



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • May 7, 2018



Wannabe Canes can train with pros in First Goal program

Posted 4:27 p.m. Friday

By Derek Medlin, WRAL sports director

Raleigh, N.C. — Got kids who are interested in learning about hockey? The Carolina Hurricanes can help.

The team announced Friday that [registration is open for the Learn to Play: First Goal program](#), a joint initiative funded by the NHL and NHL Players' Association.

The program helps introduce kids aged 5 to 9 to the game of hockey through instructional sessions with Hurricanes alumni Shane Willis, Bates Battaglia and Jeff Daniels.

The Hurricanes said First Goal is geared to children who have not already played in a house league or higher.

The program will have locations in Cary, Charlotte, Fort Bragg, Garner, Greensboro, Hillsborough, Indian Trail, Raleigh and Wake Forest.

For \$119, participants receive seven on-ice skill sessions and Hurricanes-branded equipment, including:

- Helmet
- Jersey
- Stick
- Skates
- Shoulder, elbow and shin pads
- Gloves
- Pants
- Socks
- Equipment bag

In addition, each participant receives two tickets to a Hurricanes' home game during the 2018-19 season, a Hurricanes Kids Club membership, and a graduation ceremony and certificate at the conclusion of the program.



Checkers Square Off Against Lehigh Valley in Second Round

Checkers open best-of-seven series on the road

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

May 4th, 2018

After sweeping the Wilkes-Barre/Scranton Penguins in three games in the first round of the Calder Cup Playoffs, the Charlotte Checkers move on to face the Lehigh Valley Phantoms.

The best-of-seven series between the two Atlantic Division opponents opens Friday night in Lehigh Valley. Charlotte will host Games 3 and 4 on Tuesday and Wednesday, respectively, and, if necessary, Game 5 on Saturday night.

The Checkers finished the regular season with seven consecutive wins before rattling off three straight victories against the Penguins by a combined score of 14-6 in the first

round of the playoffs. The Checkers bring what is now a 10-game winning streak into their second-round match-up against the Atlantic Division's top team.

The Checkers and Phantoms split their eight-game season series in 2017-18. Both teams logged 4-4-0 records, including marks of 3-1-0 on home ice. The Checkers defeated Lehigh Valley on consecutive nights in early April, outscoring the Phantoms 9-2 in those two games to wrap up the season series.

This second-round match-up will feature two of the most potent offenses in the AHL. The Checkers finished atop the league in the regular season with a 3.45 goals-per-game average, while the Phantoms averaged 3.42 goals per game. Lehigh Valley's offense is led by league MVP Phil Varone, who totaled 70 points (23g, 47a) in 74 games. He recorded



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six points (1g, 5) in seven games against Charlotte in the regular season.

Greg McKeegg has notched 28 points (10g, 18a) in 22 games since joining the Checkers at the NHL trade deadline. He leads the team in playoff points with five (1g, 4a) in three games. Haydn Fleury logged two goals and two assists (four points) in three first-round games with Charlotte.

The second-round series will shift to Charlotte after Games 1 and 2 on Friday and Saturday, respectively. Game 3, set for 7 p.m. on Tuesday, May 8, at Bojangles' Coliseum features \$1 hot dogs. Game 4, which faces off at 7 p.m. on Wednesday, May 9, boasts \$1 beer. If necessary, Game 5 is slated for 6 p.m. on Saturday, May 12, and the Checkers are offering 40 percent off groups of four tickets with their Family Pack ticket deal. To purchase playoff tickets or learn more about Games 3-5 in Charlotte, [click here](#).

The Hockey News

There is disruption, but also hope, in Carolina right now

By: [Ryan Kennedy](#) May 4, 2018

The franchise doesn't have a coach or a GM, but new minds plus great talents in the scouting department have the ability to make something positive in Raleigh

Time is of the essence in Carolina. The Hurricanes have now gone nine straight seasons without playoff hockey and are entering a new era with owner Tom Dundon. Ron Francis is no longer GM, coach Bill Peters left for Calgary and the draft combine is less than a month away. Even more harrowing is that the draft itself is less than two months away.

While the Hurricanes don't have a GM in place yet, president Don Waddell did just bring in old pal and veteran hockey man Rick Dudley to work in the hockey operations department with fellow recent add Paul Krepelka, the former player agent. There is hope in this transition time and Dudley points to some of the holdovers as big assets, starting with the director of amateur scouting.

"Tony MacDonald and his staff have done a pretty good job of assembling a group of young players that are very talented," Dudley said. "With a few additions, they can be a pretty solid hockey team for a long time. There are a lot of pieces there to work with."

Finding talents outside of the first round has been a particular strength of the Canes during MacDonald's tenure. Jaccob Slavin, Brett Pesce, Sebastian Aho and Justin Faulk all fall into that category, while Warren Foegele looks like he might be next. Of course, Carolina got a huge boost the other week at the draft lottery, as they won the second pick overall. That could mean Andrei Svechnikov or Filip Zadina (linemate of Canes first-rounder Martin Necas at the world juniors) wearing red and black next season.

"The fact Donny was nice enough to get the second pick for the organization makes it kinda fun to come into," Dudley said. "I've watched a lot of this draft (class) and there are some very strong players. You're getting a player who will help you a ton."

The No. 1 center Carolina truly needs is not available in this class. True, *someone* will emerge eventually (is it Barrett Hayton? Joe Veleno? Isac Lundestrom?), but for the Hurricanes to take a pivot, the only logical move would be to trade down. That route has already been discussed, interestingly enough.

So is there hope in Carolina short-term? Yes, there is. You don't need a true No. 1 center to make the playoffs, you just need one to win a title. Right now, Carolina just needs to get in and begin building a culture of winning until that pivot emerges.

Goaltending let the Hurricanes down this season and the vaunted defense corps in front of those netminders didn't look so vaunted. The new GM has work to do, that's for sure. And the new coach will have to be solid, as Peters was a rising talent (Carolina has an excellent internal candidate in Mike Vellucci, who was a very good OHL coach before joining the Canes).

On the positive side, the Hurricanes weren't downright awful this season - they finished 10th in the conference. While they will be getting an impact player in the draft this summer (assuming they keep the pick), it's going to be on the players already in Carolina to push things forward. And for the 69-year-old Dudley, a man who has seen it all in his hockey career, he has a gut feeling about his new franchise.

"I'm probably not that long for the game anymore," he said. "But I would like my last stop to be a very successful one. I hope this is my last stop."



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Checkers Crush Phantoms 6-0 to Even Series Heading Back to Charlotte

Written by Nicholas Niedzielski

Published: May 05, 2018

After dropping their first contest in over a month in Game 1, the Checkers came back with a vengeance in Game 2, throttling the Phantoms 6-0 behind a 26-save shutout from Alex Nedeljkovic.

Both teams spent a considerable amount of time in the box, totaling 78 penalty minutes between them, but it was the Checkers who took advantage. Starting with Janne Kuokkanen's opening tally six minutes in, the Checkers rocked the Phantoms for four power-play goals on the night while stifling the home squad on all six of their man advantages.

Following up his 30-save performance from Game 1, Nedeljkovic stood tall in the Charlotte crease and frustrated an offense that finished the regular season ranked second in the AHL, sending away all 26 shots he faced. Kuokkanen ended up leading the way with a pair of tallies on the night, while three different Checkers – Trevor Carrick, Andrew Miller and Andrew Poturalski – all corralled a pair of helpers each. By pulling off a split in Lehigh Valley, the Checkers have now snatched home-ice advantage back from the Phantoms, as the next three contests will all take place in Charlotte over the course of next week.

NOTES

The Checkers set a new franchise playoff record with a six-goal margin of victory. The previous record of five was set in

2013 ... After not scoring first in any of their first-round games, the Checkers scored first in each of their first two games of this series ... After going 0-for-10 on the power play in their last three games, the Checkers went 4-for-8 tonight, including goals on each of their first two opportunities. Meanwhile, the Checkers killed all six Phantoms opportunities, including a 30-second, two-man advantage early in the second period ... Alex Nedeljkovic made 26 saves for the third postseason shutout in Checkers history. Nedeljkovic tied for third in the AHL in regular-season shutouts with five. He is now 4-1-0 with a 1.71 goals-against average and .941 save percentage in the playoffs ... Andrew Miller had two assists, extending his point streak to three games and giving him five points (1g, 4a) in five playoff games. He also had five points in five playoff games for the Checkers last season ... Andrew Poturalski also had two assists and also has five points (1g, 4a) in five playoff games ... Checkers defenseman Josiah Didier left the game after a hit by the Phantoms' Nicolas Aube-Kubel in the first period and did not return. Aube-Kubel received an interference penalty on the play ... Defenseman Jake Chelios missed the game due to injury ... Forwards Mike Ferrantino, Morgan Geekie, Nick Schilkey and Zack Stortini, and defensemen Jake Bean, Matt Finn and Dennis Robertson were healthy extras.

UP NEXT

The series now shifts to Bojangles' Coliseum for the next three contests, starting with Game 3 on Tuesday at 7:00 p.m.



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Hurricanes Lose a Legend in Firing Francis

By [Mark Shiver](#) May 5th, 2018

The Carolina Hurricanes have been a bustle of activity over the past couple of weeks. One of those activities brought to an end the services of former general manager and executive vice-president, Ron Francis. Francis enjoyed a long-running tenure as one of the most beloved names in Hurricanes' history.

But, that was as a player. As a general manager he was patient and deliberative, two traits that served to bring about his ultimate demise.

Firing Hall of Fame Legend Ron Francis

The [announcement from the team was short and to the point](#):

The Carolina Hurricanes today announced that the team has terminated the contract of President of Hockey Operations Ron Francis. Francis served as the team's executive vice president and general manager from Apr. 24, 2014, until Mar. 7, 2018.

There was no fanfare, no "we wish him the best in his future endeavors." Just like the ice Francis has spent so much of his life on, it was cold and unyielding. The business of hockey moved on as it has for decades and will for decades more.

Francis, the Greatest Whaler

Ron Francis. An NHL legend is no longer part of the team in any fashion. The *Hartford Courant* described the career of Francis, [the greatest Whaler](#):

Francis, 55, is a four-time All-Star who played 10 seasons with the Whalers, won the Stanley Cup twice with Pittsburgh in the 1990s and was inducted into the Hockey Hall of Fame in 2007.

