



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • May 17, 2017



## In the System: Canes Prospects Head to Memorial Cup

by Nikki Stoudt [@NikkiStoudt](#) / CarolinaHurricanes.com

May 16th, 2017

Four Carolina Hurricanes prospects will represent their respective Canadian Hockey League teams in the 2017 Mastercard Memorial Cup, which begins Friday, May 19.

*Ontario Hockey League (OHL)*

### Warren Foegele (2014, third round)

If you're just tuning in, Canes prospect and Erie Otters forward Warren Foegele is having quite the postseason.

Foegele kicked off the Otters' OHL Championship Series scoring with a deke around Mississauga Steelheads goalie Matthew Mancina in Game 1.

Erie held the momentum through Game 2, and Foegele's third-period tally pushed the Otters to a 2-0 series lead ...

... and earned Foegele OHL Player of the Week honors for the week of May 1.

The Steelheads took a close Game 3 after a late goal from New Jersey Devils prospect Michael McLeod, but, ever the unshakeable force, Foegele went in to Game 4 ready to win. The Markham, Ont., native netted his first hat trick of the playoffs and two assists in the Otters' 5-2 win, all of which can be seen below.

Warren Foegele has been a top penalty killer and a [Game 7 hero](#). Now he's an OHL Champion, as the Otters defeated Mississauga in five games to claim the title and a berth in the Memorial Cup. Foegele himself notched an assist in the Otters' 4-3 overtime win in Game 5, but it was his overall performance throughout the postseason that earned him the Wayne Gretzky 99 Award as the MVP of the 2017 OHL Playoffs.

Don't worry. [Foegdaddy](#) wasn't all business when it came time to celebrate.

Foegele recorded 26 points (13g, 13a) through 22 playoff games. He also ranked tied for first among OHL skaters with teammate Alex DeBrincat in shots on goal (101).

The Otters will now head to the Memorial Cup to face off with the other CHL champions and the Windsor Spitfires, hosts of the tournament.

*Quebec Major Junior Hockey League (QMJHL)*

### Julien Gauthier (2016, first round), Spencer Smallman (2015, fifth round), Callum Booth (2015, fourth round)

Canes prospect and Saint John Sea Dogs forward Julien Gauthier hit the ground running in Game 1 of the QMJHL's

President's Cup Final against the Blainville-Boisbriand Armada, opening scoring for the Dogs with his eighth goal of the postseason. Gauthier would eventually net the game-winner with a helper from fellow Canes prospect Spencer Smallman.

After giving up three goals in Game 1, Saint John netminder Callum Booth made some big saves, like this one, in Game 2:

Booth would record a 27-save shutout on the night to lead the Sea Dogs to a 2-0 series lead, but he didn't do it alone. Gauthier registered his second multi-point (2g, 1a) and two-goal game in a row in the 4-0 win, while Smallman added a power-play goal and an assist to the score.

In the waning minutes of Game 2, Gauthier was called for a check to the head and was given a five-minute major and a game misconduct. The forward was suspended for what would be the final two games of the series.

Booth brought his golden gloves to Game 3, making 22 saves to record his second shutout in a row to help Saint John to a 2-0 victory.

In open-and-shut fashion, Smallman scored the Sea Dogs' game-winning (and eventual series-winning) goal with three minutes left in the first period of Game 4.

Smallman tallied a power-play goal, his second goal of the game, roughly five minutes into the third period after earning the primary assist on Simon Bourque's insurance goal at the end of the second.

Booth carried his shutout stretch through 177 minutes of play but was finally beat mid-second period. Unfazed, Booth went on to stop 20 of 21 shots faced.

And with that, the Sea Dogs swept Blainville-Boisbriand in four games and clinched the President's Cup for the third time in seven seasons.

Smallman, captain of the team, rounded out the QMJHL playoffs with 22 points (11g, 11a) in 18 games. He ranked tied for third alongside Gauthier among all QMJHL skaters in playoff goals (11). Smallman also ranked third among league skaters in power-play goals (5).

Gauthier totaled 17 points (11g, 6a) in 16 playoff games, and his 70 shots on goal placed him fifth in the league during that span. Gauthier also ranked tied for the league lead in game-winning goals during the postseason (5).

Booth served as the Sea Dogs' starter through all 18 playoff games and finished with a near flawless 16-1-1 record. Booth posted league-bests in goals-against average (1.67) and shutouts (4).



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Like the Otters, the Sea Dogs now make their way to Windsor, Ontario, to compete in the Memorial Cup. The last time all four prospects met, they were playing together as the 2016 NHL Prospect Tournament champions in Traverse City.

The 2017 Mastercard Memorial Cup begins Friday, May 19, with the Saint John Sea Dogs taking on the host Windsor Spitfires at 7 p.m. [Click here](#) for a full game schedule.



## Hurricanes, Stars get early jump on NHL goalie carousel

When the Carolina Hurricanes traded a third-round pick to Chicago for the rights to Scott Darling, the NHL's goaltender carousel started spinning.

After Carolina signed Darling to a \$16.6 million, four-year deal, the Dallas Stars sent a fourth-round pick to Los Angeles for the rights to Ben Bishop and signed the 6-foot-7 former Lightning starter for \$29.5 million over six years. Carolina and Dallas were willing to give up picks to get the jump on what Hurricanes general manager Ron Francis called an interesting offseason to shop for a goalie.

"There's two different paths you can look at: One is certainly who's going to be available on July 1 and what it may take to get them in terms of years and in terms of salary, and then the other option is you're looking at who might be available in terms of teams not wanting to lose a goaltender in expansion and willing to make a trade and what it costs you to get that player," Francis said. "When we looked at everything and studied things, we thought this was the best viable option for us."

It looks brilliant now ahead of a goalie shuffle that expected to happen over the next several weeks leading up to the Vegas Golden Knights' expansion draft June 21, the actual draft a few days later and the start of free agency July 1. The Golden Knights, Calgary Flames, Philadelphia Flyers and perhaps even the Winnipeg Jets and Colorado Avalanche are in the market, with Pittsburgh veteran Marc-Andre Fleury, Washington backup Philipp Grubauer and a handful of others in the mix to fill vacancies.

Fleury led the Penguins to the Eastern Conference final but could still be traded with Matt Murray entrenched as the goalie of the future, and his value has never been higher. Fleury wields power with his no-movement clause that could let him choose his destination.

Grubauer said he has no choice where he goes, but as a restricted free agent he does have some control and could be headed to Vegas. The Golden Knights will get 48 hours to negotiate with any unrestricted or restricted free agents left unprotected for the expansion draft, and the 25-year-old German had a 2.05 goals-against average and .926 save percentage in 24 games this season and is widely considered ready to be a starter.

"He's an outstanding goalie," Capitals starter Braden Holtby said. "What I think I've seen from him the last year especially, his talent is NHL talent, but a lot of guys have that. His mental game, his mental prep — every game he was in he was never out of it mentally. He was always sharp and that shows."

Grubauer and Darling could follow the path of understudies-turned-starters blazed by Edmonton's Cam Talbot, who has thrived since backing up Henrik Lundqvist with the Rangers, and San Jose's Martin Jones, who took the Sharks to the Stanley Cup Final a year ago after being Jonathan Quick's No. 2 in Los Angeles. Much like Grubauer, the 28-year-old Darling has improved the mental side of his game as Corey Crawford's backup with the Blackhawks and believes he has the stuff to start.

"I'm confident because I'm excited about it and I'm going to do everything in my power to learn how to be the best starter I can be," said Darling, who's 6-foot-6 and had a .924 save percentage last season. "I have a good network of goalie friends that I'm going to be picking their brains and asking for help and just trying to do everything that I can do to be successful in that role."

Current Rangers backup Antti Raanta, who has a year left on his deal at a bargain-basement \$1 million salary-cap hit, has shown evidence he can be successful too and has been speculated as a Vegas option. So have Grubauer and Flyers goaltender Michal Neuvirth because of close ties to GM George McPhee and goalie coach Dave Prior.

"There's a lot of other guys on the market too that could possibly go out there, so it's not just me," Grubauer said. "George drafted me, so they know what they probably get and with other guys they probably not know as much. I don't know what they're going to do."

Vegas' decisions in goal could have as much of a domino effect as Carolina getting Darling and Dallas locking up Bishop. The Flames made the playoffs with the tandem of Brian Elliott and Chad Johnson, now pending free agents, and could go young with prospect Jon Gilles, look at Fleury or move in another direction to improve on their 19th-ranked save percentage.

Winnipeg has youngsters Connor Hellebuyck and Michael Hutchinson and Colorado has Semyon Varlamov and Calvin Pickard but could shake things up in net to speed up the process of returning to playoff contention. The Flyers will likely move on from the Neuvirth-Steve Mason combo, but former goaltender and now GM Ron Hextall seems fine patching things up until one of Philadelphia's top prospects (Carter Hart, Alex Lyon or Felix Sandstrom) is ready for the NHL.

"We do have kids coming, and I think everybody knows it," Hextall said.



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## Roman Josi's late goal sends Predators past Ducks in Game 3

[Defenseman scores with 2:43 left to help Nashville take series lead, stay undefeated at home in playoffs](#)

by Robby Stanley / NHL.com Correspondent

12:59 AM

**NASHVILLE** -- [Roman Josi](#) scored with 2:43 left in the third period, and the Nashville Predators remained undefeated at home in the 2017 Stanley Cup Playoffs with a 2-1 win against the Anaheim Ducks in Game 3 of the Western Conference Final at Bridgestone Arena on Tuesday.

The Predators lead the best-of-7 series 2-1 with Game 4 here on Thursday.

Nashville received a power play after [Chris Wagner](#) was called for highsticking with 3:55 remaining. [Mattias Ekholm](#) took a shot from the point that went off of [Viktor Arvidsson](#), and Josi shot it past [John Gibson](#) for his fifth goal of the postseason to make it 2-1.

"I think we're a confident team," Josi said. "We know what we can do in the room. Nobody panicked. We knew we played a good game. We had a lot of chances, a lot of shots. We knew we just had to play the same way and they were going to go in some time. It doesn't matter what happens, we just try to stay positive and just stay with it."

Nashville is 6-0 at home during these playoffs and has won 10 consecutive postseason games at home dating to the 2016 Western Conference First Round against the Ducks.

Gibson made 38 saves for Anaheim.

[Filip Forsberg](#) tied it 1-1 at 3:54 of the third on a wrist shot from the left faceoff circle.

"That's what we pay him for," Ekholm said of Forsberg. "No, but he's just one of those players. He deserves the spotlight that he's getting, the attention he's getting because he's that good of a player. This is the time where everyone wants to step up and doing something good, and he's really done it."

The Predators had two goals disallowed in the third period after Forsberg tied the game.

[Harry Zolnierczyk](#) was in the crease and fell on Gibson prior to [Colton Sissons](#) scoring. The goal was disallowed on the ice.

Ekholm was called for goalie interference at 6:33 after skating in on Gibson and knocking him over prior to [Ryan Johansen](#) scoring.

"I thought that was just fruit of whatever we put in throughout the 40 minutes before," Forsberg said. "Obviously we wanted those goals to be counted, but at the same time we just kept playing. I don't think anyone said anything negatively or

anything. Just kept playing, kept being focused and then obviously that power play came up huge."

[Corey Perry](#) gave the Ducks a 1-0 lead at 15:35 of the second on a shot from below the right faceoff circle. He took a wrist shot that bounced off of Predators goaltender [Pekka Rinne](#) and into the net for his third goal.

"We didn't do a very good job in front of [Gibson] as far as managing the puck and then managing the people that were inside," Ducks coach Randy Carlyle said. "Through the comparison we look at, they worked harder to get inside than we did tonight."

The Predators held the Ducks without a shot for the first 11:43 of the second period.

### Goal of the game

Josi's game-winning goal came off of a fortunate bounce off of the leg of Arvidsson. He got to the rebound and beat Gibson with the shot before he realized where the puck was.

### Save of the game

Gibson made a save on a wrist shot by Forsberg in the second period on a Predators power play. Forsberg tried to beat Gibson on the glove side, but he made the save and the rebound was out of reach.

### Unsung performance of the game

Rinne made a save on a redirection by [Rickard Rakell](#) on a 2-on-1 rush with [Cam Fowler](#) in the first period to keep the game 0-0.

