



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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THE NEWS & OBSERVER

For Hurricanes' Faulk, Mother's Day has a special meaning

By Chip Alexander

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For Justin Faulk, Mother's Day is pretty much every day.

The Carolina Hurricanes defenseman lost his father when he was 7 years old. Now 26, Faulk has relied on his mother, Gail, for so much in his life, and he surely doesn't have to wait until the second Sunday in May to make her feel special, to tell her how much he appreciates and loves her.

"I probably wasn't the easiest child to deal with," Faulk said in an interview this past season. "I played a ton of hockey, and it's an expensive sport. She worked so hard to provide for me and my brother financially.

"She got a second job, a cleaning job at night, to have a little more cash and make it easier around the house. I think it was just last summer she finally stopped. I told her, 'You don't have to do that anymore.'"

Faulk's mom first put him on skates at 3, all the better to keep up with his brother, David, who is five years older. Justin quickly took a liking to the rink, then to the sport of hockey, although he also played football and baseball until his early teens growing up in South St. Paul, Minn.

Justin said his mom made sure he had all that he needed, could go where he needed to play and advance in hockey. He was with the U.S. National Team Development Program, then won a national championship with Minnesota-Duluth as a college freshman before starting his professional career in the Hurricanes organization.

"She worked to make sure I could participate in pretty much anything I wanted," Faulk said. "She didn't tell me 'no' for anything I needed."

Dale Faulk, Justin's father, died of a heart attack at 37. It was hard coping with such a sudden loss, and especially tough on David.

"We had to deal with it at a younger age than most people and learn how to navigate life without that support," Justin said. "You grow up fast."

Gail King, who would remarry, held the family together, gave her sons guidance and kept them pointed in the right direction.

Justin Faulk said David works as a lineman, installing power lines in the Midwest, saying he is married and has kids.

A three-time NHL All-Star and a former U.S. Olympian, Justin said, "I think my brother and I turned out pretty good."

The Hurricanes this season had a "Moms Trip" — a team first — that included a Valentine's Day dinner for the group in New York before the Canes' road game against the New Jersey Devils. Justin said he never begrudged his teammates for having so much fun on the annual "Dads Trip" and has had David along.

It was finally Gail's turn this year as she joined 16 other Hurricanes mothers.

"They're able to tell us we're spoiled a little more than they do already," Justin said, smiling. "And 100 percent we are. And they know that. My mom will always tell me I'm spoiled."

These two former first-round draft picks share goal of making Hurricanes' roster

By Chip Alexander

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Charlotte

Jake Bean and Julien Gauthier will always be linked, fellow first-rounders.

Both were [picked by the Carolina Hurricanes](#) in the 2016 NHL draft, Bean a slick-skating, offensive-minded defenseman and Gauthier the quintessential power forward. Bean was the 13th overall selection and Gauthier the 21st. Both signed their entry-level contracts during the Canes'

prospects camp soon after the 2016 draft, their eyes on the NHL.

Two years later, Bean has just made his professional debut — with [the Charlotte Checkers](#), the Canes' American Hockey League affiliate. Gauthier has put in his first professional season — with the Checkers, not the Canes.

"The year has been a big challenge," Gauthier said this week. "But the dream is not over. It's only starting. I'm only 20."

Gauthier believed he did enough in the Canes' preseason training camp last fall to stick around and be on Carolina's opening-night roster. The right wing scored in a preseason game against Washington, wheeling around Caps defenseman Matt Niskanen to get off a top-shelf bullet, and



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said he pushed himself to be among the team leaders in practice drills and off-ice workouts.

"You try to be the best you can be and have that champion's mindset," he said.

It wasn't enough. Gauthier was assigned to the Checkers while two other young forwards, Janne Kuokkanen and Martin Necas, were kept on the initial NHL roster. Kuokkanen, a second-round pick by Carolina in 2016, made his NHL debut in the Canes' opener against the Minnesota Wild and played three more games before being sent to Charlotte. Necas soon returned to the Czech Republic.

Bean, 19, was back in the Western Hockey League by then, returned to the Calgary Hitmen. He again would play for Canada in the World Junior Championship, winning a gold medal, and soon was a part of a blockbuster WHL trade, dealt to the Tri-City Americans for two players and three high draft picks.

"I think it was a great year for me," said Bean, who had 12 goals and 36 assists in 57 regular-season games. "I kind of found my game and especially by the end of the year really felt good."

Once the Americans were out of the WHL playoffs, Bean headed to Charlotte, where the Checkers were beginning a second-round series against Lehigh Valley in the Calder Cup playoffs. He watched the first two games, then was in the lineup for Game 3 because of an injury to defenseman Josiah Didier.

"This is a big step for me," Bean said before the game.

And not a memorable pro debut. The Phantoms won 5-1 at Bojangles' Coliseum.

Checkers coach Mike Vellucci said Bean had a rough start but then "built a game." Bean, thin at 6-1 and 175 pounds, lost a few of the rough-and-tumble board battles but maintained his composure and made some plays.

"Once I got a few shifts under me, I felt a lot better and was able to adjust," Bean said.

It has been a full year of adjustment for Gauthier. His numbers in the regular season were modest at best — 16 goals, nine assists in 65 games — and his playing time not what he wanted or expected after starring in the Quebec Major Junior Hockey League and playing well for Team Canada in the 2017 World Junior Championship.

"He did have a slow start but that's not anybody's fault," Vellucci said. "Sometimes that's just the way things happen. He improved immensely over the year."

Gauthier, who had just one power-play goal, said he worked at being a tougher, more effective player in the defensive zone. At 6-4 and 225 pounds, and a workout fiend, he has the size to do it.

"I'm human," Gauthier said. "Sometimes, you play only five or six minutes a game and you wonder what you're doing wrong. But you just have to stick to it and good things will happen for you. Things will work out."

Bean was not in the Checkers lineup Wednesday for the historic five-overtime thriller — and eventual 2-1 loss — to the Phantoms in the longest game in AHL history. Gauthier had two shots on a night when 10 Checkers players had six or more and the team 95 in all against Lehigh Valley goalie Alex Lyon.

The Checkers lost 5-1 in Game 5 on Saturday, ending their season.

Both Gauthier and Bean would like to believe they can be NHL players next season under new Canes coach Rod Brind'Amour. Gauthier thinks his size can be an asset, and Bean says he could fit in on the power play.

Odds are, both could be in Charlotte with the Checkers, continuing to develop, trying to work their way into the Canes' lineup.

"Everybody has a different path," Gauthier said. "It's a matter of time for some people and sometimes it takes longer, but it doesn't mean that you failed if it takes longer."



New GM says Canes can get a star with No. 2 pick

Posted 3:41 p.m. Friday

By Derek Medlin, WRAL sports director

Raleigh, N.C. — When the Carolina Hurricanes secured the second overall pick last month in the NHL Draft Lottery, then-interim general manager Don Waddell said the lucky break would "100 percent" change the team's draft strategy.

Two weeks later, it's Waddell engineering that strategy after Hurricanes owner Tom Dundon named him permanent GM this week.

So, what will the Canes do in next month's draft?

In an [interview with Adam & Joe on 99.9 The Fan](#), Waddell said it would take a lot for Carolina not to use the pick after the Canes made the biggest jump in the draft order by moving from the 11th spot to second.

"We'd have to be put in a situation where we got completely blown away (by a potential trade). The No. 2 pick is very, very valuable. Very rarely in this business do you get a chance to get a star," Waddell said. "We could trade that pick



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and get some good players that would help us for the next three or four years, but you wouldn't get a star."

The Hurricanes could certainly use a star player.

The team has a new voice in head coach Rod Brind'Amour, but it's been nine seasons since the franchise's last playoff game. The Hurricanes have changed coaches three times and general managers twice since their last postseason appearance.

In 2017-18, the Hurricanes flirted with wild-card position in the Eastern Conference in February before limping to the finish line well out of the mix.

Swedish defenseman Rasmus Dahlin is regarded as the top-rated prospect, while Russian forward Andrei Svechnikov is

the top-ranked North American prospect after playing for Barrie of the Ontario Hockey League.

The top-rated U.S.-born prospect is Boston University forward Brady Tkachuk, the son of former NHL star Keith Tkachuk.

The next step for the prospects will be attending the pre-draft combine in Buffalo from May 27 to June 2.

Waddell said he's heard from plenty of teams interested in acquiring the second pick.

"I've told all the teams – they've all called – If they want to take time to put a package together, I'll review everything. But it's going to have to be a package that I look at and say, 'Wow, they'd do this?' Otherwise, we're pretty comfortable with that pick."



Recap: Checkers Eliminated by Phantoms

Charlotte falls 5-1 to Lehigh Valley in Game 5

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

May 12th, 2018

CHARLOTTE - The Charlotte Checkers were eliminated from Calder Cup Playoff contention in a 5-1 loss to the Lehigh Valley Phantoms in Game 5 of the second round.

As he was all series long, Alex Lyon was a difference-maker in net for the Phantoms. He made 27 saves on 28 shots, with Roland McKeown scoring the lone goal for the Checkers.

Here are four takeaways from a decisive Game 5.

1. 'Til the Very End

One had to wonder how the Checkers would respond after losing in the fifth overtime in the early morning hours of Thursday. Despite the fight and battle in what was a record-setting match, the Checkers unfortunately came away empty-handed and then faced the tall task of having to win three games in a row to stave off elimination.

That's a tough hill to climb both mentally and physically, and that proved to be true tonight - the Checkers couldn't grab ahold of the momentum, while the Phantoms rode the high of their marathon victory. Still, it was a valiant effort from a resilient Checkers club, right until the very end.

"It was a drain on the psyche a little bit, but I tried to do the best we could to get them boosted up and positive," Checkers head coach Mike Vellucci said. "I didn't see any physical tiredness at all. I thought the guys were engaged and ready to go. Lots of energy. Just couldn't get it by [Lyon]."

"There was no quit between us. We knew we could do it," Warren Foegele said. "We just came up short there."

"We had an awesome group of guys. There's so much character in that locker room, so much skill," Checkers captain Patrick Brown said. "It's a sour way to end it, but we worked so hard all year, and I'm proud of all those guys in that room right now."