The Courant also noted, "Francis, whose No. 10 hangs from the XL Center rafters in Hartford, stockpiled draft picks during the three-plus seasons he spent rebuilding the Hurricanes, but he was criticized for not making enough moves to help the current club and failing to orchestrate a consequential player-for-player trade during that time."

Francis the GM

That is pretty accurate. Francis did a good job building the team from the ground up, using draft picks and the occasional trade. He leaves behind a team that is full of young, talented players but he never pulled the trigger on

bringing a difference-maker to the Hurricanes. He once asked who that might be, at the time a valid question as the free-agent market was not overrun with available players.

Is Francis to blame if former owner Peter Karmanos would not let him spend the money necessary to get a proven scoring forward or two? We will never know. That discussion will now be relegated to being a topic around wings and beer.

Ron Francis is no longer relevant to the plans of the owner, CEO and Governor of the Hurricanes, Tom Dundon. Whatever it was that these two could not agree on is not important. Whatever it was that separated the two philosophically is already part of the past. The future of the Hurricanes includes [Dundon and his most recent hire](#), Rick Dudley, the new senior vice president of hockey operations for the Hurricanes

The Hurricanes also announced that Joe Nieuwendyk has resigned his position as pro scout and advisor. Nieuwendyk is good friends with Francis and likely left because of the Francis termination. Like Francis, Nieuwendyk has had quite a storied career in the NHL, last serving as general manager of the Dallas Stars before coming to the Hurricanes in 2014.

What Happened Between Dundon and Francis?

Looking back to earlier this year when relatively new owner Tom Dundon purchased the team, one has to wonder if he had any inkling that his latest venture would require this type of time and attention. When he demoted Francis he said that he hoped he would stay with the team. Francis had been working from home for the past several weeks, which might cause one to question, "What happened?"

If Dundon wanted Francis to stay with the team, and Francis was working from home, presumably out of sight and not bothering those involved in the day to day operations of the team at the PNC Arena, what suddenly broke and caused Dundon to give Francis a pink slip? Did he terminate Francis to make room for Dudley?

We may never know what the ultimate breaking point was between Dundon and Francis. The bottom line is that Francis is a beloved figure in Raleigh and in Hartford. He was crucial to the Pittsburgh Penguins' winning the Stanley Cup twice. He is a Hall-of-Famer and a legend. And now, he's gone from the Hurricanes organization.



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TODAY'S LINKS

<https://www.wralsportsfan.com/wannabe-can-es-can-train-with-pros-in-first-goal-program/17531428/>
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<http://gocheckers.com/game-recaps/checkers-crush-phantoms-6-0-to-even-series-heading-back-to-charlotte>
<https://thehockeywriters.com/hurricanes-lose-legend-firing-francis/>

SportScan

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

1095374 Websites

The Athletic / Lightning players explain how they drew up the series-clinching goal

By Joe Smith 7h ago

TAMPA, Fla. — With the game tied and six minutes left in the second period, the Lightning were put on the power play.

This was a golden opportunity to take the lead for good — and seal the series.

"It was a big moment," captain Steven Stamkos said. "We needed to shake something up."

So winger Nikita Kucherov turned to J.T. Miller on the bench: "Let's try it."

Kucherov, 24, and Miller, 25, had drawn up a set play before the playoffs began. It was a give-and-go revolving around motion — and some deception — with the two weaving through the left circle.

They tried it a handful of times against the Devils, to no avail.

This time, however, it worked. Miller's goal was the game-winner in the series-clinching, 3-1 victory over the Bruins at Amalie Arena. It was the first time in 17 power play opportunities in this series that they tried the play. Stamkos said the unit had gone stagnant, too much standing around. It begged for creativity.

"We put it in the bank for hopefully a situation like this," Miller said. "And we're obviously super pumped it worked."

The play starts with Kucherov carrying the puck from below the circle up the boards. Miller, typically stationed in front of the net, grabs the pass down low and heads up the boards as Kucherov darts behind Bruins defenseman Zdeno Chara to take his place.

The key for Miller is giving it right back to Kucherov, before curling just inside the faceoff dot. It makes Chara, Boston's 6-foot-9 captain, have to think quickly.

"Chara's got the long stick," Miller said. "Maybe we can get inside it."

Kucherov is one of the game's most brilliant hockey minds — "crazy smart," as Sabres All-Star Kyle Okposo put it. He's also one of the best at catch-and-release, especially when it comes to passing.

With Chara's stick positioned on his left side, Kucherov zips the puck into the tiny opening on the defenseman's right.

"It looks like he's not even going to pass it to me," Miller said. "It's amazing. And it's right on my stick."

Miller, with three Bruins surrounding him, doesn't waste any time, one-timing the pass over the left shoulder of Bruins goalie Tuukka Rask.

"I know I have to get it in quick because I've got to catch the goalie looking for the puck," Miller said. "It's hard to get shots by ourselves in the middle. We learned in the Jersey series, I had a couple shots from there. Learned grade-A chances are hard to come by."

The first power play unit was given a twist, with Brayden Point replacing Alex Killorn. The tweak the coaching staff made was sliding Stamkos just inside the left circle. It draws a defender, this time Riley Nash, who was on the sniper's left shoulder.

"Everybody knows (Stamkos) can pound the puck with the best of them," Miller said. "You've got to respect him, and if you don't, other stuff opens like that."

"A diversion," Stamkos said.

The fact Miller was even here, on the Lightning's top power play, drawing up plays like it was a backyard football game with Kucherov, is a story in itself. It's not that Miller isn't skilled — he has three straight 20-plus goal seasons.

But Miller, in his previous four-plus seasons with the Rangers, was yanked like a yo-yo up and down the lineup. First line. Fourth line. There wasn't any consistency or, it seemed, enough trust from coach Alain Vigneault.

But once Miller got acquired by the Lightning at the Feb. 26 trade deadline in the Ryan McDonagh blockbuster, he quickly became a top-six staple. He fit in with Point and Yannick Gourde at first.

But for the most part, Miller has been on the same line with Stamkos and Kucherov, the team's most elite scorers. And Miller held his own, scoring more goals than any Lightning player post-deadline (10 in 19 games).

"I've seen him do it as he continues to grow confidence in this league," said McDonagh, his former Rangers teammate. "He's using his body, his size. Not afraid to stand up to anybody and go for the big hit. I always knew he had the ability to finish around the net, he's got great shot, great release.

"He has that ability to be a playmaker in tight situations."



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But, as former Rangers teammate Mats Zuccarello joked in late March, "Playing with Kucherov and Stamkos is not the worst way to play hockey."

"It's an opportunity, I'm just trying to make the most of it," Miller said. "I'm super fortunate to be playing with the players I have. This team has a ton of great players, but two guys that have 90 and 100 points, that's a pretty special opportunity. And it doesn't come often."

Coach Jon Cooper has said Miller — a 6-foot-1, 218-pound forward — gives the Lightning an element they haven't had in years. The size, the presence, the hands and stick to do some damage in front.

Miller's thunderous hit on David Backes in the second period changed the momentum of the game. Miller thumped Backes with a shoulder-to-chest check that took the Bruins' veteran out of the game with an upper-body injury.

"I was sick to my stomach when I saw him lying there, not being able to use his legs," Miller said. "I hope he's OK. I don't play dirty. I don't target heads. I hope he knows I have a lot of respect for him. I grew up as a teenager watching that guy play."

A minute and a half later, Miller and Kucherov combined on the set play that put the Lightning ahead for good.

The Athletic LOADED: 05.07.2018

1095375 Websites

The Athletic / Brayden Point, the heartbeat of the Lightning, leads drive to the Eastern Conference final

By Joe Smith 5h ago

TAMPA, Fla. — Tim Hunter says it's one of his favorite stories about Brayden Point.

Hunter, the retired NHL winger, was coaching Point in junior in Moose Jaw. Point's top line was struggling in the first period against the Edmonton Oil Kings, so Hunter decided to give his captain a jolt and bench the trio for a few shifts.

"It wasn't pretty," Hunter recalled. "After a little while, (Point) broke his stick on the boards and said, 'I'm ready to fucking play now!'"

Moose Jaw ended up thumping Edmonton 9-4, with Point leading the way. It was "Teddy Bear Toss Night," so a bunch of furry friends littered the rink. But Hunter learned one thing: Don't poke the bear.

Beneath Point's soft-spoken and shy demeanor is a relentless drive. A crazy competitiveness. You don't make the NHL All-Star Game as a 5-foot-10, third-round pick without it.

Lightning coach Jon Cooper gleaned this quickly, too. So when Point was a minus-5 in a Game 1 loss in this Eastern Conference semifinal and being dominated by the Patrice Bergeron line, Cooper knew the second-year-pro would bounce back.

"There wasn't an ounce of doubt in my mind," Cooper said.

Point flipped the switch in a hurry, his line with Tyler Johnson and Ondrej Palat tilting the series in the Lightning's favor. They not only contained arguably the best line in hockey, they contributed offensively. Palat had two goals in Game 2. Point had a goal in each of the past two games, including the game-tying tally in Sunday's series-clinching 3-1 victory at Amalie Arena.

Point was a plus-2 in 20 workmanlike minutes, winning 71 percent of his faceoffs. He out-Bergeron'd Bergeron. And the Lightning are moving on to the Eastern Conference final because of it.

"In my opinion, he was the best player in the series," Cooper said.

The Lightning won this series because they were the better team. The faster team. The deeper team. Tampa Bay held the Bruins without an even strength goal for the final three games of the series.

The Lightning kept coming in waves, from Point's line to Cedric Paquette's fourth line, they peppered Boston with a ferocious forecheck and a physical style we didn't see often during the regular season. The Lightning's 17 goals this series were scored by 12 different players.

"Every single guy made it a nightmare for them," said winger J.T. Miller, who scored the game-winner on a drawn-up set play. "We had some really good, long shifts in the other team's end and it made them not want to defend anymore."

And it started with the Point line.

They took it on the chin in Game 1, giving up three goals to the Bergeron line in a 6-2 loss. Johnson left Brad Marchand all alone for a too-easy redirection. Bergeron was given too much space on his one-timer from the slot. The line was too loose, too soft at times. Cooper said Point's minus-5 was unlucky, those goals not necessarily his fault. For example, Point had to eat a minus on Boston's first goal in Game 2, coming on the ice late on a rough change.

"They took it to heart," captain Steven Stamkos said. "Pointer's line, the way they responded after the first game, it was pretty inspiring for our team."

