



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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THE NEWS & OBSERVER

Hurricanes' Slavin unfazed by acclaim, fawning in playoffs

By Chip Alexander

Jacob Slavin is aware that more people suddenly are saying a lot more nice things about him.

As the Carolina Hurricanes have won playoff games and made their way to the Eastern Conference finals, much fawning and praise has been heaped on the defenseman. More interview requests have come. His name has been mentioned on NHL Tonight, NBC Sports, TSN and Hockey Night in Canada, used in the same sentence with Bobby Orr. Even Don Cherry might know of him.

"I've said you make a name for yourself in the playoffs and that people don't really notice you until you're in the playoffs," Canes captain Justin Williams said Tuesday. "Obviously the every-day-ers do, but on the national stage he's getting a lot of attention and very well-deserved. He's played phenomenal."

A crush of media acclaim can be a bit unsettling for some athletes, but not for Slavin. A man of strong faith, he remains as unfazed and unflappable off the ice as he is on it, with a strong sense of purpose.

"At the end of the day I've got to go out and do what I've got to do, right?" Slavin said Tuesday. "I've got to play for the team. And you know how I stand, I want to go out there and glorify God with everything I have. That hasn't changed."

"Other people's opinions or what they are saying, it doesn't matter. It's not where I find my identity."

What has changed his identity has been becoming a father. Slavin and his wife, Kylie, have adopted a baby girl, their first child.

Talk about a busy time. The Canes have opened two playoff series on the road, and in the Washington Capitals series took two extra trips to D.C. for Games 5 and 7 before going straight to New York for two games against the Islanders. The Eastern finals against the Boston Bruins will bring more time away from home for the first two games.

"Obviously family is way more important than hockey is but I've still got a job to do and it's a job I love to do," Slavin said. "My wife has been real supportive and taking the heavy load of night-time feedings and stuff. She's been a rock star with everything."

"But I love it. It's definitely a blessing from God. She's a beautiful little girl."

Slavin, who turned 25 on May 1, said he has made good use of FaceTime to stay in touch when he's away. And the few extra days in Raleigh after the Islanders series sweep has allowed him to be at home with the baby.

"She's getting a lot of Dad time, so it's been fun," Slavin said, smiling.

Slavin has gotten a lot of air time for his hockey. He has 11 assists in the 11 playoff games, leading the Canes in points and ranking second in assists among defensemen in the playoffs. (San Jose's Erik Karlsson has 12 assists in 13 games.) Slavin's 26:36 of ice time per game ranks fifth.

Slavin, asked to assess his play in the playoffs, said he has played "pretty well." His point total, he said, wouldn't be that high if his teammates weren't scoring, adding, "I'll give all the credit to the guys."

One playoff highlight was Slavin's stretch pass to spring Jordan Staal in the third period of Game 7 against the Caps. It was a sharp pass, Staal scoring on a shot from the right circle to tie the score 3-3, and the Canes won 4-3 in double overtime.

Slavin's stickwork, skating, hand-eye coordination and defensive positioning have been eye-opening for many who have not seen him play very much in his four NHL season,, the kind of recognition that only comes in a long playoff run.

"My stick has been pretty active, which is my game, and making sure we're shutting it down in the D zone," he said, which is about as much self-praise as he will offer.

The Bruins series, which begins Thursday in Boston, will be much like that against the Capitals, the 2018 Stanley Cup champs. Patrice Bergeron's line, with wingers Brad Marchand and David Pastrnak, might be the most potent in the playoffs. That trio has combined for 16 goals in 13 playoff games.

Slavin will be matched up against Bergeron's line at times, as will the defensive pair of Brett Pesce and Justin Faulk.

"It's going to be a grind all series and it's going to be pretty physical, but I think it's going to be a good series," Slavin said.



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Bruins' McAvoy suspended one game by NHL

By Chip Alexander

The Boston Bruins will be without defenseman Charlie McAvoy in Game 1 of the Eastern Conference finals against the Carolina Hurricanes.

Columbus Blue Jackets athletic trainer Mike Vogt, right, tends to Josh Anderson after he was hit by Boston Bruins' Charlie McAvoy during the second period of Game 6 of an NHL hockey second-round playoff series Monday, May 6, 2019, in Columbus, Ohio. Jay LaPrete AP

McAvoy was handed a one-game suspension Tuesday by the NHL for an illegal check to the head of Josh Anderson of the Columbus Blue Jackets late in the second period of their game Monday in Columbus. The Bruins won 3-0 to win the series 4-2.

Boston Bruins defenseman Charlie McAvoy (73) knocked Columbus Blue Jackets right wing Josh Anderson (77) down to the ice after a hit to the head in the second period during Game 6 of the NHL Stanley Cup Playoffs Eastern Conference semifinals at Nationwide Arena on May 6, 2019 in Columbus, Ohio. The Bruins won, 3-0. Kyle Robertson TNS

The NHL Department of Player Safety, which announced the suspension, said McAvoy delivered a "high, hard check that made Anderson's head the main point of contact" and was avoidable.

It was noted that McAvoy had neither been fined nor suspended previously in his 117-game NHL career.

Hurricanes-Bruins start set for Eastern Conference finals, but not the rest

The beginning of the Eastern Conference finals was set Tuesday, but the rest of the best-of-seven series between the Carolina Hurricanes and Boston Bruins remains uncertain.

The Hurricanes will open the series Thursday night in Boston at 8 p.m. on NBCSN, but Game 2 could be either Saturday night or Sunday afternoon (on NBC) depending on the results of the Game 7s in the Western Conference on Tuesday and Wednesday.

The series would then likely proceed on an every-other-day basis as it returns to Raleigh for Games 3 and 4.

Game 1

Thursday, May 9

Hurricanes at Bruins, TD Garden

8 p.m., NBCSN

THE ATHLETIC

Curtis McElhinney has forged an NHL career thanks to a quiet desire and the ability to ride to the rescue

By Scott Cruickshank

With the game going nowhere — nowhere good, anyway — Mike Keenan makes a decision.

Near the end of the second period, the Calgary Flames coach yanks Miikka Kiprusoff and inserts the clean-shaven newcomer. In the remaining 23 minutes, the visiting San Jose Sharks are able to inflict very little damage, scoring once ... on two shots.

In the preseason, too, there had been relief-work wobbles for the rookie netminder. Three goals in a single period one night in Vancouver, for instance.

But the young man — a standout for SJHL Notre Dame, a two-time All-American for Colorado College, an AHL all-star for Omaha — understands. Earning a living as an NHL second-stringer is going to be an education.

Which — the afternoon following his Oct. 22, 2007, debut against San Jose — Curtis McElhinney explains to reporters.

"I'd say it's mostly mental, getting yourself ready at a moment's notice," McElhinney, then 24, said. "For me, it's all

part of the learning process to play as a backup goalie. It's a position I've never really been in. It's a skill.

"Some guys can make a whole career out of just playing 10, 15 games a season. They're great at it. For other guys, it just doesn't work out. For me, it's something I want to learn."

Later that day, discovering that he has been demoted to the AHL, he packs up his newly won wisdom and heads for Quad City.

Just part of the journey.

Because, having shrugged off that sting and countless others, McElhinney digs in for the long haul. He hones his craft and, over the years, becomes one of the most dependable niche goalies in the game. A puck-stopper who, despite scant usage, can be counted on.

That well-earned reputation, forged by a decade of toil and travel, was put on display last week. The test, wicked.

Take the temperature of this hot seat.

Carolina Hurricanes starter Petr Mrazek — who'd led his team past the defending Stanley Cup champs in an opening-



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round upset — is wounded in Game 2 against the New York Islanders.

McElhinney, reddish-bearded and not quite so fresh-faced anymore, jumps into the fray and, holding off the home-ice Isles, pockets the win.

Then, with Mrazek's lower body on the mend — and Alex Nedeljkovic serving as his backup — McElhinney works Game 3. As someone who turns 36 in a couple of weeks, McElhinney sets an NHL record as the oldest goalie to get his first playoff start.

He triumphs that night and again on Friday, helping Carolina nail down its unlikely sweep. Out of his 153 minutes of high-wire deployment, he posts playoff-topping goals-against average (1.56) and save percentage (.947).

It's fair to say that Curtis McElhinney ended up mastering this backup thing.

And now, every corner of the hockey world knows that too.

"I've been there from the beginning — we're only a year apart — and I've always been proud of him," Shelby Stewart, McElhinney's younger sister said. "But it was interesting — Game 4, that was one of those wow moments, where you're just watching him and it kind of hits you where he's at. Especially since he's never really been the Cinderella story — he's always been the one in the background.

"I think the biggest thing is he just doesn't stop. He perseveres through every single hurdle that's gotten in his way — and there have been lots. I think it's pretty special right now."

This season, both his and Mrazek's first in Carolina, McElhinney started 33 times, the most in his career and he didn't falter — 20-11-2, 2.58, .912. Then came the postseason heroics.

But here's the thing — there is no guarantee he'll get the nod for Game 1 of the Eastern Conference final against the Boston Bruins. If his number is not called, don't expect any red-faced rants from his side of the dressing room.

"From a teammate's standpoint, he's very unassuming. He doesn't stir the pot. He is a quality, quality person," David Marcoux said. He was the goalie coach for the Flames back in the day — and later for the Hurricanes from 2014-17.

"(When Carolina got him) I sent a text to Rod Brind'Amour: 'I had the privilege of coaching Curtie when he was in Calgary. You're getting a quality guy and a very good, strong goaltender.'"

His old stablemates — Matt Zaba in Colorado College and Brent Krahn in Omaha — sing similar praise.

That, no matter what, McElhinney was always a wonderfully laid-back presence.

"It was funny. Before games, he would show up, he'd change into his workout clothes, he'd go sit in his stall, pull his tuque over his eyes," Zaba recalled. "I don't know if he was doing visualization stuff or falling asleep — we always used to joke about it. Then he'd go out there and just dominate.

"It didn't seem like anything really bothered him. He always had that calm demeanour about him."

Nothing changed when he turned pro.

Krahn refers to him as the "Steady Eddy" type. Without fanfare, McElhinney would register the organization's second-best conditioning results — only Jarome Iginla was ever fitter — and, gripe-free, he would go in whatever direction the Flames shoved him.

Crouching in the crease, he was no different.

"He just goes about his business," Krahn said. "We all handle stress and anxiety differently, but his (emotion) doesn't transfer over to his teammates. Even if he is panicked, even if he is rattled, you can't really tell. As a goaltender, that's such a valuable, valuable tool to have — your teammates don't really worry about you. They care about you, but they don't think about you. He's the same whether he's losing 7-0 or winning 2-1."

Like McElhinney, Zaba and Krahn were drafted.

Unlike McElhinney, they each made exactly one NHL appearance — Zaba for the New York Rangers, Krahn for the Dallas Stars — before calling halt to their respective pro grinds.

Further proof that the netminding racket is a challenge.

"When you're in it and you're younger, you're maybe naive to how fierce the competition is," Zaba said. "I didn't realize it till I turned pro. 'Oh, wow, there's a tonne of good goalies out there. This isn't just going to be another step up the ladder. It's not really going to be a thing that's just handed to you. You're competing for one of 60 jobs in the whole world, so it's going to be a struggle.'"

Meaning they're familiar with the path and, more than most, can appreciate how McElhinney has managed to maximize his situation.

"Everyone wants to be that No. 1 guy, but sometimes you're just better suited for the backup spot," Krahn said. "Not everybody can embrace that. It's almost like a blow to their ego. We all had the potential of being the No. 1 guy, but it's about fitting into a role. There are players that go through junior hockey, the minors and all they do is score goals. But when they get to the NHL, they're third-, fourth-line checkers. That's how they stay in the league. And Curtis has found a way to stay in the league. He just goes out there and does his job.

"At the start of his career, he probably didn't want to be pegged as a backup goaltender, but he's still playing, still contributing. He's playing in a conference final now.

"You couldn't write a better story."

And it's a tale that sparked to life more than 20 years ago.

Passed over in the WHL bantam draft, cut from his quadrant's rep team, McElhinney spent his first bantam year playing house-league hockey in Midnapore, his neighbourhood in south Calgary.

"A lot of kids, with what happened to him starting in bantam, might have quit," his dad Bob, who owned a Tim Hortons franchise in town, once said. "But he enjoyed the game so much, he didn't really care."



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Ever eager, McElhinney enrolled at Athol Murray College of Notre Dame, a Wilcox, Sask., boarding school known for grooming elite players. There, he was promptly cut from the Bantam AAA team. But a year later, he'd worked his way onto the midget side. He progressed to the school's SJHL squad, putting a pro career within reach.

"At Notre Dame, they have a wall of fame with pictures of players who have gone on to the NHL, the NCAA ... that was probably the motivation," McElhinney told Calgary reporters in 2004. "I saw that that could be an option for me — not just the WHL."

After a single winter of Junior A, he moseyed down to Colorado College.

Following his freshman year, the Flames drafted the Calgary kid, despite the fact that he was not included on Central Scouting's 2002 rankings. Apparently, there hadn't been enough viewings to merit a mention.

News of his sixth-round selection — Eric Nystrom had been the club's opening pick — marked the very first time McElhinney's name appeared in either of Calgary's daily newspapers. But Flames fans would need to be patient because McElhinney, a history major, went the four-year distance at CC, then absorbed two full years of seasoning on the farm.

He cracked the Flames' 2007-08 opening-night roster, but midway through the season, Curtis Joseph, fresh from his Spengler Cup turn, was signed. The 40-year-old took McElhinney's spot and his No. 31 sweater.

"I still remember the handshake that morning between Cujo and Curtis," Marcoux said. "Cujo, being the classy guy that he is, kind of said, 'Hey, buddy. I don't know you, but I feel bad for you, I feel sorry for you. But keep your head up. I won't necessarily be here for a long, long time. So keep on working.' It was just a funny, weird exchange between goalies ... (with McElhinney) going through all the emotions of, 'I had an NHL job and now they're sending me back (to the minors).'"

Wearing No. 1 the following season — "I was just looking for a number that I'd be able to hang onto for a little while," McElhinney said about the change. "Not too many people wear No. 1 anymore, so I figured I'd throw it back on" — he spent the entire winter in Calgary.

But, with Keenan still at the switch, finding his footing continued to be a trial.

Despite button-pushing by the bench boss, McElhinney refused to wilt.

"It's funny. All the backups to Kiprusoff, every single one of them was asking me pretty much on a regular basis, 'Dave, do you think I'm going to get the chance to play this week?'" Marcoux said. "Curtis never asked that question. He was just quietly there. Keenan probably did not know his name, quite honestly. He would say to me, 'Tell your backup that he's playing tomorrow night.' I'm pretty sure he didn't know his name. We had those laughs, Curtis and I. He was never asking for too much. He knew his role. He was in that backup position in an era when your goaltender was playing 73 games a year — that was Mike Keenan's way.

"He knew that he was basically the practice goalie. When he had a chance to play, he was able to gain some valuable experience and earn a point in Detroit on a terrible road trip and be criticized about it."

Yet another unenviable part of the backup role.

On Dec. 8, 2008, Kiprusoff and the Flames fell 4-1 in Montreal. Scheduled to play the next night in Detroit, they ran into an ice storm and subsequent delays. They didn't settle into their hotel rooms till 4:30 a.m. — with McElhinney tabbed for a rare start.

Heroically, on behalf of an exhausted team, he repelled 35 pucks, only to fall 4-3 in overtime. (Marian Hossa, Henrik Zetterberg and Nicklas Lidstrom combined for 15 shots as the hotshot locals improved to 19-4-4.)

"The only reason we got one point out of very, very difficult circumstances," Marcoux said, "was because Curtis held the fort for as long as he did."

But, postgame, Keenan actually blamed McElhinney, grumbling that the goalie had been "unnerved" by the Wings.

"You understand the motivation behind it, but it's very, very tough to hear," Marcoux said, adding that McElhinney took the coach's opinions constructively. "You could prove Mike Keenan right by quitting and never being heard from again. Or you could prove Mike Keenan wrong and keep on keeping on."

Which, of course, is the moral of McElhinney's story.

At the 2009-10 trade deadline, McElhinney was transferred for the first time — shipped to Anaheim for veteran goalie Vesa Toskala. He noted that day: "You never expect to be traded at any point in your career, regardless of how things are going."

The move, however, kicked off a series of uprootings for McElhinney and his young family.

Traded Feb. 24, 2011, to Tampa

Claimed off waivers four days later by Ottawa

Signed by Phoenix on July 4, 2011

Traded Feb. 22, 2012, to Columbus

Claimed off waivers Jan. 10, 2017, by Toronto

Claimed off waivers Oct. 2, 2018, by Carolina

"Tough times don't last," said Marcoux, "but tough people do."

On his Twitter bio — @McElhinney_C30 — he describes himself: "Proud father, loving husband and goaltender for whoever needs me but currently the Carolina Hurricanes."

Chuckled Marcoux: "I was talking to him at one point and he said, 'Yeah, I'm just collecting jerseys and masks right now.'"

Of the NHL life, Shelby puts it well: "Everyone sort of sees the glitz and glamour, but for someone who's had a career like Curt's, there's a lot of that that's not really shiny."

But as teams and transactions piled up, so, too, did his minutes in net.



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McElhinney, from his draft class, was the 22nd goalie chosen. Now, 17 years later, only two — first-rounders Cam Ward and Kari Lehtonen — have appeared in more games than McElhinney's 222.

"It's that quiet desire," Shelby said. "We've had moments where we definitely thought, 'OK, this will be his last contract and he'll go to Europe. We'll see where he ends up.' Then he just does it again. But he'll never say a word about it. He's the most humble person that I've ever seen."

Make no mistake, along the way he's earned a good living, banking more than \$8 million in salary since breaking into the NHL — on three two-year deals and six one-year pacts. This season, he drew a career-high \$850,000.

"He's gone under the radar," Krahn said. "He doesn't cause any commotion. He doesn't bring any attention to himself ... but obviously, he's able to stand out in big moments when needed."

"You're not going to find a guy that says a bad word about Curtis McElhinney, I'll tell you that much."

Especially right now in Raleigh, N.C., where the well-travelled backup is being recognized for riding to the rescue in the midst of the Hurricanes' push for another Stanley Cup.

After minor hockey in Calgary, junior in Saskatchewan, college in Colorado, minor pro in Nebraska and Illinois and Maine and Massachusetts, NHL stops in eight centres, McElhinney must realize that eyes, in every time zone, are trained on him these days.

Because, hey, you never know.

"I've always followed his career, kept tabs on him — it's been awesome to see what he's been able to do," said Zaba, goalie consultant in the Denver-area and goalie coach of the USHL Tri-City Storm. "The thing I've always admired about Curtis is he's never really had an opportunity to have an extended run as a No. 1 guy in the NHL, yet he's been able to carve out this career for himself and stay in the league for as long as he has. It's pretty crazy to think about."

Bourne: 'Team identity' is a very real concept and it's pushing the Hurricanes to new heights

By Justin Bourne

I think we're finally reaching a refreshing point with general hockey analysis, which is a statement I'm not so sure I ever saw myself making just a few years ago. More fans who prize concepts like toughness and grit and team identity seem to also be recognizing the value of play-driving skill and many are even on board with the concept of (*grabs calculator, protractor and pocket protector, pushes glasses up nose*) shot attempts as a useful stat.

And just as surprisingly, what was originally a somewhat fang-baring-to-doubters statistics community seems more open to ideas like (*puts on sleeveless red-and-black plaid flannel shirt, shotguns a Coors Banquet beer*) hustle and heart, team identity and grit.

I think it's important to accept that neither Corsi nor grit are punchlines (or at least good ones) and to really galaxy-brain this thing up, to note that they're likely more than a little intertwined.

So we here at The Athletic wanted to take a look at a prized specimen of this year's bountiful crop of Cinderellas — the Carolina Hurricanes — from both sides of the analysis aisle. Ian Tulloch will dig in a bit more analytically on the Canes later this week, while I wanted to talk about the concept at the forefront of what I believe is one of their biggest strengths: Team identity. Ideally, that provides a little something for everyone, particularly those who've found their way to the middle.

So let's talk about what team identity means, what it does and how it all shapes where the Canes have been and where they're going next.

What does the nebulous concept of "team identity" really mean?

Team identity refers to how a sports team comes to view themselves, which often becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. A team that has success using a particular style of play a couple times may start to believe they excel using that style and so they may push to play in that style more often, which leads to them better committing to said style, which leads to even better play ... within that style.

Presto, that style becomes that team's identity.

Teams can go through the season trying to play different ways, whether consciously or not, but if nothing takes, that team identity can become "Uh-oh, we might be bad." And once you're at "we're bad" as a team identity, your problems are only just beginning. That means not trusting each other positionally, not pushing back when trailing (due to a pervading feeling of hopelessness) and a general sense of being lost. It all feeds on itself.

I've written numerous times about the snowball effect of the early season and how a good start is crucial to building the type of belief-fueled foundation upon which a team can really win. In contrast to the failing team I mentioned above, winning leads to more team belief which leads to more wins.

To emphasize just how real and ubiquitous the conviction is that teams do in fact form identities, I googled "nhl coach 'we need to find an identity'" to crib a line or two for this piece. I'll let the search results themselves tell the story. Just look at the headlines.

The takeaway: The concept of team identity isn't new, isn't uncommon, and that isn't without reason.

As games tick by in the beginning of the season, teams are looking for good things to happen so they can point to them and say "When we play like this, we have success. That's our identity." Identity keeps the group on the same page.



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What are some types of team identity?

Teams that believe they're built on speed may find themselves testing the feet of their opponents more, given that's supposed to be their strength. It can get into the heads of a group — we're fast, let's see if they can hang with us. Afterburners Activate. This is where "self-fulfilling prophecy" comes in. But let's look at that example from the opposite side of the speed spectrum.

After his years with the Islanders, my Dad spent some time playing those "Legends of Hockey" games, where the last possible thing anyone wants to do is dump the puck and chase it, given that they'd never get it back. (I realize the irony is using my Dad's hockey to highlight playing slowly here given his career strengths, but I assure you, things done changed. Sorry, Dad!)

Those retired gentlemen wanted to just have the puck until they got a primo scoring opportunity, so anytime anyone of them was alone on a rush without numbers, they'd simply run the puck back like a soccer team, and gather a group to attack with. Their identity was that they thought the game so much better than the (mostly younger) hustle machines they'd be up against that they could toy with them and pick them apart. They came to see what worked for them, so they played to their strengths, and golly-gee was being on that same page important to their regular success.

That's part of what an identity is — you don't always get to choose it, it chooses you. But once you accept and embrace that and lean into it — like in the example of the Legends games — you can become truly dominant.

We see this in the NHL in a variety of forms. We see the Maple Leafs leaning into their skill and speed and challenging opponents to keep up. We saw the Bruins try to push their first-round series against them to a more muck-it-up style of game which better suited how they see their own strengths. And the team we're going to be talking about here, the Hurricanes, is playing with a youthful nothing-to-lose freedom that has opponents utterly puzzled. They're the most united-looking group of them all, thanks to a variety of internal and external factors.

So you can identify as heavy, or speedy or skilled, or cerebral, or defensive, or any number of things. But the best teams identify as something, and they then try to push as many hockey games as they can toward their preferred style.

How is it uniting?

A hockey team, like a workplace or most any gathering of 20-plus humans, is a varied bunch. We all have our strengths and weaknesses. As a team though, it's not that effective if everyone wants to play how they want to play. You need to be on the same page for everybody else to be able to trust you're all metaphorically rowing at the same time, in that you'll be where you're supposed to be and doing what the team wants you to be doing so others can react accordingly.

If you're a defensive-minded squad built on keeping pucks out of your net, you don't want to be sitting in your stall at intermission after blowing the zone looking for a breakaway while your check scored at the other end. You ostracize yourself from the group by playing away from your team's strengths, which provides pressure on everyone to fall in line.

That would be a touch awkward, as you could expect some teammate to mutter something to the effect of "That's just not who we are," or something less generous. Losing is one thing. Losing when you don't play your team game, the game that your team identifies as its style, is far more unacceptable than going out on your own terms. You have to be true to what makes up the collective "us."

How does that lead to tangible results?

I used the word "trust" above — that's what makes playing within your team identity so valuable. When you have one, you can trust you know what your teammates are going to do, so you can know how to best help them.

Let's use the example of an offensive rush — call it a 2-on-2. When you're a bad team, players are so excited to actually handle the puck and do something with it, they'll often rush offensive plays. Maybe the winger, after a prolonged shift of standing around in the D-zone, gets the puck and exits the zone and takes his chance to get off a rare shot. Great. Play over, whistle, and the player heads to the bench for a pat on the back ... before the team inevitably heads back to play D in their own end again.

If that same rush is taken by a team that believes they're good, that believes they're skilled and makes plays and shouldn't settle, then maybe that puck carrier is more likely to delay on the 2-on-2 and look for an option that isn't "Yay coach look I did a shot on goal!" A group that sees itself as patient and skilled may have a second wave of players working hard to get up the ice knowing their teammate may just delay and look for something more than a no-deception shot. In this sort of case, that identity, that belief in your teammates to try to create more, can cause other skaters to try to do more to be a part of the play. They know their teammate will try to extend it, so they can justify the work to get up into the action.

This is even bigger with defensive coverage. If every time a defenceman leaves the net-front to jump into a corner battle and his partner is right there filling in for him in front of the net, a trust builds. That allows that defenseman to not hesitate, and to jump into that corner battle even faster next time, believing his partner and team to be good defensively. Suddenly everyone's defending a whole lot less, period. Self-identity can feed on itself and lead to exponential improvements in areas where a team was already pretty darn good.

Can you beat a team with a true identity?

Of course. Having an identity is great, it's something coaches work on from training camp onward, but getting there is no guarantee of success. This is part of why the playoffs are so fun — multiple teams with differing style-identities go head-to-head for larger samples, so we get some sense which styles are more effective in today's NHL.

What is the Hurricanes identity and what does that mean for them going forward?

I'd describe Carolina's identity as thus: Fast, aggressive and tenacious. I bet they'd describe themselves the same way. That style has allowed them to pepper opposing defenses and goaltenders, like waves of skilled offence constantly pushing at the defensive levees. And as a classic song once



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foretold, many teams must find themselves amidst the storm thinking "If it keeps on rainin', levee's going to break." And it's been raining a lot for the Hurricanes these days.

The scary part for their opposition, though, is that they're also the poster team for embracing identity and running with it.

Yes, much of it grew with the Justin Williams-led Storm Surge, the post-game celebrations after home wins that led to much disdain from the normally starch-shirted hockey world. (I myself remarked that I wouldn't have enjoyed being a part of it, and that had someone asked me to simulate "duck duck goose" after a win, my first thought would NOT have been "yes, we are on track for the Stanley Cup." For what it's worth, my opinion there hasn't varied the slightest on either point.)

That led to Don Cherry referring to them as a "Bunch of Jerks," and thanks to some great social media and marketing work, the fans were then able to become a part of the team identity. For a group that may resent some of their treatment by most of the hockey media and opposing fans for being a "nontraditional hockey market," it's resulted in the most beautiful "us against them" group mentality you could ever possibly construct. They've been granted the perfect foils, with the freedom to have fun during what's supposed to be hockey's most serious season.

So combine a team that's fast and aggressive and tenacious and knows it with pulling into themselves as a group and

basically being a united face challenging the establishment hockey media and fanbases, and boy — you've got Team Identity Lightning in a Bottle. It's the much-vaunted Underdog tag taken to the never-before-seen extreme. When we're talking actually hockey there's a ton to consider about how they actually match up against the Bruins, but just the sheer "playing with house money" factor at this point makes them scary dangerous.

What does it mean for their fans and this season as a whole?

The Carolina fans are a true part of their team's run no matter what happens from here. They've been included in a way few groups have been before. When a team has a real identity, and their supporters embrace it, that's the sweet spot of being a sports fan. Even if the team loses it will all have been worth it for Caniacs because people could connect with what the players, and more importantly, what the team was about. This is "team identity" at its finest. Everyone from the faceoff dot to the rafters is on the same page.

Teams spend seasons, decades of them actually, hoping to create the sort of thing that's happening in Carolina this season. Unfortunately for most looking to replicate that, these feelings aren't something you can fabricate, or simply will into existence. All they can be is embraced when they arise and there's no doubt the Canes have done that this season. Team identity itself isn't alone enough to push a team to victory, but it sure keeps the cogs well lubricated for teams that seem to have all the right pieces in place.

Eastern Conference finals, Hurricanes vs. Bruins: Describe the opponent in three words

By Sara Civian

I was just sitting here minding my own business, writing a feature about how the depth of the Hurricanes has mattered and how people forget that. Then the Bruins had to go and defeat the Blue Jackets, 3-0, in Game 6, advancing to the Eastern Conference Final where the Hurricanes were waiting for them.

The Canes needn't wait too long for their opponent after sweeping the Islanders in Round 2. We know what we have in these Jerks, but who are these Bruins?

"It's a lot," Hurricanes head coach Rod Brind'Amour said. "I don't think that there's one thing I would say. I think they're a championship team that knows how to get it done. They've got no weaknesses. They've got goaltending, they've got great D, they've got balance up front. I'm not surprised they're having the success that they're having."

In the year of the Wild Card Chaos Squad, the Bruins might be the only team still standing that you would've expected at the beginning of the season. They had 11-1 odds to win the Stanley Cup coming into the season, San Jose was at 12-1, Dallas 25-1, St. Louis 30-1, Colorado 40-1.

The Carolina Hurricanes were 80-1.

The Bruins have a battle-tested, defensively sound leadership core in Zdeno Chara and Patrice Bergeron. They have one of the best first lines in the NHL in Bergeron, David

Pastrnak and, yes, Brad Marchand. They've got secondary skill and speed in Jake DeBrusk and Danton Heinen. They've got their Warren Foegele in Sean Kuraly, if you will. They've got Tuukka Rask, who's been lights out and just seems to keep getting hotter.

"Most of us were watching the game last night, and when it got to 3-0, I gave the ole 'Welp, here we go," Justin Williams said. "... They have a championship pedigree. Their core has won, their core is proven. They haven't been to the conference finals in a few years so they're hungry, they're motivated and I'm looking forward to a great challenge."

Rask's elimination game performance strikes me as spookiest: Undefeated (3-0), 1.00 GAA, .969 save %, and a shutout. Columbus had 212 shots and 68 high danger chances in its six meetings with the Bruins. They ended up with 11 goals overall.

Maybe the Blue Jackets would've been a more ideal opponent for the Hurricanes, but that doesn't matter at this stage of the season, right?

"Exactly," Jaccob Slavin said. "You've gotta go out there and play what's gotten your team to this point, and obviously you make sure you're playing a little to their systems too, making adjustments here and there. But you gotta do what you do."

"I think that's your job, to create that situation of who's the underdog and who's the favorite," a low-key hilarious Sebastian Aho offered. "I don't ever think about this. Either



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way, it's a hard battle out there every game. We didn't think about that ever this year."

Even if the Canes were once the so-called underdogs, Money Puck has this series 54-46 in favor of Carolina.

What three words would those who know these Bruins best use to describe them, and the challenge the Canes have to face?

Ty Anderson, 98.5-FM The Sports Hub (Boston):

Resilient — legitimately unstoppable no matter what bad call/bad goal is given up.

Sounds familiar

Survivalist — not playing their best, but their defense/goaltender comes through with the bailouts needed.

... Sounds familiar

Clicking — for first time all year, they have four lines clicking and producing. Like all of a sudden Backes fits with DeBrusk and Krejci. It's WILD.

Uh oh...

Rear Admiral, Spittin Chiclets:

"In no particular order: Ballsy. Entertaining. Confident."

Sibling of a Bruin:

"Resilient. Beauties. Wagon."

Pete Blackburn, CBS:

"Resilient. Complete. Dynamic. In general terms, likable even for a Boston team."

Matt Porter, Boston Globe:

"Jackhammer. Alpha male. Relentless.

Sorry, non-Schrute answers ...

Experienced. Solid. Skilled."

Marisa Ingemi, Boston Herald:

"Tenacious. Hard. Confident."

DJ Bean, NBC:

"Idiots wanted Halak."

None of this sounds easy, but you already knew that. A lot of it sounds just like the Hurricanes, which might come as a surprise.

Welcome to one heck of an Eastern Conference Final.



Eastern Conference Final Preview: Hurricanes vs. Bruins

Canes shipping up to Boston to begin third round

by Michael Smith

Eight wins down, eight to go.

After ousting the defending Stanley Cup champion Washington Capitals and then dispatching the New York Islanders in the franchise's first best-of-seven series sweep, the Carolina Hurricanes are one of four finalists left standing in the 2019 Stanley Cup Playoffs.

In 2009, the Hurricanes earned a berth in the Eastern Conference Final after topping the Boston Bruins in seven games. Ten years later, the Hurricanes face off with the Bruins in the Eastern Conference Final, with the winner advancing to play for Lord Stanley's Cup.

"Our goal wasn't to be one of the four teams remaining. Our goal was to keep playing and be the best team," head coach Rod Brind'Amour said after his team's Second Round series victory. "I don't think too many people expected us to be here, but we did. I know that's easy to say now because we're here, but that's the truth."

The Hurricanes, who have won 11 of their last 13 playoff series dating back to 2002, draw the Bruins in the postseason for the third time in team (since relocation) history. The series opens in Boston on Thursday, following a physical and mental rest period for the Hurricanes, who played 11 playoff games in a 23-day span.

"It's important to get your rest, very important," captain Justin Williams said at the conclusion of the Second Round. "It's a weapon this time of year."

Time to get back to work.

By the Numbers

2018-19 Regular Season Stats

46-29-7	Record	49-24-9
99	Points	107
2.96	Goals per game	3.13



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2.70	Goals against per game	2.59
17.8%	Power Play	25.9%
81.6%	Penalty Kill	79.9%
34.4	Shots for per game	32.7
28.6	Shots against per game	29.5
49.0%	Faceoffs	50.7%

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BOSTON

2019 Playoff Stats

8-3	Record	8-5
3.09	Goals per game	3.08
2.27	Goals against per game	2.15
10.5%	Power Play	28.6%
75.0%	Penalty Kill	83.8%
31.2	Shots for per game	35.7
27.8	Shots against per game	33.5
50.0%	Faceoffs	53.1%

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BOSTON

Revisiting the Season Series

The Hurricanes and Bruins met three times in the 2018-19 regular season. The Hurricanes finished 1-1-1 in the season series, which included two Whalers-themed match-ups.

"They're a championship team that knows how to get it done," Brind'Amour said of the Bruins. "There are no weaknesses. Goaltending, great D, balance up front. No surprise that they're having the success they're having."

Oct. 30: Bruins 3, Hurricanes 2

Brad Marchand scored two straight goals, one with just 18 seconds left in the second period and the next at the 5:23 mark of the third period, to lift the Bruins past the Hurricanes, 3-2, in the first game of the season series. Micheal Ferland and Dougie Hamilton chipped in power-play goals for the

Canes, who also surrendered power-play goals to David Pastrnak and Marchand in a tough, early season loss.

"The margins are tight here. We're right there, but it can go either way. Right now, it's going the other way. A mistake here or there is costing us games," Brind'Amour said. "We just have to stick with it and get rid of those mistakes. ... Those are killing us."

Dec. 23: Hurricanes 5, Bruins 3

The Bruins got a couple of bounces in the first period to claim an early 2-0 lead, but the Canes stormed back with four straight goals. Sebastian Aho and Teuvo Teravainen led the charge, with each Finn tallying a shorthanded goal and four points (2g, 2a).

