, and he made that league flourish because he knew how important it was to people and their communities," Torchetti said.

Dudley said the experience was the most rewarding of his entire hockey life.

"Because there were honestly five or six critical points the league needed to be saved," he said. "I worked harder to keep that league alive than probably anything I've ever done. It just seemed important. The people I worked with in North Carolina, the fans in Winston-Salem were absolutely wonderful and everybody deserved to have hockey. They just did."

This is why Dudley couldn't be more excited to return to North Carolina. After working all over this continent, his career has come full circle.

"It's just so cool and ironic that he's back there," Torchetti said.

In a lot of ways, this is a leap of faith because of his old pal, Waddell. He's a super-scout that would much rather scour hockey rinks for talent than conduct the day-to-day operations that a GM has to deal with.

Waddell knows this.

"I've been very lucky in my life," Dudley said. "I've done virtually everything there is to do in the game, so whatever Donny thinks he needs from me, that's what I'm going to do. A lot of people in the world don't get me. Donny does. He always has. He understands what my strengths are and understands what's not my strengths."



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"As you know, I'm an intense guy."

Uh, no kidding.

This is a guy who once beat up a coke machine, so to speak, during a prospect tournament game in Hull, Quebec. He pulled his players off the ice and they had to walk awkwardly by the machine while getting doused by soda. This is a guy who in 2003 stormed off the draft floor in Nashville humiliated because the Panthers owner forced him to try to draft Alex Ovechkin in the second, fifth, seventh and ninth rounds one year before he was draft eligible.

There are several other legendary stories about Dudley, but his relationship with Waddell is why he agreed to return to Carolina without even a yet defined role.

Asked what he will do every day, Dudley said, "To be honest with you, I don't know. I have a lot of faith in Donny, so it depends on him. I'll do whatever he wants me to do."

Will he be the guy to make trades?

"I'm not the guy who will be making phone calls, I can tell you," he said. "That's the GM's job. But I would like to think I'll have a lot of input on said phone calls. I'm pretty sure I will."

Dudley will remain living in Lewiston, N.Y., and will commute to Raleigh for periods of time.

"I'll probably ask for a residence for when I'm there," Dudley said.

But for now, he'll watch the Canes' farm team, Charlotte, play two games this weekend against Lehigh Valley in the AHL's second round. Then he'll go directly to Raleigh for amateur meetings. If asked, he'll make suggestions as to who should replace Bill Peters as the Canes' coach. Rod Brind'Amour is reportedly the top candidate, but you can bet Torchetti, a longtime minor-league head coach, interim NHL

head coach with Florida, Los Angeles and Minnesota and an NHL assistant coach with Tampa Bay, Florida, Chicago (he won a Stanley Cup in 2010), Atlanta and most recently Detroit, is on Dudley's list.

Dudley said he's looking forward to working with very engaged new owner Tom Dundon, but, "Unless he wants me to, or Don wants me to, I'm not picking up the phone and calling him because he's the owner. He's the owner and I'm not president and not the GM. That's a structure sort of thing. I worked in Montreal. Not in a million years did I pick up the and phone call Geoff Molson.

"To me, people that do that are political, and as you know, I don't like the politics."

It's one reason he has bounced around so often.

But there's no arguing with his success. Look at the Winnipeg Jets, who relocated from Atlanta. They're still reaping the rewards from Dudley's moves to acquire Blake Wheeler and Dustin Byfuglien. Dudley's fingerprints are all over Tampa Bay's Cup in 2004 (he acquired Nikolai Khabibulin, Dan Boyle, Vaclav Prospal, Dave Andreychuk and Martin St. Louis) and Chicago's Cup in 2010 working with Dale Tallon.

Now, he's hoping to help lay the groundwork by providing valuable input to a revitalize a Hurricanes franchise that hasn't made the playoffs since 2009.

"The ACHL was the lowest rung of the hockey ladder, and it couldn't have gone better," Dudley said. "I learned so much there that got me to where I am today and I am so happy to be back. I have a tremendous amount of affection for that part of the world. How much I learned while I was in North Carolina is staggering. When you own the team and it's your money that's going out and you run the league with that kind of responsibility, there was no pressure that could follow me that was going to bother me a whole lot."



Sharks shut out Golden Knights in Game 4, even Western series

Jones makes 34 saves; San Jose penalty kill goes 5-for-5

by Eric Gilmore / NHL.com Correspondent

2:41 AM

SAN JOSE -- [Martin Jones](#) made 34 saves for the San Jose Sharks in a 4-0 win against the Vegas Golden Knights in Game 4 of the Western Conference Second Round at SAP Center on Wednesday.

The best-of-7 series is tied 2-2. Game 5 is at Las Vegas on Friday.

"I know we're getting better every game," Sharks coach Peter DeBoer said. "So I know we're going to get off the plane in Vegas and we're going to play a good game, and it's going to take a real good game to win in there. We're going to have to win a game in there in order to win the series."

[Marcus Sorensen](#) and [Joonas Donskoi](#) scored 4:17 apart late in the first period to give the Sharks a 2-0 lead.



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It was Jones' sixth career shutout in the Stanley Cup Playoffs, second this year.

"Good game from everybody," said Jones, who made 25 saves in a 3-0 win against the Anaheim Ducks in Game 1 of the first round April 12. "Probably our most complete game of the series, I thought. We're trying to carry this over to next game. It will be tough. They've been tough games. We just need to make sure we have the same mindset for 60 minutes that we did tonight."

The San Jose penalty kill was 5-for-5 after allowing two goals in a 4-3 overtime loss in Game 3 on Monday.

[Marc-Andre Fleury](#) made 30 saves for Vegas.

"They came ready to play and they were fired up," Golden Knights coach Gerard Gallant said. "They just had a little more than we did. They did a good job. They competed real hard tonight."

Sorensen, a fourth-line wing, gave the Sharks a 1-0 lead at 15:37 of the first period with his fourth goal of the playoffs. Skating left to right through the slot, Sorensen was tripped from behind, but he beat Fleury with a wrist shot into the right corner of the net while going face-first to the ice.

"It was big goal," said Sharks forward [Logan Couture](#), who had two assists. "At the start of the game, they actually had some better looks than we did. I think they came out hard and better than we did, and then Marcus scored, and Joonas' goal was big as well. The 2-0 goal was a massive goal heading into the first intermission."

Donskoi, who returned to the top line after missing Game 3 with a lower-body injury, went end to end and beat Fleury with a snap shot from the high slot with six seconds left in the period. He skated along the left boards, cut toward the middle, and shot the puck between defenseman [Brayden McNabb](#)'s legs and over Fleury's glove.

"They came with speed and cut across the middle and shoot between the D's legs," Fleury said. "I just didn't pick it up, and when I saw it, it was too late."

Hertl increased San Jose's lead to 3-0 at 5:35 of the second period when he knocked in a rebound from close range after Fleury stopped [Mikkel Boedker](#)'s wraparound.

"I just tried to crash the net, and [Boedker] made a great play," Hertl said. "I got an empty net and I put it in. I should have scored a couple more."

Pavelski scored a power-play goal at 11:43 of the third period to make it 4-0.

"I think our group's done a great job all season long of dealing with adversity and injuries and everything like that," Vegas defenseman [Deryk Engelland](#) said. "It's a tough one to lose today, and I think our guys will be ready to go next game."

"Going into the series you knew they were going to be a fast, relentless team, and I don't think it surprised anyone."

Goal of the game

Sorensen's goal at 15:37 of the first period.

Save of the game

Jones stopping [William Karlsson](#) at 19:43 of the second period.

Highlight of the game

Donskoi's goal at 19:54 of the first period.

"Just came with speed and cut across the middle and shoot through the D's legs," Fleury said. "I just didn't pick it up. And when I saw it, it was too late."

They said it

"We didn't get enough forecheck, we didn't get enough forecheck pressure on their [defensemen]. They moved the puck real well and they skated real well. For me, the bottom line was they were a little more competitive than we were tonight. We didn't play a bad game, but we didn't play well enough to win, and they did." -- *Golden Knights coach Gerard Gallant*

"I thought we played really well. When we make them come through us, 200 feet through all five guys, we're a lot tougher team to play against." -- *Sharks goaltender Martin Jones*

Need to know

Sharks rookie defenseman [Joakim Ryan](#) made his NHL playoff debut in his first game since March 16, replacing [Paul Martin](#) in the lineup and skating with [Brent Burns](#). Ryan played 11:55 and had one blocked shot. ... San Jose center [Joe Thornton](#) was not in the lineup after being a game-time decision. He has not played since injuring his knee Jan. 23. ... Golden Knights forward [James Neal](#) had a game-high seven shots on goal. ... Vegas was shut out for the first time since Feb. 19 (2-0 loss to Anaheim).

What's next

Game 5 of Western Conference Second Round at T-Mobile Arena on Friday (10 p.m. ET; NBCSN, CBC, TVAS)



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Lightning score early to win Game 3 against Bruins, take series lead

Palat gets two goals in first 3:19, Vasilevskiy makes 28 saves for Tampa Bay

by Matt Kalman / NHL.com Correspondent

May 2nd, 2018

BOSTON -- Ondrej Palat scored two of the Tampa Bay Lightning's three goals in the first period of a 4-1 win against the Boston Bruins in Game 3 of the Eastern Conference Second Round at TD Garden on Wednesday.

[Andrei Vasilevskiy](#) made 28 saves for the Lightning, who took a 2-1 lead in the best-of-7 series.

Palat scored twice in the first 3:19. It was his third and fourth goals of the Stanley Cup Playoffs.

"It's always nice to have a two-goal lead," Palat said. "I'm just happy it's going in. I thought the whole team played well."

[Tuukka Rask](#) made 33 saves, and [Patrice Bergeron](#) scored for Boston.

"We made a few mistakes early that unfortunately we couldn't crawl our way back from," Bruins forward [Brad Marchand](#) said. "But we had some pushes during the game where their goalie made some big saves. That's how it goes sometimes."

Game 4 is here Friday.

Palat gave the Lightning a 1-0 lead on a 2-on-1 with [Tyler Johnson](#) 1:47 into the game with a snap shot from the left side of the slot. Palat scored again at 3:19 when he redirected [Victor Hedman](#)'s shot to make it 2-0.

"You can't argue with the start," Lightning defenseman [Ryan McDonagh](#) said. "That really got everybody going right away. We really emphasize that in here, sticking to our system and our structure early on there and playing high percentage. There was nothing fancy. Just flipped pucks and our guys capitalized on some looks."

Bergeron's power-play goal at 13:43 made it 2-1. After [Rick Nash](#) tipped Marchand's shot to Vasilevskiy, [David Pastrnak](#) poked the rebound to Bergeron for a wrist shot from the slot.

[Anthony Cirelli](#) scored at 16:43 of the first period to make it 3-1. The Bruins turned over the puck in the neutral zone, and [Yanni Gourde](#) sent the puck to the middle of the offensive zone. Cirelli fanned on his first attempt and Rask stopped the second, but Cirelli scored on the third try.

"Yeah, they had a bit of momentum after getting that goal, but we didn't really back down," Cirelli said. "We just kind of stuck with our game plan and I guess it's pretty important."

[Steven Stamkos](#) scored an empty-net goal at 19:18 of the third for a 4-1 lead. It was his second goal of the playoffs, first of this series.

"They're all big games, and Boston came in and took one of our games at home, we had to come and win one on the road and we did that," Tampa Bay coach Jon Cooper said.

Goal of the game

Palat's goal at 1:47 of the first period.

Save of the game

Vasilevskiy's save against [Jake DeBrusk](#) at 10:00 of the third period.

Highlight of the game

Cirelli's goal at 16:43 of the first period.