Point racked up a career-high four points in Game 2, fittingly icing the 4-2 victory with an empty-netter. Johnson had the go-ahead goal. The Lightning then went into TD Garden — a place they had won just eight times in 53 regular-season trips — and swept both games, including a 4-3 overtime victory in Friday's Game 4.

"I think we earned it," Miller said. "That's a hard building to play in, you take two of two there, it's pretty special. Rare."

But this is a special Lightning team, which is stronger than the 2014-15 group that went to the Stanley Cup final and the 2015-16 club that reached Game 7 of the Eastern Conference final.

They're more experienced. They're more skilled, top-to-bottom. They're thicker on defense, especially with the addition of shutdown defenseman Ryan McDonagh at the Feb. 26 trade deadline.

The fact rookie Anthony Cirelli emerged after a March 1 callup into an integral player helped make Tampa Bay's third line a force (with Yann Gourde and Alex Killorn). When Ryan Callahan and Chris Kunitz are your fourth line, you're in good shape.

"Those six guys deepened their lineup," said NBCSN analyst Pierre McGuire, who was between the benches during the series. "It's almost impossible. No team in the league matches up. Even Pittsburgh. It's too fast."

The Lightning await the winner of the Capitals-Penguins series, which continues Monday in Pittsburgh for Game 6 with Washington ahead 3-2. But Tampa Bay has emerged as the team to beat. It was the best team in the Eastern Conference during the regular season, though it sparked some cause for concern with struggles down the stretch.

But the Lightning quelled those doubts, starting with a galvanizing 3-0 shutout over the Bruins April 3 at home. Then Tampa Bay cruised in five games to beat the Devils in the first round. Boston was just one point behind the Lightning in the regular season, but was outmatched the past two weeks.

"We all knew we had it," Cooper said. "You jump out to the big (points) lead we had, and you can bark all you want to keep guys going, but they knew when they made the playoffs. I think we clinched a playoff spot



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around St. Patrick's Day. Never been in that situation before. We know our group and you just have to make sure your habits are down. We did.

"Our desperation in March is probably not what it is now. But we know the guys have it in them. Every one of them is 100 percent buy in with the group. That's why we are where we are now."

They're here also because of Point, who might be on many days the team's best overall player. Nikita Kucherov is the most elite in terms of skill. Stamkos is the biggest name and the face of the franchise.

But Point is the heartbeat, the engine. And he took it as a challenge to rebound against the Bergeron line.

"They're three super talented players that make plays and compete really hard," Point said. "It was a tough battle all series. I think we did a pretty good job."

With the Bruins on their last leg, having pulled Rask with just under two minutes to go, it was Point's line that was sent over the boards to close it out. Point, like he did many times this series, lined up in the faceoff circle against Bergeron, one of the game's best in the dot.

Point won the draw back to defenseman Anton Stralman, who iced the puck — and the game — with an empty-netter. Stralman, an 11-year veteran who has played in 97 career playoff games, marveled at Point, who just played in his 10th.

"It's not easy," Stralman said, smiling. "But he's playing like he's never done anything else."

The Athletic LOADED: 05.07.2018

1095376 Websites

The Athletic / Poker legend Daniel Negreanu might be out \$30K because of Golden Knights' historic run, and he's perfectly fine with that

By Michael Russo May 6, 2018

LAS VEGAS — Vegas Golden Knights superfan and poker legend Daniel Negreanu said when profiled in March by The Athletic that he'd have to pull out of the European Poker Tour's Grand Final in Monaco because of the inaugural Golden Knights' first postseason berth. And if the Golden Knights happened to soar all the way to the Stanley Cup final, he was willing to miss a couple of the 78 World Series of Poker bracelet events that take place over a six-week span starting later this month at the Rio.

"It would be a good problem to have," Negreanu said at the time.

What he didn't anticipate was the potential of having to also bow out of the prestigious Super High Roller Bowl at the ARIA.

When The Athletic caught up with a giddy Negreanu during the second intermission of Friday's eventual Vegas Game 5 victory over the San Jose Sharks, Negreanu rolled his eyes at the thought of having to miss the 48-person, \$300,000 buy-in tournament that runs May 27-30.

"Three-hundred K buy-in, on TV, huge event and you have to put a \$30,000 non-refundable deposit down," Negreanu said. "I've already put my deposit down, so I'm a little concerned that if we're in the Stanley Cup final, I'm going to have to say goodbye to that 30 thousand."

"If we go to the last round, it'll be right in the heart of it."

Negreanu, a hockey fanatic from the Toronto area, still can't believe he's talking about an expansion team in his current hometown potentially having a shot at hoisting Lord Stanley's treasured Cup.

Up 3-2 in the best-of-seven conference semis, the Golden Knights can advance to the Western Conference final with a win Sunday night in San Jose.

"We're at the stage now where we're one game away from the conference final against either Nashville or Winnipeg, who you know are going to go through a bloody seven games," Negreanu said of a series where the Jets suddenly hold a 3-2 lead heading back home Monday night. "And throughout the season we did quite well against both of those teams. And we have depth. I mean, just look at (Luca) Sbisa, (Oscar) Lindberg going into the lineup and Ryan Carpenter coming back in. They haven't missed a beat. We can fill guys in. That's really important in a grueling two-month playoff."

"It does seem like we're a team of destiny right now. We're lucky to be in the softer division, right? The Pacific is not on par with Winnipeg, Nashville in the Central, or Washington and Pittsburgh. So we've been a little lucky, fortunate there, but this team has faced adversity several times this season and they always just seem to find a way."

The popular Negreanu, 43, a member of the Poker Hall of Fame and known as "KidPoker," has won six World Series of Poker bracelets and two World Poker Tour championships. He's first all-time with more than \$36 million in earnings. He's third all-time with \$17 million in World Series of Poker earnings and sixth all-time with 105 World Series of Poker cashes. On the World Poker Tour, he's second all-time with \$6.4 million in earnings and nine final tables. He has cashed 23 times.

But his other passion is hockey.

Excitedly, the first thing he said when approached by The Athletic on Friday was how he discovered a huge strategy adjustment between the Golden Knights' tough 4-0 loss in Game 4 and their Game 5 win. He noticed that because the Sharks defend the point so well by getting in shooting lanes on the penalty kill, the Golden Knights were putting pucks into the corners, chasing them down and using that area to open up the middle of the ice and pass into the slot on the power play.

It stretched out San Jose's aggressive penalty kill and the Golden Knights were capitalizing.

Negreanu, who does postgame Golden Knights analysis on Fox Sports 1340-AM in Las Vegas, couldn't wait for after the game so he could share with fellow Golden Knights fanatics what he noticed.

Oh, and by the way, Golden Knights coach Gerard Gallant essentially confirmed after the game that what Negreanu saw was indeed an in-series adjustment between games.

Negreanu simply can't believe how good the Golden Knights are right now.

Take Erik Haula and Alex Tuch, two players having a terrific postseason that Vegas got from Minnesota last June. Tuch scored twice in Game 5, including a beautiful touch redirection of Cody Eakin's third-period lead-pass setup.

"I understand the Wild were in a tough spot because they wanted to keep (Matt) Dumba, but when you look at it, getting a guy like Haula and Tuch is ridiculous," Negreanu said. "I don't think they were as high on Haula as they should have been. And Tuch is such a good, young prospect. You look at Minnesota and you look at Florida and I can't believe we got (Reilly) Smith and (Jonathan) Marchessault. I mean they threw us Smith, like, 'We don't want this (\$5 million) salary, so you take it.' And we're like, OK."

"How about Columbus with (William) Karlsson? These teams have to be watching every night, like, 'What did we miss, what did we not see?'"

"This Smith, Marchessault and Karlsson line is so good. Not only are they fast, their chemistry is undeniable. They have like Sedin-like, twin-like vision. They have such confidence, and Karlsson is more confident than any player in the world right now. In the slot, he's just money."



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Negreanu hopes the Golden Knights get it done Sunday night to avoid a winner-take-all Game 7 on Tuesday. But if the Golden Knights must come home and need to win, he knows they'll be supported by an arena full of Golden Knights fans.

Unlike the regular season when Las Vegas was a destination city for scores of road fans to see their favorite team play the Golden Knights, playoff games in Vegas have largely been made up of Golden Knights fans.

"(Owner) Bill Foley did a smart thing," Negreanu said. "We have a unique issue with so many road fans wanting to come here, so Bill told all season-ticket holders to make the pledge, the vow. It's called the 'Knights Vow.' Don't StubHub your tickets and if you do StubHub your tickets, you're basically fined. So, there are not as many tickets available for road fans as there normally are. It's the hottest ticket in town. I have 16 seats. For the playoffs, I have 85 people asking me for a seat.

"It's awesome."

The Athletic LOADED: 05.07.2018

1095377 Websites

The Athletic / Expansion Golden Knights fight off Sharks, now one win from West final

By Michael Russo May 5, 2018

LAS VEGAS — Jonathan Marchessault gained possession of the puck between the circles in the defensive zone, skated to the top of the STANLEY CUP PLAYOFFS 2018 signage that sits underneath the ice about 20 feet inside his blue line, settled the puck and took aim for the wide-open net 145 feet away on the opposite end of the rink.

"I told him I was probably going to break my stick if he missed ... on him," Vegas Golden Knights teammate David Perron said, laughing. "But I was joking. We always give it to each other back and forth. You've got to understand our relationship."

No worries, David.

Nobody thinks you were actually going to crack your stick atop your teammate and good buddy, although many amongst the 18,693 inside T-Mobile Arena on Friday night let out an audible, "OH GAWD," sound when they watched Marchessault risk an icing and defensive-zone faceoff with 80 seconds left after the Golden Knights were cemented on their heels for 10 tense minutes straight by the San Jose Sharks.

"But," as Perron said, "it felt a lot different when he put it in. He's a confident guy. That's what we love about him."

Yup, Marchessault, Vegas' lovable 5-foot-8 prolific French Canadian, buried the long-distance insurance goal to relieve some incredible stress from the passionate diehards who were downright freaking out down the stretch.

Despite seeing their 4-0 third-period lead after a dominant 50 minutes of play disintegrate into a one-goal, hold-on-for-dear-life lead with 4:16 to go, the Golden Knights survived for a 5-3 Game 5 triumph.