"That was special. They were flying," Brind'Amour said. "It was nice to see them get rewarded."

The 5-3 win was a nice Christmas send-off for the Canes, who had dropped disappointing games to Detroit and Pittsburgh at home just days prior.

"The guys, they prepared today. They had their own little chat. Willy got them ready," Brind'Amour said. "You could see from the start they were engaged, even when we got down. That was nice to see. The level was engagement, really for 60 minutes, was there."

March 5: Bruins 4, Hurricanes 3 (OT)

In the regular-season match-up perhaps most indicative for what's ahead in the Eastern Conference Final, the Hurricanes and Bruins played an intense, competitive 60-plus minutes of hockey.

Aho's pair of goals - one, a bouncer off his skate while he was jostling for position in front of the net, and two, a deft backhand on a breakaway - gave the Canes a 2-0 lead that was then erased by three straight goals from Boston. Chris Wagner and Jake DeBrusk potted rebound goals to tie the game before the second intermission, and Patrice Bergeron netted a shorthanded goal in the third to give the Bruins a 3-2 lead. Enter Captain Clutch, who tied the game with a one-timer from the top of the right circle with 7:43 left in regulation. David Krejci netted the game-winner in overtime for the Bruins to stretch their point streak to 17 games.

"Two good teams playing each other," Aho said. "It was intense."

Why the Hurricanes Pose a Challenge for the Bruins

Rested & Ready

The Hurricanes had virtually no time to breathe between the First Round and the Second Round. After a grueling, seven-game series against the defending champs, they were thrown right into another best-of-seven slate against a team that had sat idle for nine days.

The Hurricanes handled it just fine, defeating the New York Islanders in a four-game sweep, which led to some much-needed time away from the rink. The Canes took Saturday and Sunday off before returning to the ice for practice on Monday.



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"Any time you can get a mental break, it's as important as the physical stuff," Brind'Amour said. "Hopefully we'll see dividends."

The Hurricanes' break isn't as prolonged as the one the Islanders experienced. The Canes wrapped up the Second Round on Friday, May 3 and square off with Boston in Game 1 of the Eastern Conference Final on Thursday, May 9.

"In practice sometimes, you can sometimes be caught going through the motions a little bit. That's not something we can get by with here," Williams said. "We know how we have to play, and we know how we have to practice. You stay sharp in this week between games."

"We just have to make sure we're ready for Game 1," Hamilton said. "We were in such a rhythm when we were just playing. We weren't skating. We were just playing every other day. It becomes a grind, so it's nice to have a little break."

Tough to Contain

The Hurricanes' style of play is tough to contain. Just ask the Islanders, who couldn't figure out how to stifle the Canes' aggressive, relentless forecheck or break through their smothering, 5-on-5 defense. And then there's the situation in the crease, with both Petr Mrazek and Curtis McElhinney stepping in and providing rock-solid goaltending in the Second Round.

The combination of their make-up and style of play makes the Hurricanes a daunting opponent, especially at even strength.

Boston is going to face the same conundrums both Washington and New York experienced, and it's not going to be easy to go through a hard-working, motivated bunch directed by hard-working, motivated leaders.

"Every day, their approach to what we do, taking pride in how they do things and who they're doing it with. They just come to work, man," Brind'Amour said on Friday. "They earn everything they're getting right now."

On a Roll

The Hurricanes have won six straight playoff games and seven of their last eight coming into the Eastern Conference Final.

There's a groove and confidence to the Hurricanes, and that's important in the quest to 16 wins.

"I'm just so proud of these guys," Brind'Amour said. "The guys want it really bad. ... They just keep digging in."

"It's who's playing best right now, and obviously both teams are playing well to be here right now," Williams said.

Why the Bruins Pose a Challenge for the Hurricanes

No Dents in Rask

Through two rounds of the Stanley Cup Playoffs, Tuukka Rask has been one of the top-performing goaltenders. He sports a 2.02 goals-against average and a .938 save percentage, and he capped a Second Round series win over the Columbus Blue Jackets with a 39-save shutout, the sixth of his playoff career.

The 32-year-old veteran netminder turned away 201 of the 212 shots he faced in the Second Round, posting a 1.83 goals-against average and a .948 save percentage. Even better were his numbers from the last three games of the series, all victories for the Bruins: a 1.33 goals-against average and a .965 save percentage.

Big Threats

The trio of Patrice Bergeron, Brad Marchand and David Pastrnak is dangerous, whether they're playing on the top line or are split between the first two lines.

Marchand ranked tied for fifth in the league in regular-season scoring with 100 points (36g, 64a). Pastrnak put up a team-leading 38 goals and totaled 81 points in 66 games, while Bergeron recorded 79 points (32g, 47a) in 65 games. All three are in familiar positions on the team leaderboard in the postseason. Marchand is a point-per-game player with 13 (5g, 8a) in as many games, Pastrnak has 11 points (6g, 5a) and Bergeron has eight (5g, 3a).

"They have more than one line," Brind'Amour said. "They have a lot of other weapons, too."

Proven Core

The Bruins were last in the Eastern Conference Final in 2013. That team swept the Pittsburgh Penguins before falling short to the Chicago Blackhawks in six games in the Stanley Cup Final.

A handful of players from that team remain on the team's roster today, including Patrice Bergeron, Zdeno Chara, David Krejci, Brad Marchand, Torey Krug and Tuukka Rask. It's a core that's battle-tested and experienced at this time of year.

"They have a championship pedigree. Their core has won. Their core is proven," Williams said. "They're hungry. They're motivated. I'm looking forward to a great challenge."

The Bottom Line

The Hurricanes dethroned the defending champs. The Hurricanes then made quick work of an upstart team that made quick work of their own in the First Round.

Now, four wins against the Boston Bruins separate the Hurricanes from the chance to play for Lord Stanley's Cup.

Game on.

"We're not making a ceiling for ourselves," Williams said after winning the Second Round. "We're not tapping out at making playoffs or winning a round or winning two rounds. We're going to see how good we can be."



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Hurricanes keeping focus on their game for conference final vs. Bruins

Carolina won't change style of play based on opponent
by Kurt Dusterberg

RALEIGH, N.C. -- The Carolina Hurricanes understand the challenge posed by the Boston Bruins in the Eastern Conference Final, but their focus will be on their game.

The best-of-7 series begins at TD Garden on Thursday (8 p.m. ET; NBCSN, CBC, SN, TVAS).

"We have to play a certain way and it kind of doesn't really matter about the opponent," Hurricanes coach Rod Brind'Amour said Tuesday. "If we're not doing what we do, we have no chance. So that has to be the first step. You need to know what the other team is doing to give yourself the best chance to succeed. The balance is trying to figure out how much of one vs. the other when you only have so much time and attention."

The Bruins reached the conference final with a 3-0 win against the Columbus Blue Jackets in Game 6 of the Eastern Conference Second Round at Nationwide Arena on Monday. The Hurricanes haven't played since finishing a four-game sweep of the New York Islanders on Friday.

"Most of us were watching the game last night, and once it got to 3-0 I gave the old, 'Well, here we go,'" Hurricanes captain Justin Williams said. "The opponent is known, information is going to be parlayed our way and we will do the best we can. We will be 100 percent prepared, I know that much."

Carolina will need an answer for one of the top lines in the NHL. Forwards Brad Marchand (five goals, eight assists in the Stanley Cup Playoffs), Patrice Bergeron (five goals, three assists) and David Pastrnak (six goals, five assists) give the Bruins a scoring threat that always must be accounted for.

"They're showing up every night and creating chances and doing what they do best," Hurricanes center Jordan Staal said. "It's like (playing against) any other top line, taking away time and space, playing in their end, making them play defense."

The Bruins have a foundation of playoff-tested veterans. In addition to Marchand and Bergeron, forward David Krejci, defenseman Zdeno Chara and goalie Tuukka Rask were part of Boston's 2011 Stanley Cup championship team, as well as the 2013 team that lost the Stanley Cup Final to the Chicago Blackhawks in six games.

Carolina will have three players who have won the Cup in its lineup: Williams, who won it with the Hurricanes in 2006 and

the Los Angeles Kings in 2012 and 2014; Staal with the 2009 Pittsburgh Penguins; and forward Teuvo Teravainen with the 2015 Blackhawks.

"They have a championship pedigree," Williams said. "Their core has won, their core is proven. They're hungry and obviously motivated. I'm looking forward to the great challenge."

The series will begin with two games in Boston, but Brind'Amour isn't overly concerned about the Bruins having the advantage in matchups.

"You look at the road records of most teams and they're pretty good," he said. "It's nice to know when you have that last change that you can for sure get what you want, but at the end of the day the teams playing at this time of year have good players. Everybody should be able to play against everybody."

For the second day in a row, goalie Petr Mrazek practiced. He has not played since leaving Game 2 against the Islanders with a lower-body injury.

Mrazek is 5-3 with a 2.22 goals-against average, .913 save percentage and two shutouts in nine playoff games. Curtis McElhinney, who replaced Mrazek during Game 2, is 3-0 with a 1.56 GAA and .947 save percentage in three games.

Brind'Amour said he has begun discussing the options for a Game 1 starter with goaltending coach Mike Bales.

"We've got to make sure both guys are 100 percent," Brind'Amour said. "That obviously trumps everything. It seems like they're both feeling good. We will sit down (Wednesday) and kind of hash it out. It won't be more than a 10-second conversation to be honest with you. Whatever way we go, we will be happy with it."

Micheal Ferland, out since Game 3 of the first round with an upper-body injury, saw a doctor Tuesday and Brind'Amour said he hopes the forward can play Game 1 of the conference final.

Jordan Martinook did not practice Tuesday after leaving practice early Monday. A lower-body injury has limited the forward to eight of Carolina's 11 playoff games. Brind'Amour said the forward was in "maintenance mode."

Forward Saku Maenalanen, who missed the past two games with an upper-body injury, practiced in a yellow no-contact jersey.



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Hurricanes MVP in Stanley Cup Playoffs debated by NHL.com staff

Brind'Amour, Williams among candidates chosen as impetus for run to Eastern Conference Final

NHL.com

The Carolina Hurricanes are in the Eastern Conference Final for the first time since 2009, parlaying a wild-card berth into upsets of the defending Stanley Cup champion Washington Capitals in seven games in the first round and the 103-point New York Islanders in a second-round sweep.

As is the case with any unexpected run through the postseason, heroes can be found at every turn for these Hurricanes. But who is most responsible for the success Carolina has experienced during a remarkable run that will see them play the Boston Bruins in the conference final?

We asked six NHL.com staffers for their thoughts on the most valuable person within the organization through the first two rounds of the playoffs:

Tom Gulitti, staff writer

It's not easy to select one person for being most responsible for the Hurricanes' success because it's difficult to separate coach Rod Brind'Amour from forward and captain Justin Williams. Brind'Amour, the captain of Carolina's 2006 Stanley Cup team, has instilled his relentless work ethic and straightforward approach in the players who, as forward Jordan Martinook said, "would run through hot coals for that guy." Williams, a three-time Cup winner, including with Carolina in 2006, is an extension of Brind'Amour on the ice and in the locker room, which has helped foster the team-first mentality necessary for the Hurricanes, the embodiment of will over skill.

Mike G. Morreale, staff writer

What makes Carolina so unique is there aren't one or two players the opposing coach can plan to shut down, because its run has been such a collaborative effort. The one area of strength, however, has been its defenseman, specifically Jaccob Slavin. The 25-year-old has established a Hurricanes/Hartford Whalers record for defensemen in a single playoff season with 11 assists, but his play has gone much deeper. Long considered a shutdown-type, Slavin has drawn the most difficult assignments for Carolina. He was out against forward Alex Ovechkin and center Nicklas Backstrom of the Capitals in the first round and on the ice against forward Anders Lee and center Mathew Barzal of the Islanders in the second round. Slavin leads the Hurricanes in average ice time in the playoffs (26:36) and blocked shots (28) and is first among Carolina defensemen with 2.26 points per 60 minutes.

Dan Rosen, senior writer

Jordan Staal is giving the Hurricanes the all-around game they need from their most-seasoned center. He has nine points (four goals, five assists). He's the only Carolina player with two game-winning goals, including the overtime goal in

a 1-0 win in Game 1 of the second round against the Islanders. That was after he scored the tying goal 2:56 into the third period of Game 7 against the Capitals. Staal has won a Hurricanes-high 53.5 percent of his face-offs, including 22 of 42 (52.4 percent) on the penalty kill. He has been physical, leading Carolina with 54 hits. The Hurricanes have controlled 59.09 percent of the 5-on-5 shot attempts when he's on the ice. Staal may not be their most dominant player, but for this debate I'm choosing their most experienced center because of how vital he has been in their surge to the conference final.

Bill Douglas, staff writer

Tough question given all the players who have stepped up for Carolina, from Williams to goalie Petr Mrazek before was injured. But I'm going with Brind'Amour, the first-year coach. The Hurricanes have become the embodiment of Brind'Amour in terms of conditioning, resilience, toughness and relentless style of play. Who is going to argue with a coach who looks like he's still in good enough shape to skate a shift or three out there? Brind'Amour's blunt, straightforward communication style -- no coach-speak -- makes it easy for younger players and veterans alike to understand what's expected of them, and they've delivered.

Brian Compton, deputy managing editor

This has no doubt been a collective effort, but I have to agree with Mike here about Slavin. Even Islanders coach Barry Trotz went out of his way toward the end of the series to rave about Slavin's play and wondered why more people don't discuss how talented he is. Slavin made everything look easy during the Eastern Conference Second Round, and his smooth skating ability always had him in the right spot to block shots or break up odd-man rushes. Let's not forget, he the only defenseman remaining in the playoffs averaging a point per game. It's easy to see why Brind'Amour has so much trust in Slavin and allows him to play major minutes.

Shawn P. Roarke, senior director of editorial

So many good choices here from my colleagues, but I'm going to go with Warren Foegele, the rookie forward who has elevated his game. Every successful team needs goals from an unexpected source and Foegele has been that player for the Hurricanes, scoring five goals in 11 postseason games after he scored 10 goals in 77 regular-season games. He scored the first two goals in Carolina's first home playoff game in a decade, in Game 3 of the first round, leading to a 5-0 victory to get back into the series against the Capitals. Then he scored 17 seconds into a Game 4 victory against Washington. In Game 2 against the Islanders, he scored 17 seconds into the third period to tie the game 1-1 in an improbable comeback that sent the Hurricanes home with a 2-0 series lead on the way to a sweep of New York. He has been the secret weapon every potential champion possesses.



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McElhinney gives Hurricanes proven insurance against Bruins in East Final

Marcoux says backup goalie boosts confidence for Carolina in playoffs

by David Marcoux

The Coaches Room is a regular feature throughout the 2019 Stanley Cup Playoffs by one of four former NHL coaches and assistants who will turn their critical gaze to the game and explain it through the lens of a teacher. David Marcoux, Paul MacLean, Don Nachbaur and Gord Murphy will take turns providing insight.

In this edition, Marcoux, former goalie coach for the Carolina Hurricanes and the Calgary Flames, discusses the injury to Carolina Hurricanes goalie Peter Mrazek in the Eastern Conference Second Round and how Curtis McElhinney was the right guy at the right time to carry the Hurricanes through to the Eastern Conference Final.

Before the Stanley Cup Playoffs started, we talked about preparing goaltending tandems for the postseason in an edition of Coaches Room.

That preparation has paid off big time for the Carolina Hurricanes.

When Petr Mrazek sustained a lower-body injury in the second period of Game 2 of the Eastern Conference Second Round against the New York Islanders, backup Curtis McElhinney was launched into the spotlight.

In that game, McElhinney made 17 saves to help Carolina to a 2-1 win. For Game 3, he became the oldest goalie to make his first Stanley Cup Playoff start (35 years, 343 days) and helped the Hurricanes to their sweep of the Islanders by winning the final two games of the series.

The Hurricanes will play the Boston Bruins in the Eastern Conference Final. Game 1 is in Boston at TD Garden on Thursday (8 p.m. ET; NBCSN, CBC, TVAS, SN).

It's a credit to Carolina goalie coach Mike Bales, making sure his goalies were ready to go. He's been with Mrazek and McElhinney all season and it was a good partnership, with McElhinney (20-11-2, 2.58 goals-against average, .912 save percentage) pushing Mrazek (23-14-3, 2.39 GAA, .914 save percentage) throughout the season.

Mrazek is back practicing with the team and seems healthy to start the next round against the Bruins; all the Hurricanes have had extended rest because of their second-round sweep. The Hurricanes are eight wins from winning the Stanley Cup but having two capable goalies has to be comforting for coach Rod Brind'Amour.

I'm really thrilled for McElhinney, who played 33 games this season, the most he's ever played in an NHL season.

I had the privilege of coaching him in my few years with the Flames. He came up from the American Hockey League as a very mature 24-year-old after being selected by the Flames in the sixth round (No. 176) of the 2002 NHL Draft and I got to know him quite well starting in 2007-08.

Back then, McElhinney (6-foot-2, 203 pounds) often reverted to a quick butterfly that would expose the upper part of the

net. He believed he needed to crouch down in a low stance to be quick at the NHL level.

Helped by many video sessions, we would often discuss having a more upright stance and a bigger presence in net. This stance modification would challenge the shooters and not allow them to go for the easy openings above his shoulders. It also allowed him be more patient and better read the release of a shot and react much better by not reverting too quickly to the butterfly save.

As his career moved on, I met up with him in Columbus one season and I remember him saying to me that he was too young and dumb to understand what we were talking about early in his career but that he got it now. He learned how to slow the game down and read it way better because he was more quiet in the net, more positionally sound and more upright. It makes him bigger in the net, and more effective.

McElhinney's level of perseverance and commitment has always impressed me. And he's been a classy guy, too. I remember the day the Flames sent him back to the American Hockey League when Curtis Joseph was brought in and that handshake the two goalies had, crossing paths, when Joseph told him, "Hey man, I'm sorry about this and I realize I'm taking your spot but keep your head up and stay with it." It's clear McElhinney took that to heart.

When McElhinney was claimed on waivers by the Hurricanes from the Maple Leafs on Oct. 2, 2018, and having worked in Carolina with Brind'Amour, I sent Brind'Amour a text congratulating them on that move, that they were getting a true pro.

I also noticed in the second round, when the Hurricanes had to make the switch, Brind'Amour said he leaves the goalie decisions to Bales.

That doesn't surprise me.

Every team has a goalie union within the team. A coach sees the big picture and makes the decisions but must trust the people around him. But often, the coach and the other assistants are not privy to some of the conversation and information that's exchanged between a goalie and his goalie coach.

One of those things with me was sleep. It was often my question to the goalies every morning. It was a starting point to many conversations. It would tell me how much activity to put into a day.

The smart organizations trust the people who are heavily involved with their goalies, which is the goalie coach.

When I was in Carolina, coach Bill Peters was like that. We would have many debates, including on the plane. Bill would ask all the assistants, for example, "Who would be your goalie tomorrow?" As the goalie coach, you can't always go with the flow. Most of the time you're on the same page. But at times, you have to speak your mind and maybe bring a different opinion because you may have information that the other coaches don't have due to a conversation or an assessment that you made as a goalie coach.



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Fatigue and injuries are part of the playoffs.

For the Hurricanes, thankfully they have a steady and reliable guy in McElhinney. His calm, collected disposition

has helped them. It wasn't an easy situation to go into but having the right people and the right preparation is making a difference.

Hurricanes coach channels former NBA star with 'practice' talk

Brind'Amour makes reference to Iverson rant on its 17th anniversary

by Adam Kimelman

Brind'Amour channels Iverson

Hurricanes coach Rod Brind'Amour gives an injury update with a nod to Allen Iverson on the 17th anniversary of his infamous "practice" rant

Rod Brind'Amour, prior to becoming coach of the Carolina Hurricanes, spent nine of his 20 NHL seasons as a center with the Philadelphia Flyers. On Tuesday he channeled a different former star athlete from the city.

In response to a question about the status of Hurricanes forward Jordan Martinook, who is dealing with a lower-body injury, Brind'Amour responded, "I think he's going to be

dealing with this for however long as we play. He's a trooper. I don't expect him to not play. But we're talking about practice."

If the "we're talking about practice" part sounds familiar, it's a line that was made famous by former Philadelphia 76ers guard Allen Iverson, who punctuated a rant during a press conference with the phrase 17 years ago today -- May 7, 2002.

Brind'Amour had been traded by the Flyers to the Hurricanes in 2000, but Iverson's memorable moment reached far beyond Philadelphia.

The Hurricanes play the Boston Bruins in Game 1 of the Eastern Conference Final at TD Garden on Thursday (8 p.m.; NBCSN, SN, CBC, TVAS).

Bruins vs. Hurricanes playoff preview

Boston, Carolina set for Eastern Conference Final, first postseason series against each other since 1997

by Tom Gulitti

Boston Bruins vs. Carolina Hurricanes

Bruins: Defeated the Toronto Maple Leafs 4-3 in best-of-7 Eastern Conference First Round; Defeated the Columbus Blue Jackets 4-2 in best-of-7 Eastern Conference Second Round.

Hurricanes: Defeated the Washington Capitals 4-3 in best-of-7 Eastern Conference First Round; Defeated the New York Islanders 4-0 in the best-of-7 Eastern Conference Second Round.

Season series: BOS 2-1-0; CAR 1-1-1

The skinny

The Boston Bruins and Carolina Hurricanes will renew an old rivalry when they play in the Eastern Conference Final.

Game 1 of the best-of-7 series is at TD Garden on Thursday (8 p.m. ET; NBCSN, CBC, SN, TVAS). The Bruins will be without defenseman Charlie McAvoy, who is suspended one game for an illegal check to the head against Columbus Blue Jackets forward Josh Anderson in Game 6 of the Eastern Conference Second Round on Monday.

This will be the third time the teams will face off in the Stanley Cup Playoffs since the Hurricanes moved to North Carolina from Hartford in 1997 and the fifth time they've played against each other in the postseason. The Bruins defeated their former regional rivals, the Hartford Whalers, in the 1990 and '91 Adams Division Semifinals.

The Hurricanes defeated the Bruins in seven games in the 2009 conference semifinals. That was the last time they qualified for the playoffs and reached the conference final, where they were swept by the Pittsburgh Penguins.

The Bruins defeated the Blue Jackets 3-0 in Game 6 to advance to the conference final for the first time since 2013, when they reached the Stanley Cup Final before losing to the Chicago Blackhawks.

Boston (49-24-9), which finished second in the Eastern Conference and Atlantic Division during the regular season with 107 points, won the last three games against Columbus by a combined score of 11-4.

"If you're playing this time of year, you're doing something right and building something great as a team," Bruins goalie Tuukka Rask said. "So we're super happy to be in this position and we'll try to keep the train rolling."

Carolina (46-29-7), which qualified as the first wild card into the playoffs from the East with 99 points, has won six straight since losing 6-0 to the Washington Capitals in Game 5 of the first round. The winning streak is the second-longest in Hurricanes/Whalers history behind a seven-game run in 2006, when the Hurricanes won the Stanley Cup.

"The journey that we've been on -- and, obviously, the road isn't over -- we're still creating it ourselves," Hurricanes forward and captain Justin Williams said "But it's been quite a change around here certainly in the past few months. Everybody's believing in each other and you see what happens."

Game breakers



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Bruins: After setting NHL career-highs with 38 goals and 81 points during the regular season, David Pastrnak started slowly in the playoffs with one assist in his first three games. The forward heated up after that and has 10 points (six goals, four assists) in his past 10 games. Pastrnak scored twice in a 4-3 win against the Blue Jackets in Game 5, including the winning goal with 1:28 remaining. He has 35 points (14 goals, 21 assists) in 31 NHL postseason games.

Hurricanes: Jaccob Slavin's 11 playoff assists are second behind San Jose Sharks defenseman Erik Karlsson (12) and nearly half his regular-season total of 23. But the defenseman's offensive production in his first NHL postseason experience is only part of what's made him so valuable for Carolina. Slavin is sixth in the NHL with an average ice time of 26:36 and has spent much of it matched against opponent's top lines, helping limit the New York Islanders to two even-strength goals in the second round. He will likely see a lot of the Bruins' top line of Brad Marchand, Patrice Bergeron and Pastrnak in the conference final.

Goaltending

Bruins: Rask played every minute in the first two rounds, going 8-5 with a 2.02 goals-against average and .938 save percentage. He went 4-2 with a 1.71 GAA and .948 save percentage in the second round, including a 39-save shutout in Game 6. Backup Jaroslav Halak was 2-0-0 with a 2.47 GAA and .938 save percentage against the Hurricanes during the regular season. He is 13-15 with a 2.39 GAA and .924 save percentage in 30 NHL postseason games (28 starts).

Hurricanes: Coach Rod Brind'Amour has an interesting decision to make with Petr Mrazek ready to return from a lower-body injury sustained in the second period of Game 2 against the Islanders. Mrazek (5-3, 2.22 GAA, .913 save percentage, two shutouts) was instrumental in Carolina's upset of the defending Stanley Cup champion Capitals and had a 31-save shutout in a 1-0 overtime win in Game 1 against the Islanders. But Curtis McElhinney, who became the oldest goalie in NHL history to make his first playoff start in Game 3 against New York (35 years, 343 days), was superb subbing for Mrazek, going 3-0 with a 1.56 GAA and .947 save percentage.

Numbers to know

Bruins: Marchand is tied with Colorado Avalanche forwards Nathan MacKinnon and Mikko Rantanen for second with 13 playoff points (five goals, eight assists). Bergeron has won an NHL-high 180 face-offs and his 61.2 winning percentage is first among players who have taken more than 75 draws. Boston is an NHL-best 28.6 percent (10-for-35) on the power play but went 3-for-19 (15.8 percent) in the second round.

Hurricanes: Carolina is second in the NHL with a 2.27 team GAA in the playoffs (behind Boston's 2.15 GAA) and second in scoring with 3.09 goals per game behind the Vegas Golden Knights (3.57). The Hurricanes are 5-0 at home, outscoring opponents 22-7. They ended a 0-for-23 drought on the power play with Sebastian Aho's goal in the first period of Game 4 against the Islanders. Justin Williams' goal in Game 4 against New York was his 100th NHL playoff point (39 goals, 61 assists).

Injury report

Bruins: Defenseman Kevan Miller (lower body) has not played since April 4 and had a setback in his recovery during the first round. Defenseman John Moore (upper body) missed the entire second round after also sitting out the first three games against the Toronto Maple Leafs. Forward Noel Acciari (upper body) missed the final two games of the second round.

Hurricanes: Mrazek returned to practice Monday but forward Jordan Martinook left after apparently aggravating a nagging lower-body injury. Forward Micheal Ferland (upper body) did not practice Tuesday but might be ready for Game 1 after missing eight games. Forward Saku Maenalanen (upper body) practiced wearing a non-contact jersey Tuesday after he was injured in Game 2 against the Islanders and was seen with a cast on his right hand/wrist. Defenseman Trevor van Riemsdyk had surgery on his left shoulder Thursday and is expected to be out 4-6 months.

They said it

"We're halfway to our goal. I think you need to relish the plateaus along the way and we're certainly at one of those. We're in the final four teams and we've had to sacrifice to win some games against some really good teams. Toronto was a different beast than Columbus was, but they each bring their own challenges and we were able to answer both challenges. -- Bruins forward David Backes

"You need to have a lot of things go your way, obviously. ... But we also had a lot of things not go our way and that to me is where we established some sort of traction. It doesn't matter what seems to get thrown at us -- injuries, other things that could have derailed us -- nobody even blinked an eye, and that goes to say a lot about what we have going." -- Hurricanes coach Rod Brind'Amour

Will win if...

Bruins: They get enough scoring from their depth forwards and Rask continues to play like an elite goalie. The Bruins will probably use home-ice advantage to get their top line of Marchand, Bergeron and Pastrnak away from Hurricanes center Jordan Staal and Slavin (whether he's paired with Dougie Hamilton or Justin Faulk) during the games in Boston, but they will have to continue to get contributions from players like Charlie Coyle (five goals) and David Krejci (four goals), and more from others including Jake DeBrusk (two goals).

Hurricanes: Their defense continues to be efficient in moving the puck out of their end and their goalies, whether it's Mrazek or McElhinney, continue to play at a high level. The puck-moving ability of the top four on defense (Slavin, Hamilton, Faulk and Brett Pesce) is the key to diffusing the opponent's forecheck and starting Carolina's offense.

How they look

Bruins projected lineup

Brad Marchand -- Patrice Bergeron -- David Pastrnak

Jake DeBrusk -- David Krejci -- David Backes

Marcus Johansson -- Charlie Coyle -- Danton Heinen



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Joakim Nordstrom -- Sean Kuraly -- Chris Wagner

Zdeno Chara -- Brandon Carlo

Torey Krug -- Connor Clifton

Matt Grzelcyk -- Steven Kampfer

Tuukka Rask

Jaroslav Halak

Scratched: Zane McIntyre, Karson Kuhlman, John Moore

Suspended: Charlie McAvoy

Hurricanes projected lineup

Andrei Svechnikov -- Sebastian Aho -- Teuvo Teravainen

Nino Niederreiter -- Jordan Staal -- Justin Williams

Warren Foegele -- Lucas Wallmark -- Brock McGinn

Jordan Martinook -- Greg McKeeg -- Patrick Brown

Jacob Slavin -- Dougie Hamilton

Brett Pesce -- Justin Faulk

Haydn Fleury -- Calvin de Haan

Petr Mrazek

Curtis McElhinney

Scratched: Jake Bean



Bruins, Hurricanes to open Eastern Conference Final Thursday

Sportsnet Staff

The Boston Bruins will welcome the Carolina Hurricanes to TD Garden for Game 1 of the Eastern Conference Final on Thursday, the NHL has announced.

Puck drop is scheduled for 8 p.m. ET/ 5 p.m. PT and the game will be broadcast on the CBC, Sportsnet and Sportsnet Now in Canada.

The Bruins punched their ticket to the conference final Monday with a 3-0 victory over the Columbus Blue Jackets to win their second-round series in six games. It will be the club's third appearance in the conference finals in the last nine seasons, with the Bruins advancing to the Stanley Cup Final in both of those previous appearances.

The Hurricanes advanced to the Eastern Conference Final Friday with a 5-2 win over the New York Islanders in Game 4 of their series. A wild-card team, the Hurricanes are competing in the Stanley Cup Playoffs for the first time in 10 years, when they also reached the conference finals.

The remaining schedule for the series has yet to be released.

The Western Conference Final matchup will be determined by two upcoming Game 7s. On Tuesday, the Dallas Stars will visit the St. Louis Blues in their series finale. The winner of that game will play the winner of Wednesday's Game 7 between the Colorado Avalanche and San Jose Sharks.

Hurricanes' Brind'Amour quotes Iverson on anniversary of practice rant

Carolina Hurricanes President and GM Don Waddell joins HC at Noon to discuss how strong the bond between captain and leader Justin Williams and bench boss Rod Brind'Amour is.

Mike Johnston

Carolina Hurricanes head coach Rod Brind'Amour updated reporters on the health of several of his players Tuesday.

He just happened to do so while channelling Philadelphia 76ers legend Allen Iverson on the anniversary of one of the most infamous North American sports speeches of the 21st century.

When asked why forward Jordin Martinook was absent from the team's practice, Brind'Amour explained the 26-year-old is in "maintenance mode" while dropping Iverson's classic line.

It was 17 years ago to the day that Iverson, a 2016 Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame inductee, went on an epic rant about practice that has remained in the sports lexicon ever since.

One has to wonder if Brind'Amour, who played for the Philadelphia Flyers when Iverson broke into the NBA with the 76ers in the mid-1990s, was aware that Tuesday marked the anniversary of the quote.

Brind'Amour also addressed the absence of Micheal Ferland from his team's skate.

"Today he went to see a doc, so he was getting checked out," Brind'Amour said. "I'm hoping that will be the last time we have to talk about that, and he'll be ready to go."

Ferland hasn't suited up since Game 3 of the opening round against the Washington Capitals due to an upper-body injury.

Despite all the injuries the Hurricanes have faced this post-season, the team managed to sweep the New York Islanders after eliminating the defending Cup champion Capitals. They are now set to play the Boston Bruins in the Eastern Conference Final with Game 1 set for Thursday.



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YAHOO! SPORTS

Hurricanes' run bringing back meaningful business

Yahoo Canada Sports

Business is booming for Tom Dundon and the Carolina Hurricanes.

Thanks to their surprise run to the Eastern Conference Final, where they'll meet the Boston Bruins, the franchise has apparently attracted \$3.6 million in new ticket business for the upcoming season, Pierre LeBrun of The Athletic shared Tuesday.

I'm no math major, but I believe that represents about a 600 percent increase from the \$500K total value the Hurricanes had sold at this time last year.

Dang.

While that will look mighty good on the sales force's powerpoint presentation this summer, it probably shouldn't be a surprise that the Hurricanes are managing to fill more seats in advance. Public interest sags when smaller-market

teams fail to make the postseason (let alone fail to make meaningful inroads) for prolonged stretches — and in the case of the Hurricanes, this was a drought that lasted an entire decade.

The only real remedy for it is the real tangible success the franchise is once again having.

Still, when speaking to the success of the Hurricanes, you can't help but think about Dundon's horribly misguided investment into the now-defunct Alliance of American Football.

If one run has secured just \$3 million in added ticket sales, plus whatever the Hurricanes are making at the gate this spring and on "Jerks" tees, how long will it take to recoup the \$70 million he sunk into his failed foray into football?

Hmm, maybe not that long.

The Guardian

How the Carolina Hurricanes hit back against the NHL's war on fun

The 'Canes have taken a stand in the name of silliness, and have ended up winning a battle of values in a league that often takes itself too seriously

Colin Horgan

Among the unexpected victors emerging from the bizarre first-round of this year's Stanley Cup playoffs were a bunch of "jerks" playing for the Carolina Hurricanes. On their way through, these jerks — members of a team that hasn't seen the post-season since 2009 — upset the defending Stanley Cup champions, the Washington Capitals, and swept their next opponents, the New York Islanders, to move on to the conference final. These jerks are playing good hockey. The only problem? These jerks and their fans are apparently having too much fun.

Throughout the regular season, the Hurricanes (who squeezed into the first wildcard slot with a 46-29-7 record) turned their post-games into a rally. It started back in October, after a win against the New York Rangers. The team lined up along one blue line, then skated together the length of the ice and threw themselves into the glass — it was quickly dubbed the "storm surge." Soon, it became a more elaborate carnival, with the team adding staged elements, like a game of duck-duck-goose, mock baseball and bowling, as well as, uh, Quidditch.

As Hurricanes captain Justin Williams told NHL.com in December, the point was to make it "a fun time to interact with us and our fans." Yet, even by that point, the antics were causing concern. In November, former NHL coach-turned-commentator Brian Burke told a sports radio station in Toronto: "I don't like it. I don't think it belongs in our league... I think it's absurdly amateurish pee-wee garbage stuff."

But Burke's personal annoyance was overshadowed weeks later, when another, more famous, former NHL coach-turned-broadcaster took aim at the fun.

"These guys, to me, are jerks!" Don Cherry, the longtime CBC commentator and human exclamation point, shouted during his regular Saturday night segment, Coach's Corner, in February. "I know what I'm talking about! Never do anything like that! They're still not drawing [a crowd], they're a bunch of jerks as far as I'm concerned!"

The Hurricanes immediately saw an opportunity. The team coopted Cherry's remarks to build the narrative of underdog pluck. It had the sneer emblazoned on t-shirts, and fans were equally swift to appropriate the derision as a badge of honour. It was they to whom Cherry addressed his latest comments this past weekend, dismissing 'Canes supporters as "front-running fans" — in other words, band-wagoners.