They said it

"It's been amazing. I think it's just an awesome experience and I'm so glad I was able to be there for my wife. It was just an amazing experience and it's really cool I was able to make it for the game tonight and overall the last 24 hours have been really amazing." -- *Lightning forward Yanni Gourde, who arrived in Boston on Wednesday following the birth of his daughter*

"Obviously every time you get the puck on your stick in the slot, you want to put the puck in the net. It just didn't go our way. Just have to be a little better next time, sharper. Pick your spot and put it in the net." -- *Bruins center David Krejci*

Need to know

Palat also scored the game-winning goal in Game 2. Two Lightning players have scored the game-winning goal in three straight playoff games: Martin St. Louis (2003) and Brad Richards (2004). ... Bergeron has a four-game point streak (four goals, four assists).

What's next

Game 4 of Eastern Conference Second Round at TD Garden on Friday (7 p.m. ET; NBCSN, CBC, TVAS)

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SportScan

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

1094829 Websites

The Athletic / Behind new Lightning dad Yannick Gourde's 'unreal' 36-hour

By Joe Smith 2h ago 1

BOSTON — Emma Kate Gourde took her first breath at 4:42 p.m., Tuesday in a Tampa hospital.

"An amazing experience," Gourde said. "Unreal."

Gourde made sure his bride and baby were healthy and happy, before Marie turned to him.

"OK, get going now," Marie said, recalled Gourde. "I know you have a big game to catch."

The "big game" was Wednesday's Game 3 of the Eastern Conference semifinal against the Bruins at TD Garden. Gourde snuck in a couple hours sleep at the hospital and a bit more on his two-hour JetBlue flight Wednesday morning.

He arrived around noon, greeting the team for its pregame meal. Teammates mobbed and hugged him like he had scored a game-winning goal. Gourde didn't score on Wednesday night, but he had a key assist in the Lightning's 4-1 win, helping them take a 2-1 lead in the best-of-seven series.

"Pretty remarkable," coach Jon Cooper said.

How Gourde got here was fitting considering his bumpy, winding path to the NHL. The undrafted and undersized winger got demoted to the ECHL five years ago, playing at the Cow Palace in San Francisco. Gourde criss-crossed the continent, with moves to Victoriaville, Worcester, Kalamazoo and Syracuse. The only constant? Marie, whom he started dating in 2009.

"She's been with me all along," Gourde said. "I'll forever be grateful. I wouldn't be able to do it without her. She's been amazing to me. She allows me to live my dream. At the same time, she put aside her dreams, doing that for us and for our family."

Our family.

The couple met in Quebec, where Gourde was playing juniors in Victoriaville.

Though the playmaking forward racked up plenty of points — 87 in 68 games his final season there — Gourde didn't get a sniff from NHL teams. He floundered in his first pro season (2012-13) with the Sharks' AHL Worcester, before getting sent to the San Francisco Bulls (ECHL). They played in the Cow Palace, where players had to take 25 steps up to the ice from the dressing room. Gourde has recalled bringing a chair to rest in between.

"I was like, 'Oh my God,' he said. "It was an experience I kind of grew on and made me the player I am today."

Gourde, light years away from the NHL, considered going to college and studying civil engineering. But Worcester coach Roy Sommer, who remembered Gourde from his junior days, brought him back to the AHL on a 25-game tryout. Sommer got the Energizer Bunny-like Gourde to slow down and play under control. Gourde exploded for 24 points (20 assists) in 25 games, with Sommer admiring the kid's "stick-to-it-iveness."

"Those guys do it the hard way," Sommer said. "By the time you get them, they don't want to go back."

When Gourde didn't show up after his 25th game, Sommer knew something was wrong. Lightning area scout Jamie Pushor had been pushing assistant GM Julien BriseBois to sign Gourde. And on March 9, 2014, the Lightning signed Gourde to an AHL contract.

In a way, Gourde was a perfect fit for the open-minded organization. Undrafted and undersized? Join the club. So was Tyler Johnson. Anthony Cirelli, who scored a goal Wednesday and is playing a key as a first-year pro, was passed over in two OHL Drafts. Ondrej Palat was a seventh rounder. Brayden Point, who might be the team's best player most nights, is 170 pounds soaking wet.

All Gourde needed was a chance. He's always said, every time he's on the ice, he's like, "I want to be here tomorrow."

It took nearly two full pro seasons in Syracuse before Gourde finally got his first NHL shot.

On one mid-December morning in 2015, he was in bed in his Syracuse apartment when BriseBois called. The Lightning were without five injured forwards, and Gourde would make his NHL debut in Toronto. Gourde smiled, not needing any words to break the news to Marie.

"I made her a sign, 'I'm moving up,'" Gourde remembered. "A dream come true."

That ended up being just a two-game cup of coffee in the NHL. Gourde's ascension was really sparked late last season, when he tallied six goals in 20 games at the end of the Lightning's season. They were some big-time goals, too, including one winner against Chicago.

Gourde believed he belonged. And the Lightning signed him to a two-year, \$2 million deal. Finally, Gourde and Marie had security.

Yet the couple stayed in a downtown Tampa hotel during September's training camp. Gourde said he didn't want to "sit" on his contract.

"I wanted to earn it," he said.

Earn it, Gourde did, with a spectacular rookie season.

Gourde won't win the Calder Trophy, but he put himself in the top-5 conversation by scoring a Lightning rookie record 25 goals (passing Johnson). For the 5-foot-9, 173-pound forward, Gourde scored most of his goals where the big boys rule. Eighteen of Gourde's 25 goals came within 15 feet.

"That's where goals are scored," Gourde often says.

Cooper has called Gourde a "waterbug." He's relentless, he's scrappy. He's smart and responsible. Assistant Todd Richards said, if you're kids want to be a hockey player, show them a video of Yannick Gourde.



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Just be full-warned not every shift is rated PG.

After Gourde's early-January fight against then-Red Wing Tomas Tatar, Marie tweeted: "Well, now that explains the crazy baby kicks. Our baby gets her feistiness from her daddy."

Gourde was named after the infamous Greek singer, Yanni, his parents having seen the unique name scrolling during the credits of a movie. Gourde and Marie have long been set on Emma as a girl's name for their first child.

Gourde said Marie went through a lengthy labor, but it was worth the wait. "It ended up perfect," he said. The whirlwind 36-hours went relatively smooth, from the direct flight to the on-time arrival for lunch. He even got his (much-needed) pregame nap at the hotel. Adrenaline got him the rest of the way, a workmanlike 12 minutes of ice time. A few teammates and trainers called him "Daddy" as Gourde strolled to the postgame news conference. Tired?

"I got a few hours last night at the hospital, a few on the plane and a few pregame," Gourde said. "But I'll definitely be sleeping tonight."

The Athletic LOADED: 05.03.2018

1094830 Websites

The Athletic / Much-traveled NHL exec Rick Dudley comes full circle in return to North Carolina

By Michael Russo 8h ago 16

Rick Dudley is a vagabond, the Mike Sillinger of NHL executives, somebody who has filled out more W-4 forms than anybody you know, who usually doesn't even get a permanent dwelling in the home base of the latest team he's working for, who has racked up, no exaggeration, millions of miles on North America's highways and country roads searching for hockey talent for decades.

So, when the phone rang Tuesday night, Dudley was already chuckling at the question he knew was about to come: "How many organizations have you worked for now, Duds?"

"I don't know. How many are there?" Dudley said, letting loose a hearty laugh. "Should we count affiliations, too?"

"Yeah, let's do that," the reporter said. "I'll give you a break. Only NHL teams, not minor-league teams."

"Well, affiliations, Vancouver, let's see, L.A., the Rangers. Did I say L.A.?" Dudley said. "Buffalo, back to the Kings, Ottawa, Tampa, then Florida, then Chicago, then Atlanta, Toronto, then Montreal, now Carolina. Not sure how many that is, but there's probably a few I've missed."

"I don't know if you know this, but I've been around a long time, and it's not quite as bad as it seems."

Dudley, 69, is a former Buffalo Sabres and Winnipeg Jets forward and WHA Cincinnati Stingers legend, somebody who'd rack up goals and penalty minutes that would ultimately land him in the Cincinnati Hockey Hall of Fame. He used to coach the Sabres and manage the Ottawa Senators, Tampa Bay Lightning, Florida Panthers and Atlanta Thrashers.

He spent nearly the past six years working for the Canadiens in various capacities. For him, that's an eternity, and, "I felt like I needed a change."

So on Tuesday, Dudley left the Habs to reunite with his old pal, Don Waddell, once again. Over the course of their careers, both have been

each other's bosses in several stops, the last time in Atlanta when Dudley went from assistant GM to GM after Waddell moved upstairs to become team prez.

In Raleigh, Waddell is again the team president on the business side, and, who knows, there's a belief by some out there that he may ultimately become the Hurricanes GM in the near future.

"I don't know who the GM will be. I guess that's a little bit of an unknown, but I wouldn't mind if it's Donny," Dudley told The Athletic during a half-hour phone interview late Tuesday. "Whenever he's been my boss, he's been a real good one."

Dudley will come in as the Canes' senior vice-president of hockey operations, the same title he had at the end in Montreal.

We'll get to what that will entail later, but the coolest part of this story is Dudley returning to his roots, the state of North Carolina where this lengthy post-playing hockey career began more than 35 years ago.

In 1981, there was a little blurb in the paper that Dudley was retiring from hockey.

The same day, a fellow named Dave Gusky that Dudley knew from his days playing in Cincinnati called and said he had moved a team to Winston-Salem, N.C., and placed it in something called the Atlantic Coast Hockey League.

"He's like, we've won like three of our last 23 games, I'm bleeding money on this thing, will you come in and help?" Dudley recalled.

Dudley was on the road on his way to Florida anyway, so he said he'd stop in for a couple weeks and give him an honest evaluation.

To the players on the Thunderbirds, Dudley was somebody special, someone who played the sport at the highest level. Dudley enjoyed himself so much, he decided not to leave.

"I realized if I left, not only would that team fold, the league would fold, too, because (Gusky) was about to close up shop and they'd go down to four teams," Dudley said.

So, Dudley came up with a proposition. He'd stay in North Carolina and try to sell the franchise for Gusky. If that didn't work, Dudley would buy the team from him.

Dudley took over the team at the end of the 1981-82 season, and even though the Thunderbirds didn't make the playoffs during a 14-win season, they won most their games down the stretch and suddenly people started showing up after drawing 300 or 400 a game.

Dudley says he purchased the team from Gusky for roughly \$100,000, which included retiring a lot of his debt.

He became owner, GM and coach of the Thunderbirds and eventually president of the ACHL because of name recognition. In that role, Dudley was tasked over and over and over again with saving the league.

It was a ton of work and stress.

He remembers right off the bat having to write checks out of his own pocket covering \$11,000 of various payrolls. He did that for two or three weeks in a row and thought, "This could get very old very quickly."

He did it all, including driving the bus at times. To save a little bit of money, Dudley hired an assistant medical trainer ... with a chauffeur's license.

"We had some hellacious trips, so when he got tired, I would take over," Dudley said of a league with a handful of geographically-nonsensical teams spanning from New York to Alabama. "As the season went on, I started taking over the driving earlier and earlier."

Longtime hockey coach John Torchetti, a former winger whom Dudley drafted first overall in the ACHL free-agent draft in 1984, used to stay up until all hours of the night talking to Dudley while he drove. They became



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tight, with Torchetti even working at Dudley's old sub shop in Winston-Salem.

"All of a sudden, he'd be like, 'it's 2 o'clock in the morning, Torch, you've got to get to bed. You have a game tomorrow,'" Torchetti said. "You'd forget he was your coach."

Dudley rebranded the team from the Winston-Salem Thunderbirds to the Carolina Thunderbirds, and they turned the corner. He coached them to three league championships and one other final appearance in four years. During that stretch, Carolina went 196-58-12 in the regular season and led the league in attendance. Not a shock since Dudley would eventually coach the IHL San Diego Gulls to a pro hockey-record 62 wins.