Amazingly, just like nobody on Earth (unless you're a liar or were insanely delusional) could have predicted when the majority of this first-year franchise was pieced together last summer, the expansion Golden Knights are one victory from the Western Conference Final.

Let that settle in for a second.

Game 6 is in San Jose on Sunday, and this resilient, fast, hard-working group of "Golden Misfits" vow not to get ahead of themselves.

They know they haven't stamped their ticket to the NHL's Final Four just yet.

"We've got to find a way to keep our focus," Perron said. "The longer the series are dragging, it's something I heard (Evgeni) Malkin say the other day, you've got to keep your focus as long as possible. It's only going to get tougher and tougher, but the team that stays focused the most, stays disciplined the most is probably going to find a way at the end of the seven games. We don't expect them to have zero push."

No, very little chance of that.

There has been no momentum that has filtered from game to game yet, so why would it start now?

Neither team has won two in a row, and Friday night, Golden Knights coach Gerard Gallant showed just how much he disliked his team's effort during a 4-0 Game 4 loss two nights earlier.

He made three lineup changes, re-inserting Ryan Carpenter and dressing for the first time this postseason both forward Oscar Lindberg and defenseman Luca Sbisa.

Gallant, who won't have to travel far to collect his Coach of the Year award next month, once again pushed all the right buttons.

Sbisa showed no rust on the back end. Carpenter assisted on one goal and was plus-2. And Lindberg was fabulous on a line with Alex Tuch and Cody Eakin.

"Just some hungry guys ready to play," Gallant said pointedly when asked his rationale for so many lineup tweaks. "I wanted competitive guys in there playing tonight."

In a first period in which it was mostly all-Vegas, James Neal scored with three seconds left after some terrific play in the corner from Perron.

Then, Tuch and Erik Haula, who came from Minnesota last June in some expansion maneuvering, went back to trolling Wild fans by continuing their fine seasons and tremendous playoffs by stretching that 1-0 first-period lead into a 3-0 lead by the second intermission.

Finally, Tuch tacked on a beautiful goal for a 4-0 lead 8:36 into the third. Eakin sent him a leading pass after Tuch got ahead of the Sharks defense and he redirected the puck to end Martin Jones' evening. At that point, nobody would have ever guessed that would ultimately turn into the game-winning goal.

The Golden Knights took three straight third-period penalties, the last being a Neal slashing minor. Kevin Labanc scored quickly on the power play, the first of three San Jose goals in a 6:09 span that ended with Mikkel Boedker scoring to stun everybody in the arena, especially the players dressed in gray who had played so well for 50 minutes.

"We have to make sure we're playing disciplined, playing smart," Gallant said. "We got away from it a little bit. I didn't like James Neal's penalty, the slashing penalty. Neal's played great hockey for us, but that opened the door for them to get back in the hockey game. You can't do that. You've got to play hard, you've got to play smart."

The Golden Knights are a team that has created some unbelievable chemistry all over the ice all season.

Marchessault's line with William Karlsson and Reilly Smith has been a juggernaut all season and it has translated right into the playoffs.

But what was special about Friday was Perron was reunited with his old linemates, Haula and Neal, and they picked up right where they left off before Perron got hurt late in the regular season. Gallant reunited Tuch with Eakin and threw Lindberg onto the line. The trio was excellent — Lindberg had four shots, an assist and made a horde of good plays and Eakin played his best two-way game of the playoffs, Gallant felt.



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And you didn't even have to read between the lines to know one giant reason for the change was to get Tuch some easier Sharks matchups.

"It got me out there against different D," Tuch said. "And right when I saw I was playing with Eaks, I knew it would click right away. It did all year long. And Perron back with Haula and Neal didn't miss a beat."

Tuch was just outstanding.

When the big guy is skating like he was Friday — and in Game 1 of the series when he scored a highlight-reel goal and assist, one wonders where the limit is for this kid.

"Tuchy, when he uses that speed against some of those D, he gets an opportunity," Gallant said. "It was his best game by far tonight. His ceiling is pretty good. He's a (21)-year-old kid. If he continues to work and play hard and compete every night, I don't know where he's going to be, but he's a good hockey player."

When it comes to the Golden Knights, Gallant often repeats the same coachspeak. Their success is based on simple principles he preaches over and over and over and over and ... again: Working hard and competing and battling and skating hard.

All that means the same stuff, and all was lacking in Game 4.

"When there's 20 guys working and competing and skating hard and you get a group of guys forechecking, it's going to be real good," Gallant said. "That's what you seen tonight from our group. We weren't happy with our effort the other night. I'm sure going back to San Jose we're going to see their best effort."

Gallant said because everybody was so disappointed by Wednesday's effort, he was convinced there would be a bounceback.

Whenever they've needed to come up with a big performance all season long, his team has shown up.

"They're confident, they feel good about themselves," Gallant said. "Last game wasn't a great game and they knew they had to rebound tonight. It's a good group, it's a confident group. We're not a cocky group or an overconfident group. We just come to work and try to do our best job the best we can, and hopefully that's good enough to win."

It has been seven times this postseason.

If it happens an eighth time, they'd be halfway to parading the Stanley Cup down the Vegas Strip.

At this point, does anybody doubt that could actually happen?

The Athletic LOADED: 05.07.2018

1095378 Websites

The Athletic / 'It's just a matter of time' — Steven Stamkos delivers signature playoff moment

By Joe Smith May 5, 2018

BOSTON — Before the puck had even reached J.T. Miller's stick, Steven Stamkos had raised his Bauer blade over his head.

The Lightning captain was locked and loaded, calling for the puck in his sweet spot, the high slot.

There were eight minutes left in Friday's Game 4, the Lightning trailing the Bruins by a goal, in danger of seeing this Eastern Conference semifinal evened.

But Stamkos came through with his signature playoff moment. It might have been the biggest goal of his 10-year career.

Stamkos ripped a rocket one-timer, dropping to his knee as the puck whizzed past the glove of Boston goalie Tuukka Rask, who had no chance. It forced overtime and the Lightning went on to win 4-3, giving them a 3-1 stranglehold on the series.

"It was almost like 'Stammer' had said, 'I've had enough,'" Lightning coach Jon Cooper said. "That thing went in with authority."

"We needed him. And he was there for us."

Stamkos needed this, too. He heard the outside noise. The criticism. Could the All-Star deliver in the playoffs? Stamkos went 19 postseason games without an even strength goal. He had no points in the series until a power play empty-netter in Game 3. And there were many games where he wasn't very noticeable.

Some wondered if he was hurt. Or if this was the new norm for the two-time "Rocket" Richard Trophy winner.

But clutch goals like this can change the narrative. This is the time of year where legacies are formed. And Stamkos, the Lightning's strongest leader and face of the franchise, came through.

"Anytime you have a lot of success in the regular season, you want it to seamlessly transition into the playoffs," Stamkos said. "It's hard to produce in the regular season, never mind the playoffs when it's very tight-checking and you're playing very good hockey teams. But we knew it was going to come. It's nice to do it in a big win."

Stamkos said he and his linemates — Miller and Nikita Kucherov — talked a lot the past few days about wanting to elevate their game. Kucherov had zero points in the first three games. The Russian was frustrated. You could see it in his body language.

But Kucherov took over the first-round series against the Devils with a dominant Game 4 and was capable of lifting the Lightning again.

"Kuch is one of those guys that, every time he has the puck in the offensive zone, your heart skips a beat," Cooper said. "Every time he has it, there's a chance it's going in."

And midway through the first period, it finally did.

The Lightning had a power play and Kucherov, as usual, was in his office, the right circle. He shoots from that spot for several minutes at the end of every practice and before he leaves the ice in warmups. Kucherov's one-timer beat Rask, and his emphatic fist-pump said it all.

"I knew the goals were going to come," Kucherov said. "You've just got to play the right way and don't get frustrated. Today was a good day for me, I guess, it finally went in."

"But we're here for one thing, to win the Stanley Cup. Sometimes, somebody else scores goals."

And that's fine. The fact the Brayden Point line carried Tampa Bay in the first three games of the series was terrific. Rookie Anthony Cirelli scored his first playoff goal in Game 3.

But at some point, the Lightning needed their big guns to make an impact. NBCSN's Jeremy Roenick said the top line of Miller, Stamkos and Kucherov was "invisible" in the first couple games. They were better in Game 3, with Stamkos playing hard and finishing checks, ending with the empty-netter.

Friday felt different. Kucherov scored, then hit the crossbar later in the first period. Stamkos had a 2-on-1 that he fanned on. Then Stamkos was thwarted on a second period breakaway, his wrist shot going right into Rask's glove.

"You could feel it coming," Stamkos said.



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The Lightning controlled 5-on-5 play for most of the past three games but let the Bruins back into it by taking penalties. Boston scored two power play goals to tie Friday's game.

Then Patrice Bergeron scored the go-ahead goal shorthanded six minutes into the third. The odd-man rush started with an offensive-zone turnover by Stamkos. Kucherov backchecked hard, but couldn't get back in time to stop Bergeron's re-direction.

TD Garden was rocking. The Bruins looked like they were going to make this a best-of-three series, starting Sunday in Tampa.

But Stamkos' timely goal helped put Boston on the ropes. In overtime, it was defenseman Dan Girardi who got the winner. The veteran defenseman made a great read in darting to the crease, getting his stick on an Alex Killorn bad-angled shot.

Girardi is known more for blocking shots and protecting his crease than being in the opponent's blue paint, but teammate Ryan Callahan says he's there more than you think.

"We joke it's his office," Callahan said.

So when Girardi was asked in the postgame press conference what he was doing in front of the net, Stamkos interrupted and said, "scoring goals," sparking laughter from the room.

Stamkos has scored 366 career goals — 18 in the postseason. But this one might be his most memorable one.

"He's got three hundred and how many of them, so there's been a lot of meaningful ones," Cooper said. "But you need your big guns to help you win. You're in a tough environment, down a goal with under 10 to go — especially after giving up a shorty in which they were on the ice for. And to sit here and say, 'We need you.' And he showed up and he delivered, and he's done that his whole career.

"It's just a matter of time."

The Athletic LOADED: 05.07.2018

1095379 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Why the Jets' defence is better than you think

Luke Fox | May 6, 2018, 7:05 PM

WINNIPEG — A commonly held belief in NHL circles is that the Nashville Predators own and operate the best defence corps in hockey.