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In response, the Hurricanes duly updated their playoff t-shirts Monday:

That Cherry doesn't like something new is unsurprising. The 85-year-old usually takes immediate umbrage at any variety beyond his own flamboyant wardrobe, which he shuffles constantly, showcasing a vast array of garish suits apparently cut from discarded reams of upholstery. But what Cherry often articulates, perhaps even without knowing it, isn't just cantankerousness, but rather a kind of unintentional airing of the NHL's core principles.

If Cherry does anything well, it's broadcasting values hockey still holds dear – those of tradition and normalcy and, subsequently, opposition to (and bewilderment at) change beyond mere aesthetics.

These are the same values he projected in 2016, for instance, when the NHL faced a different kind of fan-pleasing spectacle – that of John Scott, the low-scoring career grinder who was elevated in a collective lark to the league's All Star roster via an online public voting mechanism. In response, the NHL grumbled its recognition of the validity of the fan vote, but then seemed to disappear the actual vote totals from its website. After Scott reportedly refused the league's request to bow out of the All Star Game, he quickly found himself suspiciously traded from Arizona to Montreal, where he was immediately tossed down to the AHL. At the time, Cherry again upbraided the fans, accusing them of ruining Scott's career by denying him an NHL salary. "You jerks!" he shouted.

In the end, Scott played in the All Star Game and was unquestionably its hero. The collective joke turned into a genuine feelgood story. So, of course, when the game was all over, in lock-step with the spirit of Cherry's rant, the NHL quickly disbanded the public voting tool altogether, lest the fans have any more of the same fun again.

The values Cherry transmits are also the same that coloured testimony NHL commissioner Gary Bettman gave last week to parliamentarians in Ottawa researching concussions in sport. Asked directly about the growing evidence of a link between CTE – a degenerative brain disorder that has been found in young, deceased hockey players – and concussions, Bettman characteristically demurred. "I'm not sure that the premise that the link is clear now is one that the scientific and medical community has embraced," he remarked, echoing his previous comments on the topic.

Where braggadocio often hides timidity, frivolity can be a sign of deeper confidence. So it is in hockey. So it is with the NHL, a league that takes itself so seriously that it frequently can't recognize, or simply dismisses, the seriousness of its own fans – whether it's when they're actually enjoying themselves, or when they're simply asking for the league to live up to expectations. The NHL hasn't stopped Carolina's celebrations, and it likely won't, presumably as long as they don't spread; the NHL can't really take a joke, after all. Which is maybe all the more reason to laugh at it sometimes, like a bunch of jerks.

The Boston Globe

What are Bruins up against in the Hurricanes?

By Kevin Paul Dupont

Shaking out the playoff notebook while flying out of Columbus, connecting through the hockey hotbed of North Carolina, and landing back in the Hub of Hockey with less than 48 hours to go before Game 1 of the Eastern Conference finals Thursday night on Causeway Street.

Yep, another "speed" matchup for the Bruins. Didn't they face this in Round 1 against the Maple Leafs? The Hurricanes can buzz, and they're rested (they finished their sweep of the Islanders last Friday).

However, despite their impressive wins over the Capitals and Islanders, they don't have the equal blend of speed and skill as the Leafs. So, can the Bruins handle the pace? Yes.

By the way, the Blue Jackets had impressive legs, too. The Bruins can skate with everyone who is still playing. Speed is a key element, but in today's game it is more a baseline factor than a differentiator.

Hurricanes owner Tom Dundon, who bought a 52 percent share of the Tropical Depressions for a reported \$420 million in January 2018, thus far looks like the smartest new kid in the class.

He didn't go out and get himself a pricey, high-profile general manager (see: Ken Holland's new \$25 million deal in Edmonton). Yet he's done just fine with trusted hand Don Waddell (ex- of the Thrashers) in charge of an easy-on-the-wallet payroll that capfriendly.com reports is the lowest in the NHL.

Widgets can win, though the Hurricanes' lineup has more talent than most pundits (hand up here) claimed back in October, when even Dundon was professing that his team lacked a goal-scoring "sniper."

The Hurricanes' offensive order is led by third-year sensation Sebastian Aho, a Finnish puck wizard fresh off a career-high 30-53—83. Fast, with great edge control. Sublime stick skill.

Back when the Bruins were making their three consecutive picks in Round 1 of the 2015 draft, Aho stuck around until



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early in Round 2 (No. 35). At least two dozen NHL clubs would like a do-over on that one.

Aho now ranks No. 5 in scoring (197 points) among the entire 2015 draft class, trailing only Connor McDavid, Jack Eichel, Mitch Marner, and fellow Finn Mikko Rantanen.

His entry-level deal now expired, Aho reaches restricted free agency July 1. Dundon's budget-friendly wallet, in John Tortorella's terms, is about to get dented.

The Bruins will enter Game 1 with a foot in the bucket now that Charlie McAvoy has been suspended for his hit Monday night on Josh Anderson. McAvoy turned in his best work yet in the three games that followed the Bruins falling into a 2-1 series deficit to the Blue Jackets.

Among the keys for McAvoy: shooting more. He's been told to let it rip since making his roster debut vs. Ottawa in the 2017 playoffs, and it took him until the Blue Jackets series to buy in, even if some of his forays over the blue line did not lead to shots. He's in attack mode. He's not going to be Boston's version of Brent Burns, but he's got a lot more of Burns in his game than maybe he even believes.

John Moore is the most likely candidate to fill McAvoy's spot in Game 1. Moore is a good skater, but one year into his five-year tour here his fit in the lineup remains a question. His skating is worthy of top-four consideration. He needs to fill out the rest of his game for coach Bruce Cassidy to allot him more minutes.

Hurricanes coach Rod Brind'Amour and CNN's Chris Cuomo were born on the same day (Aug. 9, 1970). They also look amazingly alike, which could have viewers wondering if they're watching CNN's "Prime Time" when cameras scan the Carolina bench.

This is Brind'Amour's first year as a bench boss. One of the game's true warriors, he was a Hurricanes assistant coach for seven years, finally elevated to the top job when Bill Peters failed for four years to move them beyond the land of DNQ.

Brind'Amour has them excited and attacking. He has yet to figure out an effective power play in the postseason. Through

11 games, they've scored a mere four times on the advantage, for a lowly 10.5 percent (only Pittsburgh and Nashville were worse). The Bruins thus far have been a league-best 28.6 percent when a man up.

Just like Torey Krug, Brind'Amour played at Michigan State, though for only one season (1988-89). Like Cassidy, he was born in Ottawa.

The Bruins have been masters of clock control. Through 13 games, they have led the opposition (Toronto, Columbus) for a combined 400:03 — better than 30 minutes per game. They have trailed by an aggregate 125:16 — less than 10 minutes a game. The disparity has been so great, it's hard to believe it took them seven games to dismiss the Leafs and six to dump the Blue Jackets. But . . . hockey.

The Bruins and Hurricanes met in the 2009 playoffs (the year Mark Recchi didn't pull out of the Boston lineup despite being hospitalized with a kidney stone). The Hurricanes clinched it in Game 7, 3-2, on Scott Walker's OT winner at the Garden.

Boston's goal scorers: Byron Bitz (one of nine he scored in a Boston uni) and Milan Lucic.

The other Hurricanes scorers: Brind'Amour and Sergei Samsonov, the Magical Moscovite, who broke into the NHL with the Bruins in 1997-98 and was named Rookie of the Year.

Dissed as "a bunch of jerks" by Canadian commentator Don Cherry, the ex-Bruins coach, the Hurricanes have won back a good portion of their previously apathetic fan base. Their postgame on-ice celebrations — dissed by Cherry — proved key in wooing back the customers. Now they sell "Bunch of Jerks" T-shirts in the arena pro shop and online. Who could resist?

Hey, whatever works. It wasn't that long ago (or was it?) when hockey-crazed Panthers fans showered the ice with plastic rats as an homage to their warriors. It all started in year No. 3 when forward Scott Mellanby used his stick to kill a rat in the club's locker room at Miami Arena.

These days, the Panthers can't draw flies to their rink in Sunrise.



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The Hockey News

Prospect Need to Know: Calder Cup contenders and an OHL game-changer

The AHL playoffs are getting serious, while an injury to a major prospect has the OHL championship series looking a lot more wide open. We've got all the latest from the world of NHL futures in our weekly wrap.

By Ryan Kennedy

As major junior finals rage on and the USHL has its last two teams about to do battle, we turn to more futures. The USHL Draft is a two-part affair, with Phase 1 for 2003-born players and Phase 2 for older prospects. Lincoln grabbed defenseman Carter Schade with the first selection in Phase 1, while Chicago took NTDP left winger Sean Farrell with the first pick of Phase 2. A couple other names of note: Luke Mittelstadt (Casey's younger brother) went second to Madison in Phase 1, while Japanese viral sensation Aito Iguchi was taken by Waterloo in the seventh round.

Meanwhile, we've got some major drama in the OHL final as star Ottawa 67s goalie Michael DiPietro (VAN) is laid up with an ankle injury. Ottawa lost its first game of the entire playoffs Monday night with DiPietro on the shelf, giving Guelph some daylight in that series. For more of the names making noise in the prospect world right now, let's go to the list.

Morgan Geekie, C, Charlotte Checkers (AHL): Geekie has played six games in the playoffs and he has points in all of them. The Carolina pick has been great for the Checkers, one of the best teams in the AHL this season. Smart, talented and competitive, Geekie has seven points overall for Charlotte in the post-season. NHL arrival: 2020-21

Alexey Toropchenko, RW, Guelph Storm (OHL): The Storm have life in the OHL final thanks to a big Game 3 win over Ottawa. Toropchenko, the St. Louis Blues prospect, had two goals in that crucial victory, while also posting two in a Game 2 loss. Big, physical and skilled, the Russian import moves well for his size and is finding his offense. NHL arrival: 2020-21

Noah Dobson, D, Rouyn-Noranda Huskies (QMJHL): With the rare chance of winning a QMJHL title with two different teams, Dobson is helping steer the ship in Rouyn-Noranda. The New York Islanders prospect (who won a Memorial Cup with Acadie-Bathurst last year) has 26 points through 17 games, putting him first among 'Q' defensemen and fourth overall. NHL arrival: 2019-20

Kaapo Kakko, RW, TPS (Fin.): He skipped the world under-18s in order to prepare for the World Championship and it's looking like a pretty good decision. Kakko, the second-best

prospect in the 2019 draft, has looked great for Finland in exhibition play and his high-end combination of size, strength, creativity is a sight to behold. NHL arrival: 2019-20

Ryan Johnson, D, Sioux Falls Stampede (USHL): One of the top 2019 draft prospects from the USHL this season (non-NTDP, that is), Johnson continues to make plays at both ends of the ice for the Stampede as they get set to take on Chicago in the Clark Cup final. Johnson, a University of Minnesota commit, is a "one-man breakout" according to one scout. NHL arrival: 2021-22

Ian Scott, G, Prince Albert Raiders (WHL): His latest effort only counted 15 shots against, but Scott saved 'em all for his fourth playoff shutout of Prince Albert's run to the WHL final. The big Toronto Maple Leafs prospect is rocking a 1.92 goals-against average and .925 save percentage, using a range of physical tools to make stops. NHL arrival: 2021-22

Isac Lundestrom, C, San Diego Gulls (AHL): The Anaheim first-rounder has only played two playoff games for the Gulls, but Lundestrom has made an immediate impact as San Diego put Bakersfield in a 2-0 hole. The talented 200-foot center was particularly deadly in Game 2, ringing up three points in a 4-1 win. NHL arrival: 2019-20

Jeremy Bracco, RW, Toronto Marlies (AHL): He's been great all year, so it's not surprising that Bracco is one of the top post-season scorers in the league. The silky playmaker has 10 points in six games for the Marlies, who are currently rolling Cleveland in the second round. Bracco has been putting up points in bunches and opponents don't have an answer. NHL arrival: 2019-20

Ethan Haider, G, Minnesota Magicians (NAHL): One of the top picks in the USHL's Phase 2 Draft, Haider's rights are now owned by Sioux City. That's a savvy move by the Musketeers, since Haider won't be heading to NCAA Clarkson until 2020-21. The best 2019 NHL draft prospect from the NAHL this season, Haider has size, athleticism and a competitive attitude. NHL arrival: 2024-25

Nic Hague, D, Chicago Wolves (AHL): Bringing a great combination of size, snarl and skill to the Wolves blueline, Hague has put up four points in eight playoff games, tying him for tops among Chicago D-men. The Vegas Golden Knights pick may be a rookie pro, but he's certainly contributing early, as the Wolves lead Iowa 2-1 in the second round. NHL arrival: 2020-21



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • May 8, 2019



Charlotte Checkers Corner: The Sweet Taste Of Victory

The Checkers dominate the team from “The Sweetest Place On Earth” for a 2-0 series lead.

By Justin Lape

The Charlotte Checkers picked up right where they left off from their first round playoff series: winning. The Checkers are now on a four-game win streak after capturing Game 1 and 2 from the Hershey Bears. Charlotte continues to be dominant at Bojangles Coliseum, winning every game there so far in the playoffs. Through the course of their four-game win streak, Charlotte’s margin of victory has been at least three goals in each appearance.

In Game 1, Charlotte didn’t seem to mind much that starting goaltender Alex Nedeljkovic wasn’t present, but was instead in Raleigh backing up Curtis McElhinney. Dustin Tokarski put together a dominant performance, stopping 25 of 26 shots. He remained calm under pressure in the first period when the Bears pushed hard early and peppered Tokarski with 12 shots and allowing just one to squeak in late in the first. Fortunately, Tokarski received support from the Checkers well-rounded offense with an outburst of four goals in the first period.

Julien Gauthier scored his second of the playoffs less than two minutes into the game to set the tone for the series. Derek Sheppard, Aleks Saarela and Stelio Mattheos each

scored their first goal of the playoffs in consecutive order to give the Checkers a 4-0 lead. The Checkers special teams struggled, going 0-for-5 on the power play, but it wasn’t much needed as they took home the 4-1 win.

In Game 2, Charlotte showed no signs of slowing down, taking a 2-0 series lead after beating Hershey 7-3. Nedeljkovic returned for the Checkers but it was an outstanding performance by the offense that stole the show. Martin Necas welcomed himself to the playoffs with a power-play goal in the second period that gave the Checkers a 2-1 lead. Morgan Geekie helped extend the Checkers lead with his fifth of the postseason, which ranks him 5th in the AHL.

Tomas Jurco and Julien Gauthier took over early in the third with Jurco potting a pair and Gauthier scoring his third of the postseason. Necas added another for good measure late in the third.

The Checkers and Bears face off tonight for Game 3 followed by a Game 4 match-up on Wednesday. If necessary, Game 5 would take place on Friday and Games 6 and 7 in Charlotte would be played on Sunday and Tuesday.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • May 8, 2019



Checkers Get Late Winner From Stelio Mattheos to Put Hershey on the Brink

Written by Nicholas Niedzielski

In the tightest contest of the Atlantic Division Finals thus far, the Checkers used a late goal from Stelio Mattheos to secure a 3-0 series lead.

Deadlocked at one with just over two minutes to go in regulation, the Checkers pushed the puck up the ice and fired a puck on net, with the rebound popping out to the right of Hershey netminder Vitek Vanecek. Trailing the play, Mattheos swooped in and hammered the loose puck home, pushing the visitors on top for the first time all night. Aleks Saarela would deposit a final dagger into the empty net minutes later for his second of the game to clinch the 3-1 final.

Prior to notching the game winner, the Checkers were locked in defensively as they held off a hard push from the Bears. Part of that including three consecutive penalties resulting in eight minutes of power play for Hershey through the first half of the frame. Charlotte's penalty kill lived up to their regular-season prowess, though, stifling the Bears on all six of their man advantages throughout the game.

Alex Nedeljkovic played a key role in that stingy play, shaking off a first-period strike from Nathan Walker to shut Hershey down for the final 40 minutes of play, finishing the night with 17 saves on 18 shots.

QUOTES

Coach Mike Vellucci on the third period
It was all penalty kill. We killed off eight minutes in the third period and we were down some forwards with (Tomas) Jurco going out today and (Clark) Bishop) out. The guys that jumped in did a great job. Give (Assistant Coach Ryan) Warsoski credit again because that PK didn't give them a sniff. Your penalty kill is as good as your goalie and Ned made some big saves when he had to.

Vellucci on going 6-1 in the playoffs despite missing players due to injury and callups
We've said it and it's kind of a cliché and it gets a little old, but guys are stepping up. Everybody's got to step up. Sellgren gets his first game in a very tough environment in a smaller rink and handled it outstandingly. I thought he was really good and he's going to be a really good player. The next guy steps up and takes advantage of the opportunity and we've been very fortunate to get that from everybody.

Vellucci on Mattheos' winner
It's obviously huge timing-wise, but I thought their goalie

made a big save on (Julien) Gauthier on the breakaway before that. We got a lucky bounce that goes to Mattheos but he buried it. He didn't let up. It's a fortunate bounce but you earn your bounces too.

Vellucci on potentially closing the series out tomorrow
We just want to play well every game. If you can get some rest, that would be great. It was a battle tonight and we expect it to be a battle tomorrow. They're very well coached and they're very competitive guys. You saw it tonight – it was not easy. It was a very physical, tough, emotional game and we got a good bounce at the end.

Vellucci on the injury to Jurco
I'm not sure. I think he'll be alright, but I thought Bishop was going to be alright too and I was wrong on that. I'll let the trainers tell me when they're ready.

Nicolas Roy on the penalty kill
I think our PK is doing really good. We have a lot of video so we know what they're doing and we adjust pretty well. We've just got to keep going that way and keep going hard. That's the way we want to play.

Roy on the win
We knew coming here that they would come flying in their own building and that it was going to be a tough start for us because they would come hard. We played pretty good and we handled them in the first and then came back. I think that's a pretty good game for us.

Roy on new players contributing
I think we've been pretty good all playoffs with that. We've had a couple of injuries and all the guys coming in the lineup are ready to go. Mattheos got a big goal for us today and Sellgren played pretty good. All the guys coming in are playing well.

Stelio Mattheos on the third period
Just weather the storm. The building was pretty loud and the crowd was into it, and the PK was huge in the third. It was just one shot at the end.

Mattheos on adjusting to the pro game
It's professional hockey and it's guys' jobs here. Everyone is bigger and faster and I had to learn that you can't take a breath out there and it takes everything you've got. I'm feeling more confident every night.

NOTES



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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This is the first time the Checkers have ever led 3-0 in a best-of-seven series. They won three straight to sweep a best-of-five series with Wilkes-Barre/Scranton last season ... The Checkers' fifth straight playoff win is a new franchise record. They have won 23 of their last 28 games since Feb. 22 ... The Checkers did not record a shot on goal for the first 17 minutes of the third period ... The Checkers went 6-for-6 on the penalty kill, including 4-for-4 in the third period ... Mattheos, who completed his junior hockey career in March, scored his fourth goal in 18 career professional games ... This was Aleksii Saarela's first career multi-goal game in the playoffs. He had five multi-goal games in the regular season ... Alex Nedeljkovic stopped 17 of 18 shots to improve to 5-1-0 with a 2.00 goals-against average and .919 save percentage in the playoffs ... Andrew Poturalski returned after missing the last game due to injury and picked up two assists. He has at least one point in all six playoff games he's played and is tied with Toronto's Jeremy Bracco for the

league lead in scoring with 12 points (5g, 7a) ... Morgan Geekie picked up an assist to extend his playoff point streak to seven games, tying the franchise record set by Zach Boychuk in 2011 ... This was the Checkers' first win in Hershey this season. They went 0-1-1 in the regular season ... Trevor Carrick has two assists in two games since returning from suspension ... Defenseman Dennis Robertson served a one-game suspension for an illegal check to the head ... Defenseman Jesper Sellgren made his North American pro debut ... Forward Clark Bishop missed the game due to injury ... Forwards Scott Davidson and Zack Stortini, defenseman Eric Williams and goaltender Jeremy Helvig were healthy extras.

UP NEXT

The Checkers have an opportunity to close the series out in Game 4 tomorrow at 7 p.m. in Hershey.



Eastern Conference Final Preview

Corey Abbott

BOSTON BRUINS VERSUS CAROLINA HURRICANES

The Boston Bruins advanced to the Eastern Conference Final after dispatching the Columbus Blue Jackets in six games. It was a tight series for the most part with four games deciding by one goal, but Boston took over with three straight wins to send Columbus packing. The first two matches were decided in overtime, including a double overtime victory for the Blue Jackets in Game 2 to give Columbus a 2-1 lead at the time, but Boston was the better team afterward.

The top line of the Bruins had a sluggish start to the series, with one point between Patrice Bergeron, Brad Marchand and David Pastrnak through the first three games, but the trio exploded for six goals and five assists in Games 4 and 5. Marchand leads the team with 13 points (five goals, eight assists) in 13 playoff matches this year. Pastrnak is close behind with 11 points, including a team-leading six goals, in 13 matches. David Krejci has collected 10 points (four goals, six assists) in the postseason. He had the series winner in Game 6 versus Columbus and he added an assist on David Backes' first marker of the playoffs.

Tuukka Rask was spectacular in the crease during Round 2 of the postseason. He posted a 39-save shutout in Game 6 after he probably should have had a clean sheet in Game 5 as well. The only goal Rask allowed that night came after the puck went out of play, but the play was allowed to continue because the officials notice. He concluded the series with a .948 save percentage and 1.71 goals-against average.

The Carolina Hurricanes defeated the 2018 Stanley Cup champion Washington Capitals in a seven-game series in Round 1 and swept the New York Islanders in four straight games during Round 2. Carolina outscored the Islanders by a 13-5 margin in the series, while permitting a mere two even-strength goals. Curtis McElhinney, who was pressed into action because of a lower-body injury to Petr Mrazek, was superb in the crease for the Hurricanes. He stopped 71 of 75 shots in three straight victories.

Jacob Slavin has been steady on the back end throughout the playoffs and he leads the team with 11 points through 11 matches. Teuvo Teravainen (six goals, three assists), Warren Foegele (five goals, four assists), Jordan Staal (four goals, five assists) and Sebastian Aho (four goals, five assists) have produced nine points apiece during their 11 postseason outings this year. Carolina has received production up and down the lineup during an impressive run.

Carolina overcame some injuries in Round 2 of the Stanley Cup Playoffs, but they never seemed to miss a beat. The Hurricanes entered the series against the Islanders without the services of Andrei Svechnikov, who played in half of the second round, and Micheal Ferland, who didn't play at all because of an upper-body injury. Carolina also lost Trevor van Riemsdyk (shoulder), Saku Maenalanen (hand) and Mrazek after they were injured in Game 2. Jordan Martinook also missed some time because of a lower-body injury, but he played through it to finish the series. Mrazek and Ferland could be ready for the Eastern Conference Final, but if they aren't then Carolina knows they have players who can step up if called upon.

This will be an interesting matchup when the series begins on Thursday. The Hurricanes have proven that they are for real and Boston's veteran group will be another difficult



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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test. Both teams have benefited from depth scoring in the postseason and they have been stingy defensively, while getting superb goaltending. Carolina has been great at locking down the opposition, while permitting a postseason low 27.8 shots against per game, thanks to a forward group that puts plenty of pressure in the attacking zone and a defense that moves the puck very well. If the Hurricanes can limit Boston's opportunities the same way then that would go a long way to helping the team advance to the Stanley Cup Final. This is going to be a close series and the expectation is that Boston's experience will allow them to advance, but this is a playoffs that has delivered plenty of surprises. Carolina will be difficult for Boston to handle, but it's hard to bet against the Bruins, especially if the top line gets going. Boston in six.

Boston

Brad Marchand - Patrice Bergeron - David Pastrnak
Jake DeBrusk - David Krejci - David Backes
Marcus Johansson - Charlie Coyle - Danton Heinen
Joakim Nordstrom - Sean Kuraly - Chris Wagner

Zdeno Chara - Charlie McAvoy
Torey Krug - Brandon Carlo
Matthew Grzelcyk - Connor Clifton

Tuukka Rask
Jaroslav Halak

WHO'S HOT

Krejci has five points in his last five matches, including two goals and one assist in his last two outings.

WHO'S NOT

Marchand came up big in Game 5 of Round 2 with three points (one goal and two assists), but he has been held off the scoresheet in five of his last seven matches. Bergeron has two goals and one assist in the past six games. He scored both markers in Game 4 versus the Blue Jackets, but didn't much else offensively in the series.

NOTES

Charlie McAvoy has been suspended for Game 1 of the Eastern Conference Final after he delivered an illegal check to the head to Columbus' Josh Anderson in Game 6 of Round 2. Look for Steven Kampfer to play Thursday in his place.

Kevan Miller (lower body) has been making progress, but he isn't ready to return yet. He has been out of action since Apr. 4 due to an apparent knee injury.

John Moore is dealing with a nagging upper-body injury. He hasn't played since Apr. 23, but it's believed he could become available if he's needed and the Bruins don't have an alternative.

Noel Acciari, who is listed as day-to-day, has missed the last two games due to an upper-body injury.

Boston has the best power play in the postseason at 28.6%. The Bruins have scored 10 goals on 35 chances. Marchand leads the team with six power-play points, while Bergeron is first on the club with four goals on the man advantage.

The Bruins have allowed six goals on the penalty kill, while being down a man 37 times. The team's 83.8% penalty kill percentage is the best among teams remaining in the 2019 Stanley Cup Playoffs.

This is Boston's first trip to the Eastern Conference Final since 2013. The Bruins lost in the Stanley Cup Final to Chicago that year.

Carolina

Andrei Svechnikov - Sebastian Aho - Teuvo Teravainen
Nino Niederreiter - Jordan Staal - Justin Williams
Warren Foegele - Lucas Wallmark - Brock McGinn
Jordan Martinook - Greg McKegg - Patrick Brown

Jacob Slavin - Dougie Hamilton
Brett Pesce - Justin Faulk
Haydn Fleury - Calvin de Haan

Petr Mrazek
Curtis McElhinney

WHO'S HOT

Teravainen recorded three goals and two assists in four games against the Islanders. He finished Round 2 with a three-game point streak and multi-point efforts in his last two outings. Foegele also had a three-game point streak (one goal, two assists) to finish the series. Aho got going at the end of Round 2 with two goals and two helpers in his last two contests, while Justin Williams scored a goal in each of the last two matches.

WHO'S NOT

Slavin cooled down in Round 2 with two assists in four games after he had nine helpers in seven contests against Washington in Round 1.

NOTES

Ferland expects to be available for Game 1 of the Eastern Conference Final. It's unclear who he will play if he gets clearance to return, but it wouldn't be a surprise if he started on the fourth line.

Mrazek, who was back at practice earlier this week, could also be ready for Game 1. If he is cleared to return then he should get the nod against Boston to open the series despite McElhinney's heroics versus the New York Islanders.

Van Riemsdyk underwent season-ending shoulder surgery last week. He is expected to need four-to-six months of recovery time after he was injured in Game 2 of Round 2 versus the Islanders.

Maenalanen had surgery on his hand after he was hurt on Apr. 28 and he was given a 10-14 day timetable for his return. He skated Tuesday at practice in a no-contact jersey.

Carolina has the worst power play of the team's remaining in the playoffs with a 10.5 percent success rate. The Hurricanes have four goals on 38 opportunities. Carolina went 1-for-13 in Round 2 of the postseason, with Aho scoring the lone marker. Dougie Hamilton leads the team with three power-play points, including two of the four goals.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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The Hurricanes penalty kill has surrendered nine goals while being down a man 36 times (75.0%). New York scored a goal on the power play against Carolina in three of the four contests.

Round 2 of the 2019 Stanley Cup Playoffs gave the Carolina/Hartford the first sweep in a best-of-seven series in the franchise's history.

Carolina has advanced to the Conference Final in each of the team's last four playoff appearances, including this year. The team was defeated in the Stanley Cup Final by Detroit in 2002, won the Stanley Cup against Edmonton in 2006 and lost in the Conference Final to Pittsburgh in 2009.

The Hurricanes will enter the Eastern Conference Final riding a six-game win streak.

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CAROLINA HURRICANES

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SportScan

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

1105910 Carolina Hurricanes

Bruins' McAvoy suspended one game by NHL

BY CHIP ALEXANDER

MAY 07, 2019 06:33 PM

The Boston Bruins will be without defenseman Charlie McAvoy in Game 1 of the Eastern Conference finals against the Carolina Hurricanes.

Columbus Blue Jackets athletic trainer Mike Vogt, right, tends to Josh Anderson after he was hit by Boston Bruins' Charlie McAvoy during the second period of Game 6 of an NHL hockey second-round playoff series Monday, May 6, 2019, in Columbus, Ohio. Jay LaPrete AP

McAvoy was handed a one-game suspension Tuesday by the NHL for an illegal check to the head of Josh Anderson of the Columbus Blue Jackets late in the second period of their game Monday in Columbus. The Bruins won 3-0 to win the series 4-2.

Boston Bruins defenseman Charlie McAvoy (73) knocked Columbus Blue Jackets right wing Josh Anderson (77) down to the ice after a hit to the head in the second period during Game 6 of the NHL Stanley Cup Playoffs Eastern Conference semifinals at Nationwide Arena on May 6, 2019 in Columbus, Ohio. The Bruins won, 3-0. Kyle Robertson TNS

The NHL Department of Player Safety, which announced the suspension, said McAvoy delivered a "high, hard check that made Anderson's head the main point of contact" and was avoidable.

It was noted that McAvoy had neither been fined nor suspended previously in his 117-game NHL career.

News Observer LOADED: 05.08.2019

1105911 Carolina Hurricanes

Hurricanes' Slavin unfazed by acclaim, fawning in playoffs

BY CHIP ALEXANDER

MAY 07, 2019 05:21 PM

RALEIGH

Jacob Slavin is aware that more people suddenly are saying a lot more nice things about him.

As the Carolina Hurricanes have won playoff games and made their way to the Eastern Conference finals, much fawning and praise has been heaped on the defenseman. More interview requests have come. His name has been mentioned on NHL Tonight, NBC Sports, TSN and

Hockey Night in Canada, used in the same sentence with Bobby Orr. Even Don Cherry might know of him.

"I've said you make a name for yourself in the playoffs and that people don't really notice you until you're in the playoffs," Canes captain Justin Williams said Tuesday. "Obviously the every-day-ers do, but on the national stage he's getting a lot of attention and very well-deserved. He's played phenomenal."

A crush of media acclaim can be a bit unsettling for some athletes, but not for Slavin. A man of strong faith, he remains as unfazed and unflappable off the ice as he is on it, with a strong sense of purpose.

"At the end of the day I've got to go out and do what I've got to do, right?" Slavin said Tuesday. "I've got to play for the team. And you know how I stand, I want to go out there and glorify God with everything I have. That hasn't changed.

"Other people's opinions or what they are saying, it doesn't matter. It's not where I find my identity."

What has changed his identity has been becoming a father. Slavin and his wife, Kylie, have adopted a baby girl, their first child.

Talk about a busy time. The Canes have opened two playoff series on the road, and in the Washington Capitals series took two extra trips to D.C. for Games 5 and 7 before going straight to New York for two games against the Islanders. The Eastern finals against the Boston Bruins will bring more time away from home for the first two games.

"Obviously family is way more important than hockey is but I've still got a job to do and it's a job I love to do," Slavin said. "My wife has been real supportive and taking the heavy load of night-time feedings and stuff. She's been a rock star with everything.

"But I love it. It's definitely a blessing from God. She's a beautiful little girl."

Slavin said he has made good use of FaceTime to stay in touch when he's away. And the few extra days in Raleigh after the Islanders series sweep has allowed him to be at home with the baby.

"She's getting a lot of Dad time, so it's been fun," Slavin said, smiling.

Slavin has gotten a lot of air time for his hockey. He has 11 assists in the 11 playoff games, leading the Canes in points and ranking second in assists among defensemen in the playoffs. (San Jose's Erik Karlsson has 12 assists in 13 games.) Slavin's 26:36 of ice time per game ranks fifth.

Slavin, asked to assess his play in the playoffs, said he has played "pretty well." His point total, he said, wouldn't be that high if his teammates weren't scoring, adding, "I'll give all the credit to the guys."

One playoff highlight was Slavin's stretch pass to spring Jordan Staal in the third period of Game 7 against the Caps. It was a sharp pass, Staal scoring on a shot from the right circle to tie the score 3-3, and the Canes won 4-3 in double overtime.

Slavin's stickwork, skating, hand-eye coordination and defensive positioning have been eye-opening for many who have not seen him play very much, the kind of recognition that only comes in a long playoff run.

"My stick has been pretty active, which is my game, and making sure we're shutting it down in the D zone," he said, which is about as much self-praise as he will offer.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • May 8, 2019

The Bruins series, which begins Thursday in Boston, will be much like that against the Capitals, the 2018 Stanley Cup champs. Patrice Bergeron's line, with wingers Brad Marchand and David Pastrnak, might be the most potent in the playoffs. That trio has combined for 16 goals in 13 playoff games.

Slavin will be matched up against Bergeron's line at times, as will Brett Pesce and Justin Faulk.

"It's going to be a grind all series and it's going to be pretty physical, but I think it's going to be a good series," Slavin said.

News Observer LOADED: 05.08.2019

1105912 Carolina Hurricanes

Hurricanes-Bruins start set for Eastern Conference finals, but not the rest

BY LUKE DECOCK

MAY 07, 2019 03:17 PM

The beginning of the Eastern Conference finals was set Tuesday, but the rest of the best-of-seven series between the Carolina Hurricanes and Boston Bruins remains uncertain.

The Hurricanes will open the series Thursday night in Boston at 8 p.m. on NBCSN, but Game 2 could be either Saturday night or Sunday afternoon (on NBC) depending on the results of the Game 7s in the Western Conference on Tuesday and Wednesday.

The series would then likely proceed on an every-other-day basis as it returns to Raleigh for Games 3 and 4.

News Observer LOADED: 05.08.2019

1105913 Carolina Hurricanes

Eastern Conference finals, Hurricanes vs. Bruins: Describe the opponent in three words

By Sara Civian

May 7, 2019 13

I was just sitting here minding my own business, writing a feature about how the depth of the Hurricanes has mattered and how people forget that. Then the Bruins had to go and defeat the Blue Jackets, 3-0, in Game 6, advancing to the Eastern Conference Final where the Hurricanes were waiting for them.

The Canes needn't wait too long for their opponent after sweeping the Islanders in Round 2. We know what we have in these Jerks, but who are these Bruins?

"It's a lot," Hurricanes head coach Rod Brind'Amour said. "I don't think that there's one thing I would say. I think they're a championship team that knows how to get it done. They've got no weaknesses. They've got goaltending, they've got great D, they've got balance up front. I'm not surprised they're having the success that they're having."

In the year of the Wild Card Chaos Squad, the Bruins might be the only team still standing that you would've expected at the beginning of the season. They had 11-1 odds to win the Stanley Cup coming into the season, San Jose was at 12-1, Dallas 25-1, St. Louis 30-1, Colorado 40-1.

The Carolina Hurricanes were 80-1.

The Bruins have a battle-tested, defensively sound leadership core in Zdeno Chara and Patrice Bergeron. They have one of the best first lines in the NHL in Bergeron, David Pastrnak and, yes, Brad Marchand. They've got secondary skill and speed in Jake DeBrusk and Danton Heinen. They've got their Warren Foegele in Sean Kuraly, if you will. They've got Tuukka Rask, who's been lights out and just seems to keep getting hotter.