2. Lyon Stands Tall ... Again

After making 94 saves on 95 shots in the insanely long Game 4, Alex Lyon responded with an equally sharp effort in net tonight. He carried a shutout into the third period before Roland McKeown got the Checkers on the board nearly six minutes into the final frame. That goal mercifully snapped Lyon's shutout streak at 165:54, but the damage had already been done on the scoreboard. Lyon finished the game with 27 saves on 28 shots.

"He was definitely in the zone. We've got to give him a lot of credit," Vellucci said. "We had a lot of chances. ... He was doing something right, and we were doing something right."

In the second period, with the Phantoms leading just 1-0, Lyon dropped to the ice on his stomach to deny Greg McKeeg's breakaway bid. The Checkers failed to score on the ensuing power play, and Lehigh Valley stretched their lead to three goals before the end of the period.

"Their goalie played real well. It was pretty hard to get any goals past him," Foegele said. "Just didn't get any bounces."

"We stuck with it the whole way. We ran into a hot goalie. Credit to that team. They played well. But, man, that goalie played awesome," Brown said. "Ours played awesome too. We couldn't crack him, but we stuck to it. I'm proud of the



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way the guys played. It's always tough ending the year on a loss."

3. Offense Hits a Wall

The Checkers dismantled the Phantoms 6-0 in Game 2 - the only game of the series in which Lyon did not play. In the other four games, Lyon and Lehigh Valley limited the AHL's most potent regular-season offense to just a goal per game.

That was the difference in the series.

"The effort has been there all year," Vellucci said. "These guys have played really well."

"We weren't able to create a lot of offense in tight. A lot of our shots were wide shots," Brown said. "We had to get more traffic and bodies to the blue paint, and we weren't able to do that."

"It's tighter hockey in playoff hockey. We knew that going into it," Foegele said. "We just had to keep creating chances, which I thought we did. We just couldn't find the net."

4. Handshakes

The handshake line dropped the curtain on the Checkers' 2017-18 season, a disappointing end to an otherwise very impressive campaign.

"For us first-year players and the team, just be proud of each other and the way we competed. For the first-year players, we learned the pro grind. That was one of the adjustments I definitely learned," Foegele said. "I thought our leaders did a good job for us."

"I think we had an awesome group of guys. Being a leader on this team was easy because we had such a good group of guys. Everyone led from all areas of the locker room. You don't need to be a captain to be a leader," Brown said. "We had rookies pushing the pace, getting us goals at the ends of games, staying positive, giving us hoo-rah's on the bench. Then we had veteran guys who led by example and did the right things at the right times. That's how we were able to make a playoff push. I'm proud of this group we had, and I had a ton of fun this year."

"A lot of guys had career years ... you go down the list," Vellucci said. "We accomplished two things - one, we won, and two, we developed. It's a fine line in the American League, and I thought we accomplished both."



Brind'Amour's Hurricanes Honeymoon Begins

By [Mark Shiver](#) May 11th, 2018

It's official. The honeymoon has begun. Rod Brind'Amour is the new head coach of the Carolina Hurricanes. After seven years of serving as an assistant coach, "Roddy" is getting his chance to steer the ship. He will have veteran Don Waddell, the newly minted Hurricanes general manager to help him as the team hopes to make the playoffs for the first time since 2009.

Brind'Amour and Waddell held their first joint press conference Wednesday afternoon, along with team owner, Tom Dundon. Like a youngster waking up to find a long-desired bicycle under the tree, Brind'Amour came across as overwhelmed with the moment. To say he was excited would be a gross understatement.

The newness of this monumental step will wear off and Brind'Amour will get down to coaching. All eyes in Raleigh, and across the NHL universe, will be watching as yet another former player gets to hold the reins and try to guide their team to success. Will he go the way of Wayne Gretzky, the "[Not-So-Great One](#)" behind the bench? Or, will he bring the glory of the Stanley Cup to the Hurricanes once again?

The Brind'Amour Legend

As a player, Brind'Amour is without peer in Hurricanes' lore. He was pivotal in leading the team to win the Stanley Cup Finals in 2006. His intensity and personal workout regimen are legendary, even today, eight years removed from his days as a player. In December 2011, Muscle Prodigy did a

feature on the [Most Jacked NHL Players](#). In highlighting Brind'Amour the feature noted,

Brind 'Amour played with more intensity than anyone in the NHL and was the difference maker in leading the Hurricanes to their first Stanley Cup Championship in 2006. Brind'Amour has legendary workouts and is often called the bionic player for never getting tired; he nearly led the league in average minutes played as a center, a statistic dominated by defensemen. He has an extreme commitment to physical training, doing it ever since he was 12 years old and has been hooked ever since.

Brind'Amour will not be outworked by the team he is now set to lead, and they should get ready for a commitment to fitness that they may heretofore not have been exposed. His belief that it's not always the best team but the hardest-working team that can win is about to go live and under the microscope. How the team responds will play a large part in the length of the Brind'Amour honeymoon with the Hurricanes.

Roddy Impressed Dundon

During the press conference, there was plenty of emotion to go around. Dundon recalled that when he met Brind'Amour he was 'A little intimidated." Dundon also said, "Through this process as you get to know him and see the way he interacts with other people, how committed he is to his job, the way the players feel about him, the other coaches and staff, he was probably the best asset we had when we got here, and I didn't know it when we started."



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Dundon added that others that were interviewed for the head coach's position were at a disadvantage because he is around Brind'Amour every day. Dundon's biggest seal of approval came when he said,

I haven't been this impressed with many people in my life. I think we're really, really lucky, very fortunate and I'm extremely excited.

That is quite a statement coming from a man who has forged his way through the business world to become a billionaire.

Chip Alexander of the Raleigh News & Observer asked Dundon if he would reveal the terms of Brind'Amour's contract and Dundon said, "No." He did say later in the press conference that Brind'Amour has three years. Perhaps Dundon will remain impressed through the duration, which likely will only happen if the Hurricanes can begin to make the playoffs.

Brind'Amour, Waddell and Dudley

Even though Waddell has just been named the general manager, he is not in the throes of a honeymoon in the manner of Brind'Amour. Waddell has been a general

manager before, and [Rick Dudley who was hired last week](#) as the senior vice president of hockey operations worked with him at the now nonexistent Atlanta Thrashers. Emotions are mixed as to the tenure of a Waddell/Dudley team, but they do have decades of hockey experience between them. In fact, this post on Twitter speculated that trade activity might be sooner than later:

[Jeff Skinner should not be traded](#). Former Hurricanes head coach Bill Peters was impacting Skinnners' game by either trying to make him a two-way player or by putting him on lower lines in an effort to force him to play better defense. Skinner needs to have a season under Brind'Amour's tutelage.

Regardless of rumors and speculations, things are already different in Raleigh than they were even a few weeks ago. A legend has been figuratively escorted from the building and a coach walked away on his own. There are new titles galore and the Brind'Amour honeymoon has begun.

As year ten of not making the playoffs approaches, the fans are content to give "Roddy" a try. But, as it was with Ron Francis, even the best of honeymoons can end.



SB NATION
CANES COUNTRY

Recap: Phantoms eliminate Checkers with 5-1 win in Game 5

The Checkers advanced to the second round of the playoffs for the first time since 2011, but will go no further after dropping three straight on home ice.

By [Brian LeBlanc@bdleblanc](#) Updated May 12, 2018, 9:19pm EDT

CHARLOTTE — Three nights after playing the longest game in league history, the Charlotte Checkers had their backs against the wall in a win-or-else Game 5 at Bojangles Coliseum. It didn't take nearly as long to play, but the end result was nevertheless the same.

The Checkers' postseason run is finished after a 5-1 loss to the Lehigh Valley Phantoms on Saturday, a game that saw Phantoms goalie [Alex Lyon](#)'s shutout streak stretch to more than eight consecutive periods of hockey and one that was not really in doubt after a few minutes.

The Checkers and Phantoms started the game with a wide-open brand of hockey in which every shot for the first six minutes or so came off the rush. Midway through the first period, though, the Phantoms struck first as Corban Knight beat [Alex Nedeljkovic](#) cleanly from the left point, taking a 1-0 lead into the first intermission.

Knight's goal seemed to deflate the Checkers, who never really got their skating legs under them and weren't helped by ice that was less than ideal on a 90-degree day in Charlotte. The Checkers' best chances came from [Warren Foegele](#), who was the victim of a rolling puck in the first and

somehow couldn't poke the puck past Lyon in the second, either of which would have tied the game.

Midway through the second, Chris Conner doubled the Phantoms' lead by beating Nedeljkovic on a breakaway, and [Tyrell Goulbourne](#) took advantage of an uncalled crosscheck that sent Philip Samuelsson to the ice to make it a 3-0 lead after two periods.

With under a minute to go in the second, Greg McKeeg had seen enough, tussling with [Reece Willcox](#) and bodyslamming the defenseman to the ice. But the Checkers could get nothing going at 4-on-4, and three minutes later [Philippe Myers](#) scored the goal that put the nail in the Checkers' coffin.

Meanwhile, at the other end, Lyon's shutout streak reached 165:54 before [Roland McKeown](#) broke the shutout with a laser from the right point, the first goal scored by the Checkers in more than 100 consecutive shots against the Phantoms' goalie. But the Checkers only had a brief second wind before Phantoms captain [Colin McDonald](#) salted the game away, beating Nedeljkovic for a 5-1 lead just 1:20 after [McKeown](#)'s goal.

That was the closest the Checkers would get, outshooting Lehigh Valley 11-4 in the final period but seeing their postseason come to a swift conclusion by dropping their third straight on home ice, the only time all season they lost three in a row at home. The Phantoms move on to play the



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Toronto Marlies in the Eastern Conference Final, and the Checkers enter an offseason of change.

They Said It

Mike Vellucci:

Lyon was definitely in the zone. I wish I could say we weren't doing the right things, but you saw tonight: we had 45 chances over eight periods. He was doing something right, and we were doing something right.

I'm proud of the guys, the way we finished. Obviously you want to win tonight, but they played very hard and never gave up right to the end.

The effort has been there all year. You look at the series: we had one power play tonight. We had 70 power play goals over the year most in the league. We won a lot of games with our power play, and then in the playoffs we weren't getting any chances. The refs put the whistle away. One chance tonight, and only three in eight periods. When you're not getting the chances, it's going to be tough for us.