P.K. Subban, already a Norris winner and a finalist again this season, made the case last week that captain Roman Josi could easily replace him. Ryan Ellis and Matthias Ekholm deserve to be in that conversation as well, he argued.

He's right.

Were it not for Nashville's fab four — generating heaps of offence, blocking shots with their face, soaring on special teams — the Predators would not have come within two wins of a Stanley Cup last spring, they wouldn't have amassed the most blue-line points through the regular season, and David Poile wouldn't have the luxury of trading Grade-A D-men (Shea Weber, Seth Jones, Samuel Girard) without flinching.

This, however, is the series where the Winnipeg Jets' less-heralded but equally stout defence says, "Hold our beer."

All those golden defenders, and that likely Vezina winner behind them, haven't been able to stifle the playoffs' most formidable attack, as the Jets clip along at a pace of 3.8 goals per night.

"We're giving them way too much. Too many great chances," says Josi. "[Saturday] you saw it again with the [six] goals; they're all like backdoor, empty-net, rebound shots on the net. I mean, they're a dangerous team."

Connor Hellebuyck, the series' other Vezina finalist, and all the Jets' fleet-of-foot forwards have been getting ink, but Winnipeg's underrated defence corps has earned its spot in the sun — before a likely complexion change next fall.

"Our blue line has gotten better in every game," coach Paul Maurice says. "We're starting to see some of our guys' best games."

In an age where the hottest commodity in hockey might be the responsible, dynamic right-shot defenceman, the Jets only roll out three of them.

- Dustin Byfuglien — dubbed "The Great Equalizer" by captain Blake Wheeler — has four goals and seven points in the past four games and hits his man as clean and as hard as Mike Trout does a change-up. We are witnessing Peak Buff.

"Having him on our team gives us an advantage no matter who we play," Wheeler says. "From Game 1 of the playoffs, he has just dominated. You can't stop it."

This is what Pekka Rinne saw (or didn't see) when Byfuglien noticed a chance to whip home Saturday's Game 5 winner:

- Jacob Trouba (two goals) has been everywhere. In Game 3's incredible come-from-behind victory, the 24-year-old registered a Gordie Howe hat trick, and no one wrote about it because so much other crazy stuff happened.

"Trouba was a guy I didn't talk about or I wasn't asked about," Maurice says, "which surprised me a little bit because I thought he was very, very good."

- A healthy Tyler Myers (two goals, two assists) is making confident plays all over the ice and concedes he might be playing the best hockey of his career.

"It's the most balanced that he's played," Maurice says. "Tyler, at times over the past few years, again with injuries, we've run him against the other team's best and he's taken on a real defence-first mindset. And then there have been games where he'd get up in the plays and being really dynamic with that and make plays at the offensive line, one-on-one against a forechecker.

"What he's doing right now is a real nice balance between the two. He's been strong in his own end and real simple in terms of the quickness and the decisions he's made. But [at six-foot-eight] he has that ability to pull the puck off the wall to the middle of the ice without moving his feet, so he has this great range up top, so that can be a challenge when you're defending him."

On the left side, Toby Enstrom's next shot on net might be his first, but his safety allows Byfuglien to roam; Ben Chiarot plays with more than enough bite that a recovering Dmitry Kulikov needn't be rushed back; and Calgary-born Josh Morrissey is the best young defender no one talks about.

More of a pure playmaker in junior, the 23-year-old Morrissey is throwing his body in front of pucks, improving his box-outs ("It's just a fight with will and whoever wants to work harder," he says), closing gaps, and making all the tiny passes that only the nerdiest of us hockey nerds get giddy over.

"He's a guy that as soon as he came into the group he's really bought into trying to do all the little things as much as he can and do exactly what the coaches want him to do," Myers says. "I see a ton of upside for Josh going into the future."

Says Morrissey, "Shot blocking isn't something I did a ton of when I was younger.... It's just trying to play with that desperation level to try and not



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give any shots up if you can. Sometimes it hurts, but that's part of the playoffs."

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It won't always be this way.

Kevin Cheveldayoff will face his first significant cap crunch since 2016, when he correctly chose to keep Byfuglien at the expense of then-captain Andrew Ladd.

The GM's top priorities this summer will be arranging long-term commitments for Hellebuyck (RFA) and 44-goal sophomore Patrik Laine, who can ink an eight-year, gazillion-dollar extension as early as July 1.

Enstrom turns UFA, Morrissey and Trouba RFA.

Of the three, Morrissey is the only guarantee to re-sign. Lefty Sami Niku, the AHL's defenceman of the year, should replace Enstrom in the top four, and Trouba — an American who summers in Florida and has already been embroiled in one financial dispute with the Jets — presents a fascinating challenge contractually. Heck of a trade chip or offer-sheet candidate.

For now, Jets fans, bandwagon and otherwise, need to appreciate an active defence unit that brings a little of everything: size, skill, youth, experience, smarts, and will.

They've kept pace with Subban & Co. in this series. Each side's D-men have generated 10 points. It takes a special group to match the Preds' back-end production.

"I don't think any of us in the room are trying to compare to the other team," Myers cautions.

"We've done a really good job this year just focusing on a certain way we have to play to win hockey games. I thought our back end definitely showed what we're capable of."

Amen.

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1095380 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Lightning trending in right direction at perfect time

Chris Johnston | May 6, 2018, 10:08 PM

TAMPA, Fla. – Catastrophe is always just around the corner in the Stanley Cup Playoffs. You don't so much win this tournament as much as you survive it, and that's why the sun is shining so brightly on the Tampa Bay Lightning as we near the halfway point.

They've barely been touched. They're the favourites now.

After a 113-point regular season, the Lightning kicked it into another gear. They sent the mighty Boston Bruins home in five games, not surrendering a 5-on-5 goal over the last three. They needed just 10 games in all to reach the Eastern Conference final.

"It's not like after 89 games we forgot how to score or not play the right way," Bruins coach Bruce Cassidy said following Sunday's 3-1 loss in the clincher.

Sometimes you just need to tip your hat to the other guys.

Of the Lightning, he said: "They've got three forward lines that can score and they've got a fourth line that really dictates the physicality of the game. So they're in sync. They've got defencemen that can move the puck. Where I see a difference in them is how hard they've defended in this series vs. maybe what we saw during the season. It's playoffs, right?"

With the stakes raised, Tampa simply kept "Takin' Care of Business" – blasting that Bachman-Turner Overdrive track in the dressing room to punctuate each victory.

It meant finding an answer for the Brad Marchand-Patrice Bergeron-David Pastrnak line. At least after the NHL's best trio exploded for 11 points in Game 1 and tagged sophomore centre Brayden Point for a minus-5.

Jon Cooper stuck with Point, Tyler Johnson and Ondrej Palat in the Bergeron matchup and was rewarded for his trust. They scored seven even-strength goals while Tampa reeled off four straight victories. Point – a 22-year-old who somehow fell to 79th overall in the 2014 draft – had seven points, including a couple gorgeous goals, by himself.

"That kid goes minus-5 in Game 1. He eats a bad minus on the first goal in Game 2, so now he's minus-6," said Cooper. "And there wasn't an ounce of doubt in my mind or any of his teammates' [minds] that he wasn't going to come through this. In my opinion, he was the best player in this series.

"It's probably too early to say, but he's never probably going to be a huge point producer but he's probably right out of that Bergeron mold where he's going to end up playing on the power play somewhere, he's going to end up killing penalties for you and he's going to end up having those assignments where he's going to have to be the shutdown guy."

The Lightning created all kinds of trouble for a battered Bruins blue line in this series by using an aggressive forecheck. That's how Point started the sequence that allowed Tampa to erase Sunday's early 1-0 deficit, pressuring Kevan Miller into a turnover before heading to the net and beating Tuukka Rask with a backhand.

"We had experienced guys on the ice," said Cassidy. "It started with mismanaging the puck and our slot coverage broke down and Point made another good play. I mean he's been good."

"I'm very impressed by Pointer's first playoffs," added veteran Lightning defenceman Anton Stralman. "It's not easy, for sure, but he's playing like he's never done anything else."

Facing the NHL's top possession team from the regular season, Tampa controlled the series at 5-on-5. It generated 55 per cent of the shot attempts, 60.3 per cent of the high-danger scoring chances and 62.5 per cent of the goals at evens.

Boston had an edge on specialty teams but surrendered the Game 5 winner while killing a penalty. It came on a mesmerizing sequence where J.T. Miller and Nikita Kucherov traded the puck back and forth while skating around the right circle before Miller ripped home a shot while Zdeno Chara helplessly watched it happen.

They'd spent time working on that play late in the season. On Sunday, Kucherov told Miller to break it out before they jumped over the boards.

"It's hard to get shots by yourself in the middle," said Miller. "That's hard to come by, even on the power play. I mean it took five games and we had a lot of power plays. I think we just kind of put it in the bank for hopefully a situation like this.

"Obviously super pumped it worked."

By finishing off the series now, they've saved themselves another three-hour flight to Boston, not to mention another three-hour one home. They've also bought more time to rest up and prepare for the winner of Pittsburgh-Washington, a series the Caps currently lead 3-2 but could very easily be decided in a seventh game.



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When Tampa lost to Chicago in the 2015 Stanley Cup final, it ran out of gas. The Lightning played 26 games that spring and can go no more than 24 this time around.

"That's the thing: You have a long run like that and I think [Johnson] was playing with a broken hand and guys get hurt," said Stralman. "The more games you play the odds go up, obviously. That's why it's great we have a healthy team and all the small things now you get a little extra time to mend."

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They're trending in the right direction at the right moment. Tampa surged out of the gates to start this season and built up a huge lead in the Presidents' Trophy race. It ended up finishing third overall – four points back of Nashville – because of a mediocre 6-6-1 finish.

"Our desperation I would say in March, well, it's not what it is now. We knew the guys had it in them," said Cooper. "I mean it's 100 per cent buy-in with this group and that's how we're doing what we're doing now."

After charting the easiest course to the Final Four, the Lightning's odds of playing for the Stanley Cup have gone up significantly. Hey, it might just be their year to win it.

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 05.07.2018

1095381 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Capitals look for finishing blow with Penguins on the ropes

Kristina Rutherford | May 6, 2018, 3:56 PM

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Just outside the Washington Capitals' dressing room at their home arena, you'll find an enormous sign with words written inside a larger than life-size picture of the Stanley Cup—the trophy this franchise has never won.