"Most of us were watching the game last night, and when it got to 3-0, I gave the ole 'Welp, here we go," Justin Williams said. "... They have a championship pedigree. Their core has won, their core is proven. They haven't been to the conference finals in a few years so they're hungry, they're motivated and I'm looking forward to a great challenge."

Rask's elimination game performance strikes me as spookiest: Undefeated (3-0), 1.00 GAA, .969 save %, and a shutout. Columbus had 212 shots and 68 high danger chances in its six meetings with the Bruins. They ended up with 11 goals overall.

Maybe the Blue Jackets would've been a more ideal opponent for the Hurricanes, but that doesn't matter at this stage of the season, right?

"Exactly," Jaccob Slavin said. "You've gotta go out there and play what's gotten your team to this point, and obviously you make sure you're playing a little to their systems too, making adjustments here and there. But you gotta do what you do."

"I think that's your job, to create that situation of who's the underdog and who's the favorite," a low-key hilarious Sebastian Aho offered. "I don't ever think about this. Either way, it's a hard battle out there every game. We didn't think about that ever this year."

Even if the Canes were once the so-called underdogs, Money Puck has this series 54-46 in favor of Carolina.

The Athletic LOADED: 05.08.2019

1105914 Carolina Hurricanes

'Team identity' is a very real concept and it's pushing the Hurricanes to new heights

By Justin Bourne

May 7, 2019

I think we're finally reaching a refreshing point with general hockey analysis, which is a statement I'm not so sure I ever saw myself making just a few years ago. More fans who prize concepts like toughness and grit and team identity seem to also be recognizing the value of play-driving skill and many are even on board with the concept of (*grabs calculator, protractor and pocket protector, pushes glasses up nose*) shot attempts as a useful stat.

And just as surprisingly, what was originally a somewhat fang-baring-to-doubters statistics community seems more open to ideas like (*puts on sleeveless red-and-black plaid flannel shirt, shotguns a Coors Banquet beer*) hustle and heart, team identity and grit.



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I think it's important to accept that neither Corsi nor grit are punchlines (or at least good ones) and to really galaxy-brain this thing up, to note that they're likely more than a little intertwined.

So we here at The Athletic wanted to take a look at a prized specimen of this year's bountiful crop of Cinderellas — the Carolina Hurricanes — from both sides of the analysis aisle. Ian Tulloch will dig in a bit more analytically on the Canes later this week, while I wanted to talk about the concept at the forefront of what I believe is one of their biggest strengths: Team identity. Ideally, that provides a little something for everyone, particularly those who've found their way to the middle.

So let's talk about what team identity means, what it does and how it all shapes where the Canes have been and where they're going next.

What does the nebulous concept of "team identity" really mean?

Team identity refers to how a sports team comes to view themselves, which often becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. A team that has success using a particular style of play a couple times may start to believe they excel using that style and so they may push to play in that style more often, which leads to them better committing to said style, which leads to even better play ... within that style.

Presto, that style becomes that team's identity.

Teams can go through the season trying to play different ways, whether consciously or not, but if nothing takes, that team identity can become "Uh-oh, we might be bad." And once you're at "we're bad" as a team identity, your problems are only just beginning. That means not trusting each other positionally, not pushing back when trailing (due to a pervading feeling of hopelessness) and a general sense of being lost. It all feeds on itself.

I've written numerous times about the snowball effect of the early season and how a good start is crucial to building the type of belief-fueled foundation upon which a team can really win. In contrast to the failing team I mentioned above, winning leads to more team belief which leads to more wins.

To emphasize just how real and ubiquitous the conviction is that teams do in fact form identities, I googled "nhl coach 'we need to find an identity'" to crib a line or two for this piece. I'll let the search results themselves tell the story. Just look at the headlines.

The takeaway: The concept of team identity isn't new, isn't uncommon, and that isn't without reason.

As games tick by in the beginning of the season, teams are looking for good things to happen so they can point to them and say "When we play like this, we have success. That's our identity." Identity keeps the group on the same page.

What are some types of team identity?

Teams that believe they're built on speed may find themselves testing the feet of their opponents more, given that's supposed to be their strength. It can get into the heads of a group — we're fast, let's see if they can hang with us. Afterburners Activate. This is where "self-fulfilling prophecy" comes in. But let's look at that example from the opposite side of the speed spectrum.

After his years with the Islanders, my Dad spent some time playing those "Legends of Hockey" games, where the last possible thing anyone wants to do is dump the puck and chase it, given that they'd never get it back. (I realize the irony is using my Dad's hockey to highlight playing slowly here given his career strengths, but I assure you, things done changed. Sorry, Dad!)

Those retired gentlemen wanted to just have the puck until they got a primo scoring opportunity, so anytime anyone of them was alone on a rush without numbers, they'd simply run the puck back like a soccer team, and gather a group to attack with. Their identity was that they thought the game so much better than the (mostly younger) hustle machines they'd be up against that they could toy with them and pick

them apart. They came to see what worked for them, so they played to their strengths, and golly-gee was being on that same page important to their regular success.

That's part of what an identity is — you don't always get to choose it, it chooses you. But once you accept and embrace that and lean into it — like in the example of the Legends games — you can become truly dominant.

We see this in the NHL in a variety of forms. We see the Maple Leafs leaning into their skill and speed and challenging opponents to keep up. We saw the Bruins try to push their first-round series against them to a more muck-it-up style of game which better suited how they see their own strengths. And the team we're going to be talking about here, the Hurricanes, is playing with a youthful nothing-to-lose freedom that has opponents utterly puzzled. They're the most united-looking group of them all, thanks to a variety of internal and external factors.

So you can identify as heavy, or speedy or skilled, or cerebral, or defensive, or any number of things. But the best teams identify as something, and they then try to push as many hockey games as they can toward their preferred style.

How is it uniting?

A hockey team, like a workplace or most any gathering of 20-plus humans, is a varied bunch. We all have our strengths and weaknesses. As a team though, it's not that effective if everyone wants to play how they want to play. You need to be on the same page for everybody else to be able to trust you're all metaphorically rowing at the same time, in that you'll be where you're supposed to be and doing what the team wants you to be doing so others can react accordingly.

If you're a defensive-minded squad built on keeping pucks out of your net, you don't want to be sitting in your stall at intermission after blowing the zone looking for a breakaway while your check scored at the other end. You ostracize yourself from the group by playing away from your team's strengths, which provides pressure on everyone to fall in line. That would be a touch awkward, as you could expect some teammate to mutter something to the effect of "That's just not who we are," or something less generous. Losing is one thing. Losing when you don't play your team game, the game that your team identifies as its style, is far more unacceptable than going out on your own terms. You have to be true to what makes up the collective "us."

How does that lead to tangible results?

I used the word "trust" above — that's what makes playing within your team identity so valuable. When you have one, you can trust you know what your teammates are going to do, so you can know how to best help them.

Let's use the example of an offensive rush — call it a 2-on-2. When you're a bad team, players are so excited to actually handle the puck and do something with it, they'll often rush offensive plays. Maybe the winger, after a prolonged shift of standing around in the D-zone, gets the puck and exits the zone and takes his chance to get off a rare shot. Great. Play over, whistle, and the player heads to the bench for a pat on the back ... before the team inevitably heads back to play D in their own end again.

If that same rush is taken by a team that believes they're good, that believes they're skilled and makes plays and shouldn't settle, then maybe that puck carrier is more likely to delay on the 2-on-2 and look for an option that isn't "Yay coach look I did a shot on goal!" A group that sees itself as patient and skilled may have a second wave of players working hard to get up the ice knowing their teammate may just delay and look for something more than a no-deception shot. In this sort of case, that identity, that belief in your teammates to try to create more, can cause other skaters to try to do more to be a part of the play. They know their teammate will try to extend it, so they can justify the work to get up into the action.



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This is even bigger with defensive coverage. If every time a defenceman leaves the net-front to jump into a corner battle and his partner is right there filling in for him in front of the net, a trust builds. That allows that defenseman to not hesitate, and to jump into that corner battle even faster next time, believing his partner and team to be good defensively. Suddenly everyone's defending a whole lot less, period. Self-identity can feed on itself and lead to exponential improvements in areas where a team was already pretty darn good.

Can you beat a team with a true identity?

Of course. Having an identity is great, it's something coaches work on from training camp onward, but getting there is no guarantee of success. This is part of why the playoffs are so fun – multiple teams with differing style-identities go head-to-head for larger samples, so we get some sense which styles are more effective in today's NHL.

What is the Hurricanes identity and what does that mean for them going forward?

I'd describe Carolina's identity as thus: Fast, aggressive and tenacious. I bet they'd describe themselves the same way. That style has allowed them to pepper opposing defenses and goaltenders, like waves of skilled offence constantly pushing at the defensive levees. And as a classic song once foretold, many teams must find themselves amidst the storm thinking "If it keeps on rainin', levee's going to break." And it's been raining a lot for the Hurricanes these days.

The scary part for their opposition, though, is that they're also the poster team for embracing identity and running with it.

Yes, much of it grew with the Justin Williams-led Storm Surge, the post-game celebrations after home wins that led to much disdain from the normally starch-shirted hockey world. (I myself remarked that I wouldn't have enjoyed being a part of it, and that had someone asked me to simulate "duck duck goose" after a win, my first thought would NOT have been "yes, we are on track for the Stanley Cup." For what it's worth, my opinion there hasn't varied the slightest on either point.)

That led to Don Cherry referring to them as a "Bunch of Jerks," and thanks to some great social media and marketing work, the fans were then able to become a part of the team identity. For a group that may resent some of their treatment by most of the hockey media and opposing fans for being a "nontraditional hockey market," it's resulted in the most beautiful "us against them" group mentality you could ever possibly construct. They've been granted the perfect foils, with the freedom to have fun during what's supposed to be hockey's most serious season.

So combine a team that's fast and aggressive and tenacious and knows it with pulling into themselves as a group and basically being a united face challenging the establishment hockey media and fanbases, and boy — you've got Team Identity Lightning in a Bottle. It's the much-vaunted Underdog tag taken to the never-before-seen extreme. When we're talking actually hockey there's a ton to consider about how they actually match up against the Bruins, but just the sheer "playing with house money" factor at this point makes them scary dangerous.

What does it mean for their fans and this season as a whole?

The Carolina fans are a true part of their team's run no matter what happens from here. They've been included in a way few groups have been before. When a team has a real identity, and their supporters embrace it, that's the sweet spot of being a sports fan. Even if the team loses it will all have been worth it for Caniacs because people could connect with what the players, and more importantly, what the team was about. This is "team identity" at its finest. Everyone from the faceoff dot to the rafters is on the same page.

Teams spend seasons, decades of them actually, hoping to create the sort of thing that's happening in Carolina this season. Unfortunately for most looking to replicate that, these feelings aren't something you can fabricate, or simply will into existence. All they can be is embraced when they arise and there's no doubt the Canes have done that this season.

Team identity itself isn't alone enough to push a team to victory, but it sure keeps the cogs well lubricated for teams that seem to have all the right pieces in place.

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1105892 Boston Bruins

Blues win epic Game 7 in 2 OTs

Adrian Walker

Maroon slammed the puck in after Robert Thomas skated in on Ben Bishop from the right wing.

It was the second game-winning goal of the series for Maroon, who savored the moment in front of dozens of family and friends.

"As a kid, playing in a basement, on the street, you always think about doing this," Maroon said. "It's unreal. It means the world."

Maroon deflected credit for the tally to Thomas, whose rush helped create the winner.

"I saw an opening and I shot it," Thomas said. "He was there to bang it in."

Vince Dunn also scored for St. Louis, which will face the winner of the San Jose-Colorado series in the conference final. Game 7 will be played Wednesday in San Jose.

Bishop made 52 saves and Mats Zuccarello scored for Dallas. St. Louis outshot Dallas, 27-2, from the start of the second period until 5:16 left in the third.

It marked the first time in NHL history that three playoff series were decided in overtime in Game 7 in the same year. San Jose eliminated Vegas and Carolina beat Washington in the first round.

St. Louis outshot Dallas, 54-30, including 41-16 in regulation. But Bishop was terrific against his first NHL team, keeping the Stars in the game with a handful of big-time stops in regulation and the overtimes.

The Blues jumped in front when Dunn converted a shot from the point 13:30 into the first period. It was his first career playoff goal.

Zuccarello then jumped on a fortunate deflection for Dallas, tying it at 1 at 15:55. A clearing attempt by St. Louis forward David Perron hit referee Marc Joannette and bounced right into the slot. Binnington was looking in the other direction and never saw Zuccarello's shot.

Bishop, who took a drive off the collarbone in the third period of Game 6, posted shutouts in his two previous Game 7 appearances, both with the Tampa Bay Lightning. He stopped 18 shots in the second period while the Stars managed just one shot on goal.

Dallas killed off two penalties in a four-minute span midway through the second.

Stars rookie Roope Hintz just missed on a wraparound in the closing minute of regulation.

Binnington turned in several impressive saves in the first period. He stopped Radek Faksa on a breakaway and also recorded a glove save on a shot by John Klingberg.

"It was fun for the first three or four periods," Binnington said. "Then I started to get a little tired. We fought until the end. We found a way. It's been working for us."



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1105893 Boston Bruins

Bruins try to catch their breath after another long series

Adrian Walker

Either John Moore or Steven Kampfer will likely replace him, since Kevan Miller (knee) hasn't skated since April 2. Having Miller around would make coach Bruce Cassidy's job easier. He could promote Connor Clifton to Zdeno Chara's right side, and lean a bit more on the Torey Krug-Brandon Carlo and Matt Grzelcyk-Miller pairs.

Moore, a lefty, would be next choice, but he has battled since taking a hit to the back from Tampa Bay's Adam Erne on March 25. Kampfer, a righty, last suited up in Game 3 of the first round against Toronto, the only playoff contest of his career.

Clifton's rise in performance the last two games makes it feasible Cassidy could move him up to play with Krug, and promote Carlo to the top pair with Chara, his usual penalty-kill partner. Kampfer or Moore would likely play with Grzelcyk.

More thoughts on the Columbus series:

- The Bruins were grateful for a day off, given that they had just one two-day break between games in the first two rounds. Say this for the Bruins: They have fared well in long series. According to the NHL, the Bruins are the seventh team in history to win both of its first two series after going down, 2-1.

- The Bruins are in the East finals for the first time in six years. The holdovers from that run to the 2013 Cup Final are aching for another shot. Chara is 42. Patrice Bergeron is 33. David Krejci and Tuukka Rask are 32. Brad Marchand is 30. Krug, a rookie then, is 28.

All but Krug were in the organization in 2009, when Carolina eliminated the Bruins in the second round of the playoffs on Scott Walker's OT goal in Game 7. And all but Krug lifted the Stanley Cup in 2011.

- Like Tim Thomas in 2011, Rask so far has provided Conn Smythe-caliber goaltending.

After the latest 2-1 series deficit, Rask saved 111 of the next 115 shots (.965 save percentage). Of the four goals he allowed, one shouldn't have counted (puck in netting) and another went off his defenseman's stick. He also was beaten by a one-time rocket from the slot, and a perfectly placed short-angle shelf job.

That's as close to perfect as you can be in the playoffs. Rask took over the series.

Asked to compare 2013 playoff Rask with 2019, Bergeron said, "I do remember that he was pretty much lights-out the whole time. I think right now he's in the zone, and that's where he's at. He's playing some big-time hockey."

- Regardless of what set off Marchand Monday, he likely knows it would have been easier to shape the discussion around his teammates, his 100-point season, or anything other than his Marshawn Lynch act. It only gave talking heads more talking points.

- Columbus did hit four posts in Game 6, so Carolina won't be discouraged to shoot high. Rask was funny about the ironwork. In his view, he had "good angles."

- Only three Boston goalies own a pair of series-clinching shutouts: Gerry Cheevers, Thomas, and Rask.

- Columbus lost five times in its final 18 games. Each loss came against the Bruins.

- David "Playoff Krech" Krejci, one of the most clutch Bruins ever, got his eighth career playoff winner. Only three Bruins have as many: Cam Neely (11), Phil Esposito (nine), and Rick Middleton (eight). Behind his stats: an untold number of slick passes and an underappreciated amount of toughness.

- Word from the Columbus dressing room: The Bruins' penalty kill, which ended the series with 11 consecutive kills, began forcing the Blue Jackets to the outside after Game 3. Columbus was bombing away from the top, but Boston forced extra passes. The Bruins still struggled to get clears — Columbus had range and great sticks — but Rask held.

The Bruins also beat the Blue Jackets at their own game. Columbus edged Boston in shot blocks, 44-43, over the final three games.

- Sean Kuraly's return lifted the fourth line in a major way, especially with Chris Wagner and Noel Acciari banged up. His control-and-cycle game is ideal for that role. He may have a few Blue Jackets fans rooting for the Bruins the rest of the way.

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1105894 Boston Bruins

What are Bruins up against in the Hurricanes?

Adrian Walker

However, despite their impressive wins over the Capitals and Islanders, they don't have the equal blend of speed and skill as the Leafs. So, can the Bruins handle the pace? Yes.

By the way, the Blue Jackets had impressive legs, too. The Bruins can skate with everyone who is still playing. Speed is a key element, but in today's game it is more a baseline factor than a differentiator.

- Hurricanes owner Tom Dundon, who bought a 52 percent share of the Tropical Depressions for a reported \$420 million in January 2018, thus far looks like the smartest new kid in the class.

He didn't go out and get himself a pricey, high-profile general manager (see: Ken Holland's new \$25 million deal in Edmonton). Yet he's done just fine with trusted hand Don Waddell (ex- of the Thrashers) in charge of an easy-on-the-wallet payroll that capfriendly.com reports is the lowest in the NHL.

Widgets can win, though the Hurricanes' lineup has more talent than most pundits (hand up here) claimed back in October, when even Dundon was professing that his team lacked a goal-scoring "sniper."

- The Hurricanes' offensive order is led by third-year sensation Sebastian Aho, a Finnish puck wizard fresh off a career-high 30-53—83. Fast, with great edge control. Sublime stick skill.

Back when the Bruins were making their three consecutive picks in Round 1 of the 2015 draft, Aho stuck around until early in Round 2 (No. 35). At least two dozen NHL clubs would like a do-over on that one.

Aho now ranks No. 5 in scoring (197 points) among the entire 2015 draft class, trailing only Connor McDavid, Jack Eichel, Mitch Marner, and fellow Finn Mikko Rantanen.



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His entry-level deal now expired, Aho reaches restricted free agency July 1. Dundon's budget-friendly wallet, in John Tortorella's terms, is about to get dented.

■ The Bruins will enter Game 1 with a foot in the bucket now that Charlie McAvoy has been suspended for his hit Monday night on Josh Anderson. McAvoy turned in his best work yet in the three games that followed the Bruins falling into a 2-1 series deficit to the Blue Jackets.

Among the keys for McAvoy: shooting more. He's been told to let it rip since making his roster debut vs. Ottawa in the 2017 playoffs, and it took him until the Blue Jackets series to buy in, even if some of his forays over the blue line did not lead to shots. He's in attack mode. He's not going to be Boston's version of Brent Burns, but he's got a lot more of Burns in his game than maybe he even believes.

John Moore is the most likely candidate to fill McAvoy's spot in Game 1. Moore is a good skater, but one year into his five-year tour here his fit in the lineup remains a question. His skating is worthy of top-four consideration. He needs to fill out the rest of his game for coach Bruce Cassidy to allot him more minutes.

■ Hurricanes coach Rod Brind'Amour and CNN's Chris Cuomo were born on the same day (Aug. 9, 1970). They also look amazingly alike, which could have viewers wondering if they're watching CNN's "Prime Time" when cameras scan the Carolina bench.

This is Brind'Amour's first year as a bench boss. One of the game's true warriors, he was a Hurricanes assistant coach for seven years, finally elevated to the top job when Bill Peters failed for four years to move them beyond the land of DNQ.

Brind'Amour has them excited and attacking. He has yet to figure out an effective power play in the postseason. Through 11 games, they've scored a mere four times on the advantage, for a lowly 10.5 percent (only Pittsburgh and Nashville were worse). The Bruins thus far have been a league-best 28.6 percent when a man up.

Just like Torey Krug, Brind'Amour played at Michigan State, though for only one season (1988-89). Like Cassidy, he was born in Ottawa.

■ The Bruins have been masters of clock control. Through 13 games, they have led the opposition (Toronto, Columbus) for a combined 400:03 — better than 30 minutes per game. They have trailed by an aggregate 125:16 — less than 10 minutes a game. The disparity has been so great, it's hard to believe it took them seven games to dismiss the Leafs and six to dump the Blue Jackets. But . . . hockey.

■ The Bruins and Hurricanes met in the 2009 playoffs (the year Mark Recchi didn't pull out of the Boston lineup despite being hospitalized with a kidney stone). The Hurricanes clinched it in Game 7, 3-2, on Scott Walker's OT winner at the Garden.

Boston's goal scorers: Byron Bitz (one of nine he scored in a Boston uni) and Milan Lucic.

The other Hurricanes scorers: Brind'Amour and Sergei Samsonov, the Magical Moscovite, who broke into the NHL with the Bruins in 1997-98 and was named Rookie of the Year.

■ Dissed as "a bunch of jerks" by Canadian commentator Don Cherry, the ex-Bruins coach, the Hurricanes have won back a good portion of their previously apathetic fan base. Their postgame on-ice celebrations — dissed by Cherry — proved key in wooing back the customers. Now they sell "Bunch of Jerks" T-shirts in the arena pro shop and online. Who could resist?

Hey, whatever works. It wasn't that long ago (or was it?) when hockey-crazed Panthers fans showered the ice with plastic rats as an homage to their warriors. It all started in year No. 3 when forward Scott Mellanby used his stick to kill a rat in the club's locker room at Miami Arena.

These days, the Panthers can't draw flies to their rink in Sunrise.

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1105895 Boston Bruins

Bruins are doing well, so why doesn't Brad Marchand want to talk about it?

Adrian Walker

"We'll address it accordingly. Brad has obligations to you and the media in a respectful manner, and be a professional, and we'll address it. And to be honest with you, so does the media, you know, in the same light. I would ask for the same on both sides."

Sweeney said defenseman Kevan Miller (knee) has "made some progress" and could return during the playoffs.

"We've told him all along, the further we play, the more he has an opportunity to work and get back in there," Sweeney said. "Hopefully, we get that opportunity."

Some of Sweeney's recent deals have paid off. Marcus Johansson, acquired from New Jersey for two draft picks Feb. 25, scored the second goal Monday off assists from Charlie Coyle, who was acquired from Minnesota in a deal for Ryan Donato and a draft choice Feb. 20, and Danton Heinen.

"We did identify some areas we felt we needed, and to their credit they stepped in and provided those things," Sweeney said. "It's really a testament, up and down our lineup, and guys that have gone in and out of our lineup."

"David Backes is a great example of that. Noel [Acciari] gets hurt. Backes gets reinserted during the course of the series. The way Connor Clifton has stepped in.

"So really, if you talk to the guys in our room, it's just about — we've always had the next-man-up mentality, and it's a testament to the character and leadership of our group."

The Bruins have progressed with several young defensemen complementing veteran Zdeno Chara.

"I think it's just been a progression from our group," Sweeney said. "Where we were, and the steps we've taken. It's a leadership group that's been with them every step of that journey. Now, they're in the moment."

"I don't think they care whether or not they've played games before, to tell you the honest truth. They're prepared to play their next opponent and do what they do."

"So I think our coaches have embraced that and the players have themselves. But it's the sum of what we've been trying to accomplish that allows the player and individual."

"You can't take anything away from the players themselves. They're the ones that have been able to go out and rise to the occasion."

Carolina has won six successive games, rallying in a seven-game series to beat Washington and then sweeping the Islanders.

"They're a strong forechecking team," Sweeney said. "They get on you, and they get back up on the puck. Their back pressure's been good. Their goaltending has been excellent. Their shooting percentage took a big jump from February, on being able to score some goals and have some confidence as a result of it."

"I think they're a reflection of their coach [Rod Brind'Amour] and how he approaches things in his own lifestyle, and they've got some juice. So,



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we're going to have to be at our best, and I've said that before. It's not going to change going forward."

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1105896 Boston Bruins

Bruins to open Eastern Conference finals on Thursday

By Andrew Mahoney Globe Staff

May 7, 2019, 3:43 p.m.

The NHL announced that Game 1 of the Eastern Conference final between the Carolina Hurricanes and the Bruins will be Thursday at 8 p.m. at TD Garden. The game will be televised on NBCSN.

The schedule for the rest of the series, as well as that of the Western Conference final, will be released at a later date.

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1105897 Boston Bruins

Charlie McAvoy suspended; Player safety out the window in playoff hockey

By MARISA INGEMI | marisa.ingemi@bostonherald.com | Boston Herald

PUBLISHED: May 7, 2019 at 6:37 pm | UPDATED: May 7, 2019 at 7:14 PM

COLUMBUS, Ohio — If Charlie McAvoy's hit on Josh Anderson in Game 6 truly was, as he described, a hockey play, that's where the line for playoff hockey physicality has to be drawn.

McAvoy had a hearing with the NHL's Department of Player Safety and will be suspended for Game 1 of the Bruins upcoming series with the Hurricanes. That is reasonable for a head hit.

Officials whistled a two-minute minor near the end of the second period of the B's 3-0 win over the Blue Jackets, instead of a major or ejection.

"I tried to finish my check in a legal manner," McAvoy said. "I was penalized two minutes and I served it. I just came back and tried to be an impactful player. Fortunately enough it was in a winning effort and happy we're going on to the next round."

By the rule book, given the penalty called for contact to the head, the officials were correct in assigning a two-minute minor. There is a question whether the referees actually saw the play at all, after it was reported on the Blue Jackets' radio broadcast they hadn't.

Anderson was fine and returned to the game, and the rest of the contest was a focus on the game, not any revenge.

"I don't want to start complaining about hits after the game," Blue Jackets GM Jarmo Kekalainen said. "But.... If you watched the video of it, I don't think there's ... it's pretty clear-cut to me."

Maybe everyone involved was lucky that was the case, because a game with less meaning could have put McAvoy at risk for on-ice retribution; his return to the game — especially if Anderson was hurt worse on the play — surely would have created some consternation on the Blue Jackets' end.

Rule 48 of the NHL rule book says only a minor can be called for a hit to the head — not a major nor a game misconduct, with no provisions for either occurrence — which sounds like a major flaw in the system.

Officials technically made the correct call, but an environment where sticking to the book instead of any human empathy or concern for danger isn't safe for anyone.

In Game 6 of the Stars-Blues series in the Western Conference, Dallas goalie Ben Bishop took a slap shot off his collarbone and was down on the ice, writhing in pain. Play continued, as it should according to the rules, and the Blues scored.

Bishop, in a position where players are shooting the puck at his direction while he was in pain and potentially hurt, was lucky to come out of that in one piece. The argument shifted toward the angst that would occur if the goal had been wiped off the board, if play had been blown dead, simply because the rule book would be against it.

If the rule book can't be fixed at some point — one would hope both are topics at the upcoming GM meetings in Vancouver — compassion has to take a precedent over worrying about the results of a game.

If the Bruins don't have McAvoy to open their series, it makes their path tougher. To make a big check like that at the point in the game he did, with 20 seconds to go in the second with a 1-0 lead, wasn't the appropriate time or place from a hockey standpoint.

"It was a hockey play," McAvoy maintained. "I had my elbow tucked. I was hitting through him."

But from a player safety standpoint, there has to be a precedent of taking injury risk more seriously than the results. Continuing to allow the physicality of playoff hockey as an excuse makes it unsafe for everyone involved.

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1105898 Boston Bruins

Parting thoughts on Bruins' win over Blue Jackets

By STEVE CONROY | sconroy@bostonherald.com | Boston Herald

May 7, 2019 at 6:30 PM

Before we turn all our attention to Storm Surge or the Bunch of Jerks or whatever the Carolina Hurricanes are calling themselves these days, the Bruins' series with the Columbus Blue Jackets deserves one more look back with some parting thoughts.

* Playoff Krech has arrived. The crafty center David Krejci was instrumental in both the B's runs to the Stanley Cup finals earlier this decade and he stepped to the forefront once again as the B's wrestled control of the series away from the Blue Jackets in Games 5 and 6, scoring the all-important first goals in both games. In Game 5, he did a tremendous job of corralling a skipping puck and managing to slip it past Sergei Bobrovsky. In Game 6, he finally broke the ice at 12:31 of the second period when he ripped a slapper past the Jackets netminder.



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As the B's lost his wingers left and right over the last few years, Krejci had become under-appreciated. But Krejci had one of the best seasons of his career this season and is proving he still can rise to the occasion.

"He's the type of player that it doesn't matter if it's the Stanley Cup Final Game 7 or a regular-season Game No. 2, he plays the same way and I think that's his biggest asset," Tuukka Rask said. "He kind of slows the play down. He doesn't let people trying to hit him or intimidate him affect him. He's a very smart player so he always knows what's going on on the ice. He seems to always have that extra second to make a play. That's why it always looks so great."

* David Backes has given coach Bruce Cassidy a tough decision to make. The Hurricanes are a fast, young team and Cassidy's got rookie Karson Kuhlman waiting in the wings and ready to go. But Backes is proving that experience – at least his experience – is not as overrated as some might have you think.

In Game 5 with the score 0-0 and the series still hanging in the balance, Backes jumped a dippy-doodling Artemi Panarin to steal the puck high in the Bruins zone and start the play that led to Krejci's goal. And in Game 6, he drove the final stake in the heart of the Jackets with his goal that made it 3-0. He's finding ways to make an impact despite seeing less than 10 minutes a game. Cassidy may have to pick his spots with the aging Backes in the upcoming series, but he's earned a spot in the lineup for Game 1.

* The downside to Rask playing so well? It was that he had to play so well. With the exception of their Game 1 win, the B's allowed more than 30 shots in every contest and 40 or more twice. The B's are averaging 35.7 shots themselves in the playoffs, tops of the teams still in the hunt, but they're asking too much of their goalie right now.

Part of the problem is their inability to clear the puck, especially on the penalty kill. And some of the B's most reliable players, Zdeno Chara and Brad Marchand, have failed on numerous occasions to get the puck out of the defensive zone. That needs to be cleaned up.

* If you want any more evidence that hits can be a misleading stat, here's some: The Blue Jackets outthit the Bruins 43-19 in Game 6.

* Speaking of Marchand, it was disappointing to see him pull the Marshawn Lynch act after Game 6. Maybe he was upset that not enough weight was given to the shots that the Blue Jackets were taking at Jake DeBrusk and too much was given to his rabbit punch to the back of Scott Harrington's head in that Game 3 sequence. Maybe he doesn't believe he had gotten enough credit in the national media for keeping his nose clean this year. And maybe he has valid points on both those fronts. But it wasn't a good look.

Often the best antidote to the image of the on-ice Marchand was the off-ice Marchand. Until just recently, he's been thoughtful, insightful and, yes, very likable in his interactions with the press, even in some tough situations of his own making. Perhaps he's decided that showing the engaging side of his personality is not worth the effort. And that would be a shame, but also his prerogative.

But any point he thought he was making with the one-word answers fell well short of the mark.

* Here's hoping at least one or two of the Blue Jackets' big free agents rewards GM Jarmo Kekalainen by re-signing in Columbus. His gutsy decision to go for it at the trade deadline didn't pay off for him with a Stanley Cup, but this Buckeye city was on fire for hockey while the run lasted.

Boston Herald LOADED: 05.08.2019

1105899 Boston Bruins

Don Sweeney says Brad Marchand, media should play nice

By RICH THOMPSON | richard.thompson@bostonherald.com | Boston Herald

May 7, 2019 at 5:00 PM

Boston Bruins General Manager Don Sweeney's four-year tenure as the overseer of hockey operations has reached a new level of expectations.

The Bruins advanced to the Stanley Cup Eastern Conference final for the first time since 2013 with Monday's night 3-0 victory over the Columbus Blue Jackets at Nationwide Arena.

The will host the resurgent Carolina Hurricanes, who have ousted the Capitals and Islanders to get to this point, in Game 1 Thursday night.

With the players and coaches enjoying a reprieve from the grind, Sweeney held a briefing on Tuesday afternoon at Warrior Ice Arena in Brighton.

"Obviously full credit to our group and now we have the opportunity to move forward," said Sweeney. "They beat a really tough team that presented different challenges in the first round and then we adapted.

"Fortunately, we are moving forward and I'm proud of our group. We are looking for the finish line and we have a tough opponent in Carolina.

"This team forechecks really hard and their D is really active. Since February they have found ways to score some goals and their goaltending is excellent. It's a tough challenge, but it's the next step."

One area of incidental concern to Sweeney is All-Star winger Brad Marchand's recent demeanor in postgame press conferences. The normally talkative and opinionated Marchand gave obstinate, single-word answers to media inquiries despite his great success the past two games. Sweeney conceded that Marchand has been acting out of character, but the situation is a two-way street.

"It's something we will address," said Sweeney. "Obviously we talk to all of our players when we have situations that arise that become a little more public than we would like them, and we will address them accordingly.

"Brad has obligations to the media to be respectful and we'll address them but so does the media. I would ask for the same from both sides."

Sweeney declined to take a bow for the trade deadline acquisitions that have contributed in the playoffs. Sweeney took a risk when he traded Ryan Donato to Minnesota for Weymouth native Charlie Coyle and for dealing future draft picks to the New Jersey Devils for Marcus Johansson.

Coyle has played in 13 playoff games in the middle of the third line, averaging 15:45 of ice time with five goals and three assists on 24 shots. Johansson has appeared in 11 playoff games, averaging 13:19 with two goals and three assists on 20 shots. Johansson scored the Bruins' second goal in Game 6 against the Blue Jackets.

"They are just one of 20 guys at this point in time that are playing well and since day 1 our guys have been pretty welcoming," said Sweeney. "We did identify some areas we felt we needed and to their credit they stepped in and provided those things.

"It is really a testament to up and down our line up and guys that have gone in and out of the lineup."

Sweeney said injured defenseman Kevan Miller (left knee) could return to the lineup if the Bruins reach the Stanley Cup final. John Moore (upper body) could play against the Hurricanes.



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Bruins defenseman Charlie McAvoy suspended one game by NHL for hit to the head

By Nick Goss

May 07, 2019 6:15 PM

Game 1 of the Eastern Conference final between the Boston Bruins and Carolina Hurricanes will be played Thursday night at TD Garden, but B's defenseman Charlie McAvoy won't be eligible to participate.

McAvoy was suspended one game by the NHL's Department of Player Safety on Tuesday for his hit on Columbus Blue Jackets forward Josh Anderson in the second period of Monday night's Game 6 at Nationwide Arena.

The 21-year-old blueliner was given a two-minute minor penalty for an illegal check to the head on the play.

He had a hearing with the league's DoPS on Tuesday.

The league explains its decision in the video below:

This is the first suspension of McAvoy's career. He made his NHL debut in the 2017 Stanley Cup playoffs.

Comcast SportsNet.com LOADED: 05.08.2019

1105901 Boston Bruins

Credit Backes for making a big impact in Bruins series vs. Columbus

By Joe Haggerty

May 07, 2019 5:09 PM

COLUMBUS, Ohio – David Backes showed in this second-round series against the Columbus Blue Jackets that he can still be a big factor for the Bruins even at 34 years old. It was Backes who was injected into the lineup in Game 4 with the Bruins down 2-1 in the best-of-seven series to Columbus, and helped push the B's to three straight wins to close out the Blue Jackets while punching their ticket for the Eastern Conference Final.