There are certain things we wanted to accomplish this year. We wanted to improve the power play. We ended up over 20%, second in the league and the most goals. So we accomplished that. Two, we wanted to score more goals, and we were the leading scoring team in the regular season. That's from a team standpoint.

Individually, a lot of guys had career years. I could list them all. Nobody thought Ned was any good in his rookie year, and he has a great year. Foegele has a great year. [Clark] Bishop was one of our most consistent players. Go on down the list.

Warren Foegele:

Their goalie played really well. It was hard to get any goals past them. We couldn't get the bounces. You just have to keep working hard, and I thought we did that. It's tighter hockey, and we knew that going in. We just had to keep creating chances, and just couldn't find the net.

The two off days helped us a lot. I thought we battled hard. This was a proud season for all of us and our team. Just have to keep our heads up. It was a great year.

We've battled back so many times, there's no quit between us. We just fell a little short there.

Patrick Brown:

We had an awesome group of guys. So much character and skill in that room. It's a sour way to end it, but we worked so hard all year and I'm so proud of all the guys in that room right now.

We stuck with it the whole way. We ran into a hot goalie. Credit to that team, they played well, and that goalie played awesome - but ours played awesome too. We couldn't crack

him, but we stuck to it. I'm proud of the way the guys played. It's always tough to end the year with a loss.

They shut down our power play pretty good. We weren't allowed to create a lot of offense in tight; a lot of our shots were wide shots, and we had to get more traffic and guys to the blue paint.

We had an awesome group of guys. Being a leader on this team is really easy because we had such a good group. Everyone led from all areas of the room; you don't need to be a captain to be a leader. We had rookies pushing the pace, getting us goals at the end of games. We had veteran guys who led by example. I'm proud of this group we had and I had a ton of fun this year.

Ned was so good this whole year. He was the backbone of our team. Same with Smith; when he was called upon he stepped up for us. When you have two hot goalies behind you, it gives you so much confidence to play free, not afraid to make mistakes. I'm really happy we had two awesome goalies.

Game Notes

- It was remarkable to see how defensively disciplined the Phantoms were. Lyon will get credit for the incredible shutout streak, but the Checkers were stymied all night by the Phantoms' defense. They are going up against a buzzsaw Marlies team in the second round, but they're going to be a handful and a very, very tough out.
- Everyone said that the two days off helped the Checkers recover after Wednesday's marathon, but they sure looked gassed fairly early in the game. It was a real slog for the Checkers, and given how prolific their offense had been through the season it looked like they were a bit unsure of how to fight through the tight-checking hockey required in the postseason.
- Brown deserves a lot of credit for his leadership. The quotes above don't do justice to how passionate he was when talking about his teammates this season. All through the game, he was standing up on the bench, almost acting like a second assistant coach. I don't know how much longer he has as a player - it probably depends on how many minor-league deals he's willing to take - but one day, he will make a heck of a coach.
- Spotted in the press box tonight: Canes assistant GMs Rick Dudley and Paul Krepelka.
- The Checkers' getaway day will be Monday, as they enter an offseason that will see the requisite AHL turnover but one that leads to a season with sky-high expectations.



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THE ATHLETIC

Duhatschek Notebook: Conn Smythe watch, memories of 2002, Hurricanes moves, Marchand's maturity

By [Eric Duhatschek](#) May 11, 2018

Now that we're halfway through the 2018 NHL playoffs, it's time to parry possible Conn Smythe candidates down to a more manageable few, starting with the Winnipeg Jets' Mark Scheifele, who became the first player in NHL history to score seven goals on the road in a single playoff series in their win over the President's Trophy winners from Nashville. As the highest remaining seed, the Jets have home ice advantage from here until the end of the playoffs and it's hard not to start whispering about the possibility of a Canadian team finally winning the Stanley Cup for the first time since 1993. Scheifele has edged his way into the heart of the conversation for playoff MVP. The top four scorers after two rounds are all gone, leaving Scheifele sitting atop the active list, with 11 goals in 12 games heading into a date with the Vegas Golden Knights.

Scheifele had an especially dynamic second round, but the Jets have had oodles of important contributors – him, Blake Wheeler, Paul Stastny, Dustin Byfuglien, goaltender Connor Hellebuyck. If Patrik Laine, Nikolaj Ehlers and Kyle Connor can ramp it up, they have the firepower to push the Golden Knights, except ...

There's the matter of Vegas goaltender Marc-André Fleury who, through the first half of these playoffs, has to be the leader in the clubhouse for the Conn Smythe – and the biggest single obstacle standing between Winnipeg and a place in the Stanley Cup final for the first time in franchise history. Unstoppable force meets immovable object. It should be fun.

In 10 games so far, the Golden Knights are 8-2, and in four of those wins, Fleury has recorded a shutout. The NHL record for shutouts in a single playoffs in seven, established by the New Jersey Devils' Martin Brodeur in 2003. Dominik Hasek, playing for the Detroit Red Wings in 2002, recorded six. If the Golden Knights can beat the Jets and advance to the Stanley Cup, Fleury could win the MVP award, win or lose, because of his dominance so far – a 1.53 goals-against average, a .951 save percentage. Five times in NHL history, a player from the losing team in the Stanley Cup final won the Conn Smythe – and on four of those occasions, it has been a goaltender (Roger Crozier, Glenn Hall, Ron Hextall and J.S. Giguere).

Game 7 of the Nashville-Winnipeg series was reminiscent of Game 7 of the 2002 playoff series between the eventual Stanley Cup champion Red Wings and the Colorado Avalanche. The two teams played a bitter and enthralling first six games, but the deciding game was a rout, Detroit winning easily, 7-0, Colorado eventually lifting Patrick Roy after the sixth goal. Roy, who'd been the MVP of Colorado's previous year's Stanley Cup championship team, lasted until the early

part of the second period, before coach Bob Hartley gave him the mercy hook when things had been long ago decided. That's far longer than Pekka Rinne lasted Thursday night, one final cold outing in a playoff year when he ran incredibly and unpredictably hot and cold. Predators coach Peter Laviolette gave Rinne the hook after surrendering two iffy goals in the first 10:47 of play. In the history of Game 7s, it is the earliest a coach has ever lifted a goalie.

But Game 7 of the 2002 second round also jogged a memory about a genuinely oddball discussion about Conn Smythe Trophy winners because of the dazzling playoff that Colorado's Peter Forsberg had. That year, Forsberg missed the entire regular season, recovering from a variety of injuries that included a splenectomy that he suffered in the second round of the 2001 playoffs.

Think about that. He'd been off for virtually 11 months and then on the opening night of the playoffs, made his season debut in Game 1. It was extraordinary – and by the way, so was he, for the next six weeks. Forsberg never missed a beat. His performance led the Avs all the way to that seventh game of the Western Conference final, where it all ground to a halt.

But in 20 playoff games that year, Forsberg scored nine goals and added 18 assists, for 27 points, which ended up leading all playoff scorers by four points – even though he didn't play in the final round. Instead, Detroit advanced and made short work of the Carolina Hurricanes – winning the Stanley Cup in five games. In the end, the Conn Smythe went to Forsberg's fellow Swede, Nicklas Lidstrom, who had 16 points in 23 games for the Red Wings. Lidstrom was first on my ballot, though there were a lot of options to choose from on that star-studded Detroit side. Steve Yzerman led them in postseason scoring – 23 points in 23 games. Brendan Shanahan and Sergei Fedorov each chipped in 19. Brett Hull was one point back at 18, but he led the team in goals with 10. Hasek, as mentioned previously, had those six shutouts. Lidstrom was the glue that kept it all together. Chris Chelios wasn't bad either.

That Detroit team was so deep and relied on so many different players at different times that there was some talk that the playoff MVP might actually be Forsberg, even though he wasn't even playing the night the Stanley Cup was awarded. The NHL doesn't ever release the Conn Smythe voting results, which is too bad, because I wonder if anyone actually gave Forsberg a third-place vote, just as a nod to his exceptional performance. I know I thought about it but chickened out in the end. In hindsight, maybe that was the wrong call. For anyone with a long-enough memory, there was something magical about Forsberg's performance that year – being so dominant after so long a layoff – and probably deserved some sort of special recognition.



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Depending upon what happens with Fleury this round and next, I wonder if voters may need to ponder a similar scenario this spring. He really has had a performance for the ages – so far.

Carolina on your mind

It was December of 2011 when the Los Angeles Kings, shortly after firing Terry Murray, made a controversial coaching hire – Darryl Sutter – that was unilaterally criticized throughout the hockey world. Sutter had been out of coaching for almost five-and-a-half years at that point when his former general manager in San Jose, Dean Lombardi, thought he might be the right choice to take over a Kings' team with talent, but lacking direction. With Sutter, there was never any real question about methods and tactics. He was ultra-tough, extra demanding and you pretty much knew where you stood every moment of every day. Not a lot of people had a lot of faith that Lombardi's move would work – and yet, it did.

Sutter won two Stanley Cups (2012 and 2014) with the Kings before being replaced this season by his long-time associate, John Stevens. Sutter's successes reminded me that even an unconventional – and sometimes highly criticized – hire can work out and so you better keep an open mind. Even if the larger hockey world thinks you're wrong, maybe you can prove them right.

It was that essential philosophy that the new Carolina Hurricanes' owner Tom Dundon was espousing earlier this week when he unveiled his new/old front office. Dundon handed the general manager's reins to Don Waddell, who'd previously been the team's president, and the coaching job to Rod Brind'Amour, who'd been an assistant coach on both Kirk Muller's and Bill Peters's staff. The transition, for both, should be relatively seamless, given that they'd both worked in the organization before and thus were not going to need to acquaint themselves with personnel the way a hire from the outside would. As a player, Brind'Amour had a lot of that Sutter work ethic engrained in him. His nickname was Rod The Bod. He had a chiseled physique long before it ever became a commonplace thing. He was also a well-respected leader in the dressing room, and so it will be interesting to see how those two qualities translate into his first crack at being a head coach at any level.

The Hurricanes were always a team that did well in the new measures of the quantifiable aspects of the game – Corsi, possession, etc. Their only failure was in that pesky older measure that some of us cling to – the final score. They were on the wrong side of too many losses for going on a decade now and have missed the playoffs for nine consecutive years.