### Highlight of the game

[Ryan Ellis'](#) shot came from the top of the left circle and Forsberg got the rebound, scoring his sixth goal of the playoffs and third of the series.

### They said it

"We didn't play anywhere near where we're capable of playing, and we received the game a lot. But we still had a chance. And that's the most encouraging part because we can play better than what we played tonight. We know that. And we take two offensive zone penalties in the third period, you just can't do that, not in playoffs." -- *Ducks coach Randy Carlyle*

"Sometimes in games like that, you get frustrated. You're pressing. Their goaltender was good, and the key is just stick with it and believe you're going to get one at some point if you keep going, and that's kind of what we did. We just didn't give up." -- *Predators captain Mike Fisher on the win*

### Need to know



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Ducks centers [Ryan Getzlaf](#) and [Ryan Kesler](#) combined to go 12-for-31 on faceoffs. ... Ellis has 10 points (four goals, six assists), tied for the Predators record for most by a defenseman in a single playoffs. It was the first ever conference final game played in Nashville. ... The team that

wins Game 3 to take a 2-1 lead in a best-of-7 series is 205-99, including 3-2 this postseason.

## What's next

Game 4 of Western Conference Final at Bridgestone Arena on Thursday (8 p.m. ET; NBCSN, CBC, TVA Sports)

## Golden Knights name Chicago Wolves as AHL affiliate

### Vegas to enter NHL as League's 31st team next season

by Mike Cranston / NHL.com Correspondent

May 16th, 2017

**LAS VEGAS** -- The Vegas Golden Knights announced Tuesday that the Chicago Wolves will be their American Hockey League affiliate next season.

The expansion Golden Knights, who begin play next season, will replace the St. Louis Blues as the Wolves' NHL affiliate in 2017-18. The Wolves had been the affiliate of the Blues since the 2013-14 season.

"American Hockey League affiliates play a significant role in the success of all NHL clubs and are we are proud to have the Chicago Wolves as our first in team history," Golden Knights general manager George McPhee said.

Vegas sent its first signed player, forward Reid Duke, to Chicago after his junior season with Brandon of the Western Hockey League ended. He signed a professional tryout April 7 but didn't get into a game.

The Wolves finished first in the Central Division and lost to Grand Rapids in the second round of the Calder Cup Playoffs.

"If you look at George McPhee's history, he has always been a general manager who believes that winning is an important part of developing players," Wolves owner Don Levin said. "Professional playoffs are different than the regular season and he understands that and he wants his players to be ready to win."

Chicago had been the St. Louis Blues AHL affiliate, but that relationship will not continue. The Blues, however, will help stock the Wolves roster, although those players won't be allowed to play for the Golden Knights. St. Louis will not have their own AHL affiliate this season, and will assign its prospects to various organizations.

"Part of my comfort level is my relationship with (Vegas GM) George McPhee," St. Louis general manager Doug Armstrong said Tuesday. "He and I have talked extensively on the benefits of this relationship... I think it's a really competitive advantage for Vegas and us to join forces. We can input some of our better prospects into their environment."

The next step in Vegas building its roster will be at the NHL Expansion Draft. The other 30 NHL teams must submit their list of protected players by 5 p.m. ET on June 17. The list of players protected and made available by each NHL team will be released publicly June 18.

Vegas will submit its selections by 5 p.m. ET on June 20, and the announcement of the selections will be made June 21.

The Golden Knights will have the sixth pick in the 2017 NHL Draft, which will be held June 23-24 at United Center in Chicago.

The 2017 NHL Draft Lottery, held April 29 in Toronto, determined the order of selection for the first 15 picks in the draft. The Golden Knights will have the third pick in the second through seventh rounds.



## Nestrasil Moving Past Mentally Draining Year

Written by Nicholas Niedzielski

Published: May 16, 2017

If there was one word that described Andrej Nestrasil's 2016-17 campaign, it would be "challenging."

Nestrasil, a former third-round pick who had established himself as a full-time NHLer over the previous two seasons

with Carolina, was struggling to stay in the lineup with the Hurricanes to start the 2016-17 season. He found himself serving as a healthy extra more often than not, something that made it tough for him to get into a rhythm after a lengthy injury [cut his previous campaign short](#).

With the goal of getting Nestrasil into games, the Hurricanes put the 26-year-old forward on waivers and assigned him to



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Charlotte, something that he saw as a positive move.

"I feel like when I got here, at first I was really excited that I could play," said Nestrasil. "I felt like the first 15 games were really good and I showed that I can play and be an NHL player."

A look at the numbers seems to back that claim up as well. In his first 18 games as a Checker, Nestrasil collected 10 points (4g, 6a) and was a fairly consistent force for the team.

But then the trade deadline came.

There was an air of uncertainty throughout March 1, as there was a chance Nestrasil would find himself moving to another club or back up with Carolina. But the deadline came and went and not only was he still a member of the Hurricanes, he remained in Charlotte. From there Nestrasil's numbers took a dive, as he tallied just four points in his next 21 games.

"After that deadline I was mentally down because I didn't expect that I would still be here," said Nestrasil. "I kind of pressured myself too much because I thought if I want to have good job next year I need to put up points and be the best player on the ice every night. If you're not happy, and I'm not saying not happy with what's going on here, but if you're not 100 percent mentally and then you put pressure on yourself, it's not going to go your way."

That's not to say his game completely fell off over that stretch. It just seemed like the bounces just weren't going his way, and it spiraled from there.

"I feel like there was a period of like 15 to 18 games where I didn't put up points but some of those games I felt like I played really good hockey," said Nestrasil. "I remember one game where I had like six shots and one even went off the post and I made a nice play for someone back door but we didn't score and then I go to the bench and the next line goes out and they do the same exact play and they score. And you're sitting there and you're happy for the guys but in the back of your head you're like 'We just did the same thing, how did ours not go in?' And it snowballs from there and it's hard to get out of it."

The mental aspect of the game really came to the forefront for Nestrasil as he battled to keep his emotions in check while regaining confidence in his game.

"A big part of sports is your mental health," he said. "You have to be mentally, well I don't want to say tough, because I am. But you have to be happy. If you're happy and you don't pressure yourself too much and you know you're in a good spot and you know that you're going to go out there, you're more likely to score and have points."

While he tried to shake himself out of that slump, Nestrasil was also shuffled across the lineup down the stretch, playing all three positions at different times up and down the lineup.

"It's not that I mind playing any of the positions," he said. "I'm just not a big fan of playing left wing. But I think the bigger thing is that it's always better for a player to spend a longer time playing one position. They moved me to center and then I played there over the next 15 games and I was feeling

more comfortable. I hadn't played center in a long time so I was learning things again and making sure I was in the right spots. Then after game eight, game nine it comes more naturally and you don't have to think about it as much.

"That's nothing against their decision making. I'm a player so if they need me here, I'm going to play here, if you need me there I'm going to play there. That's completely fine. I'm just saying it's always better for a player to play in one spot. But it's part of hockey and it's something that you have to deal with."

Eventually, with the help of the coaching staff, Nestrasil was able to pull things together and become a contributor again.

"I feel like toward the end of the season, like the last five or six games plus the playoffs, I was able to kind of let it go," said Nestrasil. "Not completely, but I feel like I was playing better hockey."

"He did struggle at times, both with himself and his physical capabilities and his mindset of being in the AHL and not playing the role he wanted to," said head coach Ulf Samuelsson. "It was a hard year for him but I thought he had some really good games down the stretch."

Despite the frustration that manifested during his stay, Nestrasil harbored nothing but positive thoughts about the Checkers and their personnel.

"Here in Charlotte the coaching staff were great and the guys were amazing," said Nestrasil. "Obviously the fact that we were on a winning streak and had that run made it more enjoyable because when the team is winning and you're playing well and fighting for a playoff spot it's always a good atmosphere. I told the coaches it would have been better under different circumstances. I feel like they've been doing a pretty good job and trying to help me and the guys were playing really well so I can't complain about it."

With this up-and-down season in the books, the sights are now set to what next year will hold for the talented forward. To the coaching staff who watched him through it, there's still a belief that Nestrasil can be an impact player at the next level.

"Nesty has had a tough year," said Samuelsson. "I don't think he's quite back to the player he can be, but I think he will next year with a full summer of hard training, I think he'll be in the NHL somewhere, I'm not sure if it's with the Hurricanes or somewhere else. He's got a lot of skill and he's a good player."

But before that thought process even comes up, the first thing on Nestrasil's schedule is a break.

"To be honest, I forbid myself from thinking about it," said Nestrasil of his future plans. "I need to step back and relax and recharge my battery and think. I feel like I'm going to see everything in a different light three weeks from now. Obviously I have thought about all the options I might or might not have, but I don't really want to say that I would do this or that right now. I feel like I need to clear my mind first and get a break so I can look at it from a different perspective."



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# SportScan

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

1064608 Websites

FOXSports.com / Phil Kessel was incredibly frustrated throughout Game 2, and then he scored the game-winner

Pete Blackburn

Pete Blackburn @PeteBlackburn

May 16, 2017 at 8:39a ET

Phil Kessel spent most of Monday's Game 2 in Pittsburgh as the most frustrated player on the ice. By the end of it, he was the hero.

The Penguins winger was spectacularly animated throughout the night. After nearly every shift he would return to the Pittsburgh bench and grow increasingly discontent, often verbally communicating his unhappiness to others on the bench.

At a few points, Kessel and linemate Evgeni Malkin exchanged heated words of frustration. They got so worked up that Penguins coach Mike Sullivan had to step in and attempt to calm his players down. After the game, Sullivan seemed to embrace the fire that came from his guys on the bench.

"It's hard to be ultra-competitive in the absence of emotion," Sullivan said, via the Post-Gazette. "Emotion is the fabric of our game. That's part of what makes our game as great as it is."

"Do we have some exchanges on the bench? Sure we do, and we encourage it because I think it helps our game," Sullivan said. "So just because a guy gets a little bit emotional, I think it helps our overall team game. I think progress is made. We call it a man's argument. That's the way it is. I think lines go back and forth and talk to one another. I think it brings juice to the bench."

It's a lot easier to be cool with tensions running high on the bench when those frustrations ultimately lead to results on the ice, as they did on Monday night.

In the third period, the Penguins finally managed to break a scoreless tie when Malkin found — who else? — Kessel in the offensive zone and No. 81 found the back of the net.

It wasn't the prettiest goal — Kessel beat Senators goalie Craig Anderson on a second-chance opportunity after his initial shot was blocked — but it was the only goal of the night and it helped the Penguins even the series at one game apiece.

Following the final horn, Kessel finally felt a little bit of joy and couldn't help but smile while talking about the way the game played out. The winger said he was emotional over the team's failure to execute on chances they had, but praised the resilience of their group.

FOXSports.com LOADED: 05.17.2017

1064609 Websites

NBCSports.com / Prized Swedish d-man Borgman signs in NHL — but where?

By Mike Halford May 16, 2017, 10:40 AM EDT

Here's what we know about Andreas Borgman, the Swedish Hockey League's reigning rookie of the year:

— He's leaving his SHL club, HV71, to sign with an NHL squad. HV71 announced it on the club website today.

— According to Swedish news outlet Sport JKPG, Borgman has been on the radar of several NHL teams since January, but waited until the SHL campaign was done to sign an entry-level deal.

— When asked what team he's signed for, Borgman would only say "we'll see."

There's certainly plenty of intrigue surrounding the 6-foot, 205-pound rearguard.

Borgman, 21, is coming off a very solid campaign. He had five goals and 15 points in 45 regular season games, then had a terrific playoff as HV71 captured the league crown, finishing with 10 points in 14 games.

Passed over in his draft year, Borgman had previously starred in the Allsvenskan — the Swedish second division — and represented his country at the 2013 World Juniors.

NBCSports.com / LOADED: 05.17.2017

1064610 Websites

NBCSports.com / Ralph Krueger turned down two NHL coaching jobs

By Mike Halford May 16, 2017, 5:37 PM EDT

Ralph Krueger, just months removed from taking Team Europe to the World Cup of Hockey final, rejected a pair of NHL head coaching gigs this offseason.