That's the same Backes who scored the third goal in Boston's 3-0 win over the Blue Jackets to eliminate them in Game 6, and the same Backes who registered points in each of the three games after Bruce Cassidy called his number against Columbus.

That's the same Backes who didn't pout or complain when he was a healthy scratch to start things vs. Columbus, and simply waited his turn before becoming a big factor in a series against a big, strong Columbus hockey club. It was almost the perfect matchup for the 6-foot-3 power forward to play to the strengths still left in his game.

"David's role has changed a little bit in the last couple of years. We know that. Right or wrong, that is the coach's decision. We've discussed it with him and we've used other players that have gone in and helped us. [Karson] Kuhlman played in this series and did a good job," said Bruce

Cassidy. "I'm happy for David. It's an adjustment when you're used to [playing all the time]. He's been a captain in the National Hockey League.

"Now he's turned into a little more of a secondary player and he's been able to stick with it and keep working hard, and accept his role, whether he likes it or not, and contribute to the success of the team. It's even better when a guy like him scores the goal that's the nail in the coffin. I'm happy for him. The guys are very happy for him. Hopefully he continues to deliver. Our question is whether he can give you that same energy and physicality every second night for two months, and that's been the biggest reason he's been in and out."

Interestingly enough, Backes has seemed to click as the second line right wing with David Krejci and Jake DeBrusk after failing to seize that spot many times over the last couple of seasons. Circumstances may change in the next round against a Carolina Hurricanes club that has some youth and speed in spots, but the Bruins might not be readying for a conference final right now if they didn't still have No. 42 on their roster.

When does Bruins-Hurricanes start?

"Establishing my game, but not getting too anxious or excited so you end up in the penalty box [was my focus]," said Backes, who now has a goal and four points in seven playoff games for the Bruins while averaging less than 10 minutes of ice time. "I wanted to be a physical presence that could go to the net and create some space for my linemates, and distract goaltenders and occupy defensemen. If I stick to those principles, then the rest of the game works itself out. I felt like I was able to make an impact in the three games that I played in the series."

Certainly there is leadership with established, longtime veteran Bruins players like Zdeno Chara and Patrice Bergeron, and there is another tier of younger leaders on the Bruins like Torey Krug as well. But another face of true leadership is Backes saying and doing all the right things when it clearly pained him to not dress for playoff games.

That doesn't even count his vocal leadership style on the bench that demands accountability, and makes things a little less quiet around the team during these high stress games.

It's almost as if the hockey gods are now rewarding Backes for being the consummate team guy, and now the 34-year-old gets to show he can still play the game at a high level, and make an impact for the B's, when it matters most: in the Stanley Cup playoffs.

Comcast SportsNet.com LOADED: 05.08.2019

1105902 Boston Bruins

A Carolina Hurricanes cheat sheet for Bruins fans

By DJ Bean

May 07, 2019 3:42 PM

As it became clear that few, if any, titans of the of the NHL's regular season would advance past the first round, a vision appeared. It was of Boston in the springtime getting ready to hate opposing hockey teams and their fans, except it would deviate from the list of usual suspects.

Columbus. Carolina. Amazing.

Unless you watch as much hockey as your cable package allows, you likely didn't see a ton of the Hurricanes in the regular season outside of their elaborate postgame celebrations. With the Celtics in the playoffs as well, you might not have been able to catch the Canes on Bruins off-nights, either. So here's a cheat sheet to catch you up to speed.



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Haggerty: Rask turning playoffs into personal statement

THE QUICK NUMBERS

Carolina finished fourth in the Metropolitan Division to earn the first Wild Card and played through the Metropolitan bracket.

Regular season goals/game: 2.96 (16th)

Regular season goals against/game: 2.70 (7th)

Regular season PP: 17.8 (20th)

Regular season PK: 81.6 (8th)

Postseason goals/game: 3.09 (2nd; Bruins 3rd at 3.08)

Postseason goals against/game: 2.27 (2nd; Bruins 1st at 2.15)

The Hurricanes gutted out a seven-game series against the defending Cup champion Capitals and swept the Islanders despite losing starting goalie Petr Mrazek in Game 2. Mrazek is day-to-day, while Curtis McElhinney has allowed four goals over his two-plus games.

ROOKIE COACH, YOUNG TEAM

Rod Brind'Amour, who won the Cup as Hurricanes captain in 2006 and is handsome, is in his first year as Hurricanes coach. He has them in the postseason for the first time since the Hurricanes bounced the Bruins in the second round in 2009.

This has been called a "fun" team because of the amazing celebrations that have infuriated old people. It's also because there's a ton of youth on this team. Thirty-goal scorer Sebastian Aho, who centers Carolina's top line, is just 21. Teuvo Teravainen, who leads the team with six postseason goals, is 24.

Two of the team's top defenders, Jaccob Slavin and Dougie Hamilton (!) are 25. Andrei Svechnikov, chosen second overall last summer, is [extreme my own voice] only 19.

According to rosterresource.com, the Hurricanes had the fifth-youngest roster this season with an average age of 26.6. For comparison, the Bruins ranked 26th with an average age of 28.8. That, of course, is thrown off by 61-year-old legend Zdeno Chara.

IDENTITY: DEFENSE

The Bruins got through one good defensive team and will now see another. Hamilton's gifts were evident in his three seasons in Boston, and he was added last offseason to a group that already included Justin Faulk (an All-Star in 2014-15), Slavin (one of the better young defensemen in the league) and UNH product Brett Pesce. Slavin leads all Eastern Conference players this postseason with 11 assists. He and Erik Karlsson (12) are the only players to hit double digits in helpers.

Carolina's defensive pairings are more fluid than Boston's set-it-and-forget-it top four of Chara-McAvoy/Krug-Carlo. Slavin leads the top pair. He's usually with Hamilton, but Brind'Amour has moved Pesce up from the second pair of late. When that happens, Calvin de Haan moves up to the second pair to play with Justin Faulk, while Hamilton drops to the third pairing with Haydn Fleury. That means that at all times in five-on-five play, the Hurricanes can have one of Slavin, Hamilton and Faulk on the ice. That's (can't swear) freaking sick.

The adage of needing your best players to be your best players in the postseason has held true for Carolina thus far. Their best forwards have been very good. Right now their first line is Aho between Warren Foegele and Justin Williams. Jordan Staal centers Teravainen and a rejuvenated Nino Niederreiter. Svechnikov, who scored 20 goals this season, got knocked out by Alex Ovechkin in a fight in Game 3 of the first round, but returned from his concussion for Games 3 and 4 of the second round.

Carolina will get Micheal Ferland back this round, but Boston should still be deeper and better offensively. Carolina had three 50-point players this regular season in Aho, Teravainen and Williams, though Niederreiter had 30 points in 36 games after being acquired in a January trade for Victor

Rask. Boston had five players with 50 points, including four with 70 and one with 100.

Yet Staal has been something of a revelation for the Hurricanes this postseason. Staal, who is in Year 6 of a 10-year, \$60 million contract and has not reached 50 points in any of his six seasons in Carolina, is tied for the team lead among forwards in points this postseason.

Aho, Teravainen and Foegele all have nine points in 11 games. Williams has three goals and three assists. Niederreiter (four points in 11 games) has been kind of quiet.

THEY ARE A TEAM OF DESTINY

Until now.

Comcast SportsNet.com LOADED: 05.08.2019

1105903 Boston Bruins

Miller (lower body) has 'made some progress,' but not ready to start ECF

By Joe Haggerty

May 07, 2019 1:34 PM

The Bruins may not be getting much help as far as health goes on their back end with Charlie McAvoy potentially looking at a Game 1 suspension for his hit in the closeout game versus the Columbus Blue Jackets on Monday night.

Veteran D-man Kevin Miller (lower body) isn't ready to return, according to the Tuesday update from Don Sweeney, with McAvoy likely to be headed for at least a one-game suspension for his head shot to Josh Anderson in the third period of Monday night's 3-0 win in Game 6.

Miller has missed the entire 13 games of Boston's playoff run to date after injuring his knee in the final few games of the regular season, and really hasn't been seen on the ice much since then. Still, the Bruins remain hopeful that he can make a return at some point in their extended playoff run.

"[There is] nothing definitive. [He's] made some progress. We're hopeful," said Sweeney. "The further we play, the more opportunity he has."

John Moore (upper body) has been in and out of the lineup and could be available to play if absolutely needed, but it sounds like he's "dealing with stuff that makes it hard." In other words, a nagging injury that's been negatively impacting Moore's performance with zero points and a minus-4 in the four postseason games that he has appeared in for the Black and Gold.

Based on all that, the expectation would be that extra D-man Steve Kampfer would probably draw into the B's lineup for Game 1 against the Carolina Hurricanes should McAvoy get suspended for his illegal check to Anderson's head. Kampfer played one game in the first round vs. the Maple Leafs, registering 11:06 of ice time, but has otherwise been relegated to the press box for the entirety of Boston's postseason after dressing for 35 games during the regular season.

McAvoy is scheduled to have a phone hearing with the NHL Department of Player Safety on Tuesday and should learn his fate pretty quickly after that.

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1105904 Boston Bruins

This great Bruce Cassidy quote perfectly explains Bruins' road mentality

By Nick Goss

May 07, 2019 11:14 AM

The Boston Bruins are 4-2 on the road in the 2019 Stanley Cup playoffs after a 3-0 victory against the Columbus Blue Jackets in Game 6 of their second-round series.

The win sends the Bruins to the Eastern Conference final, where they will take on the Carolina Hurricanes for the opportunity to play for the Stanley Cup.

The Bruins were a decent road team in the regular season with a 20-15-6 record, but in the playoffs, Boston has improved its performance away from TD Garden. The B's have won three of their last four postseason road games, and overall they have a plus-8 goal differential on opposing ice.

B's head coach Bruce Cassidy was asked after Monday night's win about the importance of clinching the series before Game 7, and the bench boss explained the team's mentality, particularly on the road. Most teams just try to withstand the energy of the home team and its crowd early in road games, but the Bruins have taken the opposite approach, and it's certainly paid huge dividends so far.

"We needed to win the first 10 minutes," Cassidy told reporters. "I hear people saying they come into another team's building and 'We've got to weather the storm.' Well, we want to create the storm. We're not interested in weathering any storm. We want to go out and let them know we're here to play, be aggressive and assertive. I thought we did a pretty good job of that."

Putting Tuukka Rask's series-clinching shutout in historical context

That is the perfect mentality for any team going on the road in the Stanley Cup playoffs. Setting the tone (either with physicality and/or the pace of play), scoring the first goal and taking the crowd out of the game is essential to winning away from home in the postseason, and the Bruins have done a tremendous job of that through two rounds.

The Bruins, who own home ice advantage for the rest of the playoffs, will have a great chance to win the Stanley Cup if they stay true to this mindset on the road.

Comcast SportsNet.com LOADED: 05.08.2019

1105905 Boston Bruins

Shutout is more proof that Tuukka Rask is doing something special

By Joe Haggerty

May 07, 2019 11:17 AM

COLUMBUS, Ohio – It's not overstating things to say that Tuukka Rask is turning the 2019 Stanley Cup Playoffs into his own personal statement.

He's certainly not doing it with his words and has never really been a guy that needs to say "I told you so," or finds it necessary to clap back at past criticisms. It was fair game to criticize his play in big games for the Bruins and openly wonder whether the Finnish netminder would be able to carry the Bruins to the Stanley Cup as his former partner Tim Thomas memorably did back in 2011.

But his play in the first two rounds of these playoffs has spoken volumes for the B's goaltender, and Game 6 was another resounding on-ice statement with a 39-save shutout effort in a 3-0 win that closed out the Columbus Blue Jackets at Nationwide Arena. Rask stood on his head, became a Black and Gold brick wall and was any other goaltending cliché for awesome while holding down a desperate Blue Jackets team that threw plenty of vulcanized rubber at the Boston net.

Chara, Pastrnak celebrate Game 6 with epic NSFW video

So is he happy people are talking about him terms of being a big game goalie based on these current playoffs?

"It's better than sucking, I guess," said Rask, with a smirk. "You play enough in this league and you gain that experience in the regular season and the playoffs. You just tend to learn that it's not all about you. You don't have to do anything spectacular, and it's a team sport. We play for each other. That's helped me a lot. You just keep trying to carry it on."

"It's a step toward the main goal. You try to battle hard every series, and you try to be the best that you can be as a team. Sometimes it's enough and sometimes it isn't. So far it has been and we're trying to carry it on."

In fact, Bruins fans shouldn't be blamed if they're starting to get a raging case of déjà vu with Thomas in 2011 while watching what Rask is doing in this postseason. This is quite simply the best that Rask has ever played when it mattered most, with a 2.02 goals against average and a .938 save percentage in the postseason, and a blistering .948 save percentage in a second-round series when he outplayed the outstanding Sergei Bobrovsky.

McAvoy faces hearing for Anderson hit

Thomas had a similar .937 save percentage after the first two rounds of the playoffs with the Bruins during their 2011 Stanley Cup run, but still had an epic Stanley Cup Final performance vs. the Vancouver Canucks ahead of him.

Just like Thomas all those eight years ago, those are Conn Smythe kind of numbers for Rask right now with a couple of rounds to go.

"You need your goaltender to deliver, and I think it's stating the obvious that he did," said Bruce Cassidy, of Rask's sixth career playoff shutout on Monday night. "He looks really composed. They'd been bumping him and hitting him hard, and tonight they got called for it. I think there was some gamesmanship [John Tortorella's "dent" comments] that most teams go through to try to get a goalie off his game. But he kept his composure. He was able to play through that and did a real nice job for us."

"He was definitely our most consistent player throughout the whole series. We had some guys that gave us really good performances within the series, but Rask was there every night. He deserves whatever accolades come to him. I'm proud of him."

Marchand not in a talking mood after Game 6

Certainly Rask is going to need to finish out strong and take the Bruins all the way to the Stanley Cup to completely answer the questions and permanently vanquish the critics, this humble hockey writer included. But he's well on his way while admitting that his maturity and experience are difference-makers when it comes to approaching big playoff games, or even dealing with an annoyance like Columbus head coach John Tortorella claiming that Rask was "dented" after giving up a couple of late goals in Game 5.

Instead of being dented, it looks like Rask is having his signature Stanley Cup playoff run where talent, age and experience all morph into



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something special, and his performance finally starts consistently living up to the talent that's been there all along.

There are still a couple of rounds to go for Rask with the Carolina Hurricanes next starting later this week in the Eastern Conference Final, and perhaps an even bigger challenge against whichever team may await them in the Stanley Cup Final if they're lucky enough to get there again.

But these are glorious days for the Bruins, where Rask has been their best player through the first two grueling rounds of the playoffs, and his biggest moments have been in the biggest games — whether it was Game 7 vs. Toronto or Monday night's Game 6 banishment of the gritty Blue Jackets to their offseason plans.

Bruins to face Hamilton, Canes in ECF

Some will use this postseason to chirp Rask for not being this goalie in the past (cough, cough Felger), but that's monumentally missing the point that Boston's goalie is at a transcendent stage of his career where past experience, a strong situation with a very good backup and a young, improving defense are all coming together at once for him.

If Rask continues to play at his current clip with the Bruins still performing strongly in front of him, then the blue sky above is the limit in a wide open Stanley Cup playoff field. But at the very least, he has momentarily shut up those critics who always dinged Rask for not being a big game goaltender when the stakes were at their highest.

Rask is a big game goaltender now, and only needs another month's worth of big games to put Stanley Cup-worthy goalie next to his name as well.

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1105906 Boston Bruins

Bruins dogged by self-inflicted issues heading into matchup with Carolina

By Joe McDonald

May 7, 2019

After dismissing the Columbus Blue Jackets in the second round of the playoffs and advancing to the Eastern Conference finals, the Bruins should be solely focused on their matchup with the Carolina Hurricanes. Instead, the team spent its off day Tuesday dealing with some unexpected — and largely self-inflicted — issues.

Defenseman Charlie McAvoy was suspended one game by the NHL for his illegal check to the head of the Blue Jackets' Josh Anderson during the series-clinching victory in Game 6 on Monday.

After Game 6, McAvoy described his hit as a "hockey play" with no intent to injure. McAvoy was assessed a two-minute minor penalty, and Anderson was able to finish the game. The two players shook hands and smiled at one another after the game.

McAvoy has been one of Boston's most productive and consistent players during the playoffs, so losing him for the opening game is a legitimate blow to the Bruins as they start the next series. Coach Bruce Cassidy does have options, however, with Steven Kampfer and John Moore available to play. Kampfer has been a healthy scratch for the majority of the postseason. Moore has been dealing with an injury, but general manager Don Sweeney said the veteran defenseman is available if needed.

"We've always had the next-man-up mentality, and it's a testament to the character and leadership of our group," Sweeney said.

That wasn't the only problem the organization had to deal with. Forward Brad Marchand's behavior with reporters grabbed attention on social media. The feud began when Marchand skated away during a live, on-camera interview with Sportsnet's Kyle Bukauskas before Game 2 against Columbus after Bukauskas referenced a play from Game 1, where Marchand broke an opponent's stick with his skate. Marchand was then curt and monosyllabic in his postgame interview with Bukauskas after Game 6, and he kept the routine up in the postgame locker room, where he answered each question from a group of beat reporters with a series of clipped answers of mostly one or two words. The situation took on a life of its own, and the Bruins felt compelled to deal with that, as well.

"It's something we'll address. We always do," Sweeney said. "We talk to all of our players when we have situations that arise and become a little more public than we would like them. We'll address it accordingly. Brad has obligations to you and the media in a respectful manner and be a professional, and we'll address it. And to be honest with you, so does the media, you know in the same light. I would ask for the same on both sides."

There was, at least, a little good news to come out of the off day. Blueliner Kevan Miller, who has missed the entire postseason because of a lower-body injury, is progressing, according to Sweeney, and it's possible he could play sometime in this round.

Sweeney, a former defenseman, believes the entire defensive corps has done its job this postseason. McAvoy and Brandon Carlo have elevated their respective games, while rookie Connor Clifton has fit in well with partner Matt Grzelcyk.

"I don't think there's any one player," Sweeney said. "Certain players play in different situations, and we've had players step forward and play big minutes for us. Charlie and Brandon certainly have assumed, with Kevan out, some situational minutes. Connor has done a nice job, and Grizzly has done a nice job playing with a guy with limited experience."

Then there are stalwarts Zdeno Chara and Torey Krug, who have delivered as usual.

"Zee does what he does on most nights, at the top of his game from a leadership standpoint," Sweeney said. "Our power play is No. 1 in the playoffs right now, and (Krug) is a big part of that."

Game 1 of the Eastern Conference finals will start at 8 p.m. Thursday at TD Garden.

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1105907 Boston Bruins

Sergei Samsonov, Dougie Hamilton and the bunch of jerks: 13 things for Bruins fans to know about Hurricanes

By Fluto Shinzawa

May 7, 2019

Everybody knows the bunch of jerks. Whether it was through Duck, Duck, Goose, Evander Holyfield one-punching Jordan Martinook or Trevor van Riemsdyk executing an on-ice slam dunk, the Hurricanes were dubbed as jerks by Don Cherry, who had no time for Carolina's celebratory Storm Surge.



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The Hurricanes, however, are no novelty act. This group — whom the Bruins will now face in the Eastern Conference Final — is the new NHL come alive: a fast, creative and relentless team. It is a small-market club assembled with the guidance of analytics, which has uncovered value that rivals have overlooked.

Here are some of the notable facts about the jerks:

1. Dougie Hamilton is an excellent fit. The ex-Bruin is a complementary defenseman for the Hurricanes. Offensively, he is a second-wave blue liner after Justin Faulk. Defensively, he cedes time to Faulk and Brett Pesce. Hamilton's game is designed for Carolina's puck-possession approach — quick to retrieve pucks, eager to play in the other end.

The Bruins were always big on Hamilton until he made it clear he was not interested in re-signing upon the expiration of his entry-level contract. General manager Don Sweeney initiated his on-the-fly rebuild by trading Hamilton to Calgary on the same day he wheeled Milan Lucic to Los Angeles. Time will tell whether the Bruins received proper return. Zach Senyshyn, Jakob Forsbacka Karlsson and Jeremy Lauzon have yet to become full-time varsity players.

2. This is only Rod Brind'Amour's first season as head coach. He has already gained a reputation around the league for being a good, fair coach who believes in his players and maximizes their performance. One Bruin cited Brind'Amour as the coach he'd like to play for in The Athletic's leaguewide player poll.

3. Even before private investment kingpin Tom Dundon became the majority owner in 2018, the Hurricanes were big on numbers. In 2014, Carolina hired Eric Tulsky, who earned his undergraduate degree from Harvard (chemistry and physics) and his Ph.D. from Berkeley (chemistry). With input from Tulsky, the franchise has incorporated modern strategies: rapid exits, controlled entries, high shot share. On the personnel side, they were quick to lock up Pesce and Jaccob Slavin to long-term, team-friendly second contracts. They found value in net in Petr Mrazek and Curtis McElhinney. Tulsky has since been promoted to vice president of hockey management and strategy.

4. Sebastian Aho is already a superstar. The clever left-shot forward notched a career-high 83 points. The 2015 second-rounder trails only Connor McDavid, Jack Eichel, Mitch Marner and Mikko Rantanen in career scoring among his draft class. As such, the Finn is due for a whopper of a raise when his entry-level contract expires after this season.

5. Teuvo Teravainen, Aho's fellow Finn, also hit a career high in scoring (76 points). In 2016, Carolina took advantage of Chicago's perpetual cap tightness by insisting on Teravainen as the sweetener for taking on Bryan Bickell's contract. Teravainen is smart, quick, fast and skilled. This is how Carolina likes its players.

6. The Bruins were not the only club to receive pre-deadline assistance from the Wild. While the Bruins acquired Charlie Coyle, the Hurricanes landed Nino Niederreiter from Minnesota for Victor Rask. Niederreiter notched 30 points in 36 games for his new club. He is averaging 19:20 of ice time per game in the postseason, fourth-most among team forwards.

7. Mrazek was excellent in the first round against Washington. He was hurt in Game 2 against the Islanders, but has resumed practicing and should be available in the Eastern Conference Final. The Bruins have also seen McElhinney in the postseason. The ex-Maple Leaf relieved Frederik Andersen in Game 2 last year. Mrazek, who is from Czech Republic, is good friends with David Pastrnak.

8. It is unknown whether Micheal Ferland will be available against the Bruins. On March 5, the Carolina strongman walloped Marcus Johansson hard enough to bruise his lung. Ferland and Jordan Staal are two of the heavier forwards among Carolina's skill-focused lineup.

9. Ex-Bruin Sergei Samsonov is part of Carolina's player development staff. Samsonov is in charge of their forwards. That's probably not a coincidence. As a player, Samsonov was ahead of his time in terms of pace and creativity as a smaller forward.

10. Former Harvard defenseman Adam Fox, acquired in the Hamilton deal, is now an ex-Hurricane. The Rangers landed Fox's rights for second- and third-round picks and signed the defenseman to an entry-level contract. The right-shot Fox would have been behind Faulk, Pesce and Hamilton on the depth chart.

11. This was the first season the Hurricanes were without longtime radio voice Chuck Kaiton, whose contract was not renewed after last year. The Hurricanes simulcast their TV broadcast, which features John Forslund and Tripp Tracy. Kaiton called games when the team called Hartford home.

12. Former Boston College forward Patrick Brown has been good in a support role during the playoffs. He spent all year with Charlotte, Carolina's AHL affiliate. Brown is the son of ex-NHL player Doug Brown and nephew of Rangers assistant Greg Brown.

13. In 2016, Carolina selected offensive defenseman Jake Bean with the No. 13 pick. One pick later, the Bruins drafted Charlie McAvoy. Bean has yet to secure NHL traction. McAvoy is already one of the best two-way defensemen in the league.

The Athletic LOADED: 05.08.2019

1106005 Websites

The Athletic / Resetting the market: What's next for Seattle's GM search?

By Craig Custance May 7, 2019

It's been a rough stretch for the Seattle GM search. With the caveat, of course, that a hire right now would still put them well ahead of schedule. Vegas hired George McPhee less than one year before the 2017 expansion draft. Seattle has plenty of time.

But one by one, the options are being struck off the list. First, there was the longshot: Steve Yzerman wasn't going to Seattle but that didn't stop Seattle fans from hoping. Instead, Yzerman went home to Detroit.

Then, Vegas made sure Kelly McCrimmon, one of the architects behind the Golden Knights' impressive rocket path from expansion team to Western Conference power, remained in Vegas by promoting him to general manager.

This week, the Edmonton Oilers hired the executive who was the closest to a George McPhee-like option in luring Ken Holland away from Detroit. So it's clear, the Seattle franchise is going to have to forge its own path in choosing a GM. That's not necessarily a bad thing.

Multiple sources told The Athletic that Seattle is in no rush to make this hire. There isn't an urgency to get a GM in place before this draft, one in which Seattle has no picks. It could wait all next season and still have plenty of time to put a staff in place for the 2021-22 season, Seattle's inaugural season.

But there's certainly an advantage to seize by starting early, something Seattle's Dave Tippett conceded in a conversation with The Athletic's Craig Morgan.

"There is, if the right guy is available," Tippett said.

That's the challenge facing Seattle right now: Just how many candidates can you let slip away while determining the right guy?

On Monday night, the Columbus Blue Jackets were eliminated from the playoffs and with it comes an opportunity for Seattle to take a hard look at Columbus assistant GM Bill Zito. It wouldn't be surprising at all if he has moved up Seattle's list, and for good reason. He's been knocking on the door of a GM job for the past couple years, including a lengthy



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interview with Bob Nicholson for the Oilers position that ultimately went to Holland.

A big part of the success of Seattle's franchise will hinge on the ability of the management group to identify NHL talent. Vegas hit the ground running because McPhee and McCrimmon were able to unearth players who could thrive with more opportunity or a new environment. According to multiple sources close to Zito, this is one of the areas in which he thrives.

"For expansion – Seattle, Vegas, it's all about pro scouting," said one NHL source. "(Zito) oversees pro scouting there. He's smart, he's intelligent."

Zito proponents point to the trades Columbus made in recent years as an example of his ability to evaluate talent. There's a debate to be had over the major gamble GM Jarmo Kekalainen and Zito made at the deadline in acquiring Matt Duchene and Ryan Dzingel, but their instincts were right in that Duchene would be a difference-maker in the playoffs – which wasn't a universally held opinion of the talented center. Duchene finished with 10 points in 10 playoff games. The Blue Jackets upset the Lightning to move out of the first round for the first time in franchise history and further cemented the city as one of the quietly great hockey markets in the league. As John Tortorella succinctly pointed out following his team's elimination, nobody is handing out medals for a second-round loss, but there wasn't a hint of regret from Kekalainen on those deals when the season ended on Monday.

"I'd do it again in a second," Kekalainen said.

But perhaps more importantly it was the assessment that led to the Artemi Panarin and Seth Jones blockbuster, a pair of trades Kekalainen would do again even faster, that helps highlight Zito's skills as an evaluator.

"Look at the track record of the Columbus trades the last four or five years," said an NHL source. "He's at the core of innovation there and outside the box thinking."

And watching the Bruins eliminate the Blue Jackets was a reminder that those talent evaluation skills for Zito go beyond his time as an assistant GM in Columbus. It was the play of Tuukka Rask that ultimately did in Columbus and he's a goalie that Zito was a longtime proponent and defender of before taking the job in Columbus. Zito was his agent, he did the deal with Boston that pays Rask \$7 million per season through 2020-21. For what it's worth, Zito also represented the Bruins goalie before Rask, as Tim Thomas' longtime agent. Again, that ability to identify talent served him well when he built his stable of clients at Acme World Sports.

"He's one of the smartest, most intelligent guys I've ever met in this business," said Acme's Markus Lehto, who worked with Zito to build that agency. "He knows business as a whole real well as a player agent for over 20 years. Can he be a great captain of a ship? Yes, he can. I'm sure that years in Columbus have given him experience from that perspective. I have every reason to believe he's going to make an excellent GM."

It's entirely possible that Seattle still prefers finding someone with experience as an NHL GM. Mike Gillis certainly has earned another opportunity to run a team. Rox Hextall is certainly more than qualified. John Ferguson deserves credit for his contributions in helping construct a Bruins roster that is now in the Eastern Conference final. Same goes with former Hurricanes GM Ron Francis.

But as the manager market shifts, the likelihood that Seattle dips into the most-qualified assistant GM pool appears to be increasing. Former Maple Leafs assistant GM Mark Hunter is also in the mix after getting a long look from the Oilers. He was in Sweden scouting the Under-18 tournament and politely declined to comment on his future, although scouting draft-eligible players certainly suggests he's preparing for a possible return to the NHL.

People tend to lump a duo of Mike Gillis and Laurence Gilman together, but the Maple Leafs assistant GM has earned consideration for the position on his own merit, with or without Gillis. Toronto GM Kyle Dubas leans on Gilman's wide range of experiences as a part of the decision-making process in Toronto.

"There hasn't been any situation we've been in where he hasn't had experience, knowledge and some type of decisive action that he thinks

we should take," Dubas told The Athletic. "It's been a massive benefit to me in terms of his calmness and his intelligence and the way he's trying to constantly expand his own understand of what's happening and always pushing himself."

Seattle is also doing its due diligence in watching how the situation plays out in New York with the change in upper management there. If a new president comes in and wants to bring a new staff with them, perhaps that makes current Rangers GM Jeff Gorton an option, although he's set up the Rangers nicely in a rebuild that appears to be turning the corner.

The Rangers also have an assistant GM in Chris Drury whose responsibilities have grown along with his experience. Drury is currently the Team USA GM for the World Championships and built as strong a roster as the Americans have fielded in that tournament.

"He's a quick learner. He's a really sharp guy," Gorton said of Drury. "He's a guy that's won before, everywhere he's been. He has that way of looking at things, no bullshit. A no-nonsense kind of guy and he approaches every day wanting to get better."

As always, in hockey, these things are all connected. If John Davidson gets the president job in New York, the bet is that he's not going to go and shake things up in the Rangers' front office.

It also would create a vacancy in Columbus and, if ownership wants to keep the band together, the option exists of pulling a Vegas – promoting Kekalainen, making Zito the GM and removing him from the candidate list. It may be a bit early for that speculation but it's a reminder that there are a lot of moving parts when it comes to finding the right person for the job. And with Seattle, patience is a perfectly fine strategy, until it isn't.

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The Athletic / LeBrun: It's time to stop being surprised — there are no favorites. Welcome to the NHL's Parity Party

By Pierre LeBrun May 7, 2019

DENVER — The overtime hero smiled like someone who knew the jig was up.

I asked Gabriel Landeskog on Monday night if he truly still believed his Colorado Avalanche were actually still underdogs at this point.

Come on, I said. In the Year of the Upset, is there such a thing anymore?

"I guess you're right," the Avs captain said while grinned after his overtime marker gave his team a thrilling 4-3 win in Game 6. "As much as we like to embrace that underdog role, this year's playoffs is that crazy year where Carolina, Dallas, and I know Columbus lost tonight, but I think it just goes to show how good the league is and how even the teams right on the edge of the playoffs are really good. So, yeah."

It's time to stop being surprised. There are no favorites. There are no rules. Sit back and enjoy the Parity Parade.

The No. 7-seeded Hurricanes are in the Eastern Conference final. The No. 8-seeded Blue Jackets are out after giving Boston a tough go, but no one will ever take away their four-game sweep of the 62-win Tampa Bay Lightning.

The No. 7-seeded Stars have a Game 7 in St. Louis Tuesday night.

The No. 8-seeded Avalanche, well, they get to wrap up the entire second round on Wednesday night with a chance to punch their ticket to the Western Conference finals with a win at SAP Center.

"In this room, we don't really feel like a No. 8 seed," Avs forward J.T. Compher, author of two big goals on Monday night, said. "We thought we were a good team that struggled for a month and a half in the season, it was just a bad stretch for us. Once we got back to playing the way we



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know how to play the last month of the season and into the playoffs, we don't feel like an eighth seed. We feel like we can play with anyone in the playoffs."

No one's going to argue that now. The Avs beat the top-seeded Calgary Flames in five games and now have gone toe to toe with a deep and experienced Sharks team to set up a winner-take-all showdown.

The thing about saying that you don't think you're really a No. 8 seed is you have to truly believe it. The 2009-10 Montreal Canadiens said all the right things about shocking the Washington Capitals that year, but give them a little truth serum nine years later and they'll admit they have no idea how they pulled that off. That was truly shocking. The '97 Oilers beating Dallas, that was a freakin' upset.

This, well this is different. These lower seeds of today actually believe what's happening. They view themselves as equals.

"We've had that belief all year that we can play with anyone and we're doing our best to prove it," Compher said.

Please don't call it an upset if Colorado beats the Sharks on Wednesday.

That word needs to be eradicated from our NHL lexicon.

It's been anyone's Stanley Cup for the taking since Day 1 of these zany playoffs.

"It's exactly what the league wanted, right?," veteran Avs blueliner Erik Johnson said. "Maybe they're not too pleased because there's not a ton of big markets right now. But it's definitely good for the sport. Carolina had trouble with attendance for a while and now I'm sure there's a buzz in the town about them. So that's great. Columbus had never won a series, so that's great for them. Just building interest throughout the league is good. For us, we hadn't won a playoff series since 2008 or 2009, I think it's good. Anyone can win it whether you're the first seed or the eighth seed. Who knows? I mean, who had Columbus sweeping Tampa? I don't know, not many. But anything can happen."

Commissioner Gary Bettman years ago talked about the day that the salary cap would narrow the talent gap amongst teams and we'd get this kind of parity. Let's not kid ourselves, getting the cap was about controlling costs on player salaries. But a nifty by-product of that system installed in 2005 was that the discrepancy between the league-wide talent bases was shrunk like a crushed beer can.

What we see now is almost total parity.

"Under our system, all of our teams have the ability to compete, which makes NHL hockey exciting, entertaining and unpredictable," Bettman said via email over the weekend. "Our competitive balance is extraordinary. whether it's the regular season or playoffs, every game matters.

"At the end of the day, a fan wants to know that his or her team has a chance — our fans know that not only is that the case in early October, but as we have seen it holds true through the regular season and into the playoffs."

Many of the old rules are going out the window. Like the idea that a young team such as Colorado — the current group has never been this far before — would be nervous on home ice with their season on the line.

Are you kidding? I couldn't count how many players at the morning skate were giggling and goofing around. The Avs were as relaxed as can be.

Season on the line? Pffft.

"We've had this feeling before," Avs superstar Nathan MacKinnon, referring to his team's season-saving final month, said. "We were six points out with 10 or 11 games left. It felt like it feels now. We have to win or we're done. Every game was like that. We're comfortable. There's no panic. It's not like ... maybe the Lightning didn't have that all season and when they lost two (to start the playoffs) maybe they didn't know what to do. But we've lost more than two. We've been in this position a lot this season I feel like."

By the time these playoffs rolled around, the Avs were humming, already in do-or-die mode. That fear of being knocked out helped crystalize the kind of urgent hockey that brings the best out of you.

The Hurricanes, Blue Jackets, Stars and Avs, the four wild-card teams, the four clubs that had to win every night to end the regular season, they were ready to create havoc. But they also had the rosters to back it up.

"We felt like that from the beginning," MacKinnon said. "It's obviously encouraging seeing the underdogs upset the big dogs. That's what we're looking to do."