Dudley has long been a workout fiend, somebody who still at nearly 70 years old can bench 300 pounds.

Torchetti said Dudley was way ahead of his time in the early '80s, particularly bringing NHL-like systems and practice habits to that level of minor-league hockey and putting in a weight room.

Torchetti played for Carolina seven years, the first two with Dudley, where they won titles.

"I remember before my second year, he asked me up to his office, and I thought I was in trouble," Torchetti said. "I walk in, and he's sitting behind his desk wearing this purple fuchsia shirt that's ripped in the sleeves and the chest. He's curling, like a preacher curl bar with 25 pounds on each side.

"And he's just jacked. And as he's curling, he goes, 'I want to talk to you about your role this year.' I'm like, OK. He says, 'You're not going to be on a line this year. You're going to be a rover.' I go, 'Duds, I scored 44 goals last year, we won the championship.' He looks at me, ... and he does 10 more curls. Just pumping iron, pumping iron. He finally goes, 'You'll score more this way. You're not going to be on a line. You're going to rove from line to line. What do you think?' I'm 19 years old, pretty intimidated at this scene. He does 10 more curls, again says, 'What do you think?' I wanted to say, 'You're insane?'"

"But I trusted the guy. So I roved from line to line. And he turned me into a (51)-goal scorer and we won another championship."

During Dudley's reign as ACHL head honcho, the league constantly went from good shape to bad shape. It ranged from five to eight teams, "but if we dropped to five, we were in big jeopardy because if we got to four, the league would essentially be done."

He recalls one time a man named Robert Bailey, who made millions inventing the Buck Stove, wanted Dudley to come to Spruce Pine, N.C., to run a hockey school in a new rink he built.

"I had to explain that I was coach, GM, owner of the Thunderbirds and ran the league, so I didn't have a lot of free time to run a hockey school," Dudley said. "Nevertheless, the guy begged for me to come, so I drove to Spruce Pine, a town of 2,000 people in the middle of nowhere, a beautiful, remote area. I turn the corner in my car, and there's this great, big, brand new ice rink on top of a mountain, really.

"I left there without running the hockey school, but he decided to put a team there – the most unusual professional hockey team in the history of the world."

Dudley got Don Luce to coach the Pinebridge Bucks, but after one year, Bailey wanted out.

"I spent from 10 a.m. to 4 a.m. one night convincing him to spend another year in the league because if he backed out, Utica (Mohawk Valley) would want out because they didn't want to be in a four-team league," Dudley said. "And we couldn't have a three-team league. I convinced him to spend another year in the league, and he did it more for me than anything else.

"The truth is, if that doesn't happen, there would be no East Coast Hockey League ... ever because the Atlantic Coast Hockey League would have ceased to exist in 1985.

"From there, all of a sudden, we got in good markets and the Atlantic Coast League eventually became the ECHL (in 1988). So many times that league could have gone one way or the other and somehow we managed to pull it together."

Players in the ACHL were call-up guys for leagues like the AHL and IHL, and a lot of teams just didn't know how to operate.

"So he was our coach/commissioner, and he made that league flourish because he knew how important it was to people and their communities," Torchetti said.

Dudley said the experience was the most rewarding of his entire hockey life.

"Because there were honestly five or six critical points the league needed to be saved," he said. "I worked harder to keep that league alive than probably anything I've ever done. It just seemed important. The people I worked with in North Carolina, the fans in Winston-Salem were absolutely wonderful and everybody deserved to have hockey. They just did."

This is why Dudley couldn't be more excited to return to North Carolina. After working all over this continent, his career has come full circle.

"It's just so cool and ironic that he's back there," Torchetti said.

In a lot of ways, this is a leap of faith because of his old pal, Waddell. He's a super-scout that would much rather scour hockey rinks for talent than conduct the day-to-day operations that a GM has to deal with.

Waddell knows this.

"I've been very lucky in my life," Dudley said. "I've done virtually everything there is to do in the game, so whatever Donny thinks he needs from me, that's what I'm going to do. A lot of people in the world don't get me. Donny does. He always has. He understands what my strengths are and understands what's not my strengths.

"As you know, I'm an intense guy."

Uh, no kidding.

This is a guy who once beat up a coke machine, so to speak, during a prospect tournament game in Hull, Quebec. He pulled his players off the ice and they had to walk awkwardly by the machine while getting doused with soda. This is a guy who in 2003 stormed off the draft floor in Nashville humiliated because the Panthers owner forced him to try to draft Alex Ovechkin in the second, fifth, seventh and ninth rounds one year before he was draft eligible.

There are several other legendary stories about Dudley, but his relationship with Waddell is why he agreed to return to Carolina without even a yet defined role.

Asked what he will do every day, Dudley said, "To be honest with you, I don't know. I have a lot of faith in Donny, so it depends on him. I'll do whatever he wants me to do."

Will he be the guy to make trades?

"I'm not the guy who will be making phone calls, I can tell you," he said. "That's the GM's job. But I would like to think I'll have a lot of input on said phone calls. I'm pretty sure I will."

Dudley will remain living in Lewiston, N.Y., and will commute to Raleigh for periods of time.

"I'll probably ask for a residence for when I'm there," Dudley said.

But for now, he'll watch the Canes' farm team, Charlotte, play two games this weekend against Lehigh Valley in the AHL's second round. Then he'll go directly to Raleigh for amateur meetings. If asked, he'll make



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suggestions as to who should replace Bill Peters as the Canes' coach. Rod Brind'Amour is reportedly the top candidate, but you can bet Torchetti, a longtime minor-league head coach, interim NHL head coach with Florida, Los Angeles and Minnesota and an NHL assistant coach with Tampa Bay, Florida, Chicago (he won a Stanley Cup in 2010), Atlanta and most recently Detroit, is on Dudley's list.

Dudley said he's looking forward to working with very engaged new owner Tom Dundon, but, "Unless he wants me to, or Don wants me to, I'm not picking up the phone and calling him because he's the owner. He's the owner and I'm not president and not the GM. That's a structure sort of thing. I worked in Montreal. Not in a million years did I pick up the and phone call Geoff Molson.

"To me, people that do that are political, and as you know, I don't like the politics."

It's one reason he has bounced around so often.

But there's no arguing with his success. Look at the Winnipeg Jets, who relocated from Atlanta. They're still reaping the rewards from Dudley's moves to acquire Blake Wheeler and Dustin Byfuglien. Dudley's fingerprints are all over Tampa Bay's Cup in 2004 (he acquired Nikolai Khabibulin, Dan Boyle, Vaclav Prospal, Dave Andreychuk and Martin St. Louis) and Chicago's Cup in 2010 working with Dale Tallon.

Now, he's hoping to help lay the groundwork by providing valuable input to a revitalized Hurricanes franchise that hasn't made the playoffs since 2009.

"The ACHL was the lowest rung of the hockey ladder, and it couldn't have gone better," Dudley said. "I learned so much there that got me to where I am today and I am so happy to be back. I have a tremendous amount of affection for that part of the world. How much I learned while I was in North Carolina is staggering. When you own the team and it's your money that's going out and you run the league with that kind of responsibility, there was no pressure that could follow me that was going to bother me a whole lot."

The Athletic LOADED: 05.03.2018

1094831 Websites

The Athletic / Brown: Why Filip Zadina is the draft's premier NHL-ready sniper

By Mitch Brown May 2, 2018 16

Filip Zadina is set to be a top-three pick in this June's NHL Draft, top-five at worst. Watch any Zadina highlight package and the reason will be immediately clear; he scores goals. Lasers into the top corner, pinpoint shots between the goaltender's blocker and pad, five-hole tucks — if there's an opening, Zadina will put the puck through it. And he does it in style.

Zadina potted 49 goals in 66 games this QMJHL season, and a further seven in seven games as an 18-year-old at the World Juniors.

His goal scoring resume is lengthy, a reason he's been on the draft radar for years. Zadina scored at a goal-per-game rate as a 14/15-year-old on the Czech U-18 circuit. The next season, he made his professional debut, and wowed at the U-18 World Juniors with four goals in five games. By the time Zadina joined the Halifax Mooseheads for his draft season, he already had established himself as a regular in the Czech Extraliga, emerged as one of the highest scoring junior-aged Czech

players at the U-18 and U-16 levels of all time, and absolutely torched the international circuit.

There isn't a more valuable skill than scoring goals. And Zadina's a natural at it. Scoring goals starts with an ability to shoot. Every scorer has their favourite weapon, Zadina's is his wrist shot. He was the raw power to overwhelm goaltenders, demonstrated by a number of goals that he's scored that the goaltender gets a piece of. He also picks spots with pinpoint accuracy, as it's not just limited to the top corners. He regularly finds holes between the goaltenders hands and the pads, he terrorizes goaltenders with powerful shots over the shoulder, and has the innate ability to open up the goaltender's five hole.

Despite being arguably the most dangerous sniper in the QMJHL, he has a knack for slipping away from defenders. Just look at Zadina's route to the net here, how he hides behind the forward in the circle (notice how the defender shoulder checks and doesn't see Zadina there at the five second mark).

Before delving any further, it's worth mentioning that Zadina has tremendous puck skills. He uses shoulder fakes, agility, and a creative mind to shred defences and create space. But unlike many young, high-level stickhandlers, he rarely overhandles the puck. Instead, he uses his fakes, dangles, and dekes to buy more time to survey the offensive zone. It means that Zadina always has an extra step in possession, even without breakaway speed.

Zadina embraces pressure from defenders, as he slows down to bait them, then speeds up to escape. He constantly changes gear while in possession, enabling him to dictate the pace of the game. If he gets into trouble, Zadina's strong lower body and superb understanding of puck protection allows him to drive through defenders sticks and power through checks. Another detail in the clip below is how he stickhandles virtually the entire sequence on his backhand, a truly special trait, and a necessary one for a left shot playing on the right wing.

It's these same stick skills that make him such an effective sniper. Because it's not just about the power or accuracy. Scoring goals in the NHL is also about the release. And the truly great snipers often utilize a clever trick just before shooting; changing the angle.

Instead of shooting the puck straight off his stick, Zadina's extends his reach then pulls the puck towards his skates and slides his lower hand down his stick, changing the angle of release and creating a new series of holes on the goaltender. And if this wasn't enough, he does it so quickly you'll have to do a double-take on the goal below:

That might be my favourite goal he scored this season, as it perfectly encapsulates what makes his shot so lethal. His release is compact, weight shift rapid, and the angle change is executed flawlessly. With the goaltender already at the top of the crease, Zadina has limited space, so he fires it just above the goaltender's shoulder and just under the crossbar. A perfect shot, with a perfect release.

That goal also highlights the predominant way that Zadina scored goals this season; in transition, just above the hashmarks — prime goal scoring territory. He's never content to fire from the top of the circle, despite having the ability to score from there. Instead, he improves his scoring location by manoeuvring into the slot with his puckhandling and slippery feet. If given the space, Zadina will cut all the way across the slot, from circle to circle, challenging the goaltender. If the goaltender is too slow, he fires short side. If the goaltender reads it well, no problem, he will find a way to go against the grain.

If not given the space to cut across the slot, that's fine, too. Zadina will use the defender as a screen or his lateral agility to quickly open up a new series of holes on the previously square goaltender. The results show a player tailor-made for finding twine in the NHL.

At Zadina's best, he combines flashy dangles, slippery edge work, and that clever release in dramatic fashion. Take Zadina's highlight reel goal against Team Canada at the World Junior Championship as an example.



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This first frame (below, left) shows Zadina beginning to pull the puck back and push it between his legs. Kale Clague, one of the most mobile blue liners in the tournament, has closed his gap and has his head up watching Zadina's shoulders. Zadina's probably aware that he doesn't have the speed to cleanly beat Clague to the outside. To the right, Zadina has just caught the self-pass on his backhand right in the middle of his blade. His shoulders show outside drive. Clague has every reason to believe that he can cut Zadina off.