Waddell was hired in Carolina by former owner Peter Karmanos to run the business side of the operation, but once a hockey guy, always a hockey guy is my view. Publicly, Waddell said he didn't want the GM's job, but let's face it: most lifers like him, if the opportunity to shuffle back onto the hockey side is presented, they take it. Dundon appears to be an out-of-the-box thinker, which is not always the way of the NHL world and it scared a lot of potential candidates away. Under the structure he imagines, he will want to be apprised of every move; which is more hands on than most NHL GMs

are comfortable with. But ... it IS his money and he is entitled to know where it's going.

"Tom brings a different type of ownership to the table," said Waddell, at his press conference. "He's very passionate, very driven to make sure we get the results. It makes it fun to work with someone like that."

But the real question is how active will the Hurricanes actually be in the trade market? He does have – if not a surplus of young defence talent – enough there that he can wheel and deal from a position of strength. The biggest issue though is what to do in goal. They have three years remaining on Scott Darling's contract – signed as a free agent in 2016 – and maybe Darling, in his second year as a starter, will simply be better than he was in his first year. That may fall into the hope-and-prayer category of roster moves, but they may not have a choice. If Cam Ward doesn't return, it's not as if there are a lot of goalies being dangled as trade bait that could step in as a 1A-1B rotation.

I said before that I believe there's a trade fit with Edmonton, given that the Oilers could use a top pair defenceman and might be willing to deal Jesse Puljujarvi in order to make it happen. Puljujarvi may well be a better fit in Carolina, where he could be reunited with Sebastien Aho, a former junior teammate. Carolina also has Teuvo Teravainen, who had his best year since coming over from Chicago a few years back.

The Marchand quandary

This week, as the Boston Bruins conducted their postseason exit interviews, Brad Marchand was contrite once again – and said a lot of the right things, that "there's a difference between having an edge and being stupid," and that he gets himself into trouble at that precise moment when he can't control his "split-second reactions."

All true. And all versions of *mea culpas* delivered previously in his career. I specifically remember him on media day at the 2016 World Cup insisting that he'd grown up, he'd matured and that he was a far different player from the one that gave Alex Burrows a run for his money in the pest department during the 2011 Stanley Cup final. And in that World Cup, at that particular time, he was a man of his words. Marchand stuck to hockey and along with Bergeron and Sidney Crosby were exceptional for Canada as they won the World Cup. That's a telling accomplishment. At a tournament like the World Cup, featuring the best players in the world, Marchand was able to elevate his game and even in that elite company, he stood out. That counts for something. That speaks to a rare level of talent.

But as long as he continues to do stupid stuff, like licking other players, he will be a distraction and that never helps a team win. So it doesn't really matter if the coaches, managers, agents or family are instructing him to clean it up., what really matters is that his teammates do the policing — and that Marchand listens. He can still play his edgy brand of hockey, as long as he does it between the whistles. Marchand thought he might see his point totals drop if he eliminated the silliness, but I don't see it. If anything, it'll make him better. Maybe he'll even start getting a few of the calls that he doesn't anymore because everyone's tired of that "cry wolf" ethic. Because Marchand, playing at the level



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he did at different times this year, is critical to Boston continuing to make strides.

Charlie McAvoy will get healthy over the summer, and so should Torey Krug, who broke his ankle in the elimination game and wouldn't have been available to play Washington had Boston advanced past Tampa. Krug, McAvoy and another year of Zdeno Chara gives the Bruins a good top three. Bergeron had been playing with a bad groin and it may

eventually require surgery. It will be interesting to see how hard the Bruins try to sign Rick Nash, who didn't light it up offensively, after coming over from the Rangers at the trading deadline but seemed to be a good dressing room fit. If he doesn't price himself out of the market, he might return. But all eyes will be on Marchand once next year starts. Change is difficult, but not impossible. For his sake, you hope he finally figures things out.



Checkers Season Ends in Game 5 Loss to Phantoms

Written by Nicholas Niedzielski

Published: May 12, 2018

The Checkers' season came to a tough end Saturday night with a 5-1 defeat by the Lehigh Valley Phantoms in Game 5 of the Atlantic Division Finals.

Charlotte outshot their opponent for the third consecutive game but again ran into the red-hot play of Phantoms netminder Alex Lyon, who turned aside 27 of the 28 pucks he was faced with.

The visitors were able to put some run support behind their goalie, notching four unanswered tallies before Roland McKeown put the Checkers on the board early in the third. A rally wouldn't be in the cards for the home side, however, as the Phantoms responded shortly after with another strike of their own to stake a 5-1 advantage that would last until the final whistle.

The win gave the Phantoms a 4-1 victory in the Atlantic Division Finals and pushed them to a date with the Toronto Marlies in the Eastern Conference Finals.

QUOTES

Vellucci on Alex Lyon

He was definitely in the zone, I've got to give him a lot of credit. I wish I could say that we weren't doing the right things, but you saw tonight that we had a lot of chances. We had 45 chances over eight periods, so obviously he was doing something right and we were doing something right. I'm proud of the guys for the way we finished. Obviously you want to win tonight, but they played very hard and never gave up right until the end.

Vellucci on the series

In Game 1 we lost 2-1 in the last minute on a power play, then we win big, then they win big, and then we lose in eight

periods. It was a drain on the psyche a little bit, but I tried to do as best we could to get them boosted up and positive. We came up with some different things, but in the end he still was in the zone.

Vellucci on the effort

The effort has been there all year. These guys have played really well. If you look at the series, we had one power play tonight. We had 70 power-play goals over the year, most in the league. We won a lot of games on our power play. In the playoffs we weren't getting any chances and the refs put their whistles away. One chance tonight and only three in eight periods. When you're not getting the chances, it's going to be tough on us.

Vellucci on fatigue from Wednesday's five overtime game

I didn't see any physical tiredness at all. The guys were engaged, they were ready to go this morning and in the game. We had a lot of energy and we just couldn't get one by him.

Patrick Brown the end of the season

We had an awesome group of guys and so much character in that locker room and so much skill. It's a sour way to end it, but we worked so hard all year and I'm proud of all those guys in that room right now.

Brown on the series

I think we stuck with it the whole way. We ran into a hot goalie. Credit to that team because they played well, but man that goalie played awesome. Ours played awesome too but we couldn't crack him. I'm proud of the way our guys played, but it's always tough ending the year on a loss.

Warren Foegele on the effects of Wednesday's five-overtime loss

I think those two days helped us a lot. I thought we battled hard and this was a pretty proud season for all of us and our team. We've just got to try to keep our heads up. This was a



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great year and we've just got to learn from this moving forward.

Foegele on young players like himself stepping forward

For all of us first-year players and this team, we can be proud of each other and the way we competed. For us it's to learn the pro grind, which I definitely learned the second half of the year that it's a full 76 games. Just doing the right thing, taking care of your body and following our leaders. I thought our leaders did a great job for us coming into the league this year.

NOTES

The Checkers lost three consecutive games on home ice for the first time since April 6-10, 2016. Over the last two seasons, they were 54-22-2 at Bojangles' Coliseum heading into this series ... The AHL's top-scoring team in the regular season, the Checkers scored just four goals in four games against Lehigh Valley goaltender Alex Lyon in this series. In seven games against the Checkers this season (regular season and playoffs), Lyon went 5-1-0 with a 1.48 goals-against average and .965 save percentage ... Defensemen Jake Chelios and Josiah Didier missed the game due to injury ... Forwards Mike Ferrantino, Morgan Geekie, Nick Schilkey and Zack Stortini, defensemen Jake Bean and Matt Finn and goaltender Jeremy Helvig were healthy extras.

TODAY'S LINKS

<http://www.newsobserver.com/sports/nhl/carolina-hurricanes/canes-now/article211055744.html>

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SportScan

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

1096180 Carolina Hurricanes

For Hurricanes' Faulk, Mother's Day has a special meaning

BY CHIP ALEXANDER

May 13, 2018 12:17 PM

For Justin Faulk, Mother's Day is pretty much every day.

The Carolina Hurricanes defenseman lost his father when he was 7 years old. Now 26, Faulk has relied on his mother, Gail, for so much in his life, and he surely doesn't have to wait until the second Sunday in May to make her feel special, to tell her how much he appreciates and loves her.

"I probably wasn't the easiest child to deal with," Faulk said in an interview this past season. "I played a ton of hockey, and it's an expensive sport. She worked so hard to provide for me and my brother financially.

"She got a second job, a cleaning job at night, to have a little more cash and make it easier around the house. I think it was just last summer she finally stopped. I told her, 'You don't have to do that anymore.'"

Faulk's mom first put him on skates at 3, all the better to keep up with his brother, David, who is five years older. Justin quickly took a liking to the rink, then to the sport of hockey, although he also played football and baseball until his early teens growing up in South St. Paul, Minn.

Justin said his mom made sure he had all that he needed, could go where he needed to play and advance in hockey. He was with the U.S. National Team Development Program, then won a national championship with Minnesota-Duluth as a college freshman before starting his professional career in the Hurricanes organization.

"She worked to make sure I could participate in pretty much anything I wanted," Faulk said. "She didn't tell me 'no' for anything I needed."

Dale Faulk, Justin's father, died of a heart attack at 37. It was hard coping with such a sudden loss, and especially tough on David.

"We had to deal with it at a younger age than most people and learn how to navigate life without that support," Justin said. "You grow up fast."



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Gail King, who would remarry, held the family together, gave her sons guidance and kept them pointed in the right direction.

Justin Faulk said David works as a lineman, installing power lines in the Midwest, saying he is married and has kids.

A three-time NHL All-Star and a former U.S. Olympian, Justin said, "I think my brother and I turned out pretty good."

The Hurricanes this season had a "Moms Trip" — a team first — that included a Valentine's Day dinner for the group in New York before the Canes' road game against the New Jersey Devils. Justin said he never begrudged his teammates for having so much fun on the annual "Dads Trip" and has had David along.

It was finally Gail's turn this year as she joined 16 other Hurricanes mothers.

"They're able to tell us we're spoiled a little more than they do already," Justin said, smiling. "And 100 percent we are. And they know that. My mom will always tell me I'm spoiled."