It reads: "When greatness becomes tradition, success is limitless."

Well, no doubt these Capitals have made a tradition of greatness and success in the regular season, of late. It's this other part of the year—the post-season—that hasn't panned out.

But here the Capitals are, one win away from eliminating the two-time defending champions from Pittsburgh, the very team that's spelled their demise in this second round each of the last two seasons, when Washington had the NHL's best record.

Game 6 in Pittsburgh, in other words, is a big one. A monkey off the back situation.

"I imagine this will be one of the toughest games any of us have ever faced," says T.J. Oshie, author of an empty-netter in a 6-3 win on Saturday, which gave Washington the 3-2 series lead.

"You got a back-to-back champion, you got 'em up against the wall and you're going to get their best," Oshie says. "Their best is pretty good, and we got to find a way to be better."

And just how do you beat Sidney Crosby and Evgeni Malkin and Jake Guentzel and Matt Murray when their Penguin backs are up against a wall?

"We got to limit their time and space," Oshie says. "They've obviously got some big-name players, so you've got to take away some of Malkin's

skating space—when he gets some open space he can create some goals.

"I think we can box guys out in front of our net, let Holts [Braden Holtby] see more shots. And special teams for us can be big – staying out of the box and capitalizing on our opportunities."

That could do it, yes. Of course, it's easier said than done, because these are the Penguins from the City of Champions and they are the Capitals, a team that hasn't advanced past the second round in 20 years, despite a roster of stars.

It was Holtby who stole the game for them in No. 5, facing an onslaught of shots in the second period in particular—18, compared to Washington's 5. The Capitals spent far too much time in the box, and Pittsburgh capitalized on two of five power-play opportunities.

"We're going to have to play much better," Capitals head coach Barry Trotz says. "I think we're fortunate that our goaltender was really good and made some timely saves, and they didn't convert on a couple of their chances. We did, and at the end of the day, we found a way to win.

"That's playoff hockey," Trotz continues. "Sometimes, in the past, I've been on the other side where I felt like we played really good, and you didn't get the result. You've just got to take this as an opportunity. We've got a little more wiggle room than them. We've got to bring our best our game, and we've got to push our game to the next level.

"There's no ifs, ands or buts—we've got to do that. This is a very good opponent, and we're going to have to be really, really good. We have a lot of guys that I know have to be better. Have to be way better in a lot of areas."

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They do, and maybe with a less than healthy Nicklas Backstrom, to boot. He leaned down to block a shot in the first period of Game 5, and it went off his hand.

Backstrom, who's putting up more than a point per game in these playoffs, didn't take any draws in the second period, and Lars Eller took his place on the second line for the latter half of the third period.

As Oshie puts it, "You can't replace No. 19—he's just too special of a player..."

Trotz says he expects Backstrom to play in Game 6, and adds, "we'll see where is [Monday]."

Monday night in Pittsburgh is the big one, with the opportunity to advance to the Eastern Conference final just one win away for these Capitals, who have two shots at it, with Game 7 (if necessary) set for Wednesday back at home.

"I don't know if I could tell you exactly what it would mean," Oshie says, of getting through this second round. "None of us have ever been there."

Well, some of them have. But many—Oshie and Ovechkin and Backstrom and Holtby, to name just a few—haven't.

"We're just looking to get the job done and maybe after we can talk about the feelings," Oshie adds. "But right now, we still got a lot of work to do."

We'll see if the Capitals can flip the script, start to live up to that sign hanging outside their dressing room, beyond the regular season. No doubt there's more than enough desire inside that dressing room to do just that.

"I can tell you there's not a player, a coach, a trainer, ownership, GM who is not trying to do everything they can to win this series," Trotz says. "Trust me. We're trying as hard as we can, and at the end of the day, that's all we can promise."



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • May 7, 2018

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Sportsnet.ca / Winnipeg Jets rookie Kyle Connor finally erupts in playoffs

Luke Fox | May 6, 2018, 9:08 AM

NASHVILLE – There are two kinds of hockey players at this time of year.

“Sometimes guys get scared of the moment,” Paul Stastny says. “Some guys just go and play.”

Truth be told, we weren’t certain which category to slot Kyle Connor.

Then Saturday happened.

Heading into the biggest game in Winnipeg Jets history until the next one, Winnipeg’s top-line super rookie had yet to score in nine post-season outings.

A 28-day drought can make 31 goals in the regular season seem like a distant memory. Sure, Connor had four assists and a few nice plays, but there have been several games where he’s been restricted to the perimeter. Linemates Blake Wheeler and Mark Scheifele were doing all the heavy lifting.

Coach Paul Maurice recently suggested the left winger may have been snubbed by the writers who did not elect Connor as one of the Calder Trophy finalists.

“You score 30 goals as a rookie, though, you think you’d like to be in there,” Maurice said. “I didn’t vote on it. Whoever did, you can answer that one.”

But Connor’s whisper of an individual performance as the physicality and pressure escalated wasn’t exactly making voters look foolish.

“It’s a tighter series,” Maurice defended.

Winning masks all.

“I don’t lose sleep,” Connor says. “The bottom line is team success. If you score as a line, it’s just as good. If the team is winning, everybody’s happy.”

And so, the 21-year-old has been holding his head high even as his conversion rate plummeted.

“Just a matter of time. Keep shooting,” the kid would say, often. “You have to trust your skill, trust your work ethic. For me, if it’s not going in, I just try to work even harder. Results will come if you keep working.”

Kyle Connor is the first rookie in #NHLJets history (version 1 or 2) to score twice in a playoff game since Teemu Selanne on Apr 23, 1993

— Sportsnet Stats (@SNstats) May 6, 2018

The dam broke in Nashville.

The Jets won 6-2 and can now eliminate the defending Western Conference champs on home ice. Connor snapped a game-high six shots, scored twice, and added an assist prettier than all of that.

After a monster second period for the visitors, Nashville needed to push in the third.

Instead, Wheeler sprung Scheifele for a rush not 30 seconds into the final frame. Connor, a straight-line skater, zipped into the 2-on-2 rush.

Noticing one of the defenders was actually a forward, Ryan Johansen, Scheifele drew the D-man and dished to Connor, who dusted Johansen

with a between-the-legs dangle coming soon to a highlight show near you. (Connor would later admit he didn’t know it was Johansen he beat until Scheifele told him on the bench.)

Needing to respect the kid with the hat trick on his stick, Pekka Rinne had no chance when Connor slipped a quick pass back to Scheifele for his third point on the night.

“He has got a ton of confidence in himself. He’s scored goals his whole life. Good for him,” Wheeler says.

“He’s a young player used to putting the puck in the net, and when it doesn’t happen right away in your first taste of playoff action, it can be tough to stay with it. His confidence hasn’t wavered a bit.”

Wheeler and Maurice both pointed to a little dart and deke Connor made early in the game to get a shot off as an indication that he was dialed in.

“You can play not to make mistakes, that’s fine. We all want to play smart hockey,” Maurice said. “But those kind of players, your really highly skilled guys, have to have a certain amount of [confidence] in their game.”

Funny. Connor didn’t even make this roster out of training camp. But after five points in four games with the AHL Moose, he was called up for good.

“It’s tough any time you don’t make a team,” he reflects. “You have to realize where you’re at. You can’t feel sorry for yourself, thinking, ‘I should be playing [in the NHL].’”

Getting dropped to Stastny’s second line for the bulk of games 3 and 4, Connor says, was a little uncomfortable. He was happy Maurice put him back where he’s familiar on Saturday.

“He’s really simple. Sheif and I know where he’s going to be on the ice. He’s very dependable, and like you see tonight, you get him in space, he can make some pretty great things happen,” Wheeler explains.

“That’s what’s made our line go this year. Scheif and I try to drive every shift, create time and space, and when we get him moving in those holes, he’s pretty dynamic.”

It speaks volumes about Winnipeg’s forward depth that a 31-goal man can wait until the 10th game of the post-season to light the lamp, that a 29-goal man (Nikolaj Ehlers) is still looking for his first, that Patrik Laine has yet to take over a game this series, and they’ve still chased Rinne twice and have all the Presidents’ men on the ropes.

“We have a certain way that we play, and that’s what you want,” Maurice asserts.

“It’s a hard-on-the-puck game. It’s like Kyle Connor’s game. We have to do some things with the puck. We can’t be afraid to make mistakes. That’s all you want.”

Wheeler says this team can score and star by rotation. One night it’s Connor Hellebuyck standing on his head, another it’s Laine shooting the light out. Maybe Ehlers goes off Monday.

As for Kyle Connor, who just kept shooting?

“Tonight,” Wheeler says, “it was his turn.”

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TSN.CA / Statistically Speaking: Vegas, Tampa Bay advance

Scott Cullen



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • May 7, 2018

The Golden Knights and Lightning are moving on their respective Conference Finals; Fleury, Schmidt, Coburn, Vasilevskiy and more in Scott Cullen's Statistically Speaking.

HEROES

Marc-Andre Fleury – He had some help from his goal posts, but the Golden Knights netminder stopped all 28 shots that he faced in a 3-0 series-clinching Game Six victory at San Jose. He has a .951 save percentage through 10 starts in the first two rounds of the playoffs.

Nate Schmidt – The Golden Knights blueliner had a goal and an assist in Game Six at San Jose, giving him five points (2 G, 3 A) in 10 playoff games.

Braydon Coburn – The Lightning defenceman delivered a stellar performance (18 for, 3 against, 85.7 CF%, 9-1 scoring chances) in a 3-1 Game Five win against Boston.

Andrei Vasilevskiy – Tampa Bay's netminder stopped 27 of 28 shots in a 3-1 Game Five win over Boston.

ZEROES

Brad Marchand – With the Bruins' season on the line, their star left winger managed a single shot attempt which didn't make it on net, in a 3-1 Game Five loss at Tampa Bay.

Kevin Labanc – The playmaking Sharks winger had a tough night (8 for, 17 against, 32.0 CF%, 4-11 scoring chances) in a series-clinching Game Six loss against Vegas.

STANLEY CUP HALF FULL/HALF EMPTY

David Pastrnak – It's tough to be down when a player generates a dozen shot attempts (8 SOG), but Pastrnak had all those chances and failed to find the net in a 3-1 Game Five loss at Tampa Bay. He finished the playoffs with 20 points (6 G, 14 A) in 11 games.