Instead, Zadina deftly curls the puck back toward the middle on his backhand while driving his outer edge on his left skate hard into the ice. This move allows him to quickly cut towards the middle without losing the puck. Clague reaches to cut off the outside drive, but as seen on the right, it's already too late. Zadina makes one slick touch right into the wheelhouse as he shifts his weight to his outside skate.

To finish it off, Zadina blows the puck past the screened goaltender. There's no over-handling of the puck. It's flashy, skilled, and precise, all in one goal.

Another great illustration of how Zadina uses his stickhandling prowess is this goal from Feb. 9.

The first detail to notice is how Zadina's approach to his move doesn't give away where he's going. Is he going to drop it back to his teammate? Cut to the slot and wire it? Only he knows. The second detail is how the defender recovers relatively well after being momentarily mesmerized. The third, and final detail, is that it doesn't really matter if you recover when Zadina is the player coming down the wing. This is another quality finish, as he wires a backhander off the back bar and into the opposite corner.

Zadina is also a talented playmaker, primarily through creating lanes with his stickhandling and creativity. He's not a high-end playmaker, but he's not a unidimensional sniper by any means. He's a triggerman, and that's how he's going to rack up the points. But he uses his teammates quite well, and can find them in scoring locations with medium and short range passes.

Did you get all that?

Zadina sends precision lasers past goaltenders, he's an elite-level stickhandler who rarely overhandles, changes the angle of his release, has the presence of mind to cut to the slot, and he can score from pretty much anywhere from the blue line in. But he's not just a goalscorer, as he's a capable playmaker, brings defensive awareness, and is quite capable in puck battles.

There are flaws in his game, yes, but Zadina scores goals in a variety of ways. With a skill set like this, he has all the necessary tools to become a top NHL sniper.

The draft is always full of questions, primarily around if the player can play, and if so, can he score in the NHL?

Zadina's biggest question isn't if he will make it.

It's not if he'll score.

It's just how many he will score.

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1094832 Websites

The Athletic / From Scorpion Bowls to Stanley Cup quest, Jeff Vinik is the man behind the Lightning's renaissance

By Joe Smith May 2, 2018 16

BOSTON — Jeff Vinik not only owns the Lightning, he's the driving force behind a \$3 billion makeover of downtown Tampa.

The 59-year-old holds interests in an eSports gaming and film production company.

But Vinik's biggest merger came 30 years ago in a sticky-floored, Boston dive bar called Hong Kong.

Over a Scorpion Bowl or two.

Vinik was then in his mid-20s, a Harvard MBA graduate hanging with his buddies in a Faneuil Hall hotspot. In came Penny, a spunky redhead and research assistant.

"I yelled across the room, 'I want to meet her,'" Vinik recalled.

They talked for two hours, sharing the 48-ounce house specialty, a mysterious and potent cocktail concoction in a ceramic bowl. Now they share four children — Danny, 27; Jared, 25; Kyra, 24; and Joshua, 17 — and three decades of marriage.

"She had broken up with her previous boyfriend at 3 p.m. And I met her at 7," Vinik said. "So she was single for four hours.

"She's still on the rebound."

Vinik's bold moves aren't precluded to the bar. It's how the billionaire built his fortune in the stock market and money managing. And it led Vinik to make the life-changing and franchise-altering decision to buy an NHL team. Vinik, at a Christmas pop concert with his kids a decade ago, told a friend his plan for fun the rest of his life: buy a hockey team.

Vinik ended up saving one. The Lightning have been in the black for back to back years after some feared they were headed for bankruptcy — or relocation — before Vinik bought the team. Now it's buoyed by an electric fan base that's 15,000 season ticket members strong, selling out Amalie Arena 153 consecutive games.

Vinik, the same newbie who Googled "how to buy a professional sports team" one December day is now the one whom NHL commissioner Gary Bettman steered new owners like Bill Foley (Vegas) and Tom Dundon (Carolina) to for advice. Bettman said Vinik is an influential voice on the executive committee of the league's board of governors.

"All of us point to everything (Vinik) has done in Tampa as a model," Bettman said.

Lightning captain Steven Stamkos said a big reason he decided to stay with the Lightning two years ago — signing an eight-year, \$68 million deal — was Vinik. Vinik is also the reason why GM Steve Yzerman is expected to remain in Tampa Bay far beyond next year's final year of his contract.

"Working for Jeff has been fantastic," Yzerman said. "It's a tremendous position and I'm grateful to have it."

The only thing missing is a Stanley Cup, with Vinik's Lightning tied 1-1 in this Eastern Conference semifinal series with Boston heading into Wednesday's Game 3 at TD Garden.

"Jeff is a miracle," said Hall of Famer Phil Esposito, who founded the Lightning in 1992. "He's the best thing to happen to this franchise."

Esposito knew the Lightning franchise — his "baby" — was in real danger back in 2009.

The management was dysfunctional, sparked by feuding owners Len Barrie and Oren Koules. The season ticket base was down to 4,500. The Lightning, despite drafting future cornerstones in Stamkos and Victor Hedman, had missed the playoffs in three straight years.

"The brand was dead," said current Lightning CEO Steve Griggs said.

"It was a gosh-darn circus," said former winger Gary Roberts.



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Esposito heard rumors Barrie and Koules were going to drive the team into bankruptcy so they could move it to Las Vegas. "I wasn't going to let that happen," Esposito said.

So Esposito got a group together and raised \$80 million. He believed in the market. He called Bettman, who offered reassurances.

"Phil, don't worry," Bettman told Esposito. "I found the guy. And he's perfect."

"How sure are you that he's going to keep the franchise in Tampa?" Esposito asked.

"I'm 100 percent positive," Bettman replied.

"I said, 'well, that's good enough for me,'" Esposito said.

Vinik had built a fortune and a family.

He had passions like music, with Green Day and Fall Out Boy his favorite artists. He's always been a voracious reader, spending 4-5 hours a day consuming books on real estate, transportation and other business topics. He owned a small-stake in the Red Sox (which he recently sold). But still, as Vinik had a couple glasses of wine with his friend in the concourse of a Christmas concert, he felt like he was at a crossroads.

He was about to turn 50.

"What am I going to do for the rest of my life?" Vinik was asked. "I didn't like playing golf. I said, 'I'm going to buy a hockey team.'"

Vinik grew up in New Jersey loving hockey. He spent many late nights as a kid watching the Rangers games on a tiny TV when his parents thought he was reading. But never had Vinik thought of buying a hockey team.

"Good ideas can come in the shower, or you can be two glasses of wine at a Jingle Ball," Vinik said. "But I recognize it immediately.

"If you spend your life on the market, I pride myself in being flexible and changing my mind in an instant. I usually plan things out, but yes, I can be spontaneous."

The next day, Vinik Googled, "how to buy a professional sports team." No. 1 was, "Be Rich." Vinik bought several books and dug in.

A mutual acquaintance set up a meeting between Vinik and Bettman. There were about 10 teams Vinik looked at, whether they were for sale or not, from the Hurricanes to the Panthers, Coyotes to the Stars. But Vinik, who had family on the east coast of Florida, soon narrowed in on the Lightning, which had an attractive purchase price of around \$100 million and a budding market.

Vinik told Penny they were going for it and moving to Florida full-time. They've always considered each other partners, so Vinik said, "you can imagine that (conversation) was bumpy."

"It takes a lot of courage to do this," said former Wild managing partner Jac Sperling, a long-time Vinik advisor. "To make the investment he did, move his business, move his family down there. That's a huge commitment and takes a lot of courage and convictions to do it.

"He's very analytical and passionate for what he does. But when he decides to do something, he's all in."

Bettman connected Vinik with Sperling, figuring the long-time executive could show him the ropes.

The tenets Vinik took from Sperling, and still uses today, are:

Hire good people

Don't interfere (respect the chain of command)

The names Sperling suggested to Vinik were Tod Leiweke, the then-CEO of the NFL's Seattle Seahawks, and Yzerman, the iconic Red Wings captain and budding star executive. Vinik flew to Yzerman's suburban Detroit home and gave him a similar sales pitch as he did with Leiweke.

"That it's fun to take something that's kind of broken and make it really good," Vinik said. "It's a fun mission to be on. In both cases (with Leiweke and Yzerman), I was going to give them a blank canvas to do their job."

In Leiweke's case, Vinik also gave him an ownership stake in the team. It's believed Yzerman has a stake, too, though Vinik wouldn't confirm. "Both Steve and Tod were not employees," Vinik said. "They were partners."

Yzerman saw some similarities in Vinik to late Red Wings owner Mike Ilitch — their passion for the game, their willingness to give whatever needed resources to win. Tampa Bay spends to the cap every season, and when Yzerman needed to take on backup goalie Louis Domingue's \$1 million AHL salary in November, Vinik signed off.

Vinik said he and Yzerman have had informal discussions about him being here beyond his current extension, which is up after next season. "I expect him to be here for a long time," Vinik said.

Vinik gives Yzerman full autonomy in hockey-related decisions. Unlike Carolina's new owner Tom Dundon, who recently handled the Hurricanes' players exit meetings, Vinik prefers to be "hands off."

"I'll never tell Steve Yzerman to draft someone," Vinik said. "You want me to be hands off."

The owner says that other than attending games he spends only a quarter of his day on Lightning-related activities. He'll meet with sponsors, community members and has regular talks with Griggs and Yzerman.

"He's a very knowledgeable hockey person," Yzerman said. "He knows the game. He understands the game and knows the players. He'll know every player (on the Bruins), not just Patrice Bergeron."

Vinik attends most every Lightning home game and many on the road. There's one rule: no talking when the puck is in play.

"(Tampa) Mayor (Bob) Buckhorn doesn't come by anymore because he knows he has trouble with that rule," Vinik joked.

Buckhorn, who called Vinik a perfect partner for the city, said him getting kicked out of Vinik's suite has been a running joke.

Vinik rarely makes an appearance in the Lightning dressing room, believing it's their sanctuary.

Players have been inspired by their owners' philanthropy, especially the Community Hero Program that gives a local charity \$50,000 every home game (the total is now up to \$16 million). While Vinik doesn't get involved in hockey-related decisions, he makes a few exceptions.

One was making a couple personal calls to Stamkos during his contract negotiations in June 2016. Vinik dubbed Stamkos re-signing one of the best days in Tampa Bay history, and on the eve of the deal, he delivered his own pitch to the face of his franchise.

"We're in this together," Vinik told the captain.

Stamkos said Vinik is a key reason players want to stay in Tampa Bay and free agents want to join. No expense is spared, from the \$80 million Vinik put into renovating Amalie Arena and \$7 million practice facility upgrade in Brandon, Florida, to the team Christmas party at his South Tampa home.

"I've been here 10 years, and it's gotten better and better each year, which is pretty amazing," Stamkos said. "Not only does the city treat me first-class, but the organization has, and it starts with Mr. Vinik. He's transformed the organization, this city for the better. You see the fan support we have. The building is sold out every night.

"The quality of team he allows us to put together. The amount of money that he spends. He's talked about wanting to be a first-class organization, and we get treated like first-class athletes in the world. And it's pretty special. Not everywhere has that, even at this level."



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The players aren't the only ones that experience special treatment.

Just ask Karen Jo Muschiette. Muschiette, 65, has worked part-time in guest services for 22 years, so she's been around for every Lightning ownership. But she says the culture in the building has never been this connected, from cooks and security guards to marketing executives.

"Nobody is treated above or below anybody else," Muschiette said. "We've never had the team going that we have. We truly work as one team, whether it is housekeeping or its the ice crew or me in guest services. We're all there for the same reason. To me, that means a lot. I really think that's changed the whole feeling in the building."