Now Nate, can we please dispatch the underdog talk? Come on now.

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1106007 Websites

The Athletic / Not everyone's on board for the women's hockey boycott

By Hailey Salvian and Katie Strang May 7, 2019

Last week's announcement that hundreds of professional women's hockey players would be sitting out the upcoming NWHL season was heralded as the beginning of a landmark movement for the advancement of the game and gender equity as a whole.

The statement, issued by some of the game's top figures in both the U.S. and Canada — Hilary Knight, Kendall Coyne-Schofield, Marie-Philip Poulin and Shannon Szabados — reverberated throughout the larger hockey community and captivated the attention of the public smack dab in the middle of the NHL playoffs. And while it initiated an important conversation about the direction of the women's game, there remains a sizeable contingent of players who did not sign on for the call to action.

The reported 200-plus players vowed not to play in any professional North American league preached solidarity and said they banded together to build a better long-term solution for the future. And those who opted not to take the #ForTheGame pledge and commit to boycott the 2019-20 season — a number that is believed to be at least in the dozens among current NWHL players — largely support that broader goal of achieving better pay, infrastructure, insurance and overall support.

So what stopped them from committing to join the boycott?

"We're giving up a lot for a big maybe," said one NWHL player, who asked to remain anonymous for fear of blowback.

The chief concern among those who have abstained from signing on is how quickly this movement developed and the lack of clarity provided on key questions. Several players canvassed said they had only a matter of days between being contacted by a representative appointed to speak to them and making a decision whether to be on board or not. And while the interim period and lines of communication were established as a way to open the dialogue and assuage concern about what the movement's leadership was promoting as a "gap year" for the good of the game, there was difficulty obtaining information about what exactly that gap year would look like, particularly for players who were not members of the U.S. or Canadian National teams.

How would those players pay for continued training and access to ice? What sort of assurances, if any, were made by the NHL about stepping in to establish a league for the 2020-2021 season?

One player said she tried asking the basics about what many are envisioning as the ultimate end goal — an NHL-backed WNHL — and was frustrated at the lack of any concrete details.

Where would teams be? What would payments look like? What sort of access would players have to equipment?

"This past week has been a whirlwind of vague statements and large goals but with little substance behind them," said the player, who also asked that her name be withheld. "After working through it, it has left me with a lot of questions that can't be answered."

To be clear, the player doesn't feel that the movement's leadership is being vague on purpose or furtive about what they know.



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"I don't think they have (the answers). That's what scares a lot of us. I know people strongly believe this is the right thing, and no one faults them for that. At all. They truly believe this is the path to take and I truly respect that, but there's a lot of questions that haven't been answered," she said.

Kaleigh Fratkin, a defenseman for the Boston Pride, said she submitted a list of some of these questions herself when approached about joining the movement. The night before the players released a coordinated statement, she received a text asking her if she was on board. She was told she had 90 minutes to make a decision. But none of her questions had been answered.

"People felt pressured to make a decision instead of taking a step back to say, 'I don't have the information that I need. I don't feel comfortable being part of that,'" Fratkin explained. "It was almost this double-edged sword of 'Hey, we're coming forward and we're working to stand up for women's hockey' and if you weren't on board with them it looked like you weren't in support of women's hockey."

That's not the case at all, Fratkin explained. For a long time there has been talk about the need and desire for one, unified league. And since the CWHL's abrupt decision to fold, the NWHL is the sole option available for players seeking a post-collegiate professional option.

Fratkin played in both the CWHL and NWHL – in fact, she was the first Canadian to play in the NWHL – and has relied upon her experience working for a huge company in corporate America – she works in marketing for Under Armour – to help navigate her decision-making throughout this process.

Those like her who have chosen not to sign on will readily admit that the league is not perfect and that there is plenty of progress to be made to enhance the everyday lives of players, but they remain skeptical that jumping ship is the right course of action.

"It's the only league that's left and we're burning down the barn," Fratkin said. "We're burning everything down for what reason? Is that the right solution? Is the solution to burn down the only thing that's left in women's hockey to stand our ground?"

The challenges for non-national team members, who would not have access to training, facilities, top-level competition in tournaments or any sort of stipend to help subsidize these things in a gap year is significantly different from those that do have access to such resources. And so it is those non-national team members, currently playing in the NWHL, who are feeling more split about their interests. In an informal accounting of those who have signed onto the pledge, it appears that the Buffalo Beauts and Boston Pride have a majority of players signed onto the movement, whereas there are more who have abstained among the Metropolitan Riveters, Connecticut Whale and Minnesota Whitecaps.

Increasing the frustration on the side of those who have abstained from participating is the progress forged with the NWHL as a result of recent contract talks. On a recent conference call with NWHL commissioner Dani Rylan and some of the league's investors, like Scott McCormack and Lee Heffernan, it was revealed that the league would be offering a 50 percent increase to the salary cap (from \$100,000 per team to \$150,000), and a 50-50 revenue split for players on any league-level sponsorships and media rights deals.

Additionally, the standard player's contract was drawn up for the first time by legal representatives for the NWHLPA, said the NWHLPA's executive director Anya Battagliano.

"We got to write the contract this year. In years past, it was never that way; it was never collaborative," Battagliano said. "Now the discussion is much different. ... It gives us a lot of power, to be in the driver's seat. Before, we haven't had that power."

Battagliano said that the contract has gone back and forth from the players' association to the league and is expected to be finalized soon with some significant coups on line items that were priorities to the players.

It's been a frustrating week for Battagliano, who has fielded a myriad of inquiries from players about the future of the league and the implications of the boycott. She said she has even had some players circle back after

signing on to join the movement who are now wondering if they made the correct decision.

Some are puzzled when trying to make sense of it from a business perspective. On the aforementioned conference call, the players were told that average attendance in the NWHL last season was 954 per game. So while players are steadfast in believing there is a quality product to be placed on the ice and a fan base that can be furthered by adequate resources and deliberate efforts to stoke interest, there is also the recognition that a league's health is determined by revenue.

Much of the talk around this movement centered around garnering NHL support by way of an NHL-backed league that would be ready to roll out in 15-18 months time (the NHL said they will not get involved as long as there is a viable league in existence). While many believe the NHL could be a lucrative partner with deep pockets and the type of exposure and platform that could grow the game, the league is still a bottom-line business. So what will convince the NHL to remain a steadfast partner if the revenue isn't there?

Additionally, some wonder what sort of leverage this boycott can actually exert. The U.S. Women's national team was effective in using a potential work stoppage before the World Championships in 2017 in order to gain equitable treatment, but the scenario was a markedly different one – the team withheld its service until USA Hockey came to the table ready to negotiate on some very tangible requests.

This boycott – a word the movement has been deliberate to avoid – has voiced the need for better pay and health insurance, but has an end goal that some dissenters feel is a bit murkier and hypothetical in nature.

Further complicating the issue is that there is a sense of fear among the players who have questions about the movement's aims, methods, or both.

One NWHL player said she felt that the way she was approached was professional and courteous but could see how, for other players, especially those just now coming out of college, could find the request intimidating.

"I absolutely would have felt nervous to say no," the player said. "Some of these girls are really imposing figures, mainly out of respect. How do you say no to someone with four Olympic medals?"

Another player said she was not strong-armed in any way, but still felt nervous about going against the grain and worried how such a choice would impact her livelihood and her standing among her peers.

"It's more of an unspoken pressure," she said. "If I'm one of those players that signs a contract or verbally goes against what they're saying, the hockey world is small. You're going to be hated forever."

In interviews with *The Athletic* last week, both Knight and Coyne-Schofield were eager to have all players join the cause, but were ultimately diplomatic about those who did not.

"I respect those players' decision. This isn't an easy decision. I understand everyone has to make a decision and everyone has the right to make their decision. So I respect that, but I think it's important to note that the over 200 players that are taking this stance and not playing is because we are committed to a better future and committed to sustaining a viable option to showcase the best teams in the world," Coyne-Schofield said.

Added Knight: "Honestly, it's one of those things where you have to respect other people's decisions. They are in a different point in their life and they make decisions based on their own life. It's disheartening when you don't have someone that's part of your group when you want to push forward, but at the end of the day, you have to respect that decision."

What has been disheartening for those who would like to give the NWHL another try in Year 5, along with how this movement has inevitably cleaved and re-segmented the market, is how it has been oversimplified in the mainstream media coverage. In reality, this is not so much a binary choice but rather a complicated issue with layers, nuance and complexity.

"It's not about sides," Battagliano said. "You've got to more think of it as different methods to the same success. Everyone wants the same thing."



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And yet the way this has played out has left at least one portion of the women's hockey contingent reeling, feeling as if they are being pitted against their brethren even if they don't necessarily disagree on the end goal.

"You feel almost ... embarrassed isn't the right word, but ashamed to not be a part of it because people (from the outside) want to see it as this positive or unified movement, but a lot of girls have questions," one player said. "And now I feel bad I haven't jumped in, even though I know it's for the right reasons."

"It's not that we don't want these dreams or goals. We want to make sure we make an educated decision and that this is the right thing to do to get to the same goal. Some of us don't see how this benefits all of us or future generations by simply going quiet. Right now, women's hockey is making positive noise and we're very afraid that, if you take it away for a year, there will be a serious regression."

The Athletic LOADED: 05.08.2019

1106008 Websites

The Athletic / The incredible series of random events behind Carey Price quite literally becoming Carey Price

By Arpon Basu

RALEIGH, N.C. — Carey Price was upset, and a little more than usual following a loss.

As soon as Andrei Svechnikov's shot flew past him in overtime, Price began the long skate across the ice to the visitor's dressing room, hunched over as he crossed the red line, alone with his thoughts. Phillip Danault came over and gave him a pat on the ass as Price left the ice and headed for the tunnel.

This was a big game. Had the Montreal Canadiens won it in overtime, they would have been one point behind the Carolina Hurricanes in the Eastern Conference playoff race. Instead, the Canadiens were three points back, and only two up on the Columbus Blue Jackets, the team that ultimately passed them to grab the last spot.

Price was livid, steaming at his locker as he got undressed and beckoning the media to get his postgame duties over with as soon as possible. His answers were short, curt even, and his anger was palpable.

He took three questions, gave a sarcastic answer to the final one and walked away. Price doesn't enjoy this postgame back and forth in the best of times. This was not the best of times.

But a few minutes later, Price emerged from the Zamboni tunnel and began climbing the stairs in the stands of PNC Arena in Raleigh, N.C., dressed all in black. He was still visibly upset, but his mood was lightening with each step as anticipation for this moment intensified.

It was a moment that would close the circle on a lifetime of random and circumstantial connections, illustrate how small the hockey world really is, and bring together two British Columbia families with no connection to one another aside from two elite athletes who rose to stardom in Montreal playing different sports.

And a name.

"Hey Carey, I'm Carey," the man said, extending his hand. "Nice to meet you."

"I've been waiting a few years for this," Price replied.

And in that moment, the anger was gone.

There are hundreds of thousands of hockey players in Canada. But the hockey world is still small, a universe where players cross paths for brief moments while working their way through junior hockey and into the

pros. They bounce from one minor league team to the other in hopes of one day reaching the NHL.

One of those players in a sea of thousands was a goaltender in the Western Hockey League in the 1970s. He was good enough to be taken by the Philadelphia Flyers with the 126th pick in the 1978 NHL Draft. His name was Jerry Price.

Over those same years, another goaltender was ripping up the Western League. He played for the New Westminster Bruins, not far from his hometown of Maple Ridge, B.C., and they won the Memorial Cup in 1977 and 1978.

He was taken by the Canadiens with the 174th overall pick in the 1977 draft. His name was Carey Walker.

Over their junior years, Jerry Price and Carey Walker were not friends. They were competitors who knew little about each other besides what they saw from nearly 200 feet away on the ice. But their paths would cross for a brief time, leaving an indelible mark.

Carey Walker attended his first training camp with the Canadiens in 1978 in what would be Ken Dryden's final NHL season. Dryden was backed up by Michel Larocque, so Walker's fate was basically sealed before he ever stepped on the ice for the first practice.

"You want to talk about a guy that was scared stiff?" Walker said. "I was sitting between Dryden and (Guy) Lafleur in the locker room. I didn't say a word. It was the kiss of death for me because when you're a goaltender and you want to crack a lineup, Dryden and Larocque are not the two you want to knock out."

That same fall, in 1978, Jerry Price attended his first NHL training camp with the Flyers, where he, too, ran into a Hall of Fame roadblock in goal, his idol Bernie Parent. It was also the camp where he crossed paths with goaltending coach Jacques Plante, the man his son would pass as the winningest goaltender in Canadiens history 31 years later.

At the end of that camp, Price was assigned by the Flyers to the Milwaukee Admirals of the International Hockey League.

Carey Walker was assigned to the same team by the Canadiens.

Price and Walker were two of seven goalies to play for the Admirals that season. They each played three games, none of them wins, and by Christmas they were both gone.

But over those few months in the fall of 1978, a friendship was forged between the two B.C. goalies who had competed for years but barely knew each other.

"We started the season and had an apartment together, but neither one of us was there very long," Jerry Price said. "But that's where we really got to know each other and kind of got to be friends."

Walker was cut by the Admirals because they didn't want players affiliated with the Canadiens anymore. He went to play for the Erie Blades of the Northeastern Hockey League, where he would spend five of the next six years.

Carey Walker guarding his net with the Erie Blades. (Courtesy of Carey Walker)

In his final season in Erie, 1983-84, Walker shared the net with Darrell May, currently the head western amateur scout for the Chicago Blackhawks. That season, May's first child was born in Erie, a boy he and his wife, Sharmaine, named Darrell Jr. (More on that later.)

"We played against each other, but never played with each other again," Price said of Walker. "It was just that brief time. But we remained friends. ... I remember one time we drove across Canada together. I picked him up in Erie, Pennsylvania, and I think I was in Hampton, Virginia. Anyway, I picked him up and we drove all the way back home."

Carey Walker's first name is no accident.

His parents are Mary and Larry Walker. They named their four sons Barry, Carey, Gary and Larry. No need to look for any deeper meaning there.



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The Walker family had season tickets to the New Westminster Bruins when Carey was the star goalie, sitting in the first row behind the home net. His youngest brother was often there. He was nine years younger than Carey, so watching him backstop the best team in the league year after year left an impression on the young Larry Walker Jr.

Yes, that Larry Walker.

"For two periods of every game, he was right in front of me with the New Westminster Bruins, so I got to watch him for many years," Larry Walker said. "So obviously a big influence on why I wanted to put pads on."

Several years later, Larry Walker was a good enough goalie to earn a tryout with the Regina Pats of the WHL two years in a row.

"Both years I was the third goaltender; unfortunately, they only keep two," he said. "One year I went back to Maple Ridge, the other year they wanted me to go to Swift Current and play there. ... I drove into Swift Current, looked around; not for me."

"That was the last time I played hockey. Then baseball fell in my lap, kind of."

Larry Walker played for the Coquitlam Reds the next year, in 1984, and later that same year signed his first professional baseball contract with the Montreal Expos. Who knows what would have happened if he had been sent to the New Westminster Bruins instead of the Swift Current Broncos? Maybe Larry Walker would have stuck as a goalie?

But it was baseball that stuck and within five years of signing with the Expos, Larry Walker had made it to Montreal.

"I just kind of figured it out after that," he said. "Weird how it happened, really."

When he made his big league debut with the Expos on Aug. 16, 1989 – hitting a single with three walks in four plate appearances – there was someone working in his hometown of Maple Ridge, someone who had his first son two years earlier, to the day.

Jerry Price.

"Larry was the talk of the whole community there," Price said.

When Walker was told that Jerry Price was working in Maple Ridge when he made his Expos debut, he summed up this whole story quite perfectly.

"Oh, is that right?" he said. "We sound like one big, weird family. We should all be living under the same roof."

In the summer of 1987, Jerry Price and his wife, Lynda, were expecting a son. When considering a name, Jerry's old teammate with the Milwaukee Admirals, the one he drove across the country with all those years earlier, for some reason came to mind.

"I always thought a lot of Carey and my wife and I were thinking about what we were going to name him, because we knew Carey was going to be a boy," Jerry said. "I just found it to be a good name, and Carey and I were friends, and Carey was a good goalie. I don't know, we just said, 'Yeah, that sounds good.' And away we went."

Now, let's be clear. Carey Walker might have been the inspiration for Carey Price being Carey Price, but he wasn't the only reason.

The name Carey, Jerry explained, is a derivative of the Welsh name Caradog, which is derived from Caratacus, a chieftain in the first century A.D. who led a British resistance against a Roman invasion for nearly 10 years before finally being betrayed, captured and exiled by the Romans. Jerry's family is of Welsh descent, and he liked the link the name had to his ancestry.

There have been several Canadiens seasons where Carey Price, under attack from all sides, could probably relate to Caratacus in a significant way.

Still, it was Jerry's relationship with Carey Walker that got the ball rolling on choosing that name, even though, nine years after they had crossed paths for a few months in Milwaukee, they had lost touch.

When his career with the Virginia Lancers ended in 1986, Carey Walker settled in Roanoke, Va., where he has run a tiling business for more than 30 years.

The head-spinning connections of this story continued in Virginia. The Lancers' leading scorer in Walker's final season was a certain John Tortorella, who had 96 points in 60 games as a 27-year-old who spent a lot of time living on Walker's couch.

Long before reaching the NHL as a coach, John Tortorella spent time living on Carey Walker's couch. (Christopher Hanewinkel / USA Today)

"He ended up coaching the Lancers the next year, that's when he started his coaching career," Walker said. "But he used to sleep on my couch when he was playing. I was called up to Peoria in the IHL, and he was living with my wife and kids while I was gone."

Walker was called up to the Peoria Rivermen in 1985-86 to replace Darrell May, his former goalie partner in Erie, who had been called up to the NHL to play for the St. Louis Blues. Walker lived in May's house while May was in St. Louis, thus strengthening the friendship with May's wife, Sharmaine. (Which is another of these random connections that will make sense soon enough.)

By the time Carey Price was born and named on Aug. 16, 1987, Walker was back and settled in Roanoke, many years and many miles separating the families.

Jerry and Lynda Price moved from Vancouver to Lynda's ancestral home of Anahim Lake, B.C., two years after Carey was born. They considered it important that their son be in touch with his indigenous roots, so that is where he grew up, about as far away from Roanoke, Va., as you can get without leaving the continent.

It is in Anahim Lake, on the creek called Corkscrew that flowed behind their house, where Carey Price first learned to play hockey with his father.

"When he and I were out playing on the creek, we had goalie pads and we'd play goalie games and stuff like that," Jerry said. "But I never pushed him to be a goalie at all. It was his choice entirely. He was a good player. He had a hard shot and he was a good skater. He probably still thinks what would have happened if he'd never played goalie, because he was always big and strong and could really shoot the puck for a kid that age."

"I remember taking him to hockey school once, and he'd probably be 8 or so, 7 or 8, and they'd get all these kids lined up and they have a kid behind the net with a radar gun to see how fast they could shoot. They would dribble them into the net and it would be 20 km/h or whatever. So the kid would always be leaning on the back of the net holding this gun, and Carey wound up and zinged one right past his ear. He was always big and strong for his age and was excited at being good at whatever he did."

To this day, Carey Price likes to go on the ice in a track suit and zing pucks at the net, and he can still shoot it like that 8-year-old who gave that poor kid with a radar gun the fright of his life.

"He probably still thinks he could play forward," Brendan Gallagher said.

When he was around 10, Price spent the whole season playing defence until there was a postseason tournament for teams made up of indigenous youth. The team didn't have a goalie.

"He hadn't played goal all year but he decided he would play goal that game," his dad said. "He played good, but they still got blown out. It was a pretty good team. But after that game, he just said, 'Well, I'm going to be a goalie.' He's been a goalie ever since."

"Yeah," Price said, "I think I got lit up for a dozen in that game."

It was hardly a sign of things to come.

Over the next five years, Price became the best young goaltender in Western Canada heading into the 2002 WHL Bantam draft.

That draft was also the first for the new head scout of the Tri City Americans of the WHL, Darrell May, who shared a net with Carey Walker in Erie, Pa., many years earlier. When May's son Darrell Jr. played for



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the Americans in the 2000-01 season, he stayed with a billet family, Jill and Dennis Williams, who got to know his parents.

And, of course, two years later, the Williamses welcomed a young Carey Price into their home, where he stayed during his four-year junior career in Tri-City.

When Carey Price attended his first training camp with Tri-City in 2003, there was no goaltending coach on staff, so May worked with the goalies, including Price, his first draft pick.

Until then, May had no link to the Price family, and his link to the Walker family was largely limited to that time they played together in Erie and crossed paths in Peoria.

"Jerry, I've met a few times," May said. "He's, I think, a really important part behind Carey. His demeanor, everything."

But May had no idea his draft pick Carey Price was named after his old teammate Carey Walker.

It was only after Price had moved in with the Williamses that Jill Williams learned of the connection from Jerry Price in a passing conversation. And Williams decided she would act on it.

"I was talking to Sharmaine May and I said, 'Do you think I could get a hold of Carey Walker?'" Jill Williams said. "So she called (Walker's) mother and got his information, and then I contacted him."

It was Jill Williams who broke the news to Carey Walker that there was a talented young goaltender who was named after him. Walker didn't even know Jerry Price had a son, let alone one who shared his name.

"It just made me feel like we were good enough friends that he would do something like that," Walker said. "Good things come from good things."

After receiving this bit of unexpected news from an unexpected source through a random phone call, Walker told Williams he would mail her some photos of his and Jerry Price's playing days. And soon enough, an envelope with some photos arrived at the Williams home.

"Jerry had come down to watch Carey play, and I was working on his scrapbook and I said, 'Jerry, you need to come over to my house after the game,' even though it's a 13-hour trip for him to drive back to Williams Lake and he was going to drive back after the game," Williams remembered. "So, he came over and he was like, 'How did you get those pictures?'"

This knowledge laid dormant for more than 15 years.

Carey Price was taken with the No. 5 pick in the 2005 NHL draft by the same team that drafted Carey Walker in 1977. He went on to win the world junior championships, the Calder Cup and Olympic gold while becoming the Canadiens franchise player. Price knew all this time there was someone out there who used to play with his dad, someone whose name he shares and whose younger brother is one of the best baseball players in Canadian history, but that was it.

Meanwhile, Carey Walker continued going about his business laying tile in Roanoke, Va., not really following hockey much but knowing there was a goalie out there with whom he shared a name and a link to his old Admirals teammate Jerry Price. But, again, that was it.

And Walker's younger brother Larry finished his long and storied MLB career the same year Price was drafted, in 2005, hitting .289 with 15 home runs and 52 RBI in 315 at bats with the St. Louis Cardinals at age 38.

From the time he singled and eventually scored in his first official at bat on Aug. 16, 1989 – Carey Price's second birthday – to the time he singled and eventually scored in his last official at bat on Oct. 2, 2005, Larry Walker hit .313 with 2,160 hits, 383 home runs and 230 stolen bases with a career on base percentage of .400. This is his final year of eligibility for the National Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, N.Y.

None of the three men had ever met each other, though Larry came close just a day before his older brother finally did meet Price.

Larry Walker was in Montreal for the celebration of the 50th anniversary of the Expos' inaugural season and attended the Canadiens home game against the Buffalo Sabres on March 23, the day before the Canadiens

played in Raleigh. Larry, who was aware of Carey Price's connection to his older brother, managed to exchange text messages with Price after the game, though the two were unable to meet.

Larry Walker on the field at Olympic Stadium prior to the Expos 50th anniversary celebration on March 25. (Arpon Basu / The Athletic)

"I don't remember if my brother told me years ago or not, but I know he told me over Christmas," Larry Walker said. "I just remember I didn't believe it. Like, I was named after Larry Bird, you know? Who knows what's real?"

"I told Carey Price in a text that I thought he was just bullshitting me the whole time."

Last September, Jerry Price was sitting at the Canadiens practice facility in Brossard, watching one of the sessions early in training camp when I approached him to say hello. That's when he told me about the tournament where his son became a goalie. And that's also when he told me Price was named after Larry Walker's brother.

Wait, what?

I sat on the story until Price neared the Canadiens all-time wins record. That's when I decided it was a good time to write it, so I gave Carey Walker a call.

It was during that March 5 conversation when I learned the two had never met. So I asked Walker if that would interest him. The Canadiens had a game in Raleigh, about a three-hour drive from Roanoke, on March 24. Walker said yes. Later that evening, as he was taking off his equipment after a 3-1 win against the Kings in L.A. that tied Plante's franchise wins record, I told Price that I had spoken to his namesake that afternoon. He immediately stopped what he was doing, looked up, smiled, and said, "Oh yeah?"

When I asked Carey Price if he wanted to meet with Carey Walker in Raleigh, his smile grew even bigger, and he nodded.

"Yeah, sure!" he said.

And so, nearly 32 years after Jerry and Lynda Price named their first-born son Carey, it was on.

Walker drove to Raleigh from Roanoke with his son-in-law, Brian Rickerson, and grandson, Hunter Obenchain. We agreed to meet in my hotel lobby a couple of hours before the game that night, and as soon as Walker opened his mouth to say hello, it was obvious he was Larry's brother.

As excited as Price was for this meeting to happen, it became immediately clear Walker was just as excited, if not more. And he wanted to share the news with his little brother.

"Man, I've got something to tell you," Carey told Larry two days before the meeting. "Me and Brian are going to ride down to Raleigh at Carey's request and I'm going to meet Carey Price finally."

"You've got to be kidding me, dude," Larry told him. "I'm at the airport; I'm going to Montreal tomorrow. I'll be at the game (Saturday)! I was going to surprise you with an autographed Carey Price jersey, but no need for that now."

We sat down at a table in the hotel lobby and Carey Walker laid out what he had brought, an envelope full of old photos and newspaper articles from his playing days, including one of him and Jerry Price taken during the warmup of a game between the Erie Blades and Hampton Aces.

Jerry Price (left) and Carey Walker chat before a game between the Hampton Aces and Erie Blades. (Courtesy of Carey Walker).

There was the envelope the Canadiens used to send him his first paycheck. He would never receive another.

There was also an envelope for a paycheck from the NHL's Colorado Rockies after he attended training camp with them.

"That's my claim to fame," Walker said with a little grin, "that I got a paycheck from the Rockies before Larry did."



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But then, it was time to go to the rink and watch the game. It was time to meet Carey Price.

"Yeah, I don't know if he's short, tall," Walker said when asked if he was excited about the meeting. "I imagine he's tall because all goalies in the NHL these days are tall."

When told Price is around 6-feet-3, Walker said, "Well, his mother must be tall then. Because Jerry ain't tall!"

Walker, his son-in-law and grandson collected the tickets Price had left for them at the arena and made their way to their seats, unaware that what was to come would be a defining moment of the Canadiens' season, and one of the best games Price played all year.

Brian, Hunter and Carey before the Canadiens-Hurricanes game at PNC Arena. (Arpon Basu / The Athletic)

The game turned on a random bounce.

Price had stopped the first 37 shots he faced from the Hurricanes that night, allowing the Canadiens to hold a 1-0 lead late into the third period, keeping their playoff hopes off life support. Then Trevor van Riemsdyk's innocuous wrist shot from the point met Jordie Benn's knee at the exact wrong moment, allowing the puck to find its way behind Price with 5:39 left in regulation.

Do you want to know how badly Price wanted to win this game? Watch his reaction after it goes in.

Doesn't look like much, but on the scale of Price's demonstrations of on-ice anger, this is pretty high. He wanted this game and it slipped through his fingers. On a bounce.

This is what led to the terse exchange with the media and what left Price in the mood he was in just before this meeting that was 17 years in the making.

But his mood changed as soon as Price exited that Zamboni tunnel and began climbing those stairs and heard, "Hey Carey, I'm Carey."

Carey Price and Carey Walker after meeting for the first time at PNC Arena. (Arpon Basu / The Athletic).

When the woman who made all this possible, Jill Williams, heard this meeting had finally happened, she was overjoyed.

"Oh, that's wonderful! I didn't know! I was hoping that would happen someday," she said. "That definitely gives me warm feelings that he met Carey."

The meeting lasted only a few minutes because Price had to get on a bus to the airport to head back to Montreal. Walker handed over an envelope with a few mementos for Price, including that picture of him skating with Price's dad in warmups.

Price, in turn, handed Walker a signed jersey.

Price, clearly touched, expressed regret that the meeting couldn't last longer, but offered to go for a meal the next time the Canadiens visited Raleigh. Walker agreed to make the three-hour drive. The two had a lot of catching up to do.

As Price prepared to head for the bus, Walker extended his hand, but Price would have none of it.

Price gave him a big hug instead, one befitting a man he has known his entire life.

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The Athletic / Scouting reports for 10 sleepers in the 2019 NHL Draft

By Scott Wheeler May 7, 2019

What often gets lost when I'm building a year-end NHL draft ranking that runs 100 players deep in a draft that boasts more than 200 picks, is that my rankings are not indicative of where I would actually be able to take Player X.

Sure, if every NHL team followed my rankings on draft day they'd run out of players before the middle of the fourth round, but my ranking diverges in significant ways from the lists put together by each of those teams.

And the end result is that if I were to pick for any of the 31 NHL teams in late June, there would probably still be a player or two in the 50s or 60s on my list when my team's name was called for its seventh-round pick.

That doesn't mean you don't do your homework to ensure that your ranking extends well past that range, though. Because every draft is different and you must prepare for the unexpected. If, by chance, the 2019 class runs into the 80s or 90s of my list, the evaluations of those players should be just as thorough and nuanced as the ones built for the first or second round.

In today's NHL, the teams that hit on those late-round picks are usually the clubs that are the most well-prepared to insulate their depth with cheap, serviceable (and on rare occasions game-breaking) talent.

The goal, here, is to highlight 10 of the players I have ranked at various points in my 50-100 range who I think:

Have a good chance of falling deeper into the draft than my ranking.

Represent the kind of risks teams should be taking on high-upside players late in the draft.

These are players who are either under the radar, already-good talents that may not get recognized for it or untapped talents who may not look like much today but have tremendous room for growth. They're the antithesis to the quote-unquote safe pick. They're the risks worth taking.

53. Mikhail Abramov — C/RW, Victoriaville Tigres, 5-foot-10

'Misha' Abramov's NHL Central Scouting Bureau rank (63rd in North America) doesn't adequately respect his talent level. He followed up an excellent showing at the Hlinka Gretzky Cup (seven points in five games) by being named to the QMJHL's all-rookie team on the back of a combined 61 points in 70 games across its regular season and playoffs. And he did that on a Victoriaville team that finished 12th in the 18-team league with just 30 wins in 68 games and a minus-31 goal differential while adjusting to life and a different language in a new country. Abramov is on the shorter and lighter (161 pounds) but he learned not to play like it as the season progressed and wrapped up his rookie campaign with 11 points in his final nine games.

Though he played centre all season and the position benefits his ability to hang onto the puck, delay and find the open teammate, given his size, I suspect that he will have to switch to the wing to be successful at the next level (especially because faceoffs are already not a strength at the junior level). Abramov has the skill to make that move though. He's evasive along the wall, stepping around defenders with sharp edgework and the ability to open up his hips and avoid contact, plus his outside-in vision would complement a shooting centre who's able to get to the slot quite well. I'd like to see Abramov use his shot a little more because he showed real flashes this season of effortlessly picking corners of the net and surprising goalies with how quickly it snaps off of his blade despite not having the strength to power it past them. He obviously needs to get stronger, too. Nonetheless, players with Abramov's skill level are worthwhile picks in round 4-7 — and he's likely to be there due to concerns about his size.

54. Dominick Fensore — LHD, USDP, 5-foot-7

In many other years, a player as smooth and talented as Fensore would have played on the national program's top powerplay unit. Understanding that he played behind Cam York in most offensive situations makes Fensore's production this season that much more impressive. Are there 5-foot-7, 154-pound defencemen who are successful in today's NHL? No. In fact, 5-foot-8 Joe Hicketts, the smallest player to play at hockey's top level this season, got into just 11 games this season — and he weighs 180 pounds. But today's game is not tomorrow's game, hockey is changing and players with unique offensive talent and high-end four-



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direction skating are the ones who are going to surpass expectations and change the way we view modern defencemen. Fensore is skilled enough to potentially become one of those players.

Give him three or four seasons at Boston University and I suspect there are good odds he leaves school at 170 pounds and becomes so effective carrying the puck through the neutral zone and stepping around bigger opponents that concerns about his size become even more muted than they already ought to be (he defended quite well this season, especially in transition). Fensore is also a September birthday, which made him a couple of weeks shy of being a 2020 draft pick, something that bodes extremely well for his ability to add strength moving forward. Here's the list of under-18 national program defencemen who've outproduced Fensore's 0.76 points per game rate in the last decade: York (a potential top-10 pick), Adam Fox (66th overall, which has proven to be a steal), Adam Clendening (36th overall), Quinn Hughes (seventh overall) and Chad Kryz (45th overall). That's it. Five players. Fensore out-produced Noah Hanifin, Jacob Trouba and Bode Wilde. And he did while being as effective carrying the puck in all three zones as anyone on that list except Hughes. He's exactly the kind of talent you swing for the fences on.

63. Zachary Jones — LHD, Tri-City Storm, 5-foot-10

Jones, recently named the USHL's rookie of the year and a second-team All-Star, grew on me as the year progressed and he became one of the best defencemen in the league as a first-year player. You don't often see two defencemen finish a season in a team's top-three in scoring (at any level) but Jones was able to do what he did while playing alongside defenceman of the year Ronnie Attard at even-strength and often behind him on the powerplay (though the Storm have run a two-D top unit in spurts). Jones, one of the older first-year eligible defencemen on my board still led all under-19 USHL defencemen in points by a wide margin. Ranked 70th among North American skaters by NHLCSB, Jones is headed to UMass Amherst in the fall and will get to play a big role offensively there, maybe even as a freshman.

Stylistically, Jones is a player who prefers to carry the puck out of the zone than pass it and chooses those spots wisely by joining the rush selectively (sometimes a little too selectively, honestly). Though he's an excellent skater (Jones can curl back on his heels and change directions with ease), Jones' defensive game needs some work. There are two main problems I have with his game off the puck. The first is one of spatial recognition. In the defensive zone, Jones too often loses his man or scrambles because he feels he can use his skating to chase the puck. Sometimes, energy conservation and stick positioning can do the trick and he just hasn't figured that out yet. The other is how passive he is defending the rush. Simply put, Jones gives up too much when his skating is built to play a tighter gap. If he can make that adjustment, I think he'll force opposing forwards into a lot more turnovers/dumps. Offensively, he's a pleasure to watch. Jones is particularly adept at straddling the blue line and changing pace (he'll fade as if he's going to slow down for a pass only to take the puck onto his backhand or forehand and dash past an opposing player). The defensive issues, I would argue, can be taught in three or four seasons in college. And the offensive talent will blossom at the pro level regardless. That's exciting.

68. Dmitri Sheshin — LW/RW, Stalnye Lisy Magnitogorsk, 5-foot-8

Sheshin is a little guy who made up one part of my favourite line to watch in the MHL this season, playing alongside draft-eligible forward Yegor Spiridonov (my 56th-ranked prospect) for the full season and Pavel Dorofeyev (my 15th-ranked prospect) for part of it. Together, Sheshin and Spiridonov finished No. 1 and No. 2 in under-18 points per game in the MHL, with Sheshin (0.96) narrowly edging out Spiridonov (0.95). The pair were the perfect complement to one another too, with Sheshin boasting the creative, diminutive (he's 143 pounds!) puck skills needed to slide into holes and finish off plays alongside Spiridonov's seriously underrated playmaking talent for a bigger (6-foot-2, nearly 200 pounds) forward. Sheshin is, in the truest sense, a long-term project. It's going to take him at least two or three years to work his way up the professional rankings in Russia and then he'll likely have to come to North America and do the same in the AHL. But there's enough talent to potentially make the wait worthwhile (unless he comes over in the CHL Import Draft, which isn't completely out of the question).