Krueger explained as much in an exclusive interview with ProSoccerTalk's Joe Prince-Wright. The 57-year-old currently serves as the chairman of Southampton Football Club in the English Premier League.



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"It was nice and honorable that I was offered two NHL jobs this postseason and I was happy they didn't forget about me, but I turned them down," Krueger said. "It just feels like we've only just got started here [at Southampton] and especially with the management re-organization we just did, there is kind of like there's something here where we are going to take it to another level.

"I still love the game and I have lots of friends still in the playoffs, I am keeping a close eye on them. My son is playing at the World Hockey Championship for Germany right now in Germany, but it is Southampton. At the moment this is doing it. I don't think you ever close the door on anything in your life but I love being here."

When asked which teams were interested, Krueger said they were "undisclosed," only confirming there were two.

Krueger's name popped up last month in connection to the then-vacant Canucks gig. It was reported Vancouver had interest following the dismissal of Willie Desjardins, but the job eventually went to Travis Green.

It's worth noting Canucks president Trevor Linden later said Green was the only coaching candidate the team interviewed.

But that wasn't the first time Krueger had been tied to a potential NHL return. Following his success at the World Cup, there was speculation he'd entertain the idea of coming back, having previously been the bench boss in Edmonton.

Krueger didn't rule it out, but said his allegiance was to the Saints.

"I came in here committed completely to Southampton Football Club and the future of that organization in my role," he explained prior to the World Cup final. "You can never say never, but at the moment I'm very proud to be back in hockey at this level and to be competing.

"We are just having so much fun in our room, the coaches, the players, the whole group is enjoying it, and I am, too. But my real life is my commitment to Southampton Football Club at the moment."

Currently there are only two NHL head coaching vacancies, in Florida and Buffalo.

NBCSports.com / LOADED: 05.17.2017

1064611 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Magical 'Smashville' crowd propels Predators to Game 3 win

Mark Spector

@sportsnetspec

May 17, 2017, 1:29 AM

NASHVILLE — Every once in a while, the right team lands in the right town, playing the right game in front of the right people. And the result is magical — even for a jaded old hockey writer and a bunch of "never too high, never too low" hockey players.

Here in Smashville, one of those Gary Bettman landing spots where we questioned how the Predators would steal enough fans from NASCAR and college football, that mix has come together perfectly this spring.

The Predators aren't wine, cheese and a string quartet, man. They play the game like the guy over at Tootsie's bends his six strings — you can hear 'em coming, and after a night at Bridgestone your head hurts the next morning.

"Preds Hockey" means they'll trade paint with anyone, and fly around the ice at Bridgestone like the Tennessee defence. And they fight — even in the playoffs — which folks here approve of even more than we do up in Canada.

In return for this Tennessee hockey, their people cheer. And stand. And drink. And have more chants, with 17,000 folks in perfect unison, than the other 29 NHL rinks put together.

Here in Nashville, they've have learned just enough about the game to cheer for almost anything, but they also know when the refs are screwing 'em. Then they litter the ice, just like the old days at the Maple Leaf Gardens or the Stampede Corral in Calgary.

"What a city. What an atmosphere. What a rink," said Nashville's James Neal, after a 2-1 win where his team might have been turned away had the crowd not pushed them to keep overcoming the bad breaks.

"They're special fans, they really are," said Neal. "And I know everyone says that around the league. Obviously you're going to say that your fans are the best in the league. But I've played in other places, and I've played in the playoffs. The atmosphere here is the best I've ever been a part of."

Corey Perry banked a steep-angle shot in off Pekka Rinne's goal pad at 15:35 of the second period, giving Anaheim a 1-0 lead in a game they had no business leading. But Nashville kept coming.

Then, early in the third, Filip Forsberg got the break the Preds had coming: A rebound that he sniped from the side of the net, with goalie John Gibson simply worn out from the mounting saves.

"We kept hounding them," Forsberg later said. "If I didn't get this goal, I'm sure someone else would have."

What happened next? Nashville kept coming, despite having two goals called back for goaltender interference in an eight-second span. Now, we've all seen plenty of goals go for naught in this era of goalie interference, sure.

But twice in eight seconds?

"I've never seen that," said Mike Fisher.

It didn't matter. Nashville kept coming.

"It's belief," said Fisher. "Over the course of the season you ... build the belief in the group. You just believe it's going to happen."

Meanwhile, a sold out house that watched Keith Urban put the star in the Star Spangled Banner, was ceaseless. They've waited 20 years and 19 seasons for a Conference Championship to be played out here, and they weren't going to let this night end in a loss.

They booed the refs after losing those two goals — sure, who wouldn't?

But like their team, they moved on when the puck was dropped, and eventually the inevitable payback arrived in the form of fourth-line Ducks winger Chris Wagner, who took an offensive zone high-sticking penalty with 3:55 to play.

In the tarot cards that are the meting out of playoff breaks in the National Hockey League, the combination of Wagner's place in the lineup, the spot on the ice that the infraction occurred, and the needless nature of the minor penalty conspired to all but ensure that a goal would ensue.

So when the shot from the point came, and Roman Josi slipped in from the right point to greet the loose biscuit — they love biscuits here in the South — the open net that faced him was a result of an entire night's work by 20 hockey players, 17,338 fans, and Urban and wife Nicole Kidman, who couldn't possibly have not stayed for Game 3.

It's a team that never quits, and a fan base that wouldn't let them if they tried.

"I can't. I really can't ... put it into words," Josi said of the hockey faithful here in Tennessee. "You can watch it on TV, but you've got to be in here to feel the energy. It's unbelievable.

"Every time they stand up, keep cheering, keep cheering... I haven't been in a building with that much energy in my career. You've got to [come] here to see how it really is."

They're up 2-1 on Anaheim in this Conference Final, and the Preds look formidable.

Said Ryan Ellis: "Probably one of our most complete games of the playoffs."

Between the Preds and their people, we'll give Ellis that much. It's not going to go any better than this on a Wednesday night in Smashville.



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • May 17, 2017

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 05.17.2017

1064612 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Person of Interest: New Maple Leafs defenceman Andreas Borgman

Mike Johnston

@MikeyJ\_MMA

May 16, 2017, 7:56 PM

The Toronto Maple Leafs haven't been shy about looking to Europe for free agent help in recent years. They've had some hits (Nikita Zaitsev), some misses (Petri Kontiola), and some promising additions (Nikita Soshnikov and Miro Aaltonen among others).

On Tuesday, Lou Lamoriello signed a pair of undrafted free agent standouts from the Swedish Hockey League—Andreas Borgman and Calle Rosén.

The Rosén signing had been expected for a few weeks but of the two players, Borgman might be the more intriguing talent.

So with that in mind, here are a few things to know about the newest Leafs prospect.

Age: 21

From: Stockholm, Sweden

Former team: HV71 Jonkoping

Height: Six-foot

Weight: 210 pounds

Position: Defence

Shoots: Left

Contract status: Two-year, entry-level deal. Set to be RFA in 2019

He went undrafted...

Despite being a highly touted commodity today at age 21, Borgman went undrafted when he was eligible in 2013. He played his junior hockey in the Timra IK system and finished his J20 SuperElit career with 13 goals, 33 assists and 166 penalty minutes in 79 games.

That year he was ranked 36th by NHL Central Scouting among international skaters, but all 30 teams passed him over.

He's coming off a breakout, award-winning season...

There's a reason Borgman generated so much interest from NHL teams and it's because he kept improving throughout the 2016-17 season. Following an admirable 2015-16 campaign with Vasteras IK in Sweden's tier two league (HockeyAllsvenskan), he broke out this past season with HV71.

He finished the regular season with five goals, 10 assists and 26 penalty minutes in 45 games with HV71.

That was good enough for him to be named SHL Rookie of the Year.

He saved his best work for the post-season, however, putting up 10 points in 14 games and helping lead his team to a league championship.

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 05.17.2017

1064613 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / 30 Thoughts: Should St. Louis target Eberle for scoring help?

Elliott Friedman

May 16, 2017, 10:02 AM

Jordan Subban packed his suitcase as we spoke, getting ready for a short trip.

Destination: Nashville.

There's one obvious reason to travel to Tennessee: moral support for brother P.K. as the Western Conference Final resumes Tuesday night. But there's another more subtle opportunity: the chance to watch Ryan Ellis live and in-person.

A couple of weeks ago, P.K. Subban told reporters he'd advised Jordan to study Ellis's game. And, as Jordan revealed Monday, one other important figure made the same suggestion.

"In my exit interview [at AHL Utica], Travis Green told me, 'That's a guy you should be watching,'" Subban said Monday.

It is Green he will have to impress if he wishes to crack the Vancouver Canucks' lineup in 2017-18.

Ellis finished an incredible four-year junior career at OHL Windsor in 2011, just months before Subban arrived in Belleville. Ellis never averaged less than a point a game in any of those seasons as Nashville took him 11th overall in 2009. His rise in the NHL took a little longer, but he is in the midst of a stellar playoffs and has established himself as a permanent fixture on one of the league's best blue lines.

Listed at five-foot-10 and 180 pounds, Ellis is one inch taller and two pounds heavier than Subban, who scored 28 goals in 67 regular-season and playoff games during his final junior season. He was selected 115th overall by Vancouver in 2013 and spent the last two years in the American League. There were a couple of call-ups to Vancouver, but no NHL games.

Will he introduce himself to Ellis?

"I'm not sure. He's a little busy right now, it's not the best time," Subban replied with a laugh. "But hopefully I'll be able to get video of all his shifts from a series or the playoffs to study a little more."

Ellis's four goals are tied for first among all defencemen in the post-season; his nine points are tied for second. But it's not the scoring Subban notices.

"It's the way that he defends. He's always in great position, always great with the stick. He plays hard and smart, he knows how to use his brain a bit more to slow down the game. I'm always trying to push the pace, so that's something I'm going to watch.

"It's different watching Ellis in certain positions than, say, Zdeno Chara. I never thought that way before. I always studied the best players, wanting to be like them."

But Subban sees now that Ellis is a better model, since they are of similar stature.

"I'm still learning. I'm going to watch and it's exciting."

Subban will make some other changes this off-season. He's always in great shape, but will spend more time skating than in recent years.

"You have to be physically strong, but hockey players are made on the ice. I'm also shooting pucks every day. This summer is a big one for me. I have one goal next year — to be in the NHL."

30 THOUGHTS

1. Subban added that he and P.K. spend time during the summers critiquing each other's play while watching video. That's got to be some high-quality entertainment. "We're really blunt with each other. He'll say, 'What are you doing? That's such a dumb play.' In the game, you think it's not that bad, then I'll watch it and think, 'What the hell was I doing... that was so awful.' But it's the only way to get better."



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

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Okay, what do you tell P.K. about his video? "Oh, I'll just tell him, 'You've got to block that shot' or 'Your gap is too big.'" I'm betting it's more cutthroat than that.

2. An unusual name started circulating in trade circles the last few days: Minnesota's Nino Niederreiter. The 24-year-old winger had a career-high 25 goals in 2016–17, and, after making a few calls, it sounds like teams are looking at the Wild's expansion/cap situation, wondering if he could be available. Two years away from unrestricted free agency, Niederreiter is arbitration eligible and will get a nice raise from the \$2.7 million he just earned.

The Wild also need to re-sign Mikael Granlund. As an exec from another team put it, "It may not be their first choice, but if you make it worth their while, it's possible." All GM Chuck Fletcher would say is, "We are actively listening... on everything."

3. It probably wouldn't surprise Minnesota fans to hear Matt Dumba's name, too. The Wild have an expansion logjam on the blueline.

4. After the Toronto Raptors were swept in the second round of the NBA playoffs by Cleveland, team president Masai Ujiri wasn't thrilled about answering questions just days later. "I feel like talking now is BS. Maybe talk to me in a month," he told reporters. "Why do we need to do this today? I can't tell you I've made a decision on anything yet."

So when the Washington Post's Isabelle Khurshudyan reported Capitals GM Brian MacLellan wanted to take some time before his own availability, it made sense. In 2010, when Jaroslav Halak singlehandedly beat them, I wrote a blog for then-employer CBC saying Washington shouldn't panic, the window is still open. Seven years later, we're in a very different spot. And the biggest decision isn't really MacLellan's. It must be made by owner Ted Leonsis.