Each employee goes through Blue Ribbon training, the higher and lower levels working together in creating a world-class experience for fans; the Lightning were ranked the No. 1 franchise in ESPN's "Ultimate Standings" in 2016. There are suggestion boxes at the employee entrance. An All-Star of the month award. There are small touches, like if a fan is at a game on his birthday, they are brought a cupcake. Those celebrating their anniversary get another gift. If it's your first game, there's a pin and personalized certificate.

Vinik greets employees, knowing many by name, and he's gotten a standing ovation from his 200 employees at staff meetings.

"I get a little gushy — you know that feeling when you get to meet one of the hockey players for the first time and want an autograph? That's how I feel when I walk by Mr. Vinik," Muschiette said. "Just knowing how much he's done for us as employees and for the fans."

"It used to be, 'Oh my God' if Stamkos walked out. No, Mr. Vinik is the All-Star to the people who work there."

Vinik said owning the Lightning has been, "more fun than I ever imagined."

The team is in the middle of what he hopes will be another long playoff run. Vinik just broke ground on a JW Marriott, which will be across from the arena in the sparkling Water Street project.

Those who know Vinik well describe him as shy and humble, one who is uncomfortable with attention. But you're starting to see him find a comfort zone, cracking jokes at public events. He even sang for 15-20 seconds at a Tampa event.

Vinik has put down roots in Tampa, and said he can't imagine a scenario where he'd ever sell the team.

"I asked him one time," Esposito said. "He said, 'Absolutely not. No way. This is my team. Never going to sell it.'"

Vinik said he'd go to hockey games 365 days a year.

"Problem is," Vinik says, "I'd be divorced."

Vinik said the real "scoop" is that Penny is now a huge hockey fan, even watching games on her own at home. It's a stark change from when they first got together.

"She hated sports," he said.

Vinik laughs recalling the first night they met in the Harvard Square dive bar. When told Hong Kong is still there (writer's note: a great spot for karaoke), Vinik had one question.

"They still have Scorpion Bowls there?"

The Athletic LOADED: 05.03.2018

1094833 Websites

The Athletic / It's wild, wacky and controversial (again) as Capitals edge Penguins, and the NHL's best circus rolls on

By Corey Masisak May 2, 2018 44

PITTSBURGH — A few minutes after the Washington Capitals had won a playoff series for the first time since Alex Ovechkin arrived in this nation's capital, Bruce Boudreau was discussing his team's dramatic Game 7 victory against the New York Rangers with the assembled media.

While he was talking, the Carolina Hurricanes secured an even more dramatic Game 7 victory, scoring twice in the dying moments against the New Jersey Devils to move on. That win also meant the Capitals, instead of playing the Devils in the second round, would welcome Sidney Crosby and the Pittsburgh Penguins to town.

"Welcome to the circus," Boudreau famously said after finding out the news.

Truer words have rarely been spoken in the NHL. These two franchises can't seem to get out from under the big top.

The two teams met Tuesday night for the 23rd time in the Stanley Cup playoffs since Boudreau's line. The game had a little bit of everything. Ovechkin scored with 67 seconds remaining to give the Capitals a 4-3 win and a 2-1 series lead.

It was at times wild, at times wacky, and of course, controversial. In other words, it was a Capitals-Penguins playoff game, because almost all of them in the Ovechkin-Crosby era have been all of those things.

"It's a lot of emotions involved," Capitals forward Nicklas Backstrom said. "It looks like it's going back-and-forth, too. We took the lead, they came back, we came back. It's just the way it is against these guys, I guess."

These two teams seem to struggle to find ways to not be entertaining. If the play feels a little sluggish or dull, just wait a few minutes. The hair-on-fire, back-and-forth action is coming.

The second period featured five goals, seven penalties and a controversial Tom Wilson hit that went penalty-less but left Zach Aston-Reese with a broken jaw and a concussion, according to Penguins coach Mike Sullivan.

It was the second straight game Wilson delivered a hit like that. It led to the same shenanigans afterward. The trash-talking escalated. The shoves and stick whacks after the whistle increased.

"I think we everyone talked about staying cool, even if there are a lot of things going on after that," Backstrom said. "We told each other to stay cool and try to stay out of the box. I think that's what you got to do in those situations."

Tempers flared, and both coaches vented some frustration after the game.

"We lose a guy to a broken jaw that's going to require surgery and a concussion because of another high hit to the head," Penguins coach Mike Sullivan said. "So at some point, we would hope that the league might do something."

Capitals coach Barry Trotz answered two Wilson questions, Then a third started with, "Back to the Wilson hit, Sullivan said ..." and Trotz cut the reporter off.

"I already said what I'm going to say about the hit," he said. "I don't think I need to comment any more. I really don't care what Sully said."

Wilson was involved in the game-winning goal as well. The Penguins put together a long shift in the offensive zone, but eventually defenseman Olli Maatta made a bad decision and tried to flick the puck from the right point toward the middle of the zone.



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It ended up on Backstrom's stick, and a 2-on-1 with Ovechkin ended with a highlight-reel goal and Images of Penguins fans giving a celebrating Ovechkin the middle finger. How did it end up a 2-on-1? Maatta fell down. How did that happen? Well, let's just say his skate got tangled up with another player's.

Who is the player who helped cause Maatta's fall? Wilson, of course.

"I think he's got a kind of unfair reputation," Capitals goaltender Braden Holtby said of Wilson. "Watching him play every day, he hits clean and hard. I think today, for some reason, it's frowned upon to hit people in hockey. You're just putting it in perspective and knowing that the refs are gonna be looking to call anything, and I think he knows that. He's a very intelligent player and intelligent guy. He creates that room — physical play creates that room for (Ovechkin) and (Evgeny Kuznetsov). I think he's my type of player, for sure."

Wilson's hit will dominate the storylines from Game 3. It will probably suck up a lot of the air Wednesday when both teams have optional practices to prepare for Game 4.

There is a great series happening here as well. Crosby and Jake Guentzel had two more points each in Game 3. Ovechkin has a goal in every game. Evgeni Malkin is back and looked like his usually dominant self for a few shifts, but the Penguins haven't gotten a lot from Phil Kessel or Derick Brassard yet. John Carlson continued his monster postseason, which is a follow-up to his monster regular season and comes just before he is the top unrestricted free-agent defenseman on the market.

These two teams have plenty of bad blood in their history, dating back to the early 1990s and throughout each of the three playoff series featuring Ovechkin and Crosby before this one.

Sometimes the games feature breathless speed and skill. Sometimes they are a bit of a mess. Often it's a little of both.

They are also always entertaining.

The Athletic LOADED: 05.03.2018

1094834 Websites

The Athletic / Why don't NHLers usually offer opinions on officiating or discipline?

By Seth Rorabaugh May 1, 2018 42

Following Game 2 of the Penguins' second-round series with the Capitals, Pittsburgh coach Mike Sullivan was visibly furious.

A few hours after seeing Brian Dumoulin, arguably his best defensive defenseman, leave the contest due to an unpenalized check to the head from Capitals right winger Tom Wilson, Sullivan was asked if he had an opinion on the hit.

"Yes," Sullivan said curtly with a clenched jaw.

In an ensuing query, he was asked if he would share that opinion.

"No."

Sullivan's restraint in offering any sentiment on how the on-ice officials reacted to Wilson's hit is emblematic of how most NHLers — players, coaches or general managers — usually react when asked about matters involving discipline. While NHLers often have plenty to say on the subject off the record, they will usually avoid any sort of public comment when it comes to on- or off-ice officials.

"It's not for me to say," Dumoulin said Monday when asked about the NHL's lack of discipline for Wilson. "I'm not the one making decisions like that."

"It's not for me to comment on," Jim Rutherford told The Athletic's Josh Yohe Monday, as well. "They (the NHL) have a criteria that they use based on situations like this. I think they use the criteria properly."

In contrast, the NFL, the only other of the four major North American professional sports leagues with a greater level of physical contact than the NHL, often sees players lambast officials.

After Steelers wide receiver JuJu Smith-Schuster was suspended for a violent hit in December, safety Mike Mitchell erupted in a tirade:

Later that month, Smith-Schuster termed a confusing decision by officials to nullify a would-be touchdown catch by tight end Jesse James against the Patriots as "a bitch-ass call by the refs."

Why are NHLers usually so reluctant to offer an opinion or to speak out on officiating or off-ice discipline?

Following their morning skates Tuesday at PPG Paints Arena, five members of the Penguins and Capitals were asked that question.

Derick Brassard, Penguins center: "Players in general, when the game ends, you kind of move on from everything. It is what it is. Those are the things you can't really control in your game or what the refs are calling or what the league is deciding. You just go from there. You have to live with it. Basically, they make the decision and we just play."

Jay Beagle, Capitals center: "It's because you're not really in control. There's no point in beating your head over something you have no control over. It's kind of the same as any kind of job. If your boss is making decisions or a higher-up makes a decision, it's the same thing. You can't do anything about it. So there's no point in worrying about it. You let someone else do that job. That's what they're assigned to do. That's why there's no point in trying to rack your brain on how they make decisions and stuff."

Tom Kuhnhackl, Penguins right winger: "There's nothing to say to it. Whatever they decide on, you can't change it. There's things you can control and there's things you can't control. That's obviously one you can't. So you just got to accept whatever the decision is."

Alex Chiasson, Capitals right winger: "It's a really small margin for calls and all that. I know for myself, if you put yourself in that position with those guys with some of the calls and some of the decisions they have to make, it's not always easy. It's such a small margin now. Some of the offsides, some of the calls are like half an inch. A tiny error. They're trying to make the game just as fair for everyone. There's still a little bit of a gray area where it's hard to deal with. As for me, I have a lot of respect for those guys. They've got to make those calls in those tight moments."

Olli Maatta, Penguins defenseman: "My opinion is it's not an easy job either. They don't talk about us making mistakes. We don't talk about them making mistakes. It happens. It's just the way it is. We're all humans. They're not coming to us and tell us when we turn the puck over."

Brooks Orpik, Capitals defenseman: "Guys get really emotional during games. There's probably exchanges guys have with referees that are probably more emotionally driven and they probably regret it later on. At the end of the day, they're (officials) all human just like the rest of us and they probably make a lot less mistakes than we make. It's the same with the discipline and the suspensions. Everybody thinks they can do the job better than who is in place. I honestly don't know why anyone would want the job because no one seems happy with what they do."

Jamie Oleksiak, Penguins defenseman: "It's hard to say. Everyone is different. Personally, you don't want to get sucked into things like that too much. ... The more you dwell on it, the more it sits there."

Devante Smith-Pelly, Capitals right winger: "Maybe losing some money has something to do with it. Maybe also, the refs, I'm sure they all want to



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stay together and coming out and blatantly criticizing a ref might piss off another ref. In the playoffs, stuff like that is important. I think that is one of the bigger reasons.”

Chad Ruhwedel, Penguins defenseman: “That’s just the way it will probably stay. The league will do what they need to do and make their own decisions. There’s nothing good that can come from (speaking out on) it. So they just keep quiet and let the league make their decisions.”

Chandler Stephenson, Capitals center: “It’s a tough thing because everybody is going to have their own opinion. If a player does something that they maybe they don’t think is the right call and the ref calls it, that’s not really the player’s choice. It’s the official. That’s their job. I’m sure all the officials you talk to, if they make the right call, they’re going to admit it. They’re honest guys and just trying to do the best they can.”

– The Penguins held an optional morning skate. Dumoulin, Carl Hagelin and Evgeni Malkin each participated. Sullivan labeled their availability as a “game-time decision.”

“It was another good skate out there,” Dumoulin said. “It was good to get a little contact in with (assistant coach Sergei Gonchar) at the end. Hopefully, I can go tonight, but we’ll let the coach decide that.”

“It was good to go out there and take a hit from (Gonchar) and to kind of go through that a little bit.”

Malkin and Hagelin did not speak with the media.

While the status of all three of the players involved won’t be official until the NHL releases lineups, Dumoulin and Malkin appear safe bets to play as they were off the ice fairly early. In contrast, Hagelin was on the ice significantly later along with the likes of Matt Hunwick and Casey DeSmith.