News Observer LOADED: 05.14.2018

1096241 Websites

The Athletic / Every day is Mother's Day to Carey Price

By Arpon Basu May 13, 2018

One of the signature moments in Carey Price's career came at the 2015 NHL awards ceremony in Las Vegas.

Yes, Price won everything he could possibly win that night, a reward for one of the greatest seasons by a goaltender in NHL history. But the moment was not about those trophies. It was something more profound.

When he had the eyes of the entire hockey world on him, standing on stage to accept the Vezina Trophy as the NHL's best goalie, Price used the visibility to its full potential.

"I would like to take a moment to encourage First Nations youth," Price said on stage, his voice quivering a bit as he spoke. "A lot of people would say that it is very improbable that I would make it to this point in my life. I've made it here because I wasn't discouraged. I've worked hard to get here, took advantage of every opportunity that I had, and I'd really like to encourage First Nations youth to be leaders in their communities, be proud of your heritage and don't be discouraged from the improbable."

Then, Price said "sunachailya" — "thank you" in Dakelh, the language of the Ulkatcho First Nation people.

His people.

Sitting in the stands as he said those words at the MGM Grand in Las Vegas, next to his wife Angela and his father Jerry, was his mother, Lynda Price. The Ulkatcho people are her people, and she wanted to make sure her son would feel they were his people as well.

Two years after Price was born, Lynda and Jerry Price moved from Vancouver to Anahim Lake, British Columbia, Lynda's ancestral home. There was a purpose behind it.

"Coming from my background, I think that when he was young I felt like it was really important for him to know our family history," Lynda Price told The Athletic over the phone. "So I did my best to teach him about our roots. I think that was important for him to understand."

So, as Lynda sat in her seat in Las Vegas and watched as her son told indigenous people across Canada and the United States to believe in themselves, to dream big, it was clear that her son not only understood, but those roots were extremely important to him.

"I was really proud of him," Lynda said. "Carey is so well spoken and he knows how some of the young people struggle in indigenous communities. I believe he was encouraging them, letting them know they have to set their goals and their dreams and they can achieve them if they work hard at it. I was really pleased to hear him say that."

Lynda Price holds a young Carey Price in her arms.

So much of what Carey Price is today can be linked to his mother Lynda, who served two terms as chief of the Ulkatcho First Nation. Jerry Price had a big impact as well, teaching his son to skate at the age of three on the creek behind their house and, eventually, first driving and then flying his son to Williams Lake on a bush plane three times a week for practice.

But his mother Lynda has greatly impacted her son's sense of self, who he is at his core, and, in a way, his ability to weather the constant storm that comes with being the starting goaltender for the Canadiens. And that comes from the decision she and Jerry Price made to raise Carey and his sister Kayla in Anahim Lake.

Lynda's family has deep roots in the area, found in the Bella Coola river valley about a 12-hour drive north of Vancouver. Her mother, Theresa Holte, is of Nuxalk and Southern Carrier origin. Her father's side is originally Norwegian, first coming over to Minnesota and then settling in the region in the 1920s to run a ranch and guide hunting business.

Holte, 90, has had a big impact on Price as well, teaching him how to hunt and about the seasonal rounds of the local wildlife that has been such an integral part of the Ulkatcho people's life for generations. When Price was very young, maybe 6 or 7, he wanted to show his grandmother just how well he had learned the lessons she taught him.

Lynda Price's mother, Theresa Holte.

"Carey learned to hunt from his grandmother at a young age, it was important to him to learn how to do that," Lynda said. "He fished trout in the river that runs through our backyard, where he learned to skate when he was 3. I'll never forget when he went out there one day and he had his little pellet gun and he shot a grouse for his grandmother. She thanked him for it and took it home and cooked it. So it's just important to know that even at a young age, he learned a lot from his grandmother."

What is funny about that story is that Carey remembers it as well, but for an entirely different reason.

"I remember one time I shot a grouse and she was not happy about it," he said. "I was just a kid and I was scared of going to pick it up. So my sister told my mom that I shot this grouse and didn't pick it up and she got really mad because she thought I was just going to leave it out there. So it gave me more respect for life."

"It was kind of my first encounter with something un-alive."

Lynda, when told how Carey had an entirely different recollection of the same story, couldn't help but laugh.

"He was very proud of himself but I was a little concerned because I looked at them as pets in our backyard," Lynda said. "Then, of course, he was out there with his little friend so I was really worried about his friend's safety as well. But his grandmother taught him how important it was to hunt, so I recognized right away that she was teaching him a skill too."

That skill, hunting specifically, but generally an appreciation for being outdoors, helps Carey cope with the rigours of his job, the constant scrutiny. It allows him to clear his mind and get away from work when he's not working to this day.

"When he was a young boy he spent a lot of time outdoors," Lynda said. "I think there's a sense of peace and quiet being in the outdoors. When a person thinks about their situation, there's always something they will reflect back on in their lives, and I think that's what he does. He seems to enjoy the outdoors and projects, things like that, and I've always been that way as well. I've always enjoyed horseback riding and things like woodworking, and Carey's the same, he always liked to go outdoors. And my mom was that way as well, she always said you had to enjoy life."



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Carey, Lynda and Kayla Price.

Carey was still in elementary school when Lynda became Chief, a leader of her community, and it left an impression on him, one he has a bit of a greater appreciation for now. Because he, too, is the leader of a community, though in far less consequential ways than his mother was and remains today; Lynda still has an office in Anahim Lake where she provides legal services to members of the community, working in "restorative justice," as she called it.

"You're definitely proud of her," Carey said. "To take on that responsibility, it's not an easy job, for sure. Nobody's ever completely happy, as in politics it always is."

Same with hockey. When things go a little sideways for Carey in Montreal and the heat gets cranked up, Lynda can also relate to a certain extent. She says the religious foundation her kids were raised with helps at times like that.

"I always reflect on encouraging scripture, because a lot of times people will treat you, you know, not so fairly," she said. "I think one of the principles that's really important is to remember that the Lord taught us that you have to forgive people when they hurt us and know that sometimes they misunderstand something or there's a miscommunication. So always be patient with people. So when people say nasty things about him, I think he remembers those words. I know, as a leader, sometimes people aren't very encouraging to political leaders either. So I always reflect on that and have to practice that myself."

Though Carey has undergone so much change since he was a young boy shooting grouse with a pellet gun in Anahim Lake, to Lynda, he is in many ways still that boy at heart. Someone who loves his family, loves being outside and has an appreciation for who he is and where he comes from.

And in turn, Lynda remains his mom who was angry about that grouse, but who understood what was behind his actions and supported her son.

"She's proud of me no matter what. She's always been there for me, and she always will be," Carey said. "It's definitely nice to have a support group that doesn't care what your goals against average is."

The Athletic LOADED: 05.14.2018

1096242 Websites

The Athletic / LeBrun: After a titanic struggle with Nashville, Jets are 'men versus boys' in Game 1 victory over Vegas

By Pierre LeBrun May 13, 2018

WINNIPEG — Paul Stastny's last trip to the Western Conference final was just two years ago. He isn't at all interested in seeing history repeat itself.

His St. Louis Blues went into the 2016 Western Conference final on a high — having beat out divisional rivals Chicago and Dallas — and the Final Four berth was a first in the salary cap era for the club. But it was as if they didn't reset in time to prepare for the San Jose Sharks.

"What I remember most is that we played Chicago and Dallas, and they played a fast, skilled game, they really attacked you," Stastny said. "We played San Jose next. I think a team that played similarly to us that year, and I think in a sense we weren't ready for it. They beat us at our own game. What I really remember is that there was a lot of internal conflict. We were letting the emotions get the better of us."

"Maybe we thought it was going to go easier because we had that rivalry with the division clubs Chicago and Dallas, and when you play a team you don't play as much, it's hard to get that rivalry. But you have to be ready for Game 1."

Stastny took very little time to integrate himself in a tight Jets dressing room after his trade deadline acquisition, and he isn't afraid to impart his experience on some of his younger teammates. We're guessing he would have shared with teammates some of his conference final experience before Saturday's opener rolled up.

Because no doubt the same trappings were right there for the Jets, who outlasted the divisional rival Predators in a seven-game series of titans which had been awaited all year long; seriously, Winnipeg's entire season centered on the fact they would have to beat Nashville in the second round.

They had just 48 hours to reset for a Vegas Golden Knights team they had next to no history with, for obvious reasons.

Could Vegas catch the Jets napping out of the gates?

Ah, as it turns out, not so much.

As if playing Game 8 of their Predators series, Winnipeg picked up where it left off in Nashville, swarming an overwhelmed Golden Knights team right out of the gates. Dustin Byfuglien's blast setting the tone just 1:05 into the first period, and it was on.

THIS IS HOW YOU START A HOCKEY GAME!

?: DUSTIN BYFUGLIEN

?: @MARKSCHEIFELE55

?: @BIGGIEFUNKE

1-0 JETS!#WPGWHITEOUT #GOJETSGO #VGKVSWPG
PIC.TWITTER.COM/S1SX1ZKWP1

— WINNIPEG JETS (@NHLJETS) MAY 12, 2018

"I think it was nice playing right away," Stastny said after Saturday's 4-2 win. "But the coaching staff did a good job. You almost get too high a little bit after every round. Like you said, eventually you knew you'd have to probably go through Nashville just because of how good they were; then you beat them and I think we did a good job turning the page right away. That starts from the coaching staff down. Just being able to get right back into it and getting the crowd into it makes it a bit easier."

The Whiteout was deafening in pre-game, the crowd singing O Canada produced chills, and the Jets being up 3-0 after 7:35 of the opening period put Game 1 in the bag early.

"A little bit of men versus boys," said a Western Conference coach via text message Saturday night.

If the Golden Knights had thought bubbles above their helmets about halfway the opening period they'd read: "Toto, we're not in the Pacific Division anymore."

Marc-Andre Fleury's .951 save percentage through two playoff rounds was sensational, but it didn't come against the Jets. They chased a Vezina Trophy finalist three times last round and clearly aren't going to be intimidated by Fleury's gaudy numbers.

"We want Subban, we want Subban," the Jets crowd chanted Saturday night, hoping for a Fleury hook and the appearance of backup Malcom Subban.

Neither happened, but the series is young.

This is an absolute offensive machine these Winnipeg Jets, with four lines flying Saturday night once again.