5. When you're the highest-paid player and the captain, you take the heat. That's the business. But Washington's stunning Game 7 collapse was bigger than just Alex Ovechkin. It was a roster-wide meltdown. This was also the first playoffs Braden Holtby looked like a mere mortal in goal. However, Ovechkin is thrust into the spotlight because circumstances dictate such.

It is not insignificant to Leonsis that The Great Eight is the most popular player in franchise history, fills the building and sells merchandise. Games in Washington have an awesome atmosphere, but it's fair for an owner to wonder how all of that could change with a trade, particularly one who saw life prior to Ovechkin.

The Capitals have significant roster choices and must make an honest appraisal of the captain as a player. In the last four years, his even-strength goals in the regular season go 24, 28, 29, then down to 14 this past year. He had three even-strength goals in 13 playoff games. He will be 32 in September. The Capitals know him better than anyone else. Is this a one-year blip? Or has Father Time, undefeated in sports history, caught even him? How many wingers drove Stanley Cup winners into their mid-to-late 30s? Marian Hossa? Are they comparable?

The question I asked as many people as possible was this: If you trade him, can you make up his regular-season goals (33, even in a "down" year)? You still need those to make the playoffs. The majority answer was yes, because it gives you a shot at keeping T.J. Oshie, John Carlson (next year), and working on extensions for Andre Burakovsky, Evgeny Kuznetsov, Dmitry Orlov and Nate Schmidt. You still have the chance at a very good team.

6. Incredibly, Barry Trotz's future isn't secure. (One GM, hearing that, texted, "This league is a joke if [that's] real.") The surest predictor of future behaviour is past behaviour. Trotz said all the right things about Ovechkin accepting a move to the third line, but check Washington's history. Dale Hunter didn't return after demoting Ovechkin in 2012. Adam Oates faced pushback when he moved the captain into unfamiliar positions, and a harsh team meeting late in the 2013–14 season (where Ovechkin was ripped by several teammates) caused significant problems before a coaching change.

Washington played two fantastic games after Trotz's juggling. There is no doubt in my mind that one of the questions the organization is asking is, "What if our coach feels that's our best chance of winning?" The history is not to support that. Trotz has one year remaining on his contract.

7. Trotz isn't the only Washington coach with a cloudy future. Assistant Lane Lambert went deep into the process with Colorado before Jared Bednar was hired. Assistant Todd Reirden, a finalist in Calgary last year,

is expected to be interviewed by both Buffalo and Florida. And there are rumours goaltending guru Mitch Korn would like to retire. It's possible Scott Murray, who works with AHL Hershey and is a Korn disciple, replaces him. (He interviewed in Toronto two years ago, when Steve Briere got that job.) Those could be significant changes.

8. A goalie coach from another club said he noticed that Holtby has a slight "hitch" on his glove hand that the Penguins were able to exploit early in their series. If you watch the glove-side goals Pittsburgh scored in the first two games, Holtby "pulls" his hand towards his body before going where he really wants to go. When those kinds of shooters get time to exploit it, they can.

Another NHL goalie, asked about Holtby's playoffs, said, "The goals in the Toronto series were weird — tips and strange bounces. The goals early in the Pittsburgh series were Grade-A chances. He'll be fine."

9. Finally, Kuznetsov: Thought he took big strides this year in the playoffs. What's his new salary? I haven't forgotten a World Cup conversation between him and ESPN's Craig Custance. Custance asked Kuznetsov about Nikita Kucherov's contract battle with Tampa Bay, and the centre replied: "If I would be in (Kucherov's) position, I would be signed in the KHL for sure. I would sign and say, 'Bye.' I would buy a beach house and a couple Rolls-Royces." Now we find out if he was serious.

10. Another big number to come: Leon Draisaitl in Edmonton. His agent is Mike Liut, who also represents Vladimir Tarasenko. Tarasenko signed an eight-year, \$60-million contract out of entry-level and you wonder if Liut will go for the same ballpark with Draisaitl. (Liut would not comment.) Draisaitl did not accumulate the same totals over his first three years, but did outpace the St. Louis scorer in Year Three and had a marvellous playoffs. If I'm the Oilers, I'm going for term, because if Draisaitl keeps this up, the number will only go higher.

11. Speaking of Tarasenko, the Blues indicated there wouldn't be too many changes on their roster. He's a dangerous scorer, not predictable. Look at his goals — they come from all over the place. But he needs help. I didn't get to watch a ton of the Minnesota series, but scoring was a grind for them against Nashville.

If you look at the top 10 scorers this season, no player had a bigger gap between himself and a teammate than Tarasenko. The next highest Blue was Jaden Schwartz, in 61st. Connor McDavid (first) had Draisaitl (eighth). Sidney Crosby (second) had Evgeni Malkin (15th). The others: Patrick Kane and Artemi Panarin (third and 11th); Nicklas Backstrom and Ovechkin (fourth and 21st); Brad Marchand and David Pastrnak (fifth and 19th); Nikita Kucherov and Victor Hedman (sixth and 14th); Mark Scheifele and Blake Wheeler (seventh and 12th); Brent Burns and Joe Pavelski (ninth and 24th). It would take a lot of creativity, but this would be a great spot for Jordan Eberle.

12. Could see Detroit with interest in Calvin de Haan from the Islanders, who would be worried about losing him in the expansion draft. He's been very solid at the Worlds.

13. Several NHL scouts came back from the Under-18s incredibly impressed with Finland's Miro Hesikanen. A lot of the jockeying begins with the third pick, and he is one of the candidates. It wouldn't surprise anyone if a team like Detroit or Tampa Bay, searching for blueline depth, tried to move up to take him.

14. Newsday's Arthur Staple reported last week that Doug Weight is expected to hire Luke Richardson as part of his coaching staff in New York. Have also heard that Kelly Buchberger will join Weight, too. It makes sense, as they are tight. Buchberger was seen watching Mathew Barzal with Weight during the WHL playoffs. Barzal was a beast as Seattle defeated Regina.

15. Also wondering if the Islanders will make a hard push for Ilya Kovalchuk. It makes sense for them, although they will have to convince him they are going for it now. Russian sources believe Kovalchuk had serious interest in the Rangers, but a) I'm not sure of their interest, and b) I'm not sure they could pull it off if they wanted to. Sounds like Florida has also inquired. But, if he was interested in the New York area, why wouldn't the Islanders try?

16. Panthers GM Dale Tallon is part of Team USA's leadership at the Worlds, so he's there until it ends. While overseas, he re-iterated he's "got time" to wait before selecting his coach. Still see three current assistants he could talk to: Marc Crawford (Ottawa), Phil Housley



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

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(Nashville) and Paul MacLean (Anaheim). Another possible interview: Detroit's John Torchetti. He and Tallon have a history.

17. Mentioned during Hockey Night in Canada a couple of weeks ago that there was some talk of a position for Ed Olczyk in Buffalo. Not sure where that stands now, but did hear since then there were discussions before last season about Olczyk joining Paul Maurice's staff in Winnipeg. He has said that he would like to coach again, and I wonder if we're getting closer to that time. Would the Blackhawks consider him for the opening on the NHL staff or the Rockford AHL job?

18. How much does new Sabres' GM Jason Botterill consider previous NHL head coaching experience as a prerequisite for his first hire? "It's not a necessity, but I do see it as a value," he said last Saturday. "You can develop as an AHL coach, but the scrutiny from fans, media and organization at the NHL level, how do you handle that? The expectation to win is much greater. That said, I'm not going to limit who we look at."

Botterill knows Reirden and Rick Tocchet very well. He almost hired New Jersey assistant Geoff Ward for AHL Wilkes-Barre, eventually choosing Mike Sullivan. Housley and San Jose's Bob Boughner could be interviewed here, too. And I do wonder if he'd ask Jim Rutherford about Montreal's Kirk Muller. Rutherford hired Muller in Carolina.

19. Botterill said there have been "no restrictions" on who he can take from Pittsburgh to Buffalo, with one caveat: no lateral moves. So, if he's taking anyone, it has to be a promotion. He wouldn't comment on specific names, but two are making the rounds. One is former Ottawa and Florida GM Randy Sexton, who is the Penguins' director of amateur scouting. The other is Derek Clancey, director of pro scouting.

20. Best news from the conversation with Botterill: he has texted with Kyle Okposo, and plans to speak to him in the near future. The expectation is the winger will be ready for the start of camp. Okposo missed the end of last year, and spent time in neurological intensive care with a mysterious ailment.

21. Not surprisingly, Botterill's priority is the defence. "It's not rocket science," he said. "We have to address the depth of our D core. Rasmus Ristolainen is a great young player, but we have to help manage his minutes. It's important. We're going to look at every possible [method of addition]." He wouldn't discuss specifics, but the organization has to make a decision on Evander Kane. Do they let him play out his contract, re-sign him or try to move him for that defender?

22. Over at the World Championships, the vultures circled, wondering if the changes in Buffalo meant defenceman Viktor Antipin would waver on his decision to join the Sabres. But it sounds like he's sticking with his original decision. Not for lack of trying.

23. Last one on Buffalo: Botterill was asked if he is comfortable with Robin Lehner and didn't hesitate. "I have no problem starting next season with him in goal. There are more pressing needs. I liked what I saw from him when he won the Calder Cup." Lehner backstopped the Binghamton Senators to the AHL title in 2011.

24. Pittsburgh's top seven defencemen in these playoffs — Ian Cole, Trevor Daley, Brian Dumoulin, Ron Hainsey, Olli Maatta, Chad Ruhwedel and Justin Schultz — have exactly zero lifetime Norris Trophy votes between them. (Mark Streit, who would be number eight, received votes in three different years.) That's almost unprecedented for a Stanley Cup champion.

The only real comparable is 2006 Carolina, also managed by Jim Rutherford. The Hurricanes' top six — Mike Commodore, Bret Hedican, Frantisek Kaberle, Niclas Wallin, Aaron Ward and Glen Wesley — also had none. The seventh, Oleg Tverdovsky, did. He dressed for one game in the final.

Botterill credited Sergei Gonchar and Jacques Martin for their efforts with the Penguins.

"Sergei is responsible for one-on-one work. Video, stick detail and individual skills. Jacques chooses the pairings, the defensive-zone strategy, how do we want to play opponents?" Different roles, but prepare their defenders very well.

Ryan Dixon and Rory Boylen go deep on pucks with a mix of facts and fun, leaning on a varied group of hockey voices to give their take on the country's most beloved game.

25. A major reason Anaheim is in the Western Conference Final? Ryan Getzlaf is shooting the puck. Getzlaf was tied for 201st in shots during

the regular season with just 138. That put him even with Alexander Edler. He hit the net less than twice a game, nowhere near enough for someone with his skillset. Now, however, Getzlaf is bullying his way to the goal, taking 3.15 shots per game. That's a significant improvement.

26. One of the reasons some people still hold out hope for Olympic participation is that no All-Star Game has been set for next season. However, it does sound like there are plans for one. At this past season's All-Star Weekend, it was believed the next one would be held in a Western Conference city, but there are rumblings the league went southeast instead. It will be announced with the full schedule.

27. A lot of mystery at the Worlds with Evgeni Dadonov. A few NHL teams claimed they heard he'd decided to join good buddy Vadim Shipachyov with Vegas, but others disputed that, saying the decision was not final and there are still KHL offers. What I do know is a few more NHL teams like what they see. He's not a big guy, but plays a hard game that works in North America.

28. Remember Anton Belov, a defenceman who played 57 games for Edmonton in 2013-14? Word is he's considering a return engagement. But it would be a year from now.

29. Funniest World Championships controversy? During most games, the in-arena announcements were in German (for the games in Cologne) and English. But when the Russians played in Germany, the announcements were in Russian. It drove the Germans and Swedes bananas. Trump!

30. I'd forgotten (until last weekend) how much doctors and chiropractors hate each other. Years ago, I did a feature on Ted Carrick, a chiropractic neurologist who helped Sidney Crosby recover from his concussions in 2011. Some medical doctors reached out, annoyed we'd given it such a platform. My response was, "Crosby believes it helps, it's a story whether you like it or not."

Well, Ottawa's Clarke MacArthur credits "upper cervical chiropractics" with straightening his mind and head after his own concussion battles. He said his C3 vertebra was out of line. He got it adjusted and minutes later "could feel the blood flowing through the left side of my head.... It was like the train was off the track a little bit."