– The Capitals had a full morning skate. Their lines and pairings were:

– Capitals left winger Alex Ovechkin had a quip on any potential response from the Penguins:

“We’re ready. I think we’re bigger than them.”

The Athletic LOADED: 05.03.2018

1094835 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Lightning’s strong-willed identity has Tampa Bay looking tough to stop

Chris Johnston | @reporterchris May 3, 2018, 12:23 AM

BOSTON — Anthony Cirelli was never drafted into the Ontario Hockey League. Deemed way too small and a touch too slow, he battled his way onto the Oshawa Generals roster as a walk-on just months before scoring the 2015 Memorial Cup-winning goal in overtime.

In other words, he’s a perfect fit for the Tampa Bay Lightning.

“Well, I mean, he’s just Mr. Reliable,” Steven Stamkos said of his 20-year-old teammate, who scored a big goal in Wednesday’s 4-1 victory over the Boston Bruins. “He’s very comfortable in his style of game. He knows what he has to bring. You never really have to tell him to do anything, he just does it.”

The Lightning are an organization with a clear identity. They don’t try to jam square pegs into round holes. What Steve Yzerman and Julien BriseBois are willing to do more than most is look past some of the

attributes a player doesn’t possess — be it size, pedigree or hype — and focus instead on those they do.

That means Tampa is always in the market for strong-minded gamers known for digging in and finding a way — players like Cirelli and Yannick Gourde, who delivered a clinical performance in Game 3 at TD Garden to help them grab a 2-1 lead in this second-round series.

Keep in mind that Cirelli only made his NHL debut on March 1. He’s already carved out a role on the Lightning penalty kill, where he failed to get a clear Wednesday before Patrice Bergeron scored to give Boston a shot of hope after a dreadful start to Game 3.

Do you know what happened his very next time over the boards? Cirelli drove hard to the slot area, took a pass from Gourde and followed up on his own rebound to beat Tuukka Rask for his first career goal in the Stanley Cup Playoffs.

“Here you have a young kid — his feet are barely wet in the NHL — and ... he didn’t shy away from the moment or sit back and say ‘I wish I would have got that out, maybe they wouldn’t have scored,’” said Lightning coach Jon Cooper. “He just went out there and said ‘You know what, I’m going to will my way to score a goal.’

“Right there said everything to me about that kid.”

It’s the kind of recipe you need to go on a long playoff run. The Lightning have seen their top line of J.T. Miller, Steven Stamkos and Nikita Kucherov get off to a slow start in this series — Stamkos did hit the empty net on Wednesday — but they’ve still managed to control a surprising amount of the play against the NHL’s top possession team from the regular season.

Tampa has taken 57.1 per cent of the even-strength shot attempts through three games and created 65.8 per cent of the high-danger scoring chances.

In Game 3, they generated all kinds of speed on the forecheck to force Boston into poor decisions. The Lightning got to the home plate area in front of Rask’s crease for two Ondrej Palat goals in the opening 3:19 and again for the dagger from Cirelli before the first intermission.

“I think their ‘D’ sensed the pressure and then they turned the puck over a little bit,” said forward Cedric Paquette. “That’s how we got our chances.”

No wonder Boston coach Bruce Cassidy was left lamenting what he deemed to be a “slow” and “stubborn” performance. Games in this arena are usually a carnival featuring Bruins players zipping around the offensive zone while the frothing crowd leaves opponents feeling like the walls are caving in.

There was none of that in a potential swing game in this series. Instead, the Lightning gamers flexed their will for a full 60 minutes.

“We’re in a playoff series and we’re playing like that,” said Cooper. “We’re skating, we’re physically engaged. They’re just playing responsible and that’s what you want. It’s hard to do — to amp yourself up, game after game after game. It’s a tough thing to do.

“These guys, they’ve just found a way. I guess in the end they’re just putting the team first — putting team before self — that’s what’s going on right now.”

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It’s a hallmark of what they stand for. You could see it in Paquette’s willingness to drop the gloves with David Backes after he laid out Dan Girardi with a hit on the numbers. Then there was the endless energy from Gourde, who only arrived in Boston around noon on Wednesday following the birth of his daughter Emma.

Cooper said that Gourde was waiting in the meal room when the players returned from the morning skate and the scene looked like a game-winning goal had been scored with the way his teammates reacted.



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Then you had the baby-faced Cirelli, who drew three penalties on the night while chipping in the big goal and putting five shots on net. All in less than 12 minutes of work.

"His attitude — he wants to belong, he wants to be a part of this team," said Cooper. "He's been accepted by the team just because he does all the little things right. I was so pumped when he scored that goal."

He wasn't alone. The Lightning are playing for each other and playing like a team that's going to be awfully difficult to put down.

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1094836 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Why Paul Stastny was the smartest trade deadline pickup

Luke Fox | @lukefoxjukebox May 2, 2018, 4:00 PM

WINNIPEG — Every two or three days, a pioneering Hockey Hall of Famer ties to get Paul Stastny on the phone to chat hockey, but he finds his son isn't always in the mood to talk shop with Dad.

"If I'm playing well, I don't like talking because I feel I have too much arrogance. When I'm playing bad, I feel like I'm letting everyone down, so I don't want to talk to him," Stastny says.

"He sees part of himself in me, so he knows when I'm up or down. He sees it in my body language. If it was up to him, he'd want to talk every day."

Like the rest of us, Stastny used to take his father's wisdom for granted. But the centreman is 32 now. He's coming around.

Peter Stastny — Calder winner, six-time all-star, Canada Cup champion, scorer of 1,239 points, newly minted member of the NHL's 100 GOATs — keeps his pointers simple.

Stay aggressive. Bear down on your face-offs. Don't get comfortable.

"A lot of is mental — he's been through it," Paul says. "What's best for me is what's best for my team. There's been times it's tough to hear. But constructive criticism helps. As I've gotten older, I've come to realize how lucky I am to have him."

The Winnipeg Jets are lucky to have Paul Stastny, the smartest, most surprising and most rewarding scoop of the 2018 trade deadline.

Paul was born in Quebec City, the baby of a Nordiques family. A major hockey star from the Eastern bloc, Peter had defected to Canada from Czechoslovakia to pursue his dream in a watershed moment for the sport. (Brothers Anton and Marian followed, and the Stastnys remain the NHL's best sibling trio to ever skate together.)

When Peter's NHL career ran out in St. Louis, he'd join the Blues as a scout. So young Paul was raised in the city that wanted to ship him out for futures despite going all the way to the Western Conference final in '16 and being in the thick of another playoff race.

An impending unrestricted free agent scheduled to become the most coveted centre not named John Tavares, Stastny waived his no-trade clause to join cold, dark, spotty-WiFi Winnipeg — a divisional rival.

In an era where the slightest dip in ice time can provide a week's worth of trade gossip, no one saw the deal brewing.

"No matter what team you're playing for, you always get nervous at trade deadline," Stastny says.

"It was a couple days where it was emotional, but it wasn't an irrational decision. It was sit back, weigh the pros and cons, talk to my family, talk to my advisors and people I trust most. In the end, it was my say and I felt comfortable with it.

"You look at the team, you look at the community and how excited they are, and you kind of had a feeling this was gonna happen."

Of all the marquee deadline buys — Evander Kane, Ryan McDonagh, Derick Brassard, Rick Nash — none has been more impactful in his new threads than Stastny, who takes a four-game point streak (2-5-7) into Thursday's Game 4 tilt versus Nashville.

In what is already the second-longest post-season run of his 12-year career, Stastny is averaging 1.13 points per game. He's a team-best plus-9, he's winning 52.4% of his draws, he's scored two game-winners, his underlying numbers are overwhelmingly positive, and, on a club that wonderfully rides with an edge, Stastny has stayed out of the box.

"He's just incredibly consistent, professional, everything you'd want in a centreman, especially in tough series," captain Blake Wheeler gushes. "There's no ins and outs of his game. He plays extremely hard and does a lot of little things that go unnoticed and aren't really taught to young players anymore."

Stastny brings an element that didn't exist in the Jets room: Experienced hockey nerd with the sport embedded in his DNA (in addition to his father and uncles, Paul's older brother, Yan, was a 91-game NHLer). Face-off beast. A second power-play setup option with superior vision. And a calming presence between young second-line wingers Nikolaj Ehlers and Patrik Laine.

"He doesn't try too many crazy things like me and Patty would. My game is to skate, Patty's is to shoot, and Stas is an all-around guy. He can do everything," says Ehlers, who remains in constant communication with Stastny through the game. "He fits into this team really well."

Coach Paul Maurice insists not every pivot would be able to read off such a pair of dynamic wingers, to play the straight man to their creative flourishes, to keep the kids' emotions in check.

"I'm always trying to find both those guys," Stastny says. "I know they want the puck at all times, both of those guys have great shots and are creating chances every time they get it."

Equally important: Stastny is a hockey guy, which is not the same as a hockey player.

"There are really good players in the NHL who walk out of the rink and don't think about the game until the minute they walk back in," Maurice says.

"Paul's a guy who when you walk by him in the hallway or you go grab a coffee in the lounge, he's talking hockey nonstop. It's good to have a veteran guy like that in your room that's wired to the game, loves being around the game and it rubs off because he's talking to different guys all the time. He brings more of a hockey mindset into your room, and he has the respect of the players who listen."

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Stastny is a complementary and temporary(?) addition to the leadership core of Wheeler and Mark Scheifele, two hockey guys who employ their own Hall of Famer, Adam Oates, to give them the types of pointers Stastny has been getting free all his life in father-son chats.

"Some of the stuff I hear from them is stuff my dad's been telling me my whole life," Stastny says. "When you have someone who thinks the way you do, it's easier."



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Stastny cashed in to the tune of \$28 million the last time he hit UFA status. In light of a thin centre crop and his post-season showing, he should knock his next contract out of the park, too.

Winnipeg is a perfect fit on the ice, but the Jets will need to dole out juicy raises to RFAs Josh Morrissey, Jacob Trouba, Adam Lowry and Connor Hellebuyck. Oh, and Laine is eligible to ink a monster deal as early as July 1.

So, Stastny is resisting thoughts of returning to Manitoba next fall.

"If you start worrying too much about the future or get too down on the past, you don't really enjoy what you're doing. As I've gotten older, I've realized that at this time of year, you save all your energy, soak it up and then waste it all in one day and then recharge," Stastny says.

"Once we get down the road a little, I'll start thinking about it, but it's always good to keep everything open. Every time you think something is going to happen, life throws a curveball at you."

Paul doubts Peter will be flying in for the Whiteout, so the phone calls will continue as this Jets ride flies on.

"My dad has experienced this before, in the '80s, and he knows what it's like. My dad being a hockey fan, he'd rather watch at home because in the intermissions he can watch another game," Stastny says.

"The more hockey he can watch, the better. He's always been like me. He'd rather watch it at home where he can focus."

Paul is focused on winning something no Stastny ever has — and that includes Dad, the most prolific scorer of the '80s not named Wayne Gretzky.

Joining the Jets, Paul says, is everything he's envisioned and more.

"And it keeps getting more exciting, keeps getting harder and keeps getting more fun," Stastny says. "I'd sign up for that any day."

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1094837 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Dustin Byfuglien is taking over Round 2 for the Jets

Mark Spector | @sportsnetspec May 2, 2018, 5:30 PM

WINNIPEG — Dustin Byfuglien is the rarest of hockey men, a five-tool player in a sport that has so few of those, we have to borrow a baseball term just to accurately describe him.

Size, strength, speed, skill and now a consistent dose of the hockey smarts that always seemed to come and go from his game, Byfuglien has arrived as a superstar this spring in Winnipeg.