Despite only registering two points in seven games for Russia at under-18 worlds this April, Sheshin was named one of the team's top three players of the tournament for the significant role he played as a nonstop

forechecking presence whose speed was a major factor throughout. It was Sheshin who stripped Jack Hughes and set up Rodion Amirov for the shorthanded goal and the 1-0 lead to help pull off the semi-final upset. Sheshin, who doesn't turn 18 until the end of the month, plays like he's 6-foot-1 and 190, winning races and puck battles with speed and persistence on the puck. Sometimes you have to play the long game.

72. Ben Brinkman — LHD, University of Minnesota, 6-foot-1

A cursory look over his production, especially given the kinds of players who tend to appear on this sleeper list, would probably leave you scratching your heads as to why Brinkman has high upside. But that's exactly why Brinkman, who is ranked 115th on NHLCSB's final North American list, appears here. Because he also just finished a season as one of the youngest players and he did it while playing regular minutes in every single game the Golden Gophers played. Given the context of his age and the fact that Brinkman was a full year younger than the team's next-youngest defenceman, Penguins third-round pick Clayton Phillips, his freshman year was impressive. Brinkman was a hugely-positive player, especially defensively, on everything the Golden Gophers did this season and his plus-11 rating — a stat I would almost always caution against using unless in exceptional circumstances like his where it's so much stronger than his teammates' (the nearest Gophers defenceman was plus-2) — spoke to that.

A year ago, Brinkman was generating buzz as a late first-round option because he was just so, so much better than the other defencemen he was playing against in the Minnesota high school circuit (arguably the strongest high school circuit in the country) after choosing not to play in the USHL despite being a fifth overall selection and the first defenceman picked in the 2016 draft. Brinkman is a powerful skater who is overwhelmingly strong (he weighs 216 pounds, which I would normally caution is a bit heavy for his age and height but certainly hasn't seemed that way) in physical situations despite rarely taking penalties. Though I don't see dynamic playmaking ability in his game, Brinkman is an effective outlet passer and a stout defender who anticipates passes well and plays aggressively to disrupt opponents. He will build towards an offensive role in the NCAA once he gains some confidence, gets some PP time and uses what is a heavy shot a little more. His choice to skip his senior year of high school was the right one. He's now ahead of the curve in a lot of ways and held his own against players who were as much as six years older than him. In some of my viewings, Brinkman looked like the Golden Gophers' best defenceman.

81. Tuukka Tiekola — RW, Kärpät, 5-foot-10

Here's what made me fall in love with Tuukka Tiekola, despite knowing that his odds are long: He knows he's the smallest player on the ice virtually all of the time and he doesn't care. After ripping up Finland's top junior league this season (at 157 pounds he finished second in under-18 scoring with 60 points in 51 games to top 2020 prospect Veeti Miittinen), Tiekola played a lone game for the senior team and didn't look out of place even though he should have.

Here he is (No. 11 in black) circling back to the slot twice ahead of a shot on goal in his first pro hockey game:

Tiekola doesn't have the strength to finish those plays (he wasn't much of a goal scorer at the lower levels either, preferring to act as his line's playmaker and primary handling option) but he's also a late-June birthday so he has the luxury of time on his side. I love the way he moves in the offensive zone to get open and uses his footwork to stay out of trouble and make plays. He was great at under-18 worlds, too and is another player worth playing a flyer in the back third of the draft. The long game may have a significant payoff. He's not going to get there if he can't get a little stronger but if that's a player's biggest drawback then he's still a leap of faith I'd be happy with.

86. Nikola Pasic — C/LW, Linköping HC/BIK Karlskoga, 5-foot-10

Pasic is one of those players who had a tale of two seasons. In SuperElite, he looked dominant, aggressive and confident with the puck. He frequently took over games and looked like the best player on the league's best team (they ultimately lost in the final). That play earned him a 15-game stint in the SHL. There, though, he (No. 29 in all of the video) looked passive and made a lot of plays like the one below where he sends a bad shot on net to avoid getting hit.



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In the SHL, Pasic, a player who is at his best when he's holding onto the puck to make plays, reverted to a perimeter winger who preferred to lurk on the exterior. And though that can work (he did a nice job sliding backdoor on his lone goal below but you'll notice that I've cut the sequence so that you can see him enter the zone at the top of the frame only to attempt, wherever possible, to disengage from anyone who was willing to challenge his spot in the offensive zone) ...

... more often than not, it doesn't — and it's not the way Pasic is going to be successful if he ever makes it to hockey's top level.

Pasic is at his best when he's showing off his creativity with the puck making things happen, rather than waiting for the game to come to him. He offered a glimpse of that on his lone assist in the SHL, a nifty little drop pass after he attacked the middle.

The skill is there — and it makes him intriguing at worst and exciting at best.

With Pasic, though, the challenge seems to be one of mentality. Next year, against the softer competition in Allsvenskan, he'll have a better chance to build that confidence back up.

92. Leevi Aaltonen — LW, KalPa, 5-foot-9

If I were even a little confident in Aaltonen's ability to get stronger, he'd be a lot higher on this list. He's one of those kids I really feel for because there's so much upside in his game but he's just so tiny. Still, if Pasic is an example of a kid who faded at the pro level for the first time, Aaltonen's seven-game stint in Liiga is an example of the opposite. He only came out of it with one point but he looked extremely confident.

Watch how fearless he is attacking from the corner to the slot.

Or how comfortable he is sliding to the front of the net and then releasing for the chance on goal.

Or the smooth touch he shows here to get the shot off quickly before pursuing it.

Or the confidence he shows taking the puck end-to-end for an exit and an entry (even when the soft chip was available) ahead of a shot.

(How about the shoulder fakes from the lower centre of gravity too!)

Aaltonen just charges up the ice or across the offensive zone — and he doesn't seem to care what size he is. If he makes it, it will be because of that. If he doesn't, he'll be a lot of fun in a pro league that isn't the NHL. He's the kind of player who could fall and be a late round steal or go in the second or third round and never quite meet expectations. Love his approach to the game, though. Sometimes you just have to take that chance.

94. Ethan Keppen — LW, Flint Firebirds, 6-foot-2

Keppen is a big, heavy (214 pounds), often mean winger who finished the season ninth among under-18 OHL players in points (59 in 68), tied for fifth in goals (30) and put together an excellent season given his supporting cast. Flint's second-leading scorer to Dallas Stars 13th overall pick Ty Dellandrea, Keppen is a lot to handle when he wants to be and can overwhelm defenders with his reach and power, attacking at them instead of around them. I was honestly pretty surprised when he wasn't named to Team Canada for U18 worlds, given the size element he would have provided them lower in the lineup.

When Keppen keeps his feet moving he creates chaos below the hashmarks, forcing defenders and carriers into tough spots with the pressure he's able to provide. Once he gets the puck along the wall, it's tough to win it back from him. Keppen's shot isn't all that deceptive (his drawback needs to be a little tighter by leveraging his weight more) but it comes off of his blade hard and he can blast it past goalies. More than that, he's also a sneaky playmaker, which is reinforced by his strong primary assist numbers (21 of his 29 assists were first assists) and will stop up to find the trailer or throw a surprising pass to the front of the net mid-cycle in the offensive zone. I can see Keppen slipping into the later rounds of the draft only to return to Flint with an 80+ point season next year. He can take over a game as a one-man generator on his line.

100. Bryce Brodzinski — C/RW, Blaine High/Omaha Lancers, 6-foot-0

Feast your eyes on these Minnesota high school numbers (combined games between the regular season, the playoffs, and the state tournament): 31 games, 37 goals, 60 assists for 97 points or 3.13 points per game. That's what Brodzinski did as a senior this season as the winner of both Minnesota's Mr. Hockey award and the U.S. High School's All-USA Hockey Player of the Year. It's sick. And though he's a slight overager in this draft (Brodzinski is an August 2000 in a draft class that begins in September of 2000), the University of Minnesota commit also made time for a 17-point showing in his first (and last) 19 games in the USHL. His ability to make plays really impressed me once he made the jump to the USHL.

Brodzinski never looked like a rookie, immediately becoming Omaha's best player in the games I watched. He's a versatile forward who takes what defenders give him by driving the slot when space is there or finding a teammate through a seam when it's not. He's got pro size, good hands in tight and power out wide. There's a lot to like in his game and it's easy to imagine him becoming a good third-line player at the pro level when his NCAA career wraps up. The biggest question is whether he has the offensive touch and finish needed to be more than that, or if his dominance this season at both levels he played in was a product of age and physical maturity. I can't wait to track his development though.

The Athletic LOADED: 05.08.2019

1106010 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Maroon is in right place, right time to send Blues to West final

Rory Boylen | May 8, 2019, 1:44 AM

It shouldn't have gotten to overtime, never mind double overtime.

For a two-period stretch in regulation the St. Louis Blues outshot the Dallas Stars 31-4 in Game 7 of their second-round series on Tuesday. But on the back of Ben Bishop, the Stars pushed through to force the extra frames, getting more scoring opportunities in the first overtime than they had in periods two and three combined.

And just when it looked like the unforgiving hockey gods would wickedly reward the road team, the Blues struck quickly and suddenly off the draw, an area where they had been struggling. Pat Maroon played the part of hometown hero, sending the Blues to the conference final for the first time since 2016.

Will that be a rematch against the San Jose Sharks, or a showdown with the Cinderella Colorado Avalanche? That will be determined Wednesday night. Until then, here's what we saw as St. Louis ended Dallas' season in Round 2.

PAT MAROON IS IN THE RIGHT PLACE AT THE RIGHT TIME

One of the more emotional post-game interviews in recent memory was Gene Principe talking with Maroon when the latter was a member of the Edmonton Oilers in 2016. It was a mid-December game, just before Christmas, and Edmonton was on a road trip through Maroon's hometown of St. Louis. The power forward scored a big goal in the game to send it to overtime and his son was in the crowd, beaming with pride.

When Maroon saw his son's reaction during the interview he got choked up. The sight of it pulls at your heartstrings and put in perspective the human element behind the scenes of the life of an NHLer.

As a UFA this past summer, Maroon had a contract worth more money on the table than what the Blues were offering, but decided to take the one-year, \$1.75-million deal offered to him by St. Louis to prove to the league he was worth more, and to stay close to his family.

"Not only is this for my son, but I'm betting on myself," he told ESPN.

Though Maroon didn't play a prominent role throughout Game 7 — seven other Blues forwards had more ice time — he was front and centre for



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both of his team's goals. On the first, he muscled his six-foot-three, 225-pound frame to the front of the net and screened Ben Bishop from Vince Dunn's shot. On the second, he crashed the net and cleaned up the leftovers from Robert Thomas' shot that hit the post.

While there were a number of rush chances all night and some stupendous saves from both goalies, it was Maroon's hard-nosed presence that caused the necessary disturbances at the most opportune times.

In every way, he's where he should be right now. He called this one the biggest goal of his career.

"It's been an emotional roller-coaster for me all year," Maroon said. "To score a big goal like that in front of my hometown, my son was in the stands, fiancée, friends, family."

You have to root for the guy.

REMEMBER ROOPE

On Dallas' side, Miro Heiskanen garnered a lot of praise for his reliability as a 19-year-old, big-minute, rookie defenceman. Ben Bishop is a Vezina Trophy finalist and just had one of the better Game 7 performances ever, stopping 52 pucks.

But if someone on the Stars really announced himself as a playoff performer, it was Roope (pronounced rope, eh?) Hintz.

In Game 6, Hintz blocked a shot with his left foot and left the arena in a walking boot. There was some question whether he'd play at all in Game 7 because of it, but he was out there, buzzing all over the place in his 23:35 of ice time.

Hintz led all Stars forwards with three blocked shots, all of which were blistering and cringe-inducing knowing what he just went through two days ago. He was also one of their more ferocious forecheckers all night and seemed like the fastest skater on the ice.

The 22-year-old's rookie season really flew under the radar with Heiskanen sharing the same roster. Starting in October with 10 or 11 minutes a night, Hintz levelled up to a second line centre who regularly saw 16 to 18 minutes down the stretch. Seventeen of his 22 points came in his final 30 games and he added another eight in 13 playoff games. In Game 7, he mostly shared a line with Alexander Radulov and Jamie Benn.

Kelly Hrudey hit the nail on the head when talking about Hintz on the Sportsnet broadcast. We'll be talking about this kid for the next 12 to 15 years.

Ryan Dixon and Rory Boylen go deep on pucks with a mix of facts and fun, leaning on a varied group of hockey voices to give their take on the country's most beloved game.

BEST PLAYERS NOT SCORING? LET THE KIDS TAKE OVER

Ryan O'Reilly hasn't scored since Game 5 of the Winnipeg series. Brayden Schenn has been shutout just as long. Vladimir Tarasenko has one even-strength goal all playoffs.

You'd think a Game 7 win meant at least one of these players stood up, but you have to look a little further down the depth chart to find the engines of this win.

Vince Dunn, the 22-year-old defenceman, was silky in regulation, showing us his puck-moving strengths with zone-exit carries and crisp passes on the regular. He scored the game's first goal, too, using Maroon's screen and, crucially, hitting the net on the other side.

And though 19-year-old Robert Thomas only had two shots on the score sheet, it seemed like he was much more involved than that. His play led to Maroon's overtime marker (and he nearly scored on it himself).

Sammy Blais, the 22-year-old winger, also deserves commendation here. He didn't get a point, but led all players with eight hits, a few of which caught Benn in the wrong place, leaving the Stars power forward in obvious discomfort.

The Blues controlled the play through most of this game so only two players, Carl Gunnarsson and Tyler Bozak, were on the ice for more

shots against than shots for. But Dunn, Thomas and Blais had the three best five-on-five shot differentials among all Blues. St. Louis controlled at least 70 per cent of the even-strength shots when at least one of them were on the ice.

MISSED IT BY THAT MUCH

Had the Stars won this game, it would have been an undeserving victory given how decisively they were outplayed. And, sure, the Blues had ample opportunity to put this game away long before this moment — but we have to highlight just how close Dallas came to a Western Conference final berth.

After already nearly being beaten on a Hintz wraparound earlier in the game, Jordan Binnington was slow to the post when Benn tried it in overtime. Had the Star been able to tuck it around a tad tighter, hitting the bottom of Binnington's pad instead of the top, this game would have ended with a different result.

If the Stars end up losing, Jamie Benn is going to have nightmares about this all offseason long. pic.twitter.com/4RcAXXmDy

— Scott Bell (@ScottBellDMN) May 8, 2019

DON'T LET YOUR KID BE A GOALIE

Take it from Ben Bishop's mom — it's hard to watch.

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 05.08.2019

1106011 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Ken Holland's desire to sacrifice a sign of what he'll bring to Oilers

Mark Spector | May 7, 2019

EDMONTON — As a general manager — as a leader — in Detroit, Ken Holland's job was often to ask other people to sacrifice. For young players to spend a little more time in the minors; for high-priced players to leave something on the table come contract time, so that he could afford to surround them with better players.

Then, one day, ownership decided that it was time for the protégé to take over from the mentor, and Steve Yzerman came home as the new general manager in Detroit. Holland, of course, knew exactly what was required of him.

"It was my turn to sacrifice."

Of all the common sense that flowed from Holland Tuesday morning in Edmonton, that story best described the man. And we would expect, it is a sign of the substance he'll bring to Edmonton, a franchise that has talked a great game since about 1995, but seldom combined to put one on the ice.

On Ken Holland's staff, it's not about what you brought to the table. But rather, what you bring to the table that counts.

"What is culture? Culture is people who care about the logo," Holland said. "You've got to earn the jersey. You don't get to put it on just because you're a high draft pick."

And you have to earn the job, whether you're the GM or an area scout.

"Your GM, your coach, your scouts... You've got to grind. You've got to dig in."

They are words, only. And Lord knows, we've heard plenty of those from the copious new hires this organization has run out before the media over the past decade. They all come in with much promise, making many promises.

Craig MacTavish promised "bold moves." Dallas Eakins was taking away the media donuts. Then there was this foreboding quote, from the day



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Peter Chiarelli was hired: "I've actually made a few trades of good young forwards. That's something I won't shy away from."

Not long after that Taylor Hall was gone, and with him, any belief that Chiarelli would be the answer in Edmonton.

It is amazing that no man has been able to dent the losing culture in Edmonton over all these seasons, to the point where seldom seen owner Daryl Katz took a seat at the head table beside Holland Tuesday, where he proclaimed: "We have not delivered on the promise we made to our fans. You know it. I know it. We all know it," he said. "We get it."

Nobody's head is in the sand here. Gone are the days when swaggering management stood up at these gatherings and declared, "I know a thing or two about winning."

The Oilers, on the verge of being the only team in NHL history to miss the playoffs 13 times in 14 seasons, are humble. Which makes Holland — a man who is full of humility and has exactly zero ego — the perfect candidate to take things from here.

He admits, he made some mistakes in Detroit in the later years. He even warned that he'll make some here. "If you're (a GM) over 22 years and you're never going to make a bad decision? I'd like to meet that guy."

The only way to avoid making a bad decision, Holland has learned, "is not to make any." And that simply isn't an option here in Northern Alberta.

He's got cap issues, a defence without a top pairing, zero Top 6 wingers, Milan Lucic at \$6 million for four more seasons, a \$5.5 million Andrej Sekera coming off of ACL and Achilles surgeries, and a \$4 million third-pairing guy in Kris Russell. And he needs a goalie, because someone spent \$4.5 million for the next three years on Mikko Koskinen, who isn't a No. 1.

And he's got some difficult conversations ahead, when it comes to some people who have been employed here for a long time, and never really got anything done. And with that, a culture was born. One has needs to be changed.

"He knows how to build a culture," Katz said. "He will have full autonomy as general manager."

Said Holland: "You can only live in the past for so long."

Amen.

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1106012 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / How the Canucks can clear clutter, improve depth as they take next step

Iain MacIntyre | May 7, 2019, 10:13 AM

VANCOUVER — An old hockey writer changed condos in the same building, but discovered on moving day that his new home couldn't quite accommodate the volume of stuff he'd accumulated over many years in the old one.

Faced with a storage crisis, he filled his car in the parkade with the excess clutter. He realized after a few days that an undriveable car made no sense, and solved his problem by taking the road insurance off his vehicle so it could serve as a four-door storage locker indefinitely.

No, the writer was not Larry David, although this true story would have made a great Seinfeld episode.

Clutter can make you crazy, and the Vancouver Canucks have accumulated a fair bit of it.

It's counter-intuitive that a team that still needs to add key pieces and plans to be aggressive in free agency has too many players. But

Vancouver has 11 forwards under contract for next season and another five who are restricted free agents expected to receive qualifying offers.

For the Canucks to move ahead, here are the candidates to move out:

LW/RW Tim Schaller, 28

47 GP, 3-7-10 Pts., 10:39 TOI

No Canuck forward was scratched as often as Schaller, a free-agent bust who provided little of the physicality, intensity and depth scoring the Canucks had hoped for when general manager Jim Benning signed him last July to a two-year deal worth \$1.9 million annually. He was eclipsed by Tyler Motte and others, and didn't score his first goal for the Canucks until March 17.

Outlook: With no trade value, even with retained salary, Schaller is a buyout candidate. Barring a miraculous summer transformation, he will likely end up getting his NHL pay in the minors if he makes it to training camp.

LW/RW Ryan Spooner, 27

52 GP (3 teams), 3-6-9 Pts., 11:25 TOI

The Canucks traded mistakes with the Oilers when they rescued Spooner from Edmonton's minor-league team in February in exchange for Sam Gagner. There was no financial risk to the Canucks by taking on Spooner, but the experiment failed. Despite occasional flashes, Spooner had just four assists in 11 games with Vancouver. He doesn't look good enough to fill a top-nine role and isn't the kind of player who's going to provide energy from the fourth line.

Outlook: Spooner had one goal in 16 games with the Rangers, two in 25 for the Oilers, and none in 11 with the Canucks. At a salary of \$4 million (\$900,000 retained by New York), Spooner has no trade value and will probably end up back in the minors for the final year of his NHL deal if he's not bought out.

RW Nikolay Goldobin, 23

63 GP, 7-20-27 Pts., 14:59 TOI

Acquired for Jannik Hansen's expiring contract at the deadline in 2017, Goldobin has failed to seize the opportunity given to him by Canucks coach Travis Green. Despite being centred either by Bo Horvat or Elias Pettersson for most of the season and averaging 2:33 of nightly power-play time, Goldobin scored only twice in his final 32 games and was removed from the lineup by Green seven times.

Goldobin still has age and skill on his side, but Green's frustration with him reached a critical mass in March. The Russian can play only an offensive role, and the Canucks are looking for better players on which to bestow that privilege.

Outlook: If the Canucks could have traded Goldobin, they probably would have. The Russian is a restricted free agent who may simply sign in the Kontinental Hockey League.

C/RW Markus Granlund, 26

77 GP, 12-10-22 Pts., 15:02 TOI

It looked like Granlund had broken through to a higher level when he scored 19 goals in 69 games two years ago before a wrist injury ended his campaign. But he scored only eight times last season while missing another chunk of games, before rebounding slightly this season to 12 goals.

Granlund has been mostly a middle-six forward on a poor team, and as the Canucks improve he is getting pushed farther down the lineup. He was scratched for five games this season and is in danger of being pushed off the roster.

Outlook: Granlund is another player where, if a market existed for him, the Canucks probably would have traded him by now. Instead, in the absence of better players coming in and a couple of guys ahead of him in the clutter cleanout, Granlund is expected to receive a qualifying offer in June.

LW/RW Loui Eriksson, 33



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81 GP, 11-18-29 Pts., 14:03 TOI

The forward has been a colossal disappointment since Benning signed him three years ago to a six-season, \$36-million contract. Eriksson has become a 32-goal scorer for the Canucks, but it took him three seasons to amass that total. Green finally healthy-scratched Eriksson for one game in March.

Clearly, he can't play in the top six and Eriksson will face increasing competition for a role near the bottom of the forward group. His signing-bonus-heavy contract calls for another payment of \$4 million on July 1, which will leave only \$9 million owed to Eriksson over the final three seasons. Eriksson has a full NTC but not a no-movement clause, which means he'll have to listen if the Canucks unearth a trade suitor.

Outlook: Benning is expected to see this summer if there's a trading partner for Eriksson, who may actually interest a few teams if Vancouver retains salary for the Swede's reduced-earning years to come. A trade, however, still seems a longshot and Eriksson's deal is essentially buyout-proof the way it is structured. The minors are a possibility next season if he performs poorly.

LW Tyler Motte, 24

74 GP, 9-7-16 Pts., 12:46 TOI

Nobody expected Motte to even make the Canucks last fall, but once in the lineup he became a coach's favourite due to his relentless work rate, skating and hitting on the fourth line. Motte's 2.7 hits per game ranked 18th among 390 NHL forwards who played at least 41 games, and yet he took only five minor penalties. That said, he's the kind of player who will constantly be under pressure to keep his job. Of course, so were Hansen and Alex Burrows when they started with the Canucks.

Outlook: The Canucks could probably get something modest for Motte in a trade. But until somebody better comes along and takes his job — minor-leaguer Zack MacEwen? — the winger is consistent and reliable. After just one full NHL season, Motte is also still young enough to get better.

C Brandon Sutter, 30

26 GP, 4-2-6 Pts., 17:28 TOI

The checking centre missed most of the season with a separated shoulder and sports hernia, his second in four seasons since GM Benning acquired Sutter from the Pittsburgh Penguins in 2015 and predicted he would become a "foundational" player. Sutter hasn't, although his health has been the worst thing about him. He has missed 140 of 328 games in Vancouver.

Free agent Jay Beagle was signed last summer and can do what Sutter does defensively, while 22-year-old Adam Gaudette got the chance to play 56 games in Sutter's absence and improved during his audition, although the rookie finished with just 12 points. Sutter has two years remaining on his contract at an unappealing \$4.375 million. On July 1, his full no-trade clause is modified to a 15-team no-trade list.

Outlook: With retained salary and Sutter's experience, character and defensive specialties, he is tradeable. But the Canucks would be selling low, and coach Green still likes Sutter's dependability and leadership. If Sutter stays healthy next season and Gaudette improves, the Canucks may be in a stronger position to trade the veteran at the deadline.

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1106013 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Suzuki, Poehling could hold keys to Canadiens' playoff hopes in 2020

Eric Engels May 7, 2019, 2:23 PM

It was the goal seen round the hockey world. Nick Suzuki, on a one-on-one, fakes a shot, drops down to one knee, slips the puck through his legs as he's spinning into a shooting position, and then backhands it into the top right corner of the net to give his Guelph Storm a 3-0 lead in an eventual 5-1 win that evened their third-round OHL playoffs series with the Saginaw Spirit at 3-3.

A night later, when Suzuki scored the series-winning goal into an empty net, it was his 31st point of the playoffs. Yet another one scored in an elimination game to bring his total to seven goals and 10 assists in the seven games the Storm have had its back up against the proverbial wall, and it helped him extend his scoring lead over the rest of his OHL counterparts to nine points.

What Montreal Canadiens fans have seen this spring from the former 13th overall pick of the Vegas Golden Knights, who was traded to their team along with Tomas Tatar and a 2019 second-round pick for Max Pacioretty last September, has left them salivating at what could be come fall. The prospect of Suzuki graduating to the National Hockey League and potentially completing a line with Max Domi and Jonathan Drouin is as enticing as it gets. And if that comes to be, think of what it will mean for a Canadiens team that ranked 14th in goals, 30th on the power play and missed this year's Stanley Cup Playoffs by two points.

Think of what it will mean for the Canadiens if Ryan Poehling, the NCAA standout who left St. Cloud State after putting up 75 points in 107 games over three excellent seasons and made his NHL debut with three goals and a shootout winner in a 6-5 win over the Toronto Maple Leafs in the season finale, earns a job out of training camp, too. Suzuki and Poehling can do much to balance out Montreal's attack—and do it on entry-level contracts that don't put much of a dent in the \$14-million or so of cap space general manager Marc Bergevin has at his disposal this off-season.

Suzuki is a dynamic, cerebral scorer who offers a complete game at either centre or wing, while Poehling is an all-around centre who appears to have more offensive upside than most anticipated when he was chosen 25th overall by the Canadiens in 2017. If both prove ready for the NHL following training camp, it would go a long way towards offering head coach Claude Julien a far more varied deck to play with.

This past season, Julien had Andrew Shaw, Paul Byron, Joel Armia and Artturi Lehkonen rotating to complete his top-six forward group. Players who would qualify as above-average-to-elite bottom-enders on most teams, but lack the scoring pedigree top-six wingers typically possess. The coach also spent the bulk of October through March searching for a fourth line that could spend most of its shifts in the offensive zone and would land on the positive side of the plus-minus ledger. He only found one he could count on more consistently after trade deadline acquisitions Nate Thompson and Jordan Weal had become acclimated with the Canadiens.

The opportunity to integrate Suzuki in a scoring role, and Poehling in a depth role, changes the picture dramatically. Both players have much to do to convince Bergevin and Julien that they're prepared for that, but if they keep going in the direction they've set out on they could hold the keys to the Canadiens returning to the playoffs for the first time in three years.

Suzuki's emergence as a big-game player has enriched the story he's authored since being sent back to junior well ahead of the final cuts the Canadiens made at last September's training camp. The team's brass hoped that he would dominate the OHL, and he did, statistically, with 34 goals and 94 points in 59 games split between the Storm and the Owen Sound Attack. But the way he's taken control of games—like he did on Monday, notching three assists to help the Storm hand the Ottawa 67's their first loss of the playoffs in Game 3 of the OHL Finals—offers the clearest evidence yet that he might be able to skip the AHL portion of his development and jump right in with the Canadiens.

#Habs Nick Suzuki records 3 assists in a dominant 7-2 win over Ottawa. Suzuki displays some great patience and puck protection on the first goal. This is the first loss of the post-season for the 67's who lead the series 2-1. #OHLPlayoffs pic.twitter.com/GqvDMfyjxn

— Canadiens Prospects (@mtl_prospects) May 7, 2019



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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You have to think that if Suzuki can do that, he'll secure a spot amongst Montreal's top-nine forwards. Assuming Tatar, Phillip Danault and Brendan Gallagher remain together and form the top line, Suzuki could join Drouin and Domi on a potent second line and leave any combination of Byron, Shaw, Weal, Armia and Lehkonen playing with budding star Jesperi Kotkaniemi on a third line.

His presence could also potentially push at least a couple of those players further down the roster, or could enable Bergevin to sacrifice any one of them (without creating a hole) in order to address a major need on defence. Either option would make the Canadiens instantly better.

So does Poehling starting as the fourth-line centre. The six-foot-two, 185-pound Lakeville, Minn., native, who was named the MVP of the 2019 World Junior Championship, could be flanked by Weal and Lehkonen, or Lehkonen and Armia, or Byron and Shaw, or any other combination of those bottom-six forwards, and the result is a line that is all but guaranteed to be far more productive and effective than any of the ones Julien deployed this past season. That would also push the reliable, steady Thompson to the margin of the lineup and further stoke the competition between Nicolas Deslauriers, Dale Weise, Matthew Peca and Charles Hudon to provide capable NHL depth.

No matter what happens, Suzuki and Poehling are unquestionably key players in what appears to be a bright future for the organization. But if things work out as both players—and the Canadiens and their fans—hope, they could also play a huge hand in bringing the team to the next level as early as next season.

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1106014 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Dubas support means Mike Babcock must innovate to improve Maple Leafs

Chris Johnston | May 7, 2019

In his early days with the Toronto Maple Leafs, Mike Babcock envisioned a decade-long tenure to match the one he had in Detroit.

"Well I've got this year and seven more here, and then I'm going to stay for two more because the team's going to be that good," Babcock said in February 2016.

Since then, much has changed in Toronto.

His boss went from a septuagenarian to a millennial and the roster improved as quickly as the results. But the progress was interrupted this spring and, as much as Babcock's presence behind the Leafs bench always seemed secure, there was room for speculation when general manager Kyle Dubas refused to guarantee his position in the immediate aftermath of the Game 7 loss in Boston.

The doubt can now be completely removed, with Dubas affirming his commitment to the NHL's highest-paid coach on Monday, and so they must get on with tackling the interesting part: How best to change, evolve and grow together to push the Leafs further up the mountain?

The relationship between coach and GM will remain under heavy scrutiny, especially since Babcock's footing is more precarious than it's been at any point since he arrived in Toronto.

Even with four years still left on his contract and Dubas' current expression of support, the status quo won't be good enough. It's hard to conjure any scenario where Babcock survives a fourth straight first-round playoff loss next spring — at least from this far away.

That's not entirely fair, of course, because of the NHL's uneven divisional playoff format and the fact that Toronto lost to a Bruins team which might still go on and win a Stanley Cup.

But that's where we are.

Dubas didn't hide his disappointment about what he saw in 2018-19 when he met reporters on locker cleanout day. This was a team that finished fourth overall in regulation and overtime wins (ROWs) and improved its underlying metrics during the regular season, but failed to get past Boston despite holding series leads of 1-0, 2-1 and 3-2.

"I mean we had 100 points and we went to Game 7 against the Bruins in the first round, so it's tough to say that it was tangible progress," said Dubas. "I think anyone watching the series would say we played a lot better in this series than the team did the year before, but we have to continue to improve everything that we do. It starts with me improving the job that I do [with] contracts, signing players, drafting players, our development system — every single thing of our organization.

"And it's up to me to work with Mike to continue to have him improve, and with his staff improve."

Livestream every game of the Stanley Cup Playoffs, blackout-free. Plus stream the Blue Jays & MLB, Raptors and NBA Playoffs matchups and more.

There is onus here on the 56-year-old coach to pursue new methods as well.

The Leafs have entered a potential championship window that is only guaranteed to last another five seasons — the length of Auston Matthews' contract, give or take. Patience will wear increasingly thin at all levels of the organization as time ticks away without obvious progress towards that pursuit.

Sand has started passing through the hourglass.

Babcock chose the Leafs back in 2015 with an eye on climbing the highest mountain possible, taking on the biggest challenge he could find to cap a Hall of Fame career.

Whether or not it plays out as he once imagined is only partially under his control. The winds have shifted and Babcock needs to adjust his sails.

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Sportsnet.ca / Bruins, Hurricanes to open Eastern Conference Final Thursday

Sportsnet Staff | May 7, 2019, 3:48 PM

The Boston Bruins will welcome the Carolina Hurricanes to TD Garden for Game 1 of the Eastern Conference Final on Thursday, the NHL has announced.

Puck drop is scheduled for 8 p.m. ET/ 5 p.m. PT and the game will be broadcast on the CBC, Sportsnet and Sportsnet Now in Canada.

The Bruins punched their ticket to the conference final Monday with a 3-0 victory over the Columbus Blue Jackets to win their second-round series in six games. It will be the club's third appearance in the conference finals in the last nine seasons, with the Bruins advancing to the Stanley Cup Final in both of those previous appearances.

The Hurricanes advanced to the Eastern Conference Final Friday with a 5-2 win over the New York Islanders in Game 4 of their series. A wild-card team, the Hurricanes are competing in the Stanley Cup Playoffs for the first time in 10 years, when they also reached the conference finals.

The remaining schedule for the series has yet to be released.

The Western Conference Final matchup will be determined by two upcoming Game 7s. On Tuesday, the Dallas Stars will visit the St. Louis Blues in their series finale. The winner of that game will play the winner of Wednesday's Game 7 between the Colorado Avalanche and San Jose Sharks.



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1106016 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Sharks' pressure to live up to potential looms large ahead of Game 7

Eric Francis | May 7, 2019, 3:37 PM

SAN JOSE — Minutes after his club forced Game 7, Cale Makar's extraordinary vision was proven to extend far beyond the ice on which he dominates.

"Now it's a toss-up and the pressure is on them going back to San Jose," said the 20-year-old Avalanche defenceman armed with clairvoyance that betrays his youth.

Yes, nerves will certainly be felt in an Avalanche dressing room full of wide-eyed youngsters who are just as shocked as the hockey world at their staying power.

However, the club clearly feeling a bigger squeeze than a John Daly hug is the veteran Sharks squad built entirely around finally completing the journey they've positioned themselves for over the last decade.

How many more chances will they get?

Perhaps never before has the team been better equipped to win its first Stanley Cup, nor have the seas parted so fortuitously as they have of late.

The top seeds are out, leaving a wildly unpredictable path for the second seed in the west to return to the final it fell short in three years earlier.

It is there the hockey world is already fantasizing about a matchup pitting Joe Thornton against a Boston bunch he was traded by 14 years earlier. A story for another day, if only the Sharks can hold serve in a game Los Tiburones die-hards fear could be yet another opportunity squandered.

You bet the pressure is on the team with five 27-goal scorers, the best defensive trio in hockey and more depth than a Stephen Hawking opus.

Anyone who heard Sharks coach Pete DeBoer snap on reporters two of the last three days when asked routine questions about the status of Joe Pavelski can tell there is tension on the precipice they sit upon.

When asked about Makar's wise observation, DeBoer certainly didn't deny who was feeling the most heat.

"Who cares where the pressure is — you win, you advance," said DeBoer in a conference call before his team flew back to California. "That's the bottom line."