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No doubt Vegas will settle down and have a counter-punch in this series. The Golden Knights have shown all year that they're at their best when counted out.

"We're going to see what kind of team we are," said Vegas winger Jonathan Marchessault. "(Monday) is definitely a must-win game. As a group, as long as you move on, everyone needs to step up if you want to win against the best team in the league."

The Golden Knights have a four-line team, too, and can grind out wins in part using their impressive foot speed.

Here's the thing, we've read much in the past 48 hours about that Vegas team speed perhaps giving the Jets fits in this series. That bemused me only because if people were paying attention as the Jets beat Minnesota and Nashville, they would have seen that Winnipeg was in high gear and had the Wild on their heels most of the time, and the Predators just enough to make a difference, especially in Game 7.

This wasn't even Winnipeg's best game on this night. The Jets took their foot off the pedal in the second period.

Some of that was Vegas settling down.

"We've just got to stick to our game," said Jets superstar Mark Scheifele, who scored his league-leading 12th goal of the post-season. "You just can't stray from it. No matter how the game's going, no matter if they score a goal, we score a goal, we keep playing the same way, and that has to be the focus for the whole game."

For a third straight round, the Jets are off to a 1-0 series lead. They've never trailed a series all playoff long. And their confidence coming off the mega-series over Nashville is sky high.

This looks like a Cup team through and through.

The Golden Knights have made fools of many all year long. But this is a test that may just be too daunting. Finally.

The Athletic LOADED: 05.14.2018

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Sportsnet.ca / Capitals in driver's seat after 2 road wins vs. Lightning

Kristina Rutherford | May 14, 2018, 1:32 AM

TAMPA, Fla. — Evgeny Kuznetsov's eyebrows raise a little bit and he nods, because of course he knew what was coming on Sunday night in Tampa, early in the third period, as he carried that puck down the ice on a two-on-one with Alex Ovechkin, who was tearing down the left wing.

"I just know I have to get it over there," the Capitals centreman says, minutes after his team's second straight dismantling of the Tampa Bay Lightning. "It's pretty hard to stop that shot."

It really is.

And the ensuing Ovechkin top-shelf goal, which made it 5-2 in an eventual 6-2 drubbing, really put an exclamation point on a Game 2 win, a second-straight road victory for Washington.

Now, this Eastern Conference final heads back to the capital with the Capitals up 2-0.

Where the Lightning stand in this best-of-seven can perhaps be summed up by an employee at Amalie Arena, who put his hands over his neck as though he was choking, and then proceeded to dig with a fake shovel.

As Lightning defenceman Ryan McDonagh puts it: "They're making us pay."

They really are. And though Washington was up 4-2 through two periods in Game 2, you had to wonder whether the Lightning could respond, could climb out of the hole they found themselves in. And then, just 3:34 into the third, there came the answer, in the form of Kuznetsov and Ovechkin, and that two-on-one.

Lightning defender Anton Stralman dropped to the ice to try to cut off the pass, Kuznetsov made a little fake as though he was going forehand, and then he dished a backhand pass cross-ice to Ovechkin, who hammered it home and double fist-pumped. It was his 10th of these playoffs.

Stralman was on his knees at the side of the net, afterward. When he got up, the veteran Swede smacked his stick against the post.

"We have so much more in us and we're just not getting it out for whatever reason," Stralman says. "They play great, play structured and they take it to us. We're just not there, especially defensively. You don't win any playoff games giving up six goals, that's just the bottom line."

The frustration is palpable, too. Near the end of the game, Lightning forward Nikita Kucherov gave a little kick to Brett Connolly, who earlier made it 6-2, emptying the seats at a very sad and silent Amalie Arena, which had been so amped up for the 8pm puck drop.

"That's what you want," Connolly says. "You want their star players to be frustrated. He's a helluva player. You try to play him hard, and whether he likes it or not, I don't think anybody cares. It's playoff hockey, and we've got a chance to go to the final here, so everybody is playing as hard as they can."

The Capitals are now two wins away from a trip to the Stanley Cup Final, for a chance at that trophy they've never ever won, and they're firing on all cylinders. Braden Holtby made 33 saves, Ovechkin had two points, Kuznetsov and Lars Eller had three apiece, and Washington got contributions from all four lines.

They also scored at the times it hurts most.

First, Tom Wilson deflected one home just twenty-eight seconds in, off a Matt Niskanen point shot, sucking the air out of Amalie Arena early.

Then, in the space of 59 seconds at the end of the second period, the Capitals struck twice. First, Jakub Vrana found Eller in front, and then Kuznetsov scored on the power-play when he threw a shot on net from a bad angle, which pin-balled its way in. The Kuznetsov goal came seven seconds into the power-play, and three seconds before the end of the second period.

In other words, in less than a minute, the Lightning went from a tie game to being down a pair, heading into the third. Can you think of anything more demoralizing?

"That's the game-changer, I think," says Kuznetsov, who has nine points in his last four games. "It's always hard when you give up the goals end of the period."

Those are the type that send the guys who gave them up back to their dressing room for 15 minutes to think about what they could've done differently.

"The attention to detail again, eight seconds left in the period and you'd think we'd learn from our mistake in Game 1," Stamkos says, "but they get one and that's really a killer going down 4-2 instead of 3-2."

"It's little details of the game at this time of the year and they've executed and we haven't."

In good news for Tampa, unlike in Game 1, when Washington scored four in a row before Tampa could answer, they did respond early to that very early goal. In the first, Brayden Point scored at even-strength, and then Stamkos added one on the power-play, to give the Lightning their first-ever lead in this series, heading into the second period. But it was short-lived.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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Devante Smith-Pelly evened things up early in the second, with the first of five straight Capitals goals.

"Going into the third we were energized," Washington head coach, Barry Trotz says. "I'm not so sure they were because they got stung twice here [with late goals in the second]. It does have an effect. For how long, you don't know. It might be two or three minutes, it might be five minutes into the period. I thought it was beneficial for us to get that late goal and we felt good going into the third and I thought we played a good third period."

But, as with any win in this post-season, as soon as it's over, the focus shifts to the next game, which comes Tuesday in Washington.

"It's huge, but it's not over yet," Ovechkin says. "We're going to come back home and do our thing and take another one. It's going to be hard. It's an experienced team, they have tremendous players over there and we just have to play the same way and don't give them anything."

Ovechkin is pretty stoic and business-like in his post-game interviews, with short answers and little visible emotion. But he smiles at the thought of heading back to the nation's capital to play in a first conference final at home in 20 years.

"I can't wait to go home and play the game, the fans gonna be all over the place," he says. "We waiting for this moment long time."

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Sportsnet.ca / Knights tough guy Reaves looking to make impact against powerful Jets team

Iain MacIntyre May 13, 2018, 8:51 PM

WINNIPEG – Near the end of the first period on Saturday, after Ryan Reaves had knocked Winnipeg Jets' captain Blake Wheeler into the Vegas Golden Knights' bench like a bear ejecting a flea, the fourth-line forward tried his luck against Dustin Byfuglien.

Byfuglien, like many of the world's giant peaks, has his own weather system. The Winnipeg defenceman is listed at 260 pounds, but Reaves figures Byfuglien is at least 10-15 pounds heavier than that.

Turned out Reaves could not move a mountain, but the collision was still felt everywhere from Thunder Bay to Regina.

"That was two brick walls hitting each other," Reaves, who weighs 225 pounds, told reporters a day later.

Reaves' linemate, Pierre-Edouard Bellemare, described it as "two big towers going at each other, and the entire rink is shaking. So that's fun."

Actually, it was kind of. Typically, you see creatures that big butting chests only on National Geographic. Usually during mating season.

The Stanley Cup playoffs are not mating season.

Truly unlike any other player in the National Hockey League, Byfuglien was in vintage form, scoring one goal and setting up another, drifting up ice to join the attack, and using his girth and brute strength to bounce away opponents during Winnipeg's 4-2 win in Game 1 of the Western Conference Final.

Vegas winger Alex Tuch, who is merely six-foot-four and 222 pounds, took a run at Byfuglien and ricocheted off him like a spitball.

When he is on his game, Byfuglien is one of the most impactful players in the NHL. He's probably the strongest, too.

"I'm the strongest player in the league," Reaves said.

OK, then Byfuglien's the second strongest.

"Yeah, he might be," Reaves allowed.

For most of the playoffs, Reaves relied only on his mental strength. He was a healthy scratch in the until Vegas coach Gerard Gallant put him into the lineup for the Knights' second-round series-clinching win against the San Jose Sharks on Monday.

But if Reaves stays in the Vegas lineup, he has a chance to make an impact against a big, powerful Jets team that is epitomized by Byfuglien.

"They still have the speed of a lot of these good teams," Reaves said of the Jets. "But I think they bring a little more size, a little more physical play. In a seven-game series, it's going to wear you down if you don't counter it."

Reaves can counter it.

He is, of course, the son of Winnipeg Blue Bomber legend Willard Reaves, the running back from Flagstaff, Ariz., who won the Canadian Football League's Most Outstanding Player Award in 1984 and six years later settled his family back in Winnipeg and started a second career as a Manitoba sheriff.

Winnipeg is Ryan Reaves' home.

He played minor hockey for the Winnipeg Junior Jets, and was nine years old when the original NHL Jets moved to Phoenix. Reaves remembers seeing the Colorado Avalanche play the Jets and falling in love with the visiting team.

"I was a big Patrick Roy fan," he said.

Traded twice in the last year, Reaves is a 31-year-old unrestricted free agent this summer and admits to feeling like an endangered species.

When he broke into the NHL eight years ago, almost every team had a player like Reaves – a fearsome fourth-line guy who played single-digit minutes, threw hits and fought the other team's "enforcer."

Those players are nearly extinct. The game has become faster, more skilled, better.

Between the NHL and American League, Reaves fought 20 times in 2010-11. This season, he had six fights – all before Christmas with the Pittsburgh Penguins, who traded Reaves to the Knights in February for minor-league prospect Tobias Lindberg.

Reaves has had to adapt. He is still adapting.

"For a couple of summers, all I did was box, sit in the gym and throw weights around so I could fight 250-pound guys," Reaves said. "And those guys are gone, so now I've got to get a little quicker, I've got to add a little skill to my game. You've got to be able to play and not take penalties, and contribute and play responsible D. Yeah, over eight years, I've had to adjust quite a bit."