Once considered collateral damage in a Chicago Blackhawks salary purge, and the guy who famously tossed Evander Kane's track suit into the showers that day in Winnipeg, Byfuglien is a quiet Minnesota outdoorsman who'd take a fishing rod and lure ahead of a camera and microphone every day of his week.

But the difference is, he is a focused player now, where once the knock on Byfuglien was that his game would always wander. That he never had the consistency to be a true leader, because you can't preach what you don't practise.

"You know, he has been on a mission, right from the start of the season," said Jets assistant coach Charlie Huddy. "And I can tell you, there have only been a handful of times where he was wandering."

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At age 33, Byfuglien just turned his number in March. He won his only Stanley Cup back in 2010, got traded to Atlanta, and watched as his career whittled away with a franchise that gave him four lousy playoff games between 2010 and this spring.

He could have left as a free agent, but chose to stay, and decisions like that can focus a guy. Suddenly, being dangerous at both ends of the rink takes on a new meaning for this six-foot-five, 260-pound behemoth. He has five points in the first three games of this series — 3-7-10 in eight playoff games this spring — and Byfuglien has become a physical presence that has the Nashville Predators flummoxed.

"Something kicked in," Huddy admitted. "He said, 'We've got a chance to be a good hockey team here. I'm going to play the right way.'"

"He brings a lot to the table," understated Nashville coach Peter Laviolette. "Just his size, his physicality for one. The way he can move is another."

And so we see the slippery slope begin for Nashville.

In a sport where imposing your physical will on the opponent still matters, Nashville players look up and down their bench for the teammate who can knock Byfuglien on his backside and put a stop to his constant physical dominance. And they can find no one — because that player does not exist.

"I think Buff is the strongest person in the league — hands down," said Bryan Little, who has known Byfuglien since their days together in Georgia.

Truly, when Byfuglien leaves the scene of the crime, an opponent is almost always picking himself up off the ice. He rag-dolled two Predators at the same time in Game 2, dragging Roman Josi while also handling Nashville's biggest force, Austin Watson, at the same time in a scrum.

So Byfuglien is killing the Predators in their zone, crushing them in his. And gone from his game are the long, irresponsible forays into the offensive zone that opened up opportunity. That leaves the Predators to try and figure out how to handle a 27-minute defenceman that has taken over the game in his own, unique way.

And it is fair to question if there is truly an answer for Byfuglien, the only player in the league listed as high as 260 lb. whose mobility, dexterity and simple hockey "hands" are commensurate with a player five inches and 70 pounds lighter.

Chris Pronger used to run a series from his spot on the blue line, but it wasn't quite the same as what Byfuglien is doing this spring.

"You wouldn't have found (Pronger) around the other team's net, because he was playing 30 minutes a night. The other 20 he was in the box," joked Jets head coach Paul Maurice. "Dustin is behind the net with puck possession an awful lot (and) up the ice. I will say this, for a guy that hits ... as cleanly as he hits, you don't see the hands. There are not a lot of guys that size that hit like that who also have really, really pure hands."

On Byfuglien's first goal in Game 3, he simply powered a slapshot past goalie Pekka Rinne. It is a shot that has won the Hardest Shot Competition and is among the league's heaviest.

On his second goal he took a bullet cross-ice pass from Patrik Laine, and from the far edge of the circle one-timed a puck behind Rinne. It was a totally different goal requiring a completely separate set of skills, and



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when the play was over there was Byfuglien, dancing a little happy dance as the house erupted.

Where did the dance come from?

"I don't know where some of this stuff comes from," he shrugged.

His teammates say he is the team prankster. But in front of the media, when he's not sneaking out the back door, Byfuglien is as boring as his game is electrifying.

"It's strange for me to see him talking to you guys in front of the camera. It's like, 'That's not who I know,'" said Little.

The Predators are just as puzzled. We were supposed to be talking about their superior defence, but so far, there is one D-man who is running the show in Round 2, and they call him Big Buff.

"He just has that presence out there that he's going to do something," marvelled Little. "Whether it's throw a big hit, or he had a couple of big goals for us last night. Any time he's on the ice, it's dangerous."

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1094838 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / How Boston's Marchand-Bergeron-Pastrnak super line came together

Chris Johnston | @reporterchris May 2, 2018, 10:37 AM

BOSTON – Bruce Cassidy never intended for this to happen.

The man who built the most dominant line going in the Stanley Cup playoffs – a trio the hockey lifer now describes as the best he's ever seen – only put David Pastrnak beside Brad Marchand and Patrice Bergeron in a dire situation.

His Boston Bruins were down 3-0 before the halfway point of an Oct. 30 visit to Columbus. The lines went in a blender and spit out the Marchand-Bergeron-Pastrnak grouping, which immediately sparked a comeback in a 4-3 shootout loss. Even then the coach wasn't sold on rolling out such a top-heavy formation.

"Ideally for our team to be successful that's what we've determined – that we need to spread out the offence," Cassidy told reporters that night at Nationwide Arena. "We'll also move back to it if need be. Tonight, I thought it need be and it worked out."

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Six months later, it's more than working out.

Circumstances conspired to keep that No. 1 line together. The Bruins were decimated by injuries in the early part of the season and sat at a pedestrian 4-3-3 after the first month. Cassidy stuck with Marchand-Bergeron-Pastrnak for games against Vegas and Washington that followed the visit to Columbus and saw them tilt the ice considerably.

He went right back to them when Marchand returned from a concussion absence on Nov. 29 against the Tampa Bay Lightning and they outclassed what was then hockey's most dominant line – controlling about 75 per cent of the even-strength shot attempts against Vlad Namestnikov, Steven Stamkos and Nikita Kucherov while outscoring them 1-0.

They were officially a thing.

"Once they started playing well together, it was hard to break them up," Cassidy said recently. "I think that's what it came down to. I think the plan, at some point, was see if we could go back to what we started because we thought we'd be more dangerous, but it kind of evolved into where we started to win games, and that line could skate together."

The Bruins finished 46-17-9 from November onwards and are tied 1-1 heading into Game 3 of their second-round series with the Lightning.

Looking back, you can understand why Cassidy was reluctant to place all of his golden eggs in the same basket. The trend has been to spread offensive wealth throughout a lineup – like how the Pittsburgh Penguins kept Sidney Crosby, Evgeni Malkin and Phil Kessel on separate lines while winning the 2016 Stanley Cup.

The Bruins coach initially thought he'd have more success with rookie Anders Bjork beside Bergeron and Marchand while Pastrnak paired up with David Krejci and Jake DeBrusk. But with the injuries and a slow start, it never materialized that way.

What's made Marchand-Bergeron-Pastrnak so effective is the line's ability to control the puck and make plays despite being the central focus of every opponent's game plan. They've produced 11 even-strength goals in eight playoff games together – the most of any line this spring. And they've done it while controlling more than 60 per cent of shot attempts.

Pittsburgh's No. 1 line of Jake Guentzel, Crosby and Patric Hornqvist has scored nine goals at evens while Washington's Alex Ovechkin-Evgeny Kuznetsov-Tom Wilson trio has eight. The Vegas Golden Knights line of Jonathan Marchessault, William Karlsson and Reilly Smith has controlled nearly the same amount of shot attempts as the Bergeron group (CF is 60.80-60.71 at 5-on-5) but hasn't scored as frequently.

There was no hyperbole when Cassidy was asked if he'd ever personally seen a line tip the scales so decisively and answered "no."

"I don't think I have right now the way they've gone in the playoffs," said Cassidy. "Now in Toronto [in Round 1] – Toronto kept them off the scoresheet a couple of games. But to answer your question, when they're on boy are they on. That I haven't seen with my own eyes up front, behind the bench."

The addition of Pastrnak has made them special. The 21-year-old came into his own in his fourth NHL season – playing with a reckless abandon that helps keep plays alive long after they appear to have fizzled out. It's a nice complement to the strong edge work and puck-hounding ability of Marchand and Bergeron's next-level spatial awareness and ability to read a play.

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You can trace the Marchand-Bergeron pairing all the way back to before the 2011 Stanley Cup championship, but even the Boston veterans concede they've found something special and unique with Pastrnak.

"He wants to make those plays and if we don't have the puck he hunts it back. That's what amazes me with him," said Bergeron. "I think there's a lot of skilled players that are skilled when they have the puck. When they don't have it, they don't necessarily want it as much as this guy right here."

It's allowed three players to shoulder a disproportionate amount of the load. They'll ultimately be responsible for how deep the Bruins play into the spring.

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CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • May 3, 2018

Sportsnet.ca / While Tom Wilson is talk of town, Penguins 'focused on playing'

Kristina Rutherford | @KrRutherford May 2, 2018, 3:46 PM

CRANBERRY, Pa. – Sidney Crosby's team is down 2-1 in their second-round series, and so, on an off-day ahead of Game 4, the Pittsburgh Penguins captain decided to take part in an optional skate, because he figured he could work on a few aspects of his game with fewer players on the ice.

That's maybe the best player in the world, who's averaging nearly two points per game in these playoffs, saying he needs a little extra work.

OK, then.

And when Crosby was finished, still sweating, having removed only his helmet, he sat in the Penguins' pristine practice dressing room and he tossed up his hands in response to the first question he faced.

It wasn't about what his Penguins need to do to get back in this one. It wasn't about his eight goals, or the production of his linemate, young Jake Guentzel, who leads the playoffs scoring race with 19 points. It wasn't about how Pittsburgh has to limit the Washington Capitals' two-on-one chances, which cost them Game 3. It wasn't even about speculation that Crosby may have spat at a Capitals player after a whistle on Tuesday night — during a moment of verbal jarring, while Alex Ovechkin pulled on his collar.

So, the question in question wasn't any of those questions.

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No, it was about Tom Wilson.

"It's my job to play," Crosby said, from beneath the brim of a black Penguins ball cap. "I'm going to focus on playing and let everyone else whose job it is to worry about those hits take care of that.

"I'm focused on playing."

And thank goodness for that.

In this series with an embarrassment of riches when it comes to offensive firepower — the top three point-producers in these playoffs are featured here, in Guentzel, Crosby and Ovechkin — still, it's Toronto-born Wilson who's the talk of the town.

It's tiring, but also sadly necessary. The NHL is reviewing a second Wilson hit to the head in as many games, this time one that concussed and broke the jaw of winger Zach Aston-Reese, who's going to need surgery.

The six-foot-four, 218-pound Wilson has been suspended in the past, and he doesn't have what you'd call a sparkling reputation, but what irked many about this latest hit, as it should have, was the sight of Wilson laughing on the bench afterwards while Aston-Reese lay on the ice.

Obviously, Penguins fans (you should have heard the boos at PPG Paints Arena) and players weren't too pleased with that.

"I don't see the point of laughing when somebody's hurt," said veteran defender Kris Letang. "Whether it's clean or not, it's not something you do."

And Capitals head coach Barry Trotz says it's not something his first-line right-winger did or would do, either.

"I saw the same thing, and I can tell you this: Tom is very respectful for anyone who's in a situation and possibly injured. He wouldn't do that," Trotz said. "What happened was, 19,000 people were booing him and something funny was said on the bench. A guy made a funny comment, 'He's got all his friends in the building,' something like that. That's why he was smiling.

"I do take a bit of offense. I understand what's coming out of the Penguins locker room, but that was not the case. I'm 100 per cent sure of that, I was right there and one of the guys made a statement about all the booing and all that."

Capitals centre Jay Beagle said he came up with "a joke or two, to keep it light."

"I don't even know if he heard me because the crowd was screaming so loud, but, I mean, yeah. I don't know if he laughed at me or not," Beagle said.

Now that we have that out of the way, whatever the situation around Wilson, most concerning to the two-time defending Stanley Cup champion Penguins is that they're one day away from a pivotal Game 4 at home, with a chance to tie this series back up.

"We're trying to focus our attention on our game and how we can improve and put ourselves in the best opportunity and give ourselves the best chance to win games," Penguins head coach Mike Sullivan said. "And that's where the focus is."