That also didn't go over well with the medical community. MacArthur said he got the idea from former teammate Drew Stafford. It's becoming more common in hockey and it's probably not going away.

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1064614 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / MacKinnon reinvigorated at worlds after tough year with Avalanche

Daniel Nugent-Bowman

@DNBSports

May 16, 2017, 9:39 PM

PARIS — A trip to one of the world's signature tourist destinations made perfect sense for Nathan MacKinnon after the season he endured with the Colorado Avalanche.

Although mental clarity was on the agenda, MacKinnon wasn't looking for a vacation. He's treated the world hockey championship like anything but so far, finishing the preliminary round with 12 points — one off the tournament lead.

"If I didn't come here there probably would have been some negativity in my mind," MacKinnon said. "It gives me some confidence going forward."

"My game felt good at the end of the season. The results weren't there, but we didn't score many goals. It was obviously a tough year. With this team — being on a good team — six of our seven games, it's certainly looking good right now."



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

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This team, the good team, is Team Canada. And with MacKinnon leading the way offensively, the Canadians secured first place in pool play in Paris heading into a quarterfinal date Thursday with co-host Germany in Cologne.

MacKinnon recorded an assist in a 5-2 win over Finland on Tuesday and trails only Russia's Artemi Panarin in the scoring race. He's contributing, and doing so on a winning team. Canada's only blemish in Paris through seven games was an overtime loss to Switzerland.

The situation is in stark contrast to MacKinnon's season in Denver.

The Avalanche were dead last in the NHL and it wasn't even close. They won just 22 times and finished with 48 points, 21 behind 29th-place Vancouver. They sported a horrific minus-112 goal differential. Their power play was also last, efficient a measly 12.1 per cent of the time.

It didn't help that MacKinnon produced arguably his worst output as a pro with 16 goals and 53 points in 82 games. The goal production was just two better than his career low, which he registered in 2014-15 when he was limited to 64 contests.

But on a team as porous as the Avalanche, how much is MacKinnon to blame?

"Obviously, when your team struggles everyone kind of struggles. Coming last, it's hard to get a career year," MacKinnon said. "I feel like I've gotten a lot better since my rookie year, regardless of my numbers. I feel like I'm improving as a player. Coming to a tournament like this helps.

A sensational junior player for the QMJHL's Halifax Mooseheads, MacKinnon was selected first overall in the 2013 NHL Draft. He solidified his spot after a dominating MasterCard Memorial Cup tournament in which scored seven goals and 13 points, outplaying expected No. 1 pick Seth Jones, en route to a championship.

MacKinnon had 24 goals and 63 points as an NHL rookie and added 10 points in his first Stanley Cup Playoff series, a seven-game loss to Minnesota. He was added to Canada's world hockey championship team after the ouster, his first of now three appearances at the event.

It was a season, MacKinnon admits, when everything went right for him and his team. The Avalanche drew scorn from analysts for their high shooting percentage and inability to suppress shots from the opposition, signs luck was on their side.

MacKinnon has never been able to match his freshman foray, and the Avs have missed the post-season in each of the last three years.

But it's easy to forget MacKinnon doesn't even turn 22 until September. When asked to categorize his career to date, MacKinnon said, "I'm still developing."

Canada coach Jon Cooper joked that it's not hard to disregard MacKinnon as a young player given his team's all-rookie line of Brayden Point, Travis Konecny and Mitch Marner. Marner was the player of the game against Finland thanks to his three points, highlighted by his beautiful toe-drag move around defenceman Atte Ohtamaa to open the scoring.

But MacKinnon's talents and results in France shouldn't be overlooked. The six-foot, 205-pound forward has been especially proficient on the power play, scoring two of his five goals on the man advantage and helping Canada to a 48 per cent success rate on 25 opportunities.

"He's a bull out there," Cooper said. "He's a blessed power forward with that much speed. It's really hard to defend. And then he can shoot it in the net, so that always is a bonus. He's really helped the power play and been a big part of that power play. (There's a) reason he's the No. 1 overall pick."

MacKinnon has excelled playing on an extra-man unit with Marner, Mark Scheifele, Ryan O'Reilly and Colton Parayko. He skates at even strength on the right wing with O'Reilly and Jeff Skinner.

MacKinnon said he's benefitting from being with talented players who are motivated after seeing their NHL seasons end prematurely. Canada is vying for its third consecutive tournament win.

It's no vacation for MacKinnon in Paris and it certainly won't be next season with the Avalanche, a team with nowhere near the quality of Canada's roster.

As he's doing with Team Canada, MacKinnon will have to prove he can be the catalyst.

"I want to be a leader," he said. "They put the 'A' on me this year (in Colorado). I want to take that and motivate myself to be the best leader I can."

"The guy's got endless skill and ability," added Matt Duchene, a teammate on both clubs. "The sky's the limit for him if he continues to progress as a player."

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 05.17.2017

1064615 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Down Goes Brown: Most likeable Canadian teams through Stanley Cup drought

Sean McIndoe

@DownGoesBrown

May 16, 2017, 3:33 PM

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau raised some eyebrows recently when he suggested that the entire country should be rooting for the Ottawa Senators. They're Canada's last remaining playoff team, after all, and with the nation riding a Stanley Cup drought going on 24 years, surely we could all unite in a common cause of rooting them on.

Not so fast, responded hockey fans around the country. Once we were done being thankful that this is what passes for a controversial statement from our leader, the backlash to Trudeau's comments was swift.

The whole "Canada's team" thing always comes up around this time of year, and it always divides fans. Many are on Trudeau's side, happily throwing their support behind whichever of the country's teams is the last one left. But others want no part of switching allegiances, even temporarily. For those fans, the idea of getting behind some other team is a non-starter, and anyone who'd suggest otherwise doesn't get what being a fan is all about.

We'll save that particular debate for another day. Instead, let's take a look back at the teams that have laid claim to "Canada's Team" status over the years. Since the start of the country's Cup drought in 1993, there have been 11 Canadian teams that have made it to at least the conference finals as the nation's last remaining team.

Today, we'll rank them from least to most likable and see where this year's Senators would slot in if (and we emphasize the "if") you were the sort of fan who'd jump on the bandwagon of the country's last remaining team.

#11. 2011 Canucks

The good: There's a strong case to be made that this was the country's very best team of the Cup drought era. They finished the season with 117 points, the most by a Canadian team in 22 years, and earned the first of back-to-back Presidents' Trophies. They barely survived their first-round series against the Blackhawks, nearly blowing a 3-0 series lead before winning Game 7 in overtime, and seemed to get stronger as the playoffs wore on. By the time a Stanley Cup final matchup with the Bruins arrived, it really did seem like this was going to be the Canucks' year.

The bad: There's really no nice way to put it: This was a thoroughly unlikable team. Not top-to-bottom – they had easy-to-root-for players like the Sedin twins and Roberto Luongo. But they also had guys like Alex Burrows, Ryan Kesler, Kevin Bieksa and Maxim Lapierre, all of whom fell solidly into the "like them when they're on your team, hate them when they're on anyone else's" category at the time. (And according to Ryan Johansen, still do today.)

To make matters worse, the team quickly gained a reputation for diving, whining and dishing out cheap shots. It's true that every team does their



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share of that stuff, but it's a reputation that stuck to the 2011 Canucks, and fans of other teams had plenty of fun with it.

By the time they started biting opponents, their role as post-season villains had been sealed. Nobody was jumping on this bandwagon.

Bottom line: Over the years, it's become easier to overlook some of the unfortunate moments and appreciate this team in a way we may not have been able to at the time. But back in 2011, these guys were a hard no.

## #10. 2002 Maple Leafs

The good: They were a solid team that was fun to watch, playing the attacking style favoured by coach Pat Quinn. And they had to overcome plenty of adversity just to reach the conference finals, with captain Mats Sundin missing the majority of the playoffs due to injury.

The bad: Let's start with the obvious: It's the Maple Leafs. Most fans in this country wouldn't jump on the Leafs' bandwagon if the entire roster sprouted halos and angel wings.

And this particular team were certainly no angels. While the roster featured guys like Sundin and future Lady Byng winner Alexander Mogilny, it also had Tie Domi throwing elbows and Darcy Tucker taking out knees. Within months, no less an authority than Sports Illustrated would be calling this team "the NHL's most notorious band of whiners, divers and cheap-shot artists". That might have been a little harsh, but given that the 2002 Leafs had a player suspended for a Game 7 because he tried to kick an opponent in the head, only a little.

Bottom line: The fact that they didn't make it all the way to the final is probably the only thing keeping this team from challenging the 2011 Canucks for the least likable crown.

## #9. 2014 Canadiens

The good: This was a reasonably likeable team, featuring a bounce-back season from Carey Price and some peak P.K. Subban goodness – this was the year he dropped his "I can't wait to take that all away from them" Game 7 quote on what was by then a very hateable Bruins team. They also managed to straddle the line of feeling like underdogs while still having a realistic shot at winning at all.

The bad: Much like the Maple Leafs, the Canadiens are always going to have an uphill battle winning over a big chunk of the country's fans.

Bottom line: Also, this team had recently banned high-fiving, so how fun could they be?

## #8. 2003 Senators

The good: The 113-point Senators had just become the first Canadian team to win the Presidents' Trophy since the 1980s, so they'd already broken one drought. And by this point they'd earned a lingering reputation for playoff letdowns, so seeing them finally break through to the conference finals for the first time made for a decent story.

The bad: Let's face it, the Jacques Martin era Senators could be awfully boring. This particular team could actually score, but their defence-first approach – at one point they allowed two or fewer goals in 11 straight playoff games – was tough for fans outside Ottawa to get excited for.

Bottom line: Game 7 between the Devils and Senators was basically for the Stanley Cup, since both teams would be heavily favoured over the upstart Mighty Ducks in the final. It did not end well.

## #7. 2010 Canadiens

The good: If you enjoyed a classic Cinderella run, this was the team for you. They'd snuck into the playoffs by just a single point as an eight-seed, and were given virtually no chance against a 121-point Capitals powerhouse. But after falling behind 3-1 in the series, the Habs watched Jaroslav Halak go on one of the greatest goaltending hot streaks in recent history, leading them to a comeback win over Washington followed by another upset over the Penguins. By the time they drew a surprisingly winnable conference final matchup against the seventh-seeded Flyers, it was starting to feel a little like '93.

The bad: The thing with Cinderella stories is that you're always wondering when the clock strikes midnight. That moment came for Halak and the Habs against the Flyers, as they bowed out in five.

Bottom line: The underdog factor nudges them ahead of the 2014 edition as the easiest Canadiens team to get behind.

## #6. 2007 Senators

The good: After years of being known as a team that was always good but usually dull, this post-lockout edition of the Senators upped the fun factor significantly. The 2005-06 team had led the league in goals, and this one came in second. They overcame a slow start to finish with 105 points, then blew through the Eastern Conference playoffs, losing just three games on their way to their first ever appearance in the final.

The bad: The Senators were the third Canadian team in three seasons to make it to the final, so some of the novelty had worn off by this point. When it became clear that the Ducks were the better team in the final, the Senators' bandwagon quickly emptied. Also, the fact that their best player started doing stuff like this probably didn't help.

Bottom line: Chris Phillips remains the only player for a Canadian team since 1993 to score a Stanley Cup winner, so they've got that going for them.

## #5. 1999 Maple Leafs

The good: This team had a lot of positives of the 2002 edition – a wide-open playing style, lots of goals, and Curtis Joseph standing on his head – without most of the easy-to-hate baggage that later team would rack up. And the 1999 version was a nice underdog story, following up two straight playoff misses with an unexpected run to the conference finals, the first by a Canadian team in five years.

The bad: Again, it's the Leafs. They can only rank so high.

Bottom line: The Canadian Cup drought was only six years old at this point, so fans weren't under the same pressure to flip sides as they are today. Given how much of the country feels about Toronto, that's probably a good thing.

## #4. 2017 Senators

The good: From Clarke MacArthur to Nicholle Anderson to Bobby Ryan to Bryan Murray, it's hard to remember any team anywhere that's been this packed with inspirational stories. But even beyond that, they have quite possibly the league's most entertaining player in Erik Karlsson, and just about all of their games go into overtime.