In 21 games with Vegas at the end of the regular season, the winger collected only 10 penalty minutes, and earned 9:55 of nightly ice time until he fell out of Gallant's lineup when the playoffs began.

"It was on me," Reaves said. "The last three weeks, I wasn't playing good hockey. I dealt with some things the wrong way that I probably should have dealt with differently. I just wasn't playing good. You've got to put the best lineup on the ice; I understood that."

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Pressed about what he should have handled differently, he said: "Bumps, bruises, different things."



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Bellemare, who said his own late-starting NHL career as a fourth-liner would not have been possible had the NHL not evolved away from fighting, said he appreciates how Reaves has changed and improved his game.

"I've met so many players that tell you: 'I can't change, I'm too old,'" Bellemare said. "It's not about yourself. It's about what you're ready to sacrifice to be part of a team. He did all of that."

On a team of castoffs, built largely on an expansion draft last June, Reaves is like everyone else: trying to prove he can play and that those who think he can't are wrong.

"This whole team was built on adversity," he said. "I expect our best game starting from puck drop tomorrow."

Game 2 is Monday.

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Sportsnet.ca / Knights tough guy Reaves looking to make impact against powerful Jets team

Iain MacIntyre | May 13, 2018, 8:51 PM

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Sportsnet.ca / Ehlers still waiting for his big playoff moment with Jets

Chris Johnston | May 13, 2018, 7:02 PM

WINNIPEG – You can score 69 goals over your first three NHL seasons and sign a \$42-million contract before your 22nd birthday. You can reach the conference final in your first ever trip to the Stanley Cup playoffs. You can do all that and still find yourself searching for answers.

This can be a humbling game, wouldn't you say, Nikolaj Ehlers?

"I haven't exactly played the way I wanted," Ehlers said Sunday.

The dynamic Winnipeg Jets winger appears to be learning a lesson that has been taught many times before. Auston Matthews and William Nylander were subjected to it earlier in these playoffs. Travis Konecny went quiet in Philadelphia's first-round loss.

The NHL looks like an entirely different league once the post-season begins. The physicality picks up and the space to make offensive plays disappears – often neutralizing the talent of young, skilled players like Ehlers in the process.

"Everything is so much harder here," said Jets coach Paul Maurice. "Physical strength does become more of an issue. Playoff hockey's different. It doesn't mean that those players aren't going to score and be great playoff players, but they're going to go through a learning curve.

"They're going to figure it out."

There's reason to believe Ehlers is on the cusp of a breakthrough. His greatest weapon is a strong skating stride and here in the Western Conference final the Jets find themselves in a track meet with the Vegas Golden Knights.

Ehlers showed some dangerous flashes in Saturday's Game 1 victory, finding a little more room than the Nashville Predators afforded him during the second round. The Golden Knights didn't pressure the Jets breakout as aggressively as the Preds, allowing Ehlers to go darting up the ice and back off defenders who respect his ability to skate past them.

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He felt those rushes were missing throughout much of the Nashville series, but made an impact in Game 7 at Bridgestone Arena and generated five shot attempts in the opener against Vegas. Call them baby strides in the right direction.

"Everybody goes through a phase where it isn't going so well and last series I felt that was me a little bit," said Ehlers. "But it's a team sport, and when it's not going well for me I've got to find a way to play the simple game and help this team win in other ways."

It must be somewhat scary to be game planning for the Jets and see a zero in the goal column beside Ehlers's name. That can't last. They've managed to go on this run with only two goals from Kyle Connor and four from sniper Patrik Laine.

Depth is not a buzzword here.

After acquiring Paul Stastny at the trade deadline, Maurice dropped the veteran centre between Ehlers and Laine. That trio has done an excellent job of tilting the ice this post-season even if they aren't scoring at regular-season rates – controlling 57.5 per cent of even-strength shot attempts and generating 69.2 per cent of the high-danger chances, according to naturalstattrick.com.

They're spending an awful lot of time in the offensive zone.

"I've got no complaints," said Maurice. "Nikky Ehlers hasn't scored a goal, but that line's been pretty darn good and we just won our first two rounds so I don't care if Nikky scores. I want him to play the best game that he can. Whether he puts the puck in the net or not, it doesn't matter.

"The line's got to outplay the other line. The team's got to outplay the other team. That's it."

Ehlers grew up in a hockey-playing family and possesses maturity beyond his years. His father, Heinz, had a long professional career in Europe, as did his uncles Soren True and Mads True. He's managed to keep a level head despite the 14-game goalless drought – just one shy of matching his longest stretch as an NHLer.

"It's just a matter of getting back to just playing simple, playing fast, getting pucks to the net, playing good defensively," said Ehlers. "It's a simple game. You've just got to do the things you're good at. And for me that's skating."

Sportsnet's newest podcast is a weekly deep dive into the biggest hockey news in the world. New episodes every Thursday.

Like virtually all of his teammates, he's learning about playoff hockey on the fly here. School is back in session Monday at Bell MTS Place for Game 2 against the Golden Knights.

Ehlers is placing faith in the belief that his big post-season moment awaits. That a window of opportunity is bound to arrive where he can show off the skill that made him a top-10 draft pick and allowed him to jump straight from junior into the NHL.

"It's going to come and when it does it's going to feel good," said Ehlers. "But until then I'm doing the same thing. I'm working hard, I'm playing for this team and trying to help this team win."

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Sportsnet.ca / Trotz looking for Capitals to be 'greedy' with chance to snag 2-0 lead

Kristina Rutherford | May 13, 2018, 2:16 PM

TAMPA, Fla. — The Washington Capitals waited until Alex Ovechkin did a solitary lap as fast as he could before starting their morning skate ahead of Sunday night's Game 2, which is some sort of superstition the team began during these playoffs.

In the series against Pittsburgh, it was Jay Beagle who did the lonely speedy lap, but after a loss, Ovechkin took over the duties.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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"I have to. These legs have to move, you know?" the Capitals captain explained later, slapping his enormous thighs. "I have to wake up. That's why I'm over there and I do a lap."

Hey, whatever works.

The Tampa Bay Lightning, on the other hand, had an optional morning skate Sunday.

With the Capitals up 1-0 in this Eastern Conference Final, here are a few notes ahead of Game 2, with puck drop set for 8:00 p.m. ET at Amalie Arena.

Backstrom Watch

Capitals star centre Nicklas Backstrom has been out of the lineup since he hurt his hand while blocking a shot in Game 5 against Pittsburgh.

The good news: Backstrom wore a red jersey and participated in most of Sunday's pre-game skate. He took a few shots, but he didn't participate in line rushes or power-play work.

Coach Barry Trotz said the Swede is a game-time decision, without even being asked. "I knew that was going to be the next question," Trotz said. A real veteran move.

"He's our key player," Ovechkin said. "We'll see what's going to happen, if he's going to play tonight or not. Obviously, everybody knows what he means to this organization, to this club, and if he's going to be in it will be nice."

Preparation and execution and preparation and execution

Those were the words Lightning defender Anton Stralman repeated over and over and over on Sunday morning, because the veteran figured that's what was missing in Game 1, which saw Washington score four straight goals and earn a 4-2 win.

"I mean, you can make a lot of reasons, but at the end of the day we didn't get up on a level that we needed to be to compete in a playoff game and that's all our fault," he said. "Comes with preparation and execution of game plan and everything, it comes with that."

The Lightning bounced back from a Game 1 loss against Boston in Round 2, then rattled off four straight wins to get here.

"We have an experienced group and I don't think it's something that we really think much about, up or down, it's just the next game," Stralman said. "That was a bad game the other night, but it doesn't change the way that we go forward. I think we have a confident group, we know what our assets are and what our weaknesses are and I think it's up to us. We know what we want to do and what our game plan is."

Everybody loves Jay

Anybody in the Capitals dressing room will tell you fourth-liner Jay Beagle is the hardest-working guy on the team. He's rarely not smiling, and apparently he still uses a flip-phone.

Said Tom Wilson, who's on the wing on the No. 1 unit with Ovechkin and Evgeny Kuznetsov: "Beags is such a down to earth character guy and an amazing teammate and someone that's always pushing the group in the right direction.

"It's nice to have a guy like that show up every day. You know he's going to be the hardest working guy on the ice probably, and that's all he knows, I think. That's just the way that he was brought up, that's where he came from and it's a lot of fun to have him around."

Happy Mother's Day

John Carlson and his wife Gina had their second child earlier this month, so you had to figure the defenceman had Mother's Day plans, right?

"Yeah," he said. "Hockey game tonight."

Right.

Greedy Capitals

The Capitals have a chance to head home with a commanding 2-0 lead in this series, and Trotz says there's no problem with being a little greedy at this time of year.

"Your focus has to be on getting to four as quick as you can," he said. "We have an opportunity tonight to try to do that. We know that Tampa Bay is going to bring their A-game tonight. They're a high-quality team, they've got good leadership in the room, they're well-coached and they're gonna have their A-game. We know that, and we've got to have our A-game, too.

"I want us to be greedy."

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TSN.CA / Statistically Speaking: Eller leads Capitals to Game Two win

Scott Cullen

The Washington Capitals stunned the Tampa Bay Lightning to take a 2-0 series lead; Eller, Kuznetsov, Ovechkin and more in Scott Cullen's Statistically Speaking.

HEROES

Lars Eller – The Capitals centre scored a goal and added two helpers in a 6-2 Game Two win at Tampa Bay. He had nine points (3 G, 6 A) in the past seven games, and has taken on more responsibility in the past three games while Nicklas Backstrom has been out due to a hand injury.

Evgeny Kuznetsov – Washington's playmaking pivot also had a goal and two assists in Game Two at Tampa Bay; he has 19 points (8 G, 11 A) in 14 playoff games.

Alex Ovechkin – The Capitals superstar sniper scored once and added an assist in Game Two at Tampa Bay, giving him 19 points (10 G, 9 A) in 14 playoff games.

ZEROES

Ryan McDonagh and Anton Stralman – The Lightning blueliners struggled when they were together (8 for, 11 against, 42.1 CF%, 4-8 scoring chances) and both ended up on the ice for three goals against in a 6-2 Game Two loss to Washington.