Brent Burns, a man of few words but plenty of points these playoffs, shrugged off the assumption like he's shed defenders.

"I don't think about that — it's just another game," said Burns. "When you're a kid you never play Game 5. You play Game 7, in overtime. This is fun."

Not for Sharks GM Doug Wilson, whose masterful job over the years has made the Sharks a perennial powerhouse capable of doing so much more each spring than it has.

The Erik Karlsson rental expires this spring with little hope the two-time Norris winner and his \$11-million ask could be shoe-horned into their budget.

Their captain and leading scorer, Pavelski, can walk too.

There's little chance he'll leave, but his price tag will force tough decisions that will alter the core of a team that needs to give 30-goal scorer Timo Meier a massive raise as an RFA.

A decision also needs to be made on the future of Thornton, who at age 39 may be playing his last game Wednesday night.

A team with defensive anchors like Karlsson, Burns and Marc-Edouard Vlasic, combined with studs up front like Evander Kane, Tomas Hertl, Meier and leading playoff scorer Logan Couture, is armed with all you need to win a Stanley Cup.

Their biggest question mark coming into the playoffs revolved around the goaltending of Martin Jones, which has been sublime since the team faced elimination in Game 5 against Vegas to pull off three straight must-wins.

The Sharks essentially got a mulligan from the officials (and an historic scoring miracle from the hockey gods) in Game 7 to advance past Vegas, prompting some to see them as this year's team of destiny.

They now face being upset in Round 2 by a team that needed to go 8-1-2 down the stretch to squeak into the playoffs.

Nothing has come easy, yet they've persevered.

A pesky eighth seed with far more heart and talent than anyone gave them credit for now gets one last crack at knocking off the pre-season Cup favourite, and they get to do so with the NHL's best player these playoffs, Nathan MacKinnon.

The Sharks have done well to shut him out the last two games, only to see red-hot Philipp Grubauer team up with third-line winger J.T. Compher for the game of his life Monday to extend the series.

Gabriel Landeskog's winner early in overtime Monday night marked just the latest punch in a series full of counterpunches where no team has capitalized on momentum gained in previous outings.

Every game in this evenly-matched tete-a-tete has truly opened with a clean slate.

There's little doubt San Jose's lineup, spirits and leadership will be bolstered Wednesday when Pavelski is almost certain to be given the green light to return to action following his head injury two weeks earlier.

Although it's clearly a sensitive topic for DeBoer, Pavelski's return is yet another reason to expect the Sharks to pull this one off.

There are those pesky expectations again.

"Instead of a fear or a nervousness, there's an excitement level about the opportunity," said DeBoer about the experience his team has playing Game 7s.

"I know our guys have a comfort level in big games. We're obviously happy we are at home for a bunch of reasons — not just last change, but the energy of our fans and sleeping in our own beds."

And the chance for his team to continue chasing the potential everyone in that room knows they have.

"One game at home to get to the Western Conference Final," said DeBoer. "If you would have told us that at any point in the season, we would have taken it."

Game time is 6 p.m. Pacific.

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1106017 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Why Miro Heiskanen is the Dallas Stars' ultimate X-Factor

Andrew Berkshire May 7, 2019, 1:46 PM

Boasting a top-heavy lineup for years, the Dallas Stars have consistently looked better on paper than they finished in the standings. After missing the playoffs in each of the past two seasons, it seemed like they were



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spinning their wheels with a core in its prime, but on the edge of aging out.

Missing the playoffs last season after signing Alex Radulov was especially disappointing, but this year they're one game away from making the Western Conference final for the first time since 2007-08 when Marty Turco was the backbone behind a group that still included Mike Modano, Sergei Zubov (who should be in the Hockey Hall of Fame), and Jere Lehtinen.

It's been a long time for the Stars, and while they have a new coaching staff this season not as much changed as you would expect. The Stars remain a very strong defensive team just like they were under Ken Hitchcock, and they were outplayed in the more general performance metrics in the regular season, relying more on controlling quality shots.

The biggest change the Stars have seen this year has been the emergence of Miro Heiskanen. From the second shift Heiskanen took in the NHL, it was clear he was going to be something special.

The skill Heiskanen displayed on that shift was one thing, but having the confidence to attempt the end-to-end rush, complete a pass to the slot, then circle back to the point only to pinch in again for a scoring chance — all within a few seconds — is amazing.

Heiskanen's 33-point regular season may not have been eye-popping from an offensive perspective, though it is the eighth-highest point total by a teenaged rookie defenceman over the past 20 seasons. But it's not the point production that makes Heiskanen so impressive. It's his impact on quality shots in both directions at 5-on-5.

At a glance, this might not look too impressive for Heiskanen, but we need to break down how players impact each other a little bit to contextualize what we're seeing.

First off, John Klingberg is a Norris candidate and franchise defenceman in the prime of his career. His impact on the Stars is astonishingly strong and he is a player opponents should fear playing against night in and night out. Along with Esa Lindell he forms the Stars' top defence pairing, and when they're on the ice together Dallas pretty heavily outplays their opponents in every area.

The problem for the Stars last season was that when those two weren't on the ice things didn't go so well. That's true this season as well, except when it comes to Heiskanen.

The Stars essentially run three high-quality defencemen and a bunch of replacement-level players, but Heiskanen is so good that he's able to insulate Roman Polak or Ben Lovejoy enough that Klingberg and Lindell aren't stuck always playing against top competition.

Looking at Polak's on-ice numbers, keep in mind that his differentials include time spent with Heiskanen, so you can see very clearly that when none of Dallas' top-three defencemen are on the ice, things get really dire.

Hockey Central @ Noon

Stars aim to crack the ice in Jordan Binnington's veins tonight

May 07 2019

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While Klingberg gets to spend most of his ice time alongside Lindell, Heiskanen is having to constantly pair with players who are getting torn asunder whenever they're not attached to his hip. He's keeping his partners around even despite a lower than expected PDO according to Corsica.Hockey, and the fact they have to play tougher competition with Heiskanen than they do without him.

Despite carrying around objectively poor partners, Heiskanen boasts the second-best high danger scoring chance differential on the Stars defence at nearly 58 per cent.

The comparison to Klingberg might seem lofty based on the raw differentials, but the context matters, and if we take a look at some individual statistics Heiskanen looks strong once again.

Comparing Heiskanen directly with Klingberg, while showing what the rest of the Stars' defencemen accomplish, it's incredible that this kid is only 19.

Klingberg comes out on top in most areas, and it appears that Heiskanen struggles a bit in terms of connecting on exit passes out of the defensive zone. He has the worst success rate on outlet passes on the team at just 54.1 per cent, and also passes to his defensive partner less often than anyone else on the team. That makes sense considering who Heiskanen is playing with and the extra forechecking pressure placed on him because his partner is not a good option is far more likely the cause of his low pass success rate than any poor play on his part.

Heiskanen's main solution to the lack of breakout support he gets is to just skate the puck out himself, and most of the time that works perfectly.

Within one game of the conference final as Ben Bishop holds things together as he has all season, the Stars remain an extremely top heavy team and will need to be address that going forward. However, Heiskanen's presence has singlehandedly made that far less of an issue.

He's the main reason the Stars have gone from out of the playoffs to knocking on the door of the final four.

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1106018 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Hitchcock: Oilers will find success 'a lot quicker' than people think

Emily Sadler | May 7, 2019, 6:33 PM

Forget retirement. Ken Hitchcock may not be the head coach of the Edmonton Oilers anymore, but he's not going anywhere.

Newly-appointed general manager Ken Holland confirmed that the veteran bench boss won't be behind the bench of the Oilers next season, but he will remain behind the scenes as an advisor to the team as he helps the ever-rebuilding club finally get to the next level.

During an appearance on Prime Time Sports on Tuesday, Hitchcock opened up about his conversations with Edmonton brass over the past 24 hours.

"It wasn't tough on me, to be honest with you. I went in last year with [former Oilers GM] Peter [Chiarelli] to help Peter and help the Oilers in particular and I knew it was year-by-year and I told them, 'If you decide to move on from me, I want to help,'" said Hitchcock, whose job description will be sorted out in more detail within the next week or two. "Obviously Edmonton's my hometown, the team means the world to me, the success of the team means everything to me, and I knew I couldn't coach forever and I wanted to help in some way."

Holland says top priority is finding a new coach. Talked to Hitchcock last night.

— John Shannon (@JSportsnet) May 7, 2019

Hitchcock took the reins in Edmonton on an interim basis on Nov. 20 following the dismissal of Todd McLellan. He had announced his retirement from coaching just eight months earlier, after spending the 2017-18 season as head coach of the Dallas Stars, but quickly reconsidered when the opportunity to coach his hometown team presented itself. He went 26-28-8 in 62 games as the Oilers' coach this past season, and while it wasn't enough to lift the team back into the playoffs, Hitchcock said the experience of being in the hockey-crazed market "reinvigorated" him. (The opportunity to coach a generational player like Connor McDavid certainly helped with that, too.)

"When they made the decision that they were going to change both the general manager and the coach, I fully understood that but I want to work. I want to help, I want to work, I want to do whatever I can to



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continue to help the team," said Hitchcock, whose coaching career has spanned more than two decades on five different teams, and saw him hoist the Stanley Cup with the Stars in 1999. "I think I've got a lot to offer, especially on player evaluation and pro player evaluation and free agents and things like that. I know the league, as well as anybody or any coach and I, want to be able to help put this thing back on the track and help Kenny [Holland]."

Getting this Oilers team "back on the track" has proven to be a tough task over the years. In the 13 seasons since losing the Stanley Cup Final to Carolina in 2006, Edmonton has made the post-season just once — that was in 2017, and the team has stalled in the two years since. But in Hitchcock's eyes, this is a club that's not as far off the beaten path as the standings indicate.

"I'm a pretty hopeful guy, but I see this as a lot quicker turnaround than people think," he said. "I think this is more doable than anything, because if you don't have the top-end guys, you're searching and hunting and you could be years looking for that type of player and you get into bidding wars on guys who are free agents to just try to find them. Well, they're already in place. We already have them."

Unlike other "80-point teams," as Hitchcock describes the Oilers — meaning you're 14 points or "a win per month away" from the playoffs — Edmonton happens to have arguably the best player in the league in McDavid, plus an elite scorer in Leon Draisaitl as the franchise cornerstones. Those kinds of players are extremely tough to find, and the Oilers have them under contract for the next seven and six years, respectively.

"Now we've got to look for people who make them better, and I think there's a lot of those players in the National Hockey League that can really help teams and they're littered right throughout the whole league, every team's got them," said Hitchcock, who praised Holland as a no-nonsense evaluator who is well-suited to be able to find those guys — and fast.

"What we need to help ourselves with is we need the role players and the depth players to be zero maintenance," Hitchcock said. "We need those players to come in and us not spend 30 seconds worrying about whether they're going to come and play. That's my opinion, is that the players that come in to help this team, they have to bring it every day so that it opens up space so that we get more room for our top guys."

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Sportsnet.ca / Oilers wise to bet that Ken Holland is neither old, nor finished

Mark Spector May 7, 2019, 9:38 AM

EDMONTON — Ken Holland is a gatherer of opinions, who tends to listen more than he speaks. He approaches people from every level of the hockey world as an equal — not an employee, or someone who requires instruction from on high.

So, as the Edmonton Oilers begin a new era with Holland after the failed regime of the private, seldom seen Peter Chiarelli, we spent an afternoon on the phone, talking to people who have worked with, for and around Holland since the day he became the Detroit Red Wings general manager, on July 18, 1997.

That top point is what stood out as a common theme, and one we can personally vouch for. Here's an example:

Before games, they hold what is commonly called a 'press meal.' The media, the off-ice officials, the visiting scouts, often the two clubs' training staffs who have worked all day and are hungry, we all pay the \$10 or \$15 and have a nice pre-game meal.

Some general managers avoid those situations. They have a dressing room attendant get them a plate, and bring it to the privacy of the dressing room so they can eat in peace.

Ken Holland sits at a table and breaks bread with... Whomever. And by the time you walk away from that table, and load into the elevator to get upstairs, you've learned a lot about the game and he's always learned a little. Because there's always something to be learned from anyone, if you just keep your ears open.

"He values opinions. Incredibly so," said one scout who has worked for Holland. "He's a great communicator among his staff."

I meet scouts from time to time who file a negative report on a player, then come to find out their team has acquired that player without even a phonecall from the GM. That does not happen in Detroit.

The knock on Holland, coming almost exclusively from people who haven't been lucky enough to get to know the man, is that his last few seasons in Detroit are proof that the game has passed him by. So let's take that on.

Livestream every game of the Stanley Cup Playoffs, blackout-free. Plus stream the Blue Jays & MLB, Raptors and NBA Playoffs matchups and more.

Mistake No. 1: There was a lot of loyalty in Detroit to those who helped win four Stanley Cups between 1997 and 2008. In 2013-14 — the last year Johan Franzen was an NHL force; with Nicklas Lidstrom and Tomas Holmstrom having retired — the Red Wings should have begun their rebuild.

They did not, because as long as Henrik Zetterberg and Pavel Datsyuk were there, Holland felt a responsibility to compete for the playoffs. He shouldn't have, but that loyalty is what gives the Red Wings one of the top cultures among NHL franchises.

"He treats people right, treats people with respect," said a Red Wings employee of more than 20 years. "Those players he had signed, he wasn't just going to move on from them."

In a perfect world Holland trades Datsyuk and Zetterberg for youth and draft picks. In a perfect world the Blackhawks trade Brent Seabrook, and Boston moves on from Zdeno Chara. The NHL is not a perfect world.

Mistake No. 2: In September of 2014 they broke ground on Little Caesar's Arena in downtown Detroit. At that time, again, Holland should have gone to his owners, the Ilitch family, and told them it was time to rebuild. But the Ilitches had always given Holland everything he needed to compete, and now they were at the tail end of a 25-year run of making the playoffs, and had a new arena on the way.

Every owner in every sport wants a competitive team in their new arena. Holland acquiesced and made some moves that look bad now. The arena opened for the 2016-17 season. The Wings missed the playoffs. It happens, in an organization that was used to winning. They don't take the concept of rebuilding well.

Today the Red Wings have a few good young players, and 10 picks inside the top three rounds of the draft, this year and next. It is not scorched earth, and the rebuild has finally begun.

Holland will have sat down with Oilers CEO Bob Nicholson, and not minced any words.

"He's as honest as the day is long. He doesn't bullshit people," said another hockey voice who has known Holland for many years. "You know where you stand at all times."

There is much fear in Edmonton, among current employees, that Holland will use that honesty as he cleans house. That, with incoming Red Wings GM Steve Yzerman moving his people into Detroit, so too will Holland bring his familiar employees from Detroit to Edmonton.

At 63, some would say Holland is too old. GMing a hockey team is a cerebral job, however, that requires decision-making based on experience, trust and relationships.

George McPhee is 60, and recently constructed the Vegas Golden Knights. Lou Lamoriello is 76, and put together an Islanders lineup that



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improved by 23 points this season. Jim Rutherford was 65 when he took the GM job in Pittsburgh, where he has since collected two Stanley Cups.

Holland is neither old nor finished.

You'd know that, if you ever had a chance to meet the man.

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Sportsnet.ca / Hurricanes' Brind'Amour quotes Iversen on anniversary of practice rant

Mike Johnston | May 7, 2019, 5:21 PM

Carolina Hurricanes head coach Rod Brind'Amour updated reporters on the health of several of his players Tuesday.

He just happened to do so while channelling Philadelphia 76ers legend Allen Iverson on the anniversary of one of the most infamous North American sports speeches of the 21st century.

When asked why forward Jordin Martinook was absent from the team's practice, Brind'Amour explained the 26-year-old is in "maintenance mode" while dropping Iverson's classic line.

It was 17 years ago to the day that Iverson, a 2016 Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame inductee, went on an epic rant about practice that has remained in the sports lexicon ever since.

One has to wonder if Brind'Amour, who played for the Philadelphia Flyers when Iverson broke into the NBA with the 76ers in the mid-1990s, was aware that Tuesday marked the anniversary of the quote.

Brind'Amour also addressed the absence of Micheal Ferland from his team's skate.

"Today he went to see a doc, so he was getting checked out," Brind'Amour said. "I'm hoping that will be the last time we have to talk about that, and he'll be ready to go."

Ferland hasn't suited up since Game 3 of the opening round against the Washington Capitals due to an upper-body injury.

Despite all the injuries the Hurricanes have faced this post-season, the team managed to sweep the New York Islanders after eliminating the defending Cup champion Capitals. They are now set to play the Boston Bruins in the Eastern Conference Final with Game 1 set for Thursday.

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TSN.CA / Was the juice worth the squeeze for Blue Jackets' Kekalainen?

By Frank Seravalli

COLUMBUS, Ohio — When it was over, after the handshake line and the salute to the Blue Jackets' faithful, they lingered on the ice just a second longer.

Artemi Panarin gave Nationwide Arena a thumbs up, while Sergei Bobrovsky waved to the crowd in what felt a lot like goodbye.

"What they give us for these playoffs, it was an unbelievable atmosphere," Bobrovsky said. "I think we will remember that all our life."

The day of reckoning has come from Columbus. General manager Jarmo Kekalainen went all-in in February and that debt is now due.

Wholesale changes are on the horizon. Blue Jackets president of hockey operations John Davidson is expected to return home to New York to succeed Glen Sather as Rangers president. Assistant coach Brad Shaw is expected to interview for the head coaching vacancy in Ottawa. (Assistant GM Bill Zito interviewed for the Edmonton Oilers' GM job that went to Ken Holland. He will likely be a GM soon.)

Oh, yeah. Panarin, Bobrovsky, Matt Duchene and Ryan Dzingel are all likely to hit the market on July 1 in free agency.

"It's disappointing," Kekalainen said. "I think everybody in the room, including coaches and management, believe that we had a team that we think could win the Cup. When you fall short, it's disappointing."

On one hand, this was the best season in Blue Jackets history. They won the franchise's first-ever playoff series in spectacular fashion, sweeping the Presidents' Trophy winner in an upset that flipped the playoffs on its head with a series that will be talked about for years.

On the other hand, the Blue Jackets failed to make it out of the second round, falling short of halfway to their goal.

In all, the cost was one first-round pick, two second-round picks, a fourth-round pick, fifth-round pick, seventh-round pick, forward Anthony Duclair, plus prospects Vitali Abramov, Jonathan Davidsson and Julius Bergman in exchange for Duchene, Dzingel, (injured defenceman) Adam McQuaid and third-string goalie Keith Kinkaid.

Was the juice worth the squeeze?

Coach John Tortorella answered that question quite succinctly.

"Don't even go there with me," Tortorella said. "I'm not going to listen to any of that [bleep] about an accomplishment getting to the second round."

Kekalainen said after Game 6 that winning six postseason games wasn't the goal. But there was no hint of second-guessing his decisions.

"I don't think anybody is going to be happy winning two or three rounds," Kekalainen said. "Everybody wants to win the Cup and lift that big trophy. There are no trophies over anybody's head for winning just two or three rounds."

Few of Kekalainen's peers would say that winning one round was enough to justify the significant asset and opportunity cost, but they almost universally commended him for taking a swing. In a notoriously conservative cadre of GMs, some were openly rooting for him.

"I give him a ton of credit for being decisive and pushing his chips in to take a real shot at it," said one Western Conference GM. "They won the first series in franchise history and will see residual impact of that. He recognized they were in a tough spot and he gave his team the best chance to have spring success. He showed that he has a brass set and I commend him and respect him for that."

Another GM said: "I wouldn't consider it a success. When you commit so many significant assets to one year, it's Cup or bust for me. I think there are some value plays on the margin that can be made without requiring a Cup. It all depends on how you're viewing your organization."

"As a manager, when you make a decision to take a chance, you have to understand there are no guarantees," a third GM in the West said. "You have to understand you will second-guess all the way along and might only be vindicated if you win the Cup. Only one team can. You will either be the hero or the goat. We all face it more than people know."

The truth is, though, if you would've told Kekalainen and Co. that they'd punch above their weight class, sweep the Lightning who were 30 points better, and hold a 2-1 series edge over the Bruins in the second round with a wide open Eastern Conference waiting — well, he probably would've made the same bet again.

Even if it didn't work out. Even if they led for just 48:56 of a possible 388:57 (13 per cent) in the second round.

"It's always a missed opportunity when you don't win," Kekalainen said. "I think [Boston] is capable. They're a great team; they have a really good



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chance to go all the way. I think we had a really good team and we had a chance to go all the way and beat anybody. It was a really close series, small margins. They were better."

Panarin was the Blue Jackets' best forward against Boston. He registered a series-best six points and was their only scorer with more than one even-strength goal. The belief is he is heading for a larger market with a bigger Russian population.

"Who knows? I not think about that," Panarin said when asked about his decision. "I feel empty right now. I can't think of that. I just lost the game. That's all I think."

Bobrovsky had the ghosts of playoffs past revisit him at the worst time in the series. He allowed 11 goals against in his final three games, including a weak back-breaker to make it 2-0 in Game 6, after an all-world start to the playoffs.

Bobrovsky said he will need time to make his "lifetime decision."

"It's too early to say," Bobrovsky said. "I don't think about that future right now."

Both will be sought-after commodities on the market, one of the few dynamic and creative wingers in the NHL who can truly drive play and a Vezina-quality hyper-athletic netminder. They may even go somewhere as a package.

Duchene said throughout the playoffs he enjoyed "every day being a Blue Jacket," but the reality is Columbus will have to sacrifice another first-round pick if they re-sign him. Dzingel, who also came over from Ottawa, was a healthy scratch in Game 2 in Boston.

The Blue Jackets currently hold just two of the 217 picks in this June's Draft in Vancouver – one third and one seventh-round selection.

But Kekalainen's players appreciated that he gave them the best shot to win.

"He sent a message to the group that he wants to compete, that he wants to win this year," Bobrovsky said. "So it was huge for us."

Those future picks, most of which wouldn't hit the ice until 2022 or later, will hurt, but not as much as the holes that Kekalainen will have to fill on the current roster to try and compete again next year.

"This one hurts," said captain Nick Foligno. "The biggest thing is I'm proud of the way we battled through adversity all year long with questions about our group [and] what's going to happen. This was probably the strongest team I've seen in my time here. If anything, I just hope guys understand how hard it is to win and what it's going to take."

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TSN.CA / Officiating clouding playoffs seemingly more than ever before

By Frank Seravalli

COLUMBUS, Ohio — Nick Foligno pleaded his case, to the point that he had to be restrained by a linesman so referee Kelly Sutherland could announce his call to the cauldron that had become Nationwide Arena.

An incensed Blue Jackets fan threw a bag of popcorn on the ice in protest to the two-minute minor penalty for Charlie McAvoy's blatant illegal check to the head of Columbus' Josh Anderson.

The ensuing cleanup allowed Foligno more time to offer his opinion — all to no avail.

The damage was done. Now, after a hit that could now cost McAvoy as many games as minutes served, the Blue Jackets are left to a different kind of cleanup on Wednesday. Their lockers.

Yes, there was no guarantee the Blue Jackets would have scored on extended power play if it was called differently, not with Tuukka Rask stopping all 11 shots he faced with Columbus (0-for-4) on the man-advantage.

But it certainly changed the momentum in a one-goal elimination game. Marcus Johansson delivered the dagger six minutes after the Bruins killed it off, sending Boston to their first Eastern Conference final since 2013.

"It sucks," Foligno said. "Kelly is a good ref. I don't want to get into it. He had a tough call to make. I just think when your player is injured, it's an automatic five minutes."

It's difficult to remember a Stanley Cup playoffs that has been clouded more by polarizing calls from officials than this one. With the speed of today's NHL, there is no question hockey is the most difficult of the four major professional sports to call. There are always going to be mistakes, even for the best officials in the world.

But one series to the next, from Cody Eakin's season-changing botched major to Ben Bishop getting scored upon while he's on his back and injured, there have seemingly been more nights with controversy than clean hockey.

McAvoy's headshot wasn't nearly the only controversial call of this series. Brad Marchand punched Scott Harrington in the back of the head at the end of Game 3 and it went unpenalized.

Remember when Artemi Panarin scored a goal in Game 4 that clearly bounced off the mesh netting above the goal?

That play should have been blown dead, but it was not correctable with the help of video because a puck out of play is not reviewable.

"In this day and age, I think it's crazy," Rask said after Game 3. "I mean what if that's in overtime? ... It didn't cost us but I think it's just funny that they can look at a lot of other goals and call them back from the offices so why not that?... I didn't know what happened. I didn't see it hit the [netting]. If I saw it then I probably would have slammed the stick and chased the refs. It was probably better I didn't see it."

Monday night's pivotal call in Game 6 was also not reviewable. NHL general managers shot down a proposal to make major penalty calls reviewable at their last meeting in March. These playoffs may put that decision up for debate again at their next meeting in June.

In this case, Anderson remained in the game. So did McAvoy — even after Sutherland initially seemed to indicate he would be tossed by touching his head and then signalling to the bench.

According to Rule 48.1, an illegal check to the head may only be assessed either a minor penalty or a match penalty. There is no provision for a major penalty or a game misconduct penalty. In other words, so long as an illegal check to the head was the call, the Blue Jackets could not enjoy a power play longer than two minutes.

Blue Jackets GM Jarmo Kekalainen said he did not receive any explanation from the NHL on the call.

"I think the video was very self-explanatory what happened there," Kekalainen said.

McAvoy stated his case postgame saying it was "a hockey play."

"I thought it was a hockey play," McAvoy said. "I mean I put my shoulder into it. When I hit I do my very best to keep my elbow tucked so I don't get it out there. I hit with my shoulder. I try to hit with as much power as possible. He's a bigger guy, it was a hockey play."

The NHL declined to make series supervisor Bill McCreary available to the media or even a pool reporter. The NHL's Situation Room also did not respond to a request for explanation or insight.

(Meanwhile, the NBA — itself a lightning rod for officiating at times — has created a Twitter account for its officials to explain and add context to almost every call in the playoffs.)

Columbus coach John Tortorella would not elaborate on the explanation he was given.



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"Yeah, I'm not going to discuss that," Tortorella said. "It's a huge moment. But I'm not going to discuss what was told to me."

Ultimately, Foligno said he believes the referees got it right.

"At the end of the day, he probably makes the right call, but at the time you probably want to see it be a five," Foligno said. "Then again, we got a two-minute power play and we didn't make anything of it. We got another power play after that and we didn't make anything of it."

But Foligno said he was "confused" based on what transpired in Game 7 between the Vegas Golden Knights and San Jose Sharks in Round 1.

"I don't understand, especially with the other series that went on, that just confused me," Foligno said. "You see your teammate laying on the ground from a hit that's right to the head and really just unnecessary. The guy [Zdeno Chara] is already on him, he's playing him one-on-one, there's no reason to come across like that."

You know the story. Sharks captain Joe Pavelski left Game 7 with a significant head injury after an awkward but routine and mostly innocent cross-check from Eakin. Referees Dan O'Halloran and Eric Furlatt huddled and assessed a five-minute major.

The rest is now history. The Sharks, down 3-0, scored four goals on the major and won in overtime to advance to Round 2.

Pavelski himself said this week that Eakin's call should not have been a major.

"Was it a five-minute penalty? No, I don't think it was," Pavelski said Sunday. "Am I glad they called it that way? Heck, yeah."

Like the Golden Knights, O'Halloran and Furlatt did not make it to Round 2. Knowing that history, and that their own playoffs might be on the line, did Sutherland and Kozari shy away from a different call in Columbus that could have resulted in a major?

In this case, Sutherland and Kozari punted on a potentially series-changing call for McAvoy, leaving discipline now ultimately to the Department of Player Safety.

That's too little, too late for the Blue Jackets, who will have all summer to wonder what could have been. They aren't alone.

"It's tough," Foligno said, "because who knows what happens."

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USA TODAY / St. Louis native Patrick Maroon sends Blues to conference final with double-OT goal in Game 7

Kevin Allen, USA TODAY Published 12:19 a.m. ET May 8, 2019 | Updated 1:07 a.m. ET May 8, 2019

The St. Louis Blues were in last place in the 31-team NHL on Jan. 2. Today, they are four wins away from reaching the Stanley Cup Final for the first time in 49 years.

The Blues showed in their rousing 2-1 double-overtime win in Game 7 against the Dallas Stars that this may be the best chance the franchise has ever had to win a Stanley Cup.

To earn their place in the Western Conference final against either the San Jose Sharks or Colorado Avalanche, the Blues had to overcome a 52-save performance by Dallas goalie Ben Bishop.

Gritty role player Patrick Maroon, a St. Louis native, scored the winner at 5:50 of double-overtime. This could have been the most entertaining game of the playoffs. Tension. Drama. Memorable plays and saves. Good TV.

"It doesn't get better than that – a Game 7 double-overtime goal in your hometown," said Robert Thomas, who assisted on the game-winner.

Do or die. Pat Maroon chooses do.
#stlblues#WeAllBleedBluepic.twitter.com/4GrkFzXkQ

— St. Louis Blues (@StLouisBlues) May 8, 2019

Bishop was so spectacular he could have beat almost anyone on this night. But he couldn't beat a Blues team that controlled the puck for most of the game.

In the second and third period, the Blues outshot Dallas 31-4. But Bishop kept thwarting them. He made 47 consecutive saves before Maroon tapped one in the net.

"That's the story of our season," Thomas said. "We keep battling."

The Blues have the look of a team of destiny. Early in the season, they played poorly enough that it seemed possible they might embrace a mini-rebuild. But coach Craig Berube took over in November, and after an adjustment period, the Blues began to play like one of the league's best teams.

Getting to the conference finals is big for St. Louis. After being swept by the Boston Bruins in the 1970 Stanley Cup Final, the Blues only advanced to the NHL's final four on four other occasions before this year.

Optimism in St. Louis should be high for this trip to the Western final because numerous upsets have created a wide-open tournament.

The Blues seem to have the grit, goaltending and goal-scoring necessary to make a serious run. Rookie Jordan Binnington was a primary reason why the Blues were among the NHL's top teams in the second half. While Bishop's performance was more memorable, Binnington's patience and poise in net in his first Game 7 was equally impressive. Bishop is known for his puck-handling, but Binnington's puck-handling undermined the Dallas forecheck in this Game 7.

St. Louis Blues Pat Maroon is mobbed by teammates after scoring the game-winning goal in double-overtime of Game 7.

In Games 5, 6 and 7, the Blues only gave up a total of four goals to the Stars.

The Blues are playing the edgy, defensively-stingy style that often wins a Stanley Cup. When you look at who's still alive in the playoffs, there's no one there that the Blues should be intimidated by.

These St. Louis players also believe in each other. Maroon said after the game that the Blues expected to win. Confidence is crucial for a contender.

Said Thomas: "We went through some tough times and that brought us together."

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1106024 Websites

USA TODAY / Bruins' Charlie McAvoy gets one-game suspension for hit, but only a minor penalty in game

Kevin Allen, USA TODAY Published 9:27 p.m. ET May 6, 2019 | Updated 7:01 p.m. ET May 7, 2019

The NHL determined Tuesday that Boston Bruins defenseman Charlie McAvoy's blow to the head of Columbus Blue Jackets forward Josh Anderson was worthy of a one-game suspension.

But McAvoy received only a minor penalty for the hit with 20 seconds left in the second period of Game 6, raising questions about whether he got off too easily at a time when Boston was leading 1-0.



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"I'm shocked by this call," NBCSN analyst Brian Boucher said on the broadcast after the referees made their ruling. "I think this is a clear targeting of the head."

Referees have the option of giving two minutes or a match penalty for an illegal hit to the head. If a match penalty, McAvoy would be gone from the game and the Bruins would have had to kill off five minutes, most of it with a fresh sheet of ice in place for the third period.

Instead, the Bruins killed off the two-minute penalty and got two more goals to win 3-0 and advance to an Eastern Conference final meeting with the Carolina Hurricanes.

"I was a huge moment, but I'm not going to discuss what was told to me (by the referees)," Blue Jackets coach John Tortorella told reporters after the game.

McAvoy connected directly with Anderson's chin as the Blue Jackets forward was trying to get away from Boston's Zdeno Chara.

Though the NHL noted in its suspension video that McAvoy did make some contact with Anderson's body, it wasn't a full-body hit.

"McAvoy's shoulder clearly makes contact with the head of Anderson, and Anderson's head absorbs the brunt of the impact," the league said.

Bruins defenseman Charlie McAvoy is called for an illegal check to the head against Blue Jackets right wing Josh Anderson.

The NHL said the hit was avoidable and that checks from the side are always difficult. Making it worse, it said, McAvoy elevated his shoulder before making contact.

Anderson crumpled to the ice and left the game, but he returned for the third period.

He and McAvoy had a warm exchange in the handshake line after the game.

Anderson/McAvoy pic.twitter.com/4d5MRBy4mB

— Bucci Mane (@Buccigrass) May 7, 2019

McAvoy will miss Game 1 of the Eastern Conference final, which is scheduled for 8 p.m. ET Thursday in Boston.

Although McAvoy is a young player, he is a key to Boston's success. He has six points in 13 games and is averaging nearly 25 minutes a game in the postseason. He also had a big blocked shot in the closing seconds of the Bruins' Game 5 win.

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1106025 Websites

USA TODAY / Opinion: Ken Holland built a winner. Now he has a chance to turn around Oilers franchise

Kevin Allen, USA TODAY Published 12:06 p.m. ET May 7, 2019 | Updated 1:58 p.m. ET May 7, 2019

Even though Ken Holland said recently he was ready to stop being a general manager, it was easy to conclude he was not.

Holland has always lived for the game. Short conversations become long conversations when you talk to Holland about the NHL.

The Edmonton Oilers are hiring a future Hall of Fame general manager, one of the league's best hockey minds, a man who believes in skilled teams, structured organizations and giving young players time to develop.

At 63, he was not ready for the rocking chair. Not by a long stretch. He was never going to say no to the Oilers' job even after he stepped aside to become an adviser to new Detroit GM Steve Yzerman.

Not with Connor McDavid and Leon Draisaitl there.

While the Oilers are rightfully viewed as a managerial mess, there are a handful of desirable players to build around. This is a better situation than Lou Lamoriello (now with the New York Islanders) inherited when he joined the Toronto Maple Leafs in 2015, and he had that team headed in the right direction quickly.

Comparing Holland to Lamoriello is workable in this case because their chief strength is knowing how to build a winning organization.

That's what the Oilers need most of all. They need a clear vision of where they are going and how they will get there. That's Holland. He's a planner. Holland will bring a road map to success. He will have to hire a coach because interim coach Ken Hitchcock is not coming back.

The Oilers have missed the playoffs 12 of the last 13 seasons. Holland was the Red Wings' GM for 22 seasons of their 25-year streak of making the playoffs.

Seems like Holland is exactly what the Oilers need.

The Red Wings have missed the playoffs for the past three seasons, and Detroit fans have turned on Holland. The team's three Stanley Cups and considerable postseason success no longer mattered as much as the reality that Holland was saddled with some bad contracts he gave out, including to Justin Abdelkader, who has four more years with a cap hit at \$4.25 million.

One criticism of Holland through the years is that he has been too loyal to players. Fair or not, that supposed flaw is far outweighed by his strengths.

If anything, his work in trying to rebuild the Red Wings, who are headed in the right direction, was perfect preparation for what he must do in Edmonton.

When the Hall of Fame selection committee weighs Holland's candidacy years from now, they will be talking about a man with a lengthy history of success.

That's the guy the Oilers are hiring.

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