The bad: They're not always the most exciting team to watch, and in a copycat NHL it's a little depressing to imagine an entire league full of teams trying to play Guy Boucher's system. Plus the presence of Burrows probably produces some 2011 flashbacks.

Bottom line: This run is still a work in progress, so we'll reserve the right to nudge them up if they can keep it going and/or down if Burrows bites someone.

## #3. 1994 Canucks

The good: They were a great Cinderella story, entering the post-season as the West's seventh seed and then going on an impressive run to within one game of a Stanley Cup. They featured Pavel Bure's goal-scoring wizardry, Trevor Linden's leadership, and Kirk McLean's kick save. They were the perfect scrappy underdog to stand in the way of Mark Messier and the Rangers, whose Cup win had felt preordained all season long.

The bad: I'm not sure there was any, aside from an unfortunate (and false) rumour about Bure threatening to walk out on the team for more money. Really, the only reason the Canucks don't push for the No. 1 spot on this list is that the Canadian Cup drought hadn't truly started yet, so the idea of the country uniting behind them didn't seem necessary. If they'd come along 20 years later, they'd have been a hard story to resist.

Bottom line: Nathan LaFayette, man. It was that close.

## #2. 2006 Oilers

The good: They were one of the best Cinderella stories in playoff history, going in as a No. 8 seed, knocking off a massive favourite in the 124-point Red Wings, and then coming within a game of winning the Stanley Cup. They had a roster full of deeply likable players, and also Chris Pronger. And once they lost starting goalie Dwayne Roloson to injury in the opening game of the Cup final, only a monster could have been rooting against them.

But there was something else going on with the '06 Oilers. Remember, this was the first year after the lockout that wiped out a season and ushered in the salary cap. For years, rooting for smaller market Canadian



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teams like the Oilers had felt hopeless. Now, one was about to win the Stanley Cup, which would no doubt be the first of many for the country's teams.

The bad: It was not the first of many.

Bottom line: Lots of you will have the Oilers as your No. 1 team; really, it's a coin flip between them and these next guys.

## #1. 2004 Flames

The good: The Flames were pretty much the ideal bandwagon team for the country to get behind. They were likeable, were built around a popular Canadian star (and recent Olympic hero) in Jarome Iginla, and were solid underdogs without ever feeling hopeless. And since they hadn't even so much as made the playoffs in eight years, not many fans could remember any good reasons to hate them.

Maybe more importantly, they arrived at the ideal sweet spot for "Canada's team" status. By 2004, a Canadian team hadn't been to the final in 10 years, so the idea of a national Cup drought was officially a thing, but not so played out that fans were rolling their eyes at it. By the time the Flames arrived in the final to face a southern US-based team, it really did feel like most of the country was behind them.

The bad: When the chips were down and the pressure was on, they had an unfortunate tendency to score goals that didn't end up counting.

Bottom line: The 2004 Flames and 2006 Oilers are neck-and-neck for top spot, so much so that I seriously considered listing them as tied for first. That would have felt like a cop out, so we'll give Calgary top spot by the slimmest of margins, mainly because they were the first Canadian team in a decade to play for the Cup.

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1064616 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Senators facing golden opportunity as series shifts to Ottawa

Chris Johnston

@reporterchris

May 16, 2017, 6:47 PM

OTTAWA – Here lies an opportunity among the blooming tulips and endless construction sites dotting our nation's capital.

It's the sort of thing that comes around maybe once in a decade, if you're lucky, especially as a small-market, budget-conscious team.

The Ottawa Senators have a realistic path to the Stanley Cup Final.

After splitting two games to open the third round against Pittsburgh, the notion of scaling that mountain is not as daunting as it once was. The Penguins are talent-laden and experienced, but they aren't currently on the same level as the group that lifted the Cup last June.

"It's tough to play like this," Evgeni Malkin told reporters before leaving Pittsburgh on Tuesday afternoon, referencing Ottawa's knack for making available ice disappear.

"Two games you score two goals, it's not easy. You want to score more."

Against the odds, the window is open here for the Senators to sneak through.

They could help their cause in a big way by taking care of business on home ice starting with Game 3 on Wednesday night. Ottawa will certainly need to generate more than the meagre 29 even-strength shot attempts it managed in Monday's 1-0 loss – its sixth-lowest total in 96 games this season.

However, the Senators should feel good about the manner in which they limited Pittsburgh's ability to produce scoring opportunities.

"They play so good in D-zone," said Malkin. "It's a hard game."

It doesn't help that the Penguins are now patching potholes on the blue line. Kris Letang is already done for the season – imagine, for a brief moment, how the Senators might cope without Erik Karlsson – and Trevor Daley still isn't ready to practice with his teammates.

In seeing Justin Schultz leave Monday's game with an apparent shoulder injury, they lost a third defender capable of quarterbacking the power play and getting the puck in the hands of their skilled forwards.

If Schultz is unable to dress for Game 3, Mike Sullivan is likely to roll out a back end featuring Brian Dumoulin, Ron Hainsey, Olli Maatta, Chad Ruhwedel, Ian Cole and Mark Streit.

With due respect to that group, it doesn't scream championship calibre. The Senators should be able to find success by applying some forechecking pressure at Canadian Tire Centre, something they were lacking during an 18-minute stretch in Game 2 where they failed to register a shot on goal.

Pittsburgh might also be forced to play without injured wingers Patric Hornqvist and Bryan Rust – both key components in last year's playoff run – while Ottawa is close to being at full health with Viktor Stalberg nearing a return.

Injuries are an inevitable part of playoff hockey, especially at this stage, but they have not slowed the Senators to nearly the same degree as the deeper defending champs.

"There's a lot of emotion in the first round," Ottawa coach Guy Boucher said last week. "Teams are mostly healthy in the first round and excited and got a lot of energy. Then you start seeing in the middle of the second round, every game there's more guys banged up, more guys tired. There's a mental, physical and emotional wear down."

"And I think it's nothing like the third round. ... The third round is the banged-up round."

The Senators have held a quiet internal belief these last few months and repeatedly asked of themselves: Why not us?

Why not?

Pittsburgh is still rightfully favoured in this best-of-seven, but it's hard to miss the golden opportunity now in the Senators hands. They enjoyed an easier path to the conference final and are facing a battered opponent.

They can draw on the confidence of bounce-back performances in Round 2 and were focused largely on atoning for an ugly third period on Monday – easily their worst of this series.

"We didn't manage the puck like we did the previous five," said Boucher. "We gave away the puck way too many times, and we didn't go to their net as much as we could. So we didn't do enough in the third, and that's where we lost the game."

Now they are back home preparing for Game 3 – the game where every series tends to take on a different look.

Not only does the venue change, but the other coach assumes last line change and has a chance to alter the in-game matchups. There are usually some adjustments made.

"Game 3, I think we understand they play at home," said Malkin. "I hope they not play like last game, they play a little bit more in the offensive zone and we have more chance to score."

If not?

Well, we might be coming back here again in June, too.

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Sportsnet.ca / Ryan Kesler responds to Ryan Johansen: 'He's not my friend'



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Rory Boylen

May 16, 2017, 1:34 PM

Everyone in and outside the NHL knows all about the reputation that follows Ryan Kesler wherever he goes. One of the best two-way players in the game through most of his career, Kesler is still probably best-known for his capabilities as a skilled pest.

Heck, it took Ryan Johansen just two games to get sick enough of Kesler's antics that he decided to sound off about it.

"He just blows my mind, I don't know what's going through his head out there," Johansen said after the Predators' Game 2 loss. "His family and friends watching him play, I don't know how you cheer for a guy like that.

"It just doesn't make sense how he plays the game. I'm just trying to go out there and play hockey, and it sucks when you have to pull a stick out of your groin after every shift."

This, of course, was a big mistake.

Far from backing down Kesler, predictably, played up his role as an agitator and how Johansen's comments just show how effective Kesler's way has been so far in the series (watch it in full at the top of this post).

Kesler on Johansen's comments: "I laughed got a lot of text messages from my friends and family saying they still cheer me on."

More Kesler on Johansen's comments: "Doesn't matter he's not my friend he's not going to be my friend so he can say whatever he wants."

Kesler on Johansen's comments: "Obviously I know he doesn't like it now and I'm not gonna let up just because he said something."

With both the Vancouver Canucks and Anaheim Ducks, Kesler has made a career of being a presence on the score sheet as a productive player, and off of it, adding a frustration factor with his ability to get under the skin of his opponents.

With eight points in 13 games during these Stanley Cup Playoffs, and now at least one Predator upset enough to air his grievances with Kesler to the public, he's still at the top of his game.

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1064618 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / 12 Chiarelli takeaways: Oilers don't fear the offer sheet

Luke Fox

@lukefoxjukebox

May 16, 2017, 2:19 PM

A spring of success will shift to a summer of change for Peter Chiarelli and the Edmonton Oilers.

The general manager addressed reporters in Edmonton Tuesday at his season-ending press conference and gave us a glimpse into how he will treat the futures of Connor McDavid, Leon Draisaitl, Jordan Eberle, and Kris Russell.

He also dropped an injury bomb and gave his thoughts on both the expansion and entry drafts.

Here, in brief, are a dozen things we learned from the Oilers' front-office czar.

Expect major long-term signings, not blockbuster trades

The Oilers have a specific order in which they intend to sign their players. It goes like this:

1. Connor McDavid (RFA 2018)

2. Leon Draisaitl (RFA 2017)

3. Everyone else

Chiarelli isn't concerned about the Oilers' cap situation for 2017-18, but...

"It's the following year when Mr. McDavid's contract will kick in, so I have to be cognizant of that," he said. "We'll certainly have the resources to keep a competitive team in place."

Although the Oilers came within two goals of advancing to the Western Conference Final, there is no plan to expedite team building. He wants the young players to grow together, which is why, Chiarelli said, he didn't add a high-end rental at the trade deadline (no offence, David Desharnais).

As for cooking up a blockbuster in the vein of 2016's Taylor Hall-Adam Larsson deal?

"I may want to take a break from the summer for that one," Chiarelli said.

This is the summer of satisfying Mr. McDavid's financial needs.

The GM characterized a hypothetical offer sheet for his impending RFA as "predatory," a move that would only drive market prices up but serve no other purpose. He did say that the chances of such a rarity increase when a player like Draisaitl remains unsigned late into summer.

"We have a lot of cap space to match. Other than to penalize us, I don't know why a team would do that," Chiarelli said.

According to Chiarelli, Draistail's representatives say the centre wants to stay in Edmonton. Negotiations could get tricky in light of the McDavid deal, but Chiarelli conveyed confidence.

"I don't anticipate a problem there," he said.

Is the big, versatile German forward better slotted as a No. 2 centre or finishing McDavid's plays on the right side of the top line?

"I still don't have the answer," Chiarelli admitted.

The GM's instinct may be to establish Draisaitl as a firm C2 behind McDavid (think Gretzky-Messier if you want to get dreamy), but he's not sure if this roster is ready for that just yet.

For one, moving Draisaitl to the middle bumps Ryan Nugent-Hopkins to a third-line centre position, something Chiarelli spoke about with Nugent-Hopkins in his exit meeting. RNH is a team player willing to take any role assigned, Chiarelli said, but there is a sense his talents and desires align better with a second-line centre role. His \$6-million salary certainly does.

Secondly, Chiarelli wants to give Todd McLellan the leeway to juggle Draisaitl around the lineup between and within games to give the Oilers their best chance to win based on matchups and chemistry. The GM noted the value of versatile forwards such as Desharnais late in this season or Chris Kelly from his Boston days — neither of whom are comparable to Draisaitl's impact.

"In an ideal world it would be nice to have set centres," Chiarelli said. "[But] I can't go firm up a lineup. I have to be more resourceful.

"I want to give our coach the ability to flip-flop."

Chiarelli set the bar at 85 points and meaningful games in March. "I had us in and around the playoffs," he said.

Edmonton's leap was "unprojected": meaningful games in May, 103 points, a Game 7, and two heavy series' worth of experience against proven post-season heavyweights.

Some front offices won't even blink on June 21, the eve of the NHL Expansion Draft. Others we be sweat-soaked messes. The Oilers fall somewhere in the middle.