Andrei Vasilevskiy – Tampa Bay's netminder allowed six goals on 37 shots in Game Two, leaving him with a .839 save percentage through the first two games of the series against the Capitals.

STANLEY CUP HALF FULL/HALF EMPTY

Steven Stamkos – The Lightning star centre had team-worst possession stats (6 for, 13 against, 31.6 CF%, 2-8 scoring chances) and was on the ice for two goals against in a 6-2 Game Two loss to Washington, but he also recorded a goal and an assist on the power play.

VITAL SIGNS

Nicklas Backstrom – For the third straight game, the Capitals were without their stellar two-way centre and, against the odds, Washington has won all three games.

SHORT SHIFTS

Capitals RW Tom Wilson contributed a goal and an assist in a 6-2 Game Two win at Tampa Bay and has six points (1 G, 5 A) in his past five games...Capitals D John Carlson added two assists and has 14 points (3



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G, 11 A) in 14 games...Lightning C Brayden Point chipped in a goal and an assist in the 6-2 loss to Washington, giving him 12 points (5 G, 7 A) in 12 playoff games...Capitals G Braden Holtby made 33 saves on 35 shots in Game Two at Tampa Bay; he has a .926 save percentage in 14 playoff games.

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USA TODAY / Capitals giving Washington fans reason to believe as they take 2-0 lead vs. Lightning home

Kevin Allen, USA TODAY Sports Published 12:12 a.m. ET May 14, 2018 | Updated 12:55 a.m. ET May 14, 2018

TAMPA — A running joke for Washington area sports fans for many years has been that every spring, in our nation's capital, cherry blossoms bloom and the Washington Capitals wilt.

But this season's Capitals appear determined to break the cycle of postseason failures. The Capitals turned in another strong overall game to down the Tampa Bay Lightning 6-2 and claim a 2-0 lead in the best-of-seven Eastern Conference final.

Two weeks ago, the story was the Capitals hadn't been to the conference finals in the Alex Ovechkin era. Now, the Capitals are two wins from reaching the Stanley Cup Final for the first time in 20 years.

"We are playing good," said Brett Connolly, who scored one of Washington's goals. "They look like they are frustrated a little over there, and we have to continue to play hard, keep playing fast, and stay on them."

Forgive Washington fans if they don't know how to act on Tuesday when the series shifts to D.C. for Games 3 and 4.

The Capitals aren't just squeaking by against the Lightning. Despite missing key center Nicklas Backstrom because of an injury, the Capitals have outscored the Lightning 10-4 in the two games in Tampa. This is a Lightning team that boasted the league's No. 1 offense in the regular season. The Lightning have one even-strength goal against Washington in two games.

Enthusiasm abounds for the Capitals. It's as if the Washington players, now with a huge weight lifted off their shoulders by escaping the second round, are now playing with unbridled confidence. The Capitals are 3-0 without Backstrom, who is among the NHL's best centers. They are 7-1 on the road. They overcame a blown officiating call that led to a Lightning power-play goal in Game 2.

"A lot of our guys have learned tough lessons," Washington coach Barry Trotz said.

It's still undecided what will happen from this point, but the Capitals, at the very least, are playing strong enough to believe they can win it all.

Ovechkin scored his 10th goal of this postseason, and Evgeny Kuznetsov had a goal and two assists. But Washington's success thus far hasn't only been about the stars. The Capitals had six different scorers in this game.

"Everyone is stepping up," Ovechkin said. "We played hard, we played smart and you can see all the four lines did their job. We didn't force it. We just did our job."

After the Game 1 loss, the Lightning talk was all about how poorly they played. After Game 2, there was more recognition about how sharply the Capitals are playing.

"They're playing really well, taking away a lot of our options and taking away a lot of our speed with their physicality and defensive play," Lightning defenseman Ryan McDonagh said. "We've got to continue to make good decisions with the puck, play high percentage a little bit more, and obviously spend more time in their end."

Sunday morning, Tampa Bay coach Jon Cooper was asked to describe Kuznetsov's importance with Backstrom out, and he detailed Kuznetsov's skill package before offering unsolicited that he was most impressed by Lars Eller's performance in Backstrom's absence. That seemed prophetic Sunday night when Eller generated a goal and two assists in the Game 2 win.

"He's got all of the qualities of a playoff type player," Trotz said of Eller. "He's big, he's strong and he's got experience. He's very competitive. He's got a good skill level and he's playing that way. He's playing to his ability right now. We've had people step up, but he's one of the guys that has stepped up in a major way for us. The guys in the room they know how valuable he is."

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USA TODAY / Bad NHL officiating strikes again as Lightning score after phantom high-sticking call

Kevin Allen, USA TODAY Sports Published 9:58 p.m. ET May 13, 2018 | Updated 11:39 p.m. ET May 13, 2018

TAMPA - NHL officiating was back in the spotlight Sunday night when a phantom high-sticking call led to the Tampa Bay Lightning scoring a key power play goal.

Washington's T.J. Oshie was penalized for high sticking, even though his stick never connected with Lightning defenseman Victor Hedman's face. Both players were trying to play an airborne puck. Oshie's stick nicked Hedman's arm, and the puck struck Hedman in the face.

Capitals captain Alex Ovechkin was incensed by the decision and replays showed he had a legitimate right to complain.

Officials huddled before making the call. That kind of play is not subject to video review.

Tampa Bay's Steven Stamkos then scored on the ensuing power play to give the Lightning a 2-1 lead.

ummm x2 pic.twitter.com/9AiITBK12y

— NBC Sports Capitals (@NBCSCapitals) May 14, 2018

Gripping about officiating in the playoffs has long been a tradition in the NHL, but this season, the criticism has been heavier, and more warranted, than usual.

Multiple games have been influenced by muffed calls, such as a missed slashing call when Boston's Brad Marchand was on a late-game breakaway in the second round.

Minnesota Wild coach Bruce Boudreau said during the first round that a missed cross-checking penalty by Winnipeg's Josh Morrissey against Wild center Eric Staal cost his team the game. Morrissey later was suspended one game for the infraction.

Washington's Tom Wilson wasn't penalized on the ice for a hit that bloodied Pittsburgh's Zach Aston-Reese in the second round. The Penguins announced after the game that Aston-Reese had a broken jaw,



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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and Wilson was suspended for three games. Wilson later had an assist on the tying goal in the game.

Apparently Hedman hit himself in the face and that's what caused him to bleed not Pastrnak high sticking... but it looks like at the very least he made Heddy raise his stick that way, idk.
#GoBoltspic.twitter.com/zOp0BhuTii

— Zac Blobner (@ZacOnTheMic) May 1, 2018

Also, in the last round, Boston's David Pastrnak was assessed a high-sticking penalty when Hedman hit himself with his own stick. Though it didn't result in a goal, the Bruins spent four minutes killing a penalty when they were trailing in the third period.

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USA TODAY / After chance meeting, Charles Barkley, Lightning coach Jon Cooper become good friends

Kevin Allen, USA TODAY Sports Published 4:51 p.m. ET May 13, 2018 | Updated 9:15 p.m. ET May 13, 2018

TAMPA - Former NBA star Charles Barkley was passionately rooting for Washington Capitals captain Alex Ovechkin to reach the NHL conference final "because he's on that list that I'm on."

Ovechkin is one of the greatest NHL players to never win a championship. Barkley has a similar status in the NBA. Barkley at least made it to the NBA Finals. Ovechkin never reached the conference final before this season. The Capitals are up 1-0 against the Tampa Bay Lightning in the best-of-seven series, which resumes Sunday night in Tampa.

"I wanted Ovechkin in the conference finals so I could quit hearing that stat every year," Barkley told USA TODAY Sports

But Sir Charles has traveled as far as he's going on the Ovi bandwagon because "I root for the Tampa Bay Lightning because (coach) Jon Cooper is a good friend of mine."

The two men met by chance at the Marina Del Ray Ritz-Carlton bar a few years ago and hit it off before Barkley even knew who Cooper was.

"He was there with his dad, and we talked about hockey and basketball and everything else for three hours and he is one of the most mild-mannered guys in the world," Barkley said. "At the end of the night, he hands me his card and I look at it and said, 'Dude, you are the coach of the Tampa Bay Lightning? You should have started the conversation with that.' We've been friends ever since."

Cooper confirmed the story, laughingly adding that they didn't "meet at a conventional time, like 1 in the afternoon, it might have been 1 in the morning."

As Cooper recalls, Barkley, his agent and a buddy were the only people in the bar, when he came in with his family.

"We're like, 'Holy cow, that's Charles Barkley,' and I don't remember who spoke to him first, whether it was brother or dad, but I remember we migrated together and had a blast," Cooper recalled. "We had so much fun, the night got away from us."

Barkley had long been an NHL fan. He's friends with several former NHLers, including Jeremy Roenick and Rick Tocchet. But after meeting Cooper, the basketball Hall of Famer probably became the Lightning's most famous fan.

Even when Barkley is working on television as a basketball analyst, he has been known to have one of his televisions tuned to an NHL game.

"We text all of the time," Cooper said.

Cooper brought out his phone and scrolled his Barkley messages to show there is a steady stream of contact.

"I will mock his commercials, and I will always get a smart aleck answer back," Cooper said.

Barkley loves overtime playoff hockey, and as soon as Dan Girardi scored an overtime winner against the Boston Bruins in the second round, he sent a congratulatory text.

When the Lightning acquired Ryan McDonagh on the trade deadline day, Barkley poked fun at himself for being caught up in trade deadline chatter.

"This is sad," Barkley wrote to Cooper. "I was watching trade day shows. Laughing out loud. I hear you had a great day, congrats to you and (general manager) Steve (Yzerman)."

On the day after the Humboldt Broncos bus crash, he texted to Cooper that sports is a tight fraternity and that his thoughts and prayers were with the Humboldt family.

In 2015, Cooper said Barkley "held court" in the Lightning dressing room after they won a Game 7 in Madison Square Garden. "He was awesome," Cooper said.

"He's a genuine person," Cooper said. "I've told him this: He is one of the only guys I ever met who can say whatever he wanted to whomever he wanted. For everyone else, it would be offensive, but coming from him, the person leaves loving him more than he did. I don't know how he is does it. It's a gift."

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