VITAL SIGNS

Ryan Reaves – With William Carrier injured, the Golden Knights turned to the enforcer (rather than Tomas Tatar or Tomas Nosek) to fill a fourth-line spot in Game Six at San Jose, and Reaves had a strong game (16 for, 9 against, 64.0 CF%, 9-3 scoring chances).

David Backes – The veteran Bruins forward was knocked out of Game Five on a hit by Lightning LW J.T. Miller.

BYE-BYE BRUINS

The Boston Bruins faced a tough test, meeting the Tampa Bay Lightning in the second round, and it was a competitive series that turned, rather quickly, in Game Four.

Boston opened the series with a decisive 6-2 win in Tampa Bay, but dropped the next two games, bringing up a critical Game Four. Patrice Bergeron scored a shorthanded goal to give the Bruins a third-period lead, but Bruins defenceman Torey Krug suffered an ankle injury and was forced from the game. The Lightning then tallied a somewhat controversial tying goal, as Nikita Kucherov grabbed Bruins rookie defenceman Charlie McAvoy, sending the Boston defenceman to the ice, but the puck turned over to Tampa Bay; with no call, one pass later, Steven Stamkos one-timed the tying goal past Bruins goaltender Tuukka Rask.

When Tampa Bay scored in overtime, a series that looked like it was going to be even was suddenly 3-1 in favour of the Lightning, heading back to Tampa Bay for Game Five. That overtime winning goal was courtesy of veteran defenceman Dan Girardi, who was on the ice for six five-on-five goals for and just one against in the series.

If there was a difference-maker for Tampa Bay, it was second-year centre Brayden Point, who recorded seven primary points in five games. He did have the worst possession stats (50.3 CF%) among Lightning

forwards, and his line outscored the Bruins 6-5 during 5-on-5 play, but it's hard to argue with the production that Point had in a five-game series.

Eight players recorded points in the series for Boston – that means 11 Bruins skaters played at least two games in the series and didn't come up with a point.

Rookie defenceman Matt Grzelcyk had a tough series (41.2 CF%, 31.2 SCF%) and was outscored 5-0 in five games. Centre Riley Nash (29.1 CF%, 19.4 SCF% vs. Tampa Bay) couldn't get on track in the playoffs after suffering a late-season injury. Their big trade deadline acquisition, Rick Nash, had three points (2 G, 1 A) in the series, five points in a dozen playoff games.

There were some curious lineup decisions for the Bruins. After scoring nine points in 12 games late in the regular season, rookie winger Ryan Donato dressed for three playoff games.

Then, of course, there is the story of Brad Marchand, the left winger on the best line in hockey, Marchand had eight points against Tampa Bay, but scored one goal on just seven shots on goal – that's atypical for one of the top goal-scorers in the league over the past three seasons. Of course, none of that is what anyone will remember about Marchand in this series.

The playoffs were, generally, a tough time for Bruins goaltender Tuukka Rask, who finished with a .907 save percentage in the series, .903 in a dozen playoff starts.

This feels like a premature departure from the postseason for a Bruins team that, at times, looked like the best team in the league this year. They made a quick transition, thanks in large part to contributions from rookies, and now the hope has to be that those rookies can continue to develop while hoping that the core veterans can maintain their high level of play from this season.

SHARKS SUNK

The Vegas Golden Knights continued their miracle season, finishing off the San Jose Sharks in six games to advance to the Western Conference Final.

Logan Couture and Tomas Hertl were strong performers in a losing effort, recording seven and five points, respectively.

They could have used more help from the likes of Joe Pavelski and Evander Kane, the latter playing with a separated shoulder (and suspended for the second game of the series against Vegas) but, aside from a 7-0 loss in Game One, it's not like the Sharks were badly outplayed. Goaltender Martin Jones had a .895 save percentage in the series, a stark regression after posting a .970 save percentage in the first round, and it paled in comparison to Marc-Andre Fleury, who had a .935 save percentage in the second round.

San Jose could have used veteran playmaking centre Joe Thornton, who was close enough to be skating in pre-game warm-ups later in the Vegas series, but didn't play after January 23.

This all sends the Sharks towards an interesting offseason. They were a competitive team, and they have loads of cap room in order to improve. At the same time, they also looked slower than the Golden Knights, so that need for speed ought to be addressed.

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TSN.CA / Statistically Speaking: Connor, Vrana come up big

Scott Cullen



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • May 7, 2018

Connor and Vrana bust out and Winnipeg and Washington are the better for it; Kuznetsov, Hellebuyck and more in Scott Cullen's Statistically Speaking.

HEROES

Kyle Connor – Winnipeg's rookie winger busted out with two goals and an assist in a 6-2 Game Five win at Nashville. Those were his first goals of the playoffs and he has six points (2 G, 4 A) in 10 playoff games.

Jakub Vrana – Washington's rookie winger put up a goal and two helpers in a 6-3 Game Five win against Pittsburgh, surpassing his production from his first nine playoff games.

Evgeny Kuznetsov – The Capitals centre had a goal and two assists in a 6-3 Game Five win against Pittsburgh. He has 13 points (6 G, 7 A) in 11 playoff games.

Connor Hellebuyck – Winnipeg's netminder stopped 38 of 40 shots in a 6-2 Game Five win at Nashville. He has a .925 save percentage in 11 playoff starts.

ZEROES

Patric Hornqvist, Evgeni Malkin and Phil Kessel – Pittsburgh's forward trio was on the ice for four goals against at even strength in a 6-3 Game Five loss at Washington.

Austin Watson, Viktor Arvidsson, Mattias Ekholm and P.K. Subban – All four Nashville skaters were on the ice for three 5-on-5 goals against and less than 46% of shot attempts in a 6-2 Game Five loss to Winnipeg.

Sidney Crosby – Pittsburgh's superstar centre had team-worst possession stats (7 for, 21 against, 25.0 CF%, 3-11 scoring chances) in a 6-3 Game Five loss at Washington.

Pekka Rinne – Nashville's netminder allowed six goals on 26 shots in a 6-2 Game Five loss against Winnipeg, leaving him with a .898 save percentage in 11 playoff starts.

STANLEY CUP HALF FULL/HALF EMPTY

Paul Stastny and Patrik Laine – Even though the Jets forward pair had team-worst possession numbers (6 for, 14 against, 30.0 CF%, 1-9 scoring chances), yet they were responsible for Winnipeg scoring the first goal of the game, with Laine's shot hitting Stastny on its way into the net, and that was critical given how badly the Jets had been outplayed to that point in the contest.

VITAL SIGNS

Mathieu Perreault – The Jets lineup was made better when the skilled winger returned to the lineup for Game Five. He scored the sixth goal in a 6-2 rout at Nashville.

Kevin Fiala – After he was a healthy scratch in Game Four, Fiala was back in the lineup, replacing Scott Hartnell for Game Five. He recorded eight shot attempts (4 SOG) in 11:55 of ice time.

Nicklas Backstrom – Washington's star centre left Game Five against Pittsburgh with an upper-body injury, an injury that could be devastating if he isn't able to return in this series.

SHORT SHIFTS

Jets RW Blake Wheeler put up three assists in a 6-2 Game Five win at Nashville; he has 13 points (3 G, 10 A) in 10 playoff games...Jets D Dustin Byfuglien and C Mark Scheifele both contributed a goal and an assist in the win. Big Buff has 12 points (4 G, 8 A) and Scheifele has 14 points (9 G, 5 A) in 10 playoff games...Capitals C Lars Eller and RW T.J. Oshie both had a goal and an assist in a 6-3 Game Five win vs. Pittsburgh. Eller has seven points (3 G, 4 A) and Oshie has eight points (5 G, 3 A) in 11 playoff games...Penguins D Justin Schultz had a couple of helpers at Washington, and has eight points (1 G, 7 A) in 11 playoff games...Penguins C Derick Brassard had a strong showing (21 for, 5

against, 80.8 CF%, 7-1 scoring chances) in a 6-3 Game Five loss at Washington.

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TSN.CA / Golden Knights riding top line against the Sharks

Travis Yost

The National Hockey League is in the midst of one of the more entertaining second rounds in recent playoff history. This is one of the hidden benefits of not having any real upsets in the first round – you see more compelling action further down the road.

In that vein, the Pacific Division has certainly delivered. San Jose and Vegas have played five games, with the Knights holding a 3-2 series lead. Despite a couple of lopsided box scores (Vegas won Game 1 7-0; San Jose won Game 4 4-0), the series has been extremely competitive.

The Sharks have had their moments – their aggressive forecheck has given Vegas' blueline issues, and they've been able to generate heaps of scoring chances right in front of Marc-Andre Fleury's crease. Even with Joe Thornton out their power play has been able to deliver, with five goals in five games.

Fleury (94.6 save percentage) has been sensational and may be the Conn Smythe favourite right now, but there's no doubt he has looked less comfortable against San Jose's waves of attacks than he did against Los Angeles' punchless offence.

You aren't alone if you have felt that San Jose has looked the better side through the first five games, even with the series deficit and facing elimination on Sunday night at the Shark Tank. Vegas' depth has struggled more than usual.

But there has been one massive card in Vegas' favour. Their top line of Jonathan Marchessault, Reilly Smith, and William Karlsson – as they have done all season long – are terrorizing every combination of players Sharks coach Peter DeBoer throws at them. The on-ice/off-ice splits for Vegas, in that light, are something to behold:

If you're giving up more than 60 per cent of the shots and scoring chances and 87 per cent of the goals to any team's top line, you're going to have a bad time. And that's precisely what has happened in the first five games of the San Jose series.

The Sharks don't seem to have any answer for the speed and pace of which that group plays, and most shifts have been little more than futile attempts to not get scored on as Vegas works a sustained offensive zone cycle.

It's worth mentioning that this isn't the typical performance you should expect from a top line against a comparatively quality opponent. If you look at the best performance measures of all players in the second round, you see that the Vegas top line is dummifying San Jose in a way that no other line around the league seems to be doing.

Below is a quick reference table showing best Corsi%, Scoring Chance%, and Goal% (EV) for all qualified players during the second round:

San Jose obviously has a dilemma. They can either throw their best units against Vegas' top line and hope their depth can outscore their opponents, or they can assume that any matchup against Vegas' top line is going to be a loss and save their best weapons against Vegas' weaker players.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • May 7, 2018

Through five games, the Sharks have kind of played around with forward matchups, but they have consistently utilized their shutdown pairing of Marc-Edouard Vlasic and Justin Braun against the Knights' first line. As you can see, the Vlasic/Braun pairing has played around 70 per cent of even-strength minutes, which is materially higher than any other player on the roster:

You aren't going to find many better shutdown defensive players than Vlasic, and that pairing with Braun has been effective for years now. But it's noticeable how they're a step or two slower in the run of play against a group of Vegas attackers who skate like the wind and whip the puck around effortlessly in the offensive zone.