"We're going to lose a player that we prefer to keep, and we have to decide who we're going to protect," Chiarelli said. "There's a little more meaning for them to me."

A few players at risk include defencemen Griffin Reinhart and Eric Gryba, centre Mark Letestu, backup goaltender Laurent Brossoit, and winger Benoit Pouliot. Chiarelli would have to incentivize Vegas GM George McPhee to take Pouliot.



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While many writers criticized Jordan Eberle's goal-free performance in his first post-season, going so far as to speculate a summertime trade, Chiarelli believes they did so "unfairly."

Chiarelli noted that the \$6-million winger was the Oilers' third-highest scorer in the regular season (20 goals, 51 points), that he's done excellent work creating space with his quickness and smarts, and that even aspects of a power game began to come to the fore. Consistency is an issue.

"He's a very skilled player," Chiarelli said. "We have to be careful about how we evaluate him."

The defence is good, just not, y'know, championship good

Chiarelli pointed out how the Oilers' power play improved to 22.9 per cent, fifth overall, without the presence of "a pure power-play D," a puck-mover with a booming point shot.

He liked the development of the Nurse-Larsson and Benning-Russell pairings, and praised the defensive depth of Nashville and Anaheim, the two teams left standing in the West.

"It would be nice to have a D at that level. We're not there yet," Chiarelli said. "Do we have a championship D core? I'm not sure yet."

"I'd like to let it evolve a little bit."

Andrej Sekera suffered a torn ACL in Game 5 of the Oilers' series against the Ducks when Anaheim captain Ryan Getzlaf hit him into the boards.

Sekera is set to undergo surgery Thursday and will be out for six to nine months.

This is a serious blow to the Oilers' top four. Sekera is smart power-play man who logs heavy minutes and contributed 35 points from the back end.

Selecting 22nd overall, the Oilers have an unusually late first-rounder this June.

Chiarelli said he's willing to trade down to the second round if the right offer comes across his table.

The Oilers don't have a second-round pick but do hold two thirds and two fifths.

"It's a good year not to have a second," Chiarelli said. "[The draft] is a little deeper than the pundits have said, but still it drops off."

Defenceman Kris Russell says he wants to remain an Oiler, and the feeling is mutual.

"I want to have Kris back," Chiarelli said. "The way he approaches a game, the way he battles, his poise, his skating — I think he was a really good complement to our group."

Russell will be an unrestricted free agent on July 1 and looking for more money and term than his \$3.1-million, one-year deal for 2016-17.

Chiarelli said he needs certainty on McDavid and Draisaitl's contracts before extending Russell, even if that means reaching the July 1 deadline.

Though it would be hard to sell 2016 first-round pick Jesse Puljujarvi's NHL debut as a positive, Chiarelli spun the focus to the 19-year-old prospect's 28-point showing in 38 games with AHL Bakersfield.

"If you ask him, he'd say it was frustrating," Chiarelli said. "Every time he touches the puck in the American league, it turns into a scoring chance."

Edmonton's faceoff win percentage this post-season was atrocious: 44.4 per cent, worst among all 16 playoff teams. This was in keeping with their league-worst 47 per cent success rate during the regular season.

Much of this can be chocked up to size and experience. McDavid and Draisaitl should get better in this area, and Chiarelli gave faceoff homework to Nugent-Hopkins this summer.

But you have to wonder if the Oilers pursue a bottom-six centre like Brian Boyle to help in this area.

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1064619 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Craigslist ad offers \$75 for 'catfish thrower' at Predators-Ducks game

Sportsnet Staff

May 16, 2017, 2:45 PM

If a catfish finds its way onto the ice at Bridgestone Arena during Game 3 or Game 4 of the Western Conference Final, anyone wanting to solve who did it might want to start with Craigslist for clues.

A person in the Nashville area posted a "Wanted: Catfish Thrower for 5/16 or 5/18 Preds Home Game" ad on Craigslist this past Friday.

The person explains in the ad that they bet against the Predators advancing to the third round of the Stanley Cup Playoffs. As punishment for losing the bet, this person agreed to smuggle a catfish into Bridgestone Arena and throw it onto the ice. However, there was just one problem — it turns out this person is "deathly allergic to catfish."

If you are in the Nashville area and have tickets to Game 3 (Tuesday) or Game 4 (Thursday) you have the opportunity to earn a cool \$75—just as long as you're willing to have a catfish saran-wrapped to your body, are strong enough to "to chuck a 2lb catfish over the glass" and have the "stones large enough to stand there and fire up the crowd after the guts have splattered over the ice."

Catfish and saran wrap will be provided. How generous.

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 05.17.2017

1064620 Websites

TSN.CA / Youth is served in NHL's changing defensive landscape

By Travis Yost

If you've been paying even casual attention to this year's playoffs, you know that the common refrain is that the postseason has been "wildly unpredictable."

I won't be the one to argue that teams like Ottawa, Anaheim and Nashville were obvious picks to end up in the final four. Each of those teams had (and has) notable flaws. Each of these teams, at some point during the postseason, has benefited from some external variable, like injury luck or a relatively soft schedule.

But it's not as if these teams ended up here by way of a total crapshoot. To say so would be to completely ignore that these three teams share an obvious and important strength.

If you were to create a hierarchy of best defences from 1 to 30, how quickly would you name all of the above teams? The Predators are absolutely loaded from top to bottom. Ditto the Ducks. And while the Senators don't have the same type of depth, they do have the best defender in the world playing half of every game.

We've grown quite accustomed to superstar forwards driving teams deep into the postseason, not dissimilar to what we are seeing with the Sidney Crosby/Evgeni Malkin Penguins again this spring. But guys like Crosby and Malkin don't grow on trees. If you can't get your hands on a game-breaking forward, you better build through competent depth and find elite puck-movers to offset that disadvantage.

To this end, the defensive landscape has surely changed in the modern era, and teams like Nashville, Anaheim and Ottawa are only going to strengthen the resolve of new-age general managers who see as big of a need for quick, puck-moving defenders as they do for superstar centres and goaltenders.



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

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Consider this year's playoff teams for a moment. The Predators ended the regular season with three regular defenders 26 or younger in Mattias Ekholm, Roman Josi, and Ryan Ellis. Their entire blueline – from P.K. Subban all the way down to names like Anthony Bitetto, Matt Irwin, and Yannick Weber – is under the age of 30.

The Senators are similarly situated. Four of their defenders are in the 26-and-under category in Erik Karlsson, Ben Harpur, Cody Ceci, and Fredrik Claesson. They haven't yet released arguably their best prospect in Thomas Chabot.

The Ducks are even younger. They have six regular defenders under the age of 26 in Cam Fowler, Sami Vatanen, Josh Manson, Hampus Lindholm, Shea Theodore and Brandon Montour.

Even the Penguins, who I initially omitted from this mostly because the strength of their team is through their forward group, are reasonably young defensively. Four of their defenders – Justin Schultz, Brian Dumoulin, Olli Maatta and Chad Ruhwedel – are also in the 26-and-under crowd.

What's the significance? Well, consider final four teams historically and how their bluelines have been distributed age-wise. We've usually seen a couple of talented younger defenders per team. Now? It's about half or more of each blueline.

A less-entrenched fan might ask if these numbers – and the way they are categorized – are misleading. After all, it's possible that teams are burying these younger defenders in the press box or on third pairings, and that they're still handing out the majority of their ice time to older, veteran blueliners.

But those who have followed this year closely know that's simply not true. By way of quick illustration, consider the average ice time of these defenders during the regular season.

It's another modern-era high and, again, a testament to how three of these teams (and maybe four) have been built. That's nearly 21 minutes a night for one of these defenders – not exactly an isolated/sheltered role where coaches are picking and choosing minutes to mitigate risk. No, these guys are really doing most of the heavy lifting.

Lastly, I don't want to leave the impression that these three teams are exceptions to the rule. They may be the most talented of the bunch, but across the league we've seen a shift to younger defenders. That's true in both the regular season and postseason, and it's been trending in the downward direction for close to 20 years:

So, while I do agree that this year's Stanley Cup playoffs haven't played out as in years past, that isn't necessarily a bad thing. Teams like Nashville, Anaheim, and Ottawa are simply built differently, and each has tortured their opposition this postseason because of a strong backend. Their ability to skate out of forecheck pressure, distribute pucks through the neutral zone to rushing wingers and sustain offensive zone pressure by owning the blueline has stifled opposing teams all postseason.

Not every team should build their organization from the blueline up. But, I think this year has shown just how value-added it is to have defenders like this on your roster. A big piece of the NHL's evolution has been a drive to get younger across the board, and it seems as though that development has started to permeate through defensive units across the league.

A season like this will only accelerate that change.

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1064621 Websites

TSN.CA / Ducks, Pens trying to win Stanley Cup without No. 1 defencemen

Staff Report

The Canadian Press

The Philadelphia Flyers showed the hockey world what a No. 1 defenceman meant in July 2012 when they signed then-Nashville Predators defenceman Shea Weber to a spectacular 14-year offer sheet worth US\$110 million.

Letting Weber walk would've meant a haul of top draft picks for the Preds, but the club matched the offer and described it as "the most important hockey transaction in franchise history."

Teams that compete for a Stanley Cup without an elite defenceman such as Weber are almost non-existent these days, but this might just be one of those odd years when the trend is bucked — with two of the four teams remaining lacking such a player.

The Anaheim Ducks captured their first and only Cup in 2007 with a pair of future Hall of Famers at the top of their defence in Scott Niedermayer and Chris Pronger. There's no such player fronting this year's edition though; the Ducks defence is instead made up of a collection of well-rounded parts, including 25-year-old American Cam Fowler and the young core of Hampus Lindholm, Josh Manson, Sami Vatanen and Brandon Montour.

Fowler, who's absorbing almost 27 minutes per-game this spring, is the closest thing the Ducks have to that ace, but he's yet to top 40 points from the back-end in his seven NHL seasons — a touch below the current greats in that respect.

Pittsburgh, meanwhile, lacks anything close to the top-end No. 1 guy with Kris Letang shelved for the playoffs by a neck injury. The Pens are trying to go back-to-back for the Cup with a collective approach in his absence, doling out near-even minutes to their pack of six, which is generally led by former Oilers cast-off Justin Schultz.

Schultz, who left Monday's Game 2 against Ottawa with an undisclosed injury, has become an effective top-four option for Pittsburgh — he had a career-best 51 points this season — but he doesn't meet the all-situations requisite of that upper-class No. 1 defender. The Pens don't use him, for instance, on their penalty kill.

The Ottawa Senators don't just have that lead defenceman, but maybe the best one in the world at the moment in captain Erik Karlsson. The 26-year-old, a two-time Norris trophy winner as the NHL's best defenceman, has shredded foes during the playoffs, humming at around a point per-game while soaking up nearly 30 minutes every night.

Nashville has not one, but maybe two candidates in P.K. Subban, the former Norris winner who was flipped for Weber last summer, and Roman Josi, the Swiss defender who finished fifth in the Norris voting in each of the previous two seasons.

It's that defence, and the top of it especially, which makes the Preds such a threat to emerge with a first Stanley Cup next month.

Getting 16 wins without the defender who can kill penalties, run a power play, match up with top lines and drive an offence has shown to be highly improbable — bordering on impossible. It's just too many games at too high a level to survive most of the time.

Only two real exceptions exist since the 2004-05 lockout: The '09 Pittsburgh Penguins, who had Sidney Crosby and Evgeni Malkin at their physical peaks, and the '06 Carolina Hurricanes, who rode Cam Ward and Eric Staal to a first and only Cup.

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1064622 Websites

USA TODAY / Penguins lose players but keep winning games

Kevin Allen , USA TODAY Sports Published 4:48 p.m. ET May 16, 2017 | Updated 3 hours ago

Pittsburgh Penguins coach Mike Sullivan was asked Tuesday rather bluntly how he hopes to win the Eastern Conference finals with three of his top defensemen potentially out with injuries.



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Sullivan didn't hesitate.

"Because we believe we have a good team and we have a deep team," he said. "We have what it takes to win regardless of which guys are in our lineup."

In this series, which is tied 1-1 headed to Ottawa for Game 3 on Wednesday, the Senators have been cast as the resilient group, a team that has overcome hardship and heartache to win nine games this postseason, including six in overtime.