That's exactly where it ought to be, too.

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1094840 Websites

TSN.CA / Statistically Speaking: Jones gets Sharks back to even

Scott Cullen

Columnist image

Jones shuts down the Golden Knights, Palat paces the Lightning and more in Scott Cullen's Statistically Speaking.

Martin Jones – San Jose's netminder recorded a 34-save shutout in a 4-0 Game Four win against Vegas and has a .934 save percentage in eight playoff games. He also has a .927 save percentage in 40 career playoff games.

Ondrej Palat – The Lightning left winger scored two goals in a 4-1 Game Three win at Boston, giving him eight points (4 G, 4 A) in eight playoff games.

Alex Tuch – Vegas' rookie right winger had a tough night (12 for, 18 against, 40.0 CF%, 3-8 scoring chances) and was on the ice for two goals against in a 4-0 Game Four loss at San Jose.

Kevan Miller – Boston's stay-at-home blueliner was on the wrong side of the puck (17 for, 22 against, 43.6 CF%, 7-9 scoring chances) and on the ice for two goals against in a 4-1 loss to Tampa Bay.

James Neal – The Golden Knights winger recorded a game-high 12 shot attempts (7 SOG), but couldn't find the scoresheet and was on the ice for two goals against in a 4-0 Game Four loss at San Jose.

David Backes – He missed some time while serving a fighting major, but the Bruins winger played just 6:09 in Game Three against Tampa Bay.



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He was on the ice for two goals against in that time, which may have contributed to his game-low ice time.

Lightning D Victor Hedman added a couple of assists in a 4-1 Game Three win at Boston. He has four assists in the past three games after he had zero points in the first five games of the postseason... Sharks C Logan Couture and D Brenden Dillon both earned a pair of assists in a 4-0 Game Four win vs. Vegas. Couture has nine points (4 G, 5 A) in eight games and Dillon has four assists in eight playoff games... Lightning G Andrei Vasilevskiy turned away 28 of 29 shots in a 4-1 Game Three win at Boston, giving him a .925 save percentage in eight playoff starts.

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TSN.CA / Statistically Speaking: Byfuglien, Wheeler lead Jets comeback

Scott Cullen

Columnist image

Byfuglien and Wheeler lead the Jets to a huge comeback win, Ovechkin is the difference for the Capitals in Game Three and more in Scott Cullen's Statistically Speaking.

Dustin Byfuglien and Blake Wheeler – The Jets defenceman and right winger both had two goals and an assist in a 7-4 Game Three win against Nashville, an impressive turnaround after falling behind 3-0 in the first period. Byfuglien has 10 points (3 G, 7 A) in eight playoff games. Wheeler had 11 shot attempts (8 SOG) in Game Three and has 10 points (3 G, 7 A) in eight playoff games.

Alex Ovechkin – Washington's superstar left winger scored the winning goal with 1:07 remaining in the third period, and added an assist, in a 4-3 Game Three win at Pittsburgh. He has 13 points (8 G, 5 A) in nine playoff games.

Nicklas Backstrom – The Capitals centre produced three assists in Game Three at Pittsburgh, giving him 12 points (3 G, 9 A) in nine playoff games.

Bryan Rust – The Penguins winger had a tough night (8 for, 14 against, 36.4 CF%, 6-9 scoring chances) and was on the ice for two goals against in a 4-3 Game Three loss to Washington.

Roman Josi and Ryan Ellis – Nashville's defence tandem was on the wrong side of the puck (10 for, 24 against, 29.4 CF%, 6-13 scoring chances) in a 7-4 Game Three loss at Winnipeg.

P.K. Subban – Nashville's star blueliner had a goal and an assist in Game Three at Winnipeg, but was on the ice for three goals against (with one for) and his third period penalty for high-sticking led to Blake Wheeler's game-winning goal on the ensuing power play.

Evgeni Malkin – The Penguins centre returned to action after missing a couple of games. He recorded an assist and played more than 19 minutes in Pittsburgh's 4-3 Game Three loss against Washington.

Zach Aston-Reese – Pittsburgh's rookie winger reportedly suffered a broken jaw and a concussion after taking a high hit from Capitals winger Tom Wilson.

SHORT SHIFTS

Penguins C Sidney Crosby and LW Jake Guentzel both had a goal and an assist in a 4-3 Game Three loss to Washington. Guentzel jumps back into the playoff scoring lead with 19 points (8 G, 11 A) in nine games,

while Crosby has 17 points (8 G, 9 A)... Jets C Paul Stastny put up a goal and two assists in a 7-4 Game Three win against Nashville. He has nine points (3 G, 6 A) in eight games... Jets D Jacob Trouba added a goal and an assist in Game Three and C Mark Scheifele had a pair of assists. Trouba had one point in his previous eight games and Scheifele has 12 points (8 G, 4 A) in eight games... Predators LW Filip Forsberg contributed a goal and an assist, on 12 shot attempts (9 SOG), in a 7-4 Game Three loss at Winnipeg; he has 11 points (5 G, 6 A) in nine games... Predators D Mattias Ekholm and C Ryan Johansen both added a couple of assists. Ekholm has eight points (1 G, 7 A) and Johansen has nine points (4 G, 5 A) in nine games.

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TSN.CA / Big Buff beating Predators at their own game

Frank Seravalli

Columnist image

WINNIPEG — These Stanley Cup playoffs are Big Buff's world and the Nashville Predators are just living in it.

Dustin Byfuglien, the 6-foot-5 force of nature on the Winnipeg Jets blueline, has more bone-crunching hits in one game than some other entire series do, but he's also delivering the heavy artillery at the offensive end.

"What makes him unique is he can, I don't know if take over is right, but he can make an impact in a game in just about every single way possible," Jets coach Paul Maurice said of Byfuglien. "He can defend, he can play real physical. Nobody wants to drop the gloves with him. Then there's an offensive side. It's a perfectly placed shot, quick hands, all the other things he can do offensively."

Yes, this second-round slugfest has already done what is increasingly rare in sports: It has lived up to the hype.

We could all envision the 20 goals scored in the last two games while the Jets and Predators rode wild emotional swings amid the Stanley Cup playoff carnage in two of the loudest buildings in the league.

Perhaps the twist we didn't see coming was Byfuglien and the Jets beating the Predators at their own game.

Byfuglien has singlehandedly outscored Nashville's vaunted defence corps, three goals to two, to push the Jets to a 2-1 series edge.

"The game gets bigger and I think he just wants to be out there more making an impact," Paul Stastny said. "He's so good because he is engaged but he's not too emotional. He doesn't go out of his way. He wants the puck. He wants to be out there. He wants to be involved. We feed off that."

The Predators led the NHL with 206 points produced by their blueline this season. They were one of only three teams with two 50-point defencemen – Toronto and Minnesota being the others.

So far, Roman Josi has been held off the scoresheet in this series, while P.K. Subban has the only two goals from the Predators' defence. Josi and Ryan Ellis — who has a shot his teammates nicknamed "The Silencer" — have yet to score a goal in these playoffs.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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Meanwhile, the Jets ranked 10th in points by defencemen during the regular season with 170, and Byfuglien was the only one to break the 40-point plateau.

"We do have a back end that can get really involved, jump in the holes, buy the forwards time, similar to Nashville," Maurice explained.

Winnipeg's defencemen played a critical role in the first four goals of Game 3's rousing comeback win, scoring three of them and collecting the primary assist on Stastny's marker that got the ball rolling in the second period.

The Jets' defence activated in the play more while down 3-0 as the Predators seemed to sit back.

"I think that was an important change for us," Maurice said. "Our back end gets up the ice with the play and if they had an opportunity to take ice, they took ice. That's standard for our game and there was probably a little more room because they had a 3-0 lead."

Jacob Trouba collected the first multi-point playoff game of his career.

But it was Byfuglien who stole the show, doing a jig on the ice after notching his first three-point playoff game since Game 5 of the 2010 Stanley Cup Final with the Blackhawks.

The laid-back Byfuglien, who says Manitoba suits him well with his off-ice pursuits of ice fishing and hunting similar to his Minnesota roots, was at the centre of it all.

"It was nice to see him get a little excited," Blake Wheeler said. "It's tough to get him to smile."

Wheeler was joking. Teammates say he's incredibly different away from the cameras, rarely serious except when it's time to go to work.

"There isn't anyone here who doesn't get the business from Buff," Maurice said. "From the owner, to management, to the trainers and coaches, no one is safe. He likes to get everyone going."

Byfuglien's disposition is what makes him the perfect complement to a wired Wheeler, who is almost always plugged in, while Mark Scheifele is the conduit to the Jets' young stars in Winnipeg's leadership triumvirate.

"He's the release valve," Maurice said. "He can do it with a smile on his face. Blake is going to stare you to death. Buff is going to make you smile first."

Byfuglien shrugged for reporters after Tuesday night's win. Nothing to see here, move along. This is just what he does at this time of year – and he's almost impossible to stop when he's engaged.

"I want to win every night," Byfuglien said. "I believe everyone does. It's just a matter of coming to the rink, playing hard and doing my job best as I can do it. Hopefully the guys can follow and get some energy off it."

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TSN.CA / Statistically Speaking: Byfuglien, Wheeler lead Jets comeback

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USA TODAY / Tom Wilson suspension right call; now make every head hit a penalty

Kevin Allen, USA TODAY Sports Published 9:56 p.m. ET May 2, 2018 | Updated 10:14 p.m. ET May 2, 2018

The best evidence that the NHL's Department of Player Safety made the right call in suspending Tom Wilson three games is that few people are pleased with the decision.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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Given the spark and fire that Wilson provides the Washington Capitals, this is a significant suspension. He is gone for the key games of this series.

But some fans, particularly those in Pittsburgh, wanted the book thrown at the rugged Washington forward for his high hit that broke Zach Aston-Reese's jaw. At a minimum, Penguins fans wanted Wilson gone for the rest of the Eastern Conference semifinal.

With this suspension, Wilson can be back for Game 7. Can you imagine how fired up the Washington fans will be if Wilson comes back for Game 7?

Even some neutral fans believed the suspension should be five games or more. The other unhappy folks are those who believe Wilson's hit was a legal check. Let's not forget that officials on the ice saw it that way. Wilson was not penalized. Some former NHL players have also tweeted they thought the hit was fine.

We all watch the same videos in these situations, and none of us agrees on what we saw happen or what the league's reaction should be.

Maybe that's part of the problem.

The illegal check to the head rule, as it is written now, provides a gray area in which heavy hitters like Wilson can operate.

On the ice, the officials believed his hit was clean because Aston-Reese saw Wilson coming. He had time to prepare for the blow, and Wilson made contact with Aston-Reese's shoulder before driving upward into his chin.

The NHL had to dig deeper to suspend Wilson on the technicalities of Rule 48. He was suspended for changing his angle of attack to make it a more dangerous hit, and then for driving upward to make the head the main point of contact. It was pointed out, in the Player Safety explanation video, that Wilson could have delivered a clean hit if he had continued on his initial path and drove through Aston-Reese's core.

Maybe the Wilson situation is another reminder that it is time to remove the gray area from head shots. Maybe it's to change the rule to read that if a player makes contact with the head, intended or not, it is a minor penalty. If the referee deems it intentional or reckless, it is a major penalty and a game misconduct. That would reduce the number of head shots.

No gray area. Just like we do with stick fouls. You are responsible for your stick. If it cuts someone, you are in the penalty box. Under a zero-tolerance head shot rule, you would be responsible for making sure you don't make contact with the head.

Some argue it would eliminate hitting from the game. Don't believe that. These are incredible athletes who always find ways to adjust. They would find ways to be physical.

If that were the standard, would Wilson have run over Aston-Reese by driving into his chest? We will never know for sure.

But we do know is we want to protect players' brains. And we don't want players checked in the face hard enough to break their jaw.

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