It also raises an interesting strategical question. If Vegas' top line is running wild against San Jose's best defensive pairing, what can DeBoer really do? The only other option – as alluded to earlier – is to totally punt those minutes away. I'm not sure how much worse it can get than sub-40 per cent shots, scoring chances, or goals, but you never know.

That's why it's worth keeping an eye on what San Jose does with home ice in Game 6. Their backs are officially against the wall and what they have tried against Vegas' first line has failed. Do they roll the dice once more, or make a massive deployment change?

We'll find out on Sunday night.

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TSN.CA / One month after Humboldt, a reflection on Saskatchewan Strong

Frank Seravalli

The red light clicked off on the camera giving us the all-clear on a flawless Friday afternoon last week on the rooftop of one of the most famous bars in the world, Tootsie's Orchid Lounge in Nashville.

Someone's grandmother was at the centre of a beer chugging contest when a security guard approached and snapped me back to the real world.

"A young man over here wanted me to give this to you," he said.

His arm was outstretched with a green, rubber bracelet imprinted with "Humboldt Broncos" and two hockey sticks.

We are one month on from April 6, the day our hearts broke for Humboldt, though rarely an hour passes that Humboldt does not cross my mind.

There are times when it is impossible to shake the image of the white roses laying on coach Darcy Haugan's Broncos pickup truck in the parking lot of Elgar Petersen Arena, its driver never to turn the key again to go home to his wife and two kids. Or the conversations with parents who wanted to share their sons' stories, their dreams as pure as any player who made it to the NHL.

Mostly, I choose to think about the incredible people of Saskatchewan.

I think of the feeling landing in Saskatoon. I prepared for pushback. Twenty cameras, satellite trucks and dozens of reporters were descending on a proud town of 5,800 people. I figured the response would be: "Leave us alone, let us grieve in peace."

Instead, the response was: "Thank you for being here. How can we help?" Imagine that for one second.

I think of the man at the vigil outside Saskatoon City Hall that Sunday night. I was struggling through a stand-up report. I could barely keep it together. The slow, painful reading of each deceased victim's name broke me.

I was well into double digits on takes, trying to compose myself, when a young man stopped me and just gave me a hug.

"You've got this," he said. "We're all here with you. We're all struggling right next to you."

The next take was the keeper. I didn't get his name, but he was the Humboldt in all of us.

I think of the wonderful women from the Humboldt A&W burger shop. Every night, they would bring a spread of hot food - free of charge - to the lobby of the Canalta Hotel because they wanted to make sure we were fed. For myself and TSN colleagues Ryan Rishaug and Ryan Varty, it was more than sustenance, it was food for our souls. The root beer was pretty good, too.

I think of the six former Humboldt Broncos, members of last year's team, who flocked to their second home on a moment's notice - from as far as Nunavut and North Carolina - to pay tribute. They invited me to their place, Johnny's Bistro, and honoured their fallen teammates in the best way they knew how, with stories and laughter.

I think of the incredible strength of Broncos president Kevin Garinger. I think of his hurt, the billet parent of one of the players lost, and the class and dignity in which he represented his town, province and country.

I think of Broncos assistant coach Chris Beaudry, the man who was spared so he could help put the pieces back together. I think of the smile on Beaudry's face when he stepped onto the ice later that week for practice with the Nipawin Hawks, the team the Broncos were supposed to face in that playoff game one month ago.

"If you can find happiness, even if only for five minutes, enjoy it," Beaudry said, an important lesson for us all.

I think of the powerful conversations I had with TSN colleagues Darren Dreger, a Saskatchewan native, and Craig Button on the lonely drives back and forth between Saskatoon and Humboldt. They were reassuring, comforting and emotional.

"You are from an amazing place," I told Dreger. He knew.

I think of Jeff Schenn, the father of NHL brothers Brayden and Luke Schenn, who stood watch at City Hall for that vigil as a lieutenant in the Saskatoon Fire Department. His sons rode the bus, too. He peeled the green ribbon off his dress uniform for me to wear on-air, the one I've worn every day during the Stanley Cup playoffs.

I think of Brodie, the young man I met on that rooftop at Tootsie's. He was from a small Saskatchewan town just 15 minutes away from Humboldt. Here we were, thousands of miles away in Nashville, for a chance encounter during his holiday. He wanted me to have his bracelet.

There will eventually come a time that we put away the green ribbons and bracelets. That day is not today. No matter, visible or not, I will wear Humboldt forever.

TSN.CA LOADED: 05.07.2018

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USA TODAY / Expansion Golden Knights' Cinderella story continues with trip to conference final

Kevin Allen, Published 10:15 p.m. ET May 6, 2018 | Updated 11:59 p.m. ET May 6, 2018



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • May 7, 2018

If you placed a \$100 bet on the expansion Vegas Golden Knights when they were listed at 500/1 odds to win the Stanley Cup, you'd have no confusion about who to root for in the NHL playoffs.

The Golden Knights moved a step closer to this unlikely occurrence when they knocked off the San Jose Sharks 3-0 in Game 6 Sunday night to win their second-round series and earn a trip to the Western Conference final. They even caught a break Sunday when Nate Schmidt was awarded a goal that originally was missed by on-ice officials but was caught after the fact on replay.

Vegas will face the winner of the Winnipeg Jets-Nashville Predators series, which the Jets lead 3-2 heading into Monday's Game 6 in Winnipeg.

Even if you have no money riding on the Golden Knights, here are five reasons why you should root for them to win the Stanley Cup:

Playing for the city: The team played its first regular-season home game while the city was grieving the loss of 58 victims of a mass shooting at a nearby outdoor concert venue. Players made efforts to help any way they could, including an opening-night ceremony that honored the victims and first responders, and a special bond was formed with the community.

Everybody loves an underdog: Expansion teams traditionally don't make the playoffs, let alone the conference final. The Golden Knights captured the Pacific Division title with 51 victories and 109 points. Before Vegas paid a \$500 million fee to join the NHL, the league's last expansion teams - the Columbus Blue Jackets and Minnesota Wild - had 71 and 68 points, respectively, in 2000-01. Rooting for the Golden Knights must be what is was like rooting for the Miracle Mets in 1969 or for Loyola-Chicago during this year's NCAA tournament.

Golden misfits: The Golden Knights have played with a chip on their shoulder since their first game. They rally around the idea that each player was considered expendable by his former team, exposed in the expansion draft or moved in a trade. Vegas general manager George McPhee and coach Gerard Gallant had been fired from their previous teams. The Golden Knights play every game as if they have something to prove.

Marc-Andre Fleury's popularity: The acrobatic goalie, one of the Pittsburgh Penguins' most popular players, now holds that status leaguewide. His jersey sales rank among the NHL's top sellers. Fleury, who made 28 saves Sunday for his fourth shutout of the playoffs, is enjoying an exceptional season and might have been a finalist for the Vezina Trophy had he not missed nearly two months with an injury. He's a marketer's dream as a likable star who connects with the public.

Vegas-style entertainment: Attending a Vegas game is like nothing you've seen before. It's theater as much as it is sports. A castle sits above one section. Skits and cheers are unique. Enthusiasm is authentic. On the ice, the Golden Knights are a speedy, skating team with a relentless pursuit of puck. In their first season, they are hard to play against and mesmerizing to watch. Even the team Twitter account is clever and glib.

USA TODAY LOADED: 05.07.2018

1095388 Websites

USA TODAY / Why the Tampa Bay Lightning can win the Stanley Cup

Kevin Allen, Published 5:59 p.m. ET May 6, 2018 | Updated 8:42 p.m. ET May 6, 2018

When the Tampa Bay Lightning swung a major trade with the New York Rangers before this year's deadline, defenseman Ryan McDonagh was considered the key acquisition.

But Lightning coaches were as happy to land winger J.T. Miller in the deal.

Miller proved his value Sunday when he delivered the go-ahead goal in the second period to spark the Lightning to a 3-1 win against the Boston Bruins to earn a spot in the Eastern Conference final.

The Lightning, who needed five games to topple the Bruins in the best-of-seven series, now play the winner of the Pittsburgh Penguins-Washington Capitals series. Washington leads 3-2, with Game 6 Monday in Pittsburgh.

Tampa Bay's Brayden Point tied the game 1-1 on Sunday with a backhand goal midway through the second period. Anton Stralman added an empty-netter.

Here are five reasons why the Lightning can win it all:

Checkmarks in key boxes: The Lightning's goal-scoring ability was tops in the NHL in 2017-18. Goalie Andrei Vasilevskiy is a Vezina Trophy finalist. Norris Trophy finalist Victor Hedman leads a skilled group of defenders. Tampa Bay's coaching is high-caliber. This is an experienced group.

Improved defensive team: The Lightning ranked 19th in goals-against average in the regular season, but their numbers are better in the postseason. Their goals-against average is down from 2.86 to 2.50. The addition of full-service defender McDonagh has helped tighten up the defensive coverage. He can play a shutdown role with Dan Girardi and still contribute to the team's formidable transition game.

Coach knows his team: Jon Cooper is in his sixth season as Tampa Bay's coach and he knows how to get the most out of his skilled team. Under Cooper's supervision, Nikita Kucherov has continued to improve every season. Brayden Point has developed and Yann Gourde was one of the league's top rookies this season. Cooper has won 57.1% of all of his NHL playoff games.

It's Steve's time: Steven Stamkos is only 28, but you already see his name among the best NHL players without a Stanley Cup. He's a difference-maker on the ice and a quality captain. Feels like he now has learned all he needs to know to lead this team to a championship.

Wunderkind goalie: At 23, Vasilevskiy has started 17 playoff games and won 12. He came up big in the third period with the Bruins pressing, stopping all 14 shots he faced. He was dominant in the first half of the regular season, looked fatigued in the second half, but has been sharp in the playoffs. He has a 2.20 goals-against average and .927 save percentage in the postseason. When he is at his best, he is as skilled as any goalie in the league.

USA TODAY LOADED: 05.07.2018