But it may be the Penguins who deserve the title of most resilient, at least in terms of overcoming injuries.

First, they lost No. 1 defenseman Kris Letang. He's as important to the Penguins as Erik Karlsson is to the Senators.

Then, projected starting goalie Matt Murray went down minutes before the first game of the playoffs and Marc-Andre Fleury had to takeover.

Trevor Daley, another puck-moving defenseman, has now missed four games with an undisclosed injury. Puck-moving defenseman No. 3 Justin Schultz had to leave Monday's game after injuring his arm or shoulder.

Bryan Rust, one of Sidney Crosby's wingers, also left Monday's game after being crushed by a check from Ottawa's Dion Phaneuf. Patric Hornqvist, the player who gives Pittsburgh a net-front presence, is also out with an injury.

Speedy Carl Hagelin, crucial to the Penguins' Stanley Cup win last year, has only played five playoff games this year because he's been injured. He did play in Monday's 1-0 victory.

Even Crosby had to miss a game last series against Washington when he suffered a concussion. Conor Sheary also missed a game.

When you factor that in, you wonder how the Penguins managed to defeat the No. 1 and No. 4 teams in the NHL just to reach the Conference finals.

But Sullivan doesn't wonder at all.

"I think this team has a chemistry that is a competitive advantage," Sullivan said. "We believe that. These guys get along extremely well. They enjoy playing for one another. And I think they play extremely hard for one another."

The Penguins' resolve may serve them better than their speed and skill.

It was almost as if general manager Jim Rutherford could see the rash of injuries when acquired veteran defenseman Ron Hainsey and Mark Streit before the trade deadline.

Hainsey has been steady. Streit, known for his offensive spark, hasn't played a game, but he could get the call if Schultz isn't ready to play Wednesday.

"(Streit) has invaluable experience," Sullivan said. "He's a savvy player. He could help us on our power play. He could get us out of our end zone. He's a really good puck mover. He has good puck skills. That was one of the reasons we got him. We know he can continue to help us win games. He helped us win games down the stretch."

The belief that the next man up will plug the gap has become a Penguins' tradition. That's their identity now, even more than being a speed and skill team.

Losing three top defenseman? No problem.

"(This is) one more challenge this team is going to have to face and find ways to overcome," Sullivan said. "Regardless of what aspect of our game we are discussing, it's a collective effort."

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1064623 Websites

USA TODAY / Predators break through in third to win Game 3 of Western Conference final

Kevin Allen , USA TODAY Sports Published 11:10 p.m. ET May 16, 2017 | Updated 4 hours ago

NASHVILLE — Filip Forsberg and Roman Josi scored third-period goals to carry the Nashville Predators to a 2-1 win against the Anaheim Ducks in Game 3 of the Western Conference final.

Josi scored the game-winner on the power play with 2:43 left in regulation as the Predators won their sixth consecutive home playoff game this season. They now hold a 2-1 lead in the best-of-seven series.

"To have our fans standing up the whole third period, cheering us on, gave us a lot of energy," Nashville defenseman Mattias Ekholm said.

Anaheim winger Chris Wagner was in the penalty box for high-sticking Ryan Ellis when Josi scored. The Predators trailed 1-0 going into the third period.

"Throughout the game I thought we played great," Forsberg said. "We played fast and competitive. It was just a matter of sticking with it."

Here's what mattered in the game.

Scoring plays: Corey Perry celebrated his 32nd birthday by scoring a bad-angle power-play goal at 15:35 of the second period. Nashville tied the score 1-1 when Forsberg scored at 3:54 of the third period.

Predators dominated: The Predators had 40 shots on goal. They outshot Anaheim 21-1 over one stretch spanning parts of the first and second periods. The Ducks didn't have a shot on goal in the second period until 11:43.

Two lost goals: In the third period, twice in a span of 8 seconds, the Predators had goals waved off.

An apparent Predators goal by Colton Sissons was waved off at 6:25 because Harry Zolnierczyk interfered with Ducks goalie John Gibson. At 6:33, a Nashville goal by Ryan Johansen was waved off because the referee was calling an interference penalty on Ekholm for crashing into Gibson.

Costly penalty: Nashville forward Cody McLeod was in the penalty box when Perry scored. He received a two-minute instigator penalty for starting a fight with Anaheim's Jared Boll after Boll threw a heavy check at Zolnierczyk.

Boll didn't receive a penalty for the hit, but McLeod took exception after Boll took a few strides to deliver the open-ice blow.

Rare Rinne mistake: Nashville goalie Pekka Rinne owns the NHL's best playoff goaltending numbers thus far, but he would like to have a do-over on Perry's shot.

Perry had the puck beyond the goal line toward the corner, and simply centered the puck back out front. It struck Rinne's right skate and deflected into the net.

No-goal call was right: On Anaheim's first shot of the second period, Ducks defenseman Brandon Montour seemed to tap the rebound over the goal line. But the referee ruled the net was dislodged before that occurred. A replay verified that.

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1064624 Websites

USA TODAY / Playing like favorites, Predators continue to find ways to win in playoffs

Kevin Allen , USA TODAY Sports 1:00 a.m. ET May 17, 2017

NASHVILLE — Defenseman Mattias Ekholm's read of the Nashville Predators' dressing room between the second and third periods was that players felt "something better was coming."



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The Predators had outshot the Anaheim Ducks 28-13 over the first 40 minutes. They were playing the way they wanted to play. They were feeding off the raucous Nashville crowd. It made no sense that they were trailing 1-0.

"Their goaltender (John Gibson) played real well," Predators center Mike Fisher said. "We were getting chances. Sometimes it's easy to get frustrated. But that's not the right emotion. We stayed with it. We knew if we kept doing that, and not sit back, we would find a way."

That's exactly what happened. They found a way. Filip Forsberg and Roman Josi scored third-period goals to lift the Predators to a 2-1 victory. Nashville now owns a 2-1 lead in the best-of-seven series.

"Going into that third, guys were saying the right things," Nashville coach Peter Laviolette said. "They were confident. They believed they were playing a decent game, and if we just stayed with it we would eventually get one to drop."

The Predators are now 10-3 in this postseason, and 6-0 at home. Somewhere in this process they have made the transition from a team hoping to win a Stanley Cup to a group of players who understand they have a true opportunity to get it done.

For the first time in franchise history, the Predators have a postseason swagger. They have gone from hoping to win playoff games to expecting to win them.

It has helped that the City of Nashville is smitten with the Predators' success. Other NHL arenas might be able to match the crowd boost the Predators had Tuesday, but it would be difficult to surpass it.

"It's tough to put in words," Josi said. "You've got to be here to feel the energy. It's unbelievable. Our fans, they're amazing. Like every time they stand up they just keep cheering and cheering. I haven't been in a building that has that much energy."

Every time the Predators have lost a game in this postseason, they have come back with a win. They lost Game 2 in Anaheim, and followed that up with this come-from-behind effort.

"We wanted to play better defensively tonight and I thought we did," Josi said. "We did a good job. And this team has done a really good job so far in the playoffs of rebounding."

More than anything else, the Predators are behaving like a favorite. They're finding different ways of getting the desired results. Sometimes it's goaltending. Sometimes it's defense. Sometimes it's opportunistic scoring.

Coaches say regularly that the star players have to play like stars to have a successful playoff run, and the Predators' stars are delivering. That was Forsberg's team-leading sixth goal of the postseason.

"He scores a lot of goals," Laviolette said. "And not just ones that get us back in the game. He scores in different ways at different times. That's what he does. He's good at it."

That also is a description of the Predators in these playoffs. They win at different times in different ways. They are good at it.

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1064625 Websites

USA TODAY / Team USA rallies to beat Russia, win group at hockey World Championships

Kevin Allen , USA TODAY Sports Published 2:04 p.m. ET May 16, 2017 | Updated 11 hours ago

New York Islanders forward Anders Lee has his own theory on why the youngest U.S. National Team players in recent memory has become the talk of the World Championships.

"Maybe they don't know any better," Lee told USA TODAY Sports. "All of them have been good players for a long time, and they just get thrown in the fire. It is fight or flight, and all they know is how to respond to these situations."

With an average age of 22.7 coming into the tournament, the Americans (6-1) won their preliminary round group Tuesday by downing a talented Russian team 5-3.

Three times the Russians took a one-goal lead, and three times the Americans rallied to tie before Lee scored at 12:57 of the third period to put the Americans ahead for good. Brock Nelson (Islanders) scored an empty-netter to go along with his two assists in the game.

"We probably played as complete of a game as we have played in this tournament," said U.S. coach Jeff Blashill (Detroit Red Wings)

The Russian team that the Americans took down included Evgeni Kuznetsov and Dimitry Orlov (Washington Capitals), Artemi Panarin (Chicago Blackhawks), plus Andrei Vasilevskiy and Nikita Kucherov (Tampa Bay Lightning) among others.

"It was a good win, but we didn't come here to win our group," Blashill said. "The hard games are ahead of us."

As a top-seed, the Americans move into the medal round where it will face the fourth-place team from the other group, either Finland or the Czech Republic, in the quarterfinals.

Johnny Gaudreau (Calgary Flames), 23, picked up two assists to give him 11 points in seven games. Dylan Larkin (Detroit Red Wings), 20, scored to give him 10 points. He's ninth among all tournament scorers.

"USA Hockey has done a great job of developing their younger players," Blashill said. "Our pool is deeper. The second thing is these young players come into the NHL so physically and mentally ready to play."

Kevin Hayes, who only recently joined the team after his New York Rangers were eliminated from the NHL playoffs, scored a pair of goals for the Americans.

"He has given us more offensive punch," Blashill said. "It gives us three good offensive lines, and a fourth line that is real good in terms of effort and ability to grind. Kevin also helps us have two power play units that are real dangerous."

The Americans are trying to win their third medal in five years at this tournament, and this young group seemed to be overflowing from confidence from the beginning.

Hayes actively lobbied to play with this U.S. team

"I thought they had a great young team, and I thought they could do some damage in this tournament, and I wanted to be part of it," Hayes said.

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## Anaheim Ducks

On Tuesday the Predators scored a pair of third-period goals to down the Ducks 2-1 and take a 2-1 lead in the best-of-seven Western Conference finals. Game 4 is Thursday.

## Chicago Blackhawks

The Chicago Wolves are joining forces with the newest member of the NHL.

The team announced Tuesday that it has signed a multiyear partnership with the Vegas Golden Knights to be the NHL expansion franchise's AHL affiliate. A source said the deal is for five years.

## Edmonton Oilers

Andrej Sekera will be out of action for six to nine months.

"He'll have surgery, I think, on Thursday," GM Peter Chiarelli said during his season-ending media conference on Tuesday at Rogers Place.



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He'll go on long-term injury status, so his salary won't count against the cap to start the season. But he won't be exempt from the upcoming Las Vegas expansion draft, so the Oilers will still to protect him as one of their three defencemen.

## **New York Rangers**

In the first offseason changes for the Rangers' organization, Ken Gernander, the coach of the AHL Hartford Wolf Pack for 10 seasons, was fired, and Rangers assistant general manager Chris Drury has been named general manager in Hartford.

The Wolf Pack finished last in the AHL, with 54 points (24-46-4-2). Gernander's replacement was not immediately named. Jim Schoenfeld, the Rangers senior vice president and assistant general manager who had been general manager in Hartford, will concentrate on assignments in New York.

Drury, the former center who played for the Avalanche, Sabres and Rangers, has been an assistant general manager for a year. He had been a candidate for the general manager's job with the Sabres.

## **Ottawa Senators**

With the Eastern Conference Final shifting to the Canadian Tire Centre for Game 3 Wednesday at 8 p.m., the Senators were happy to leave the Steel City with a split after a 1-0 loss to the Pittsburgh Penguins in Game 2 Monday at the PPG Paints Arena.

## **Pittsburgh Penguins**

The Penguins are badly banged up. Sidney Crosby has not seemed quite the force on the ice since he missed an earlier game with a concussion. Key forward Patric Hornqvist, a menace in the crease area, is hurt. The team's top offensive defenceman, Kris Letang, is lost for the year. Defenceman Trevor Daley is hurt. And Monday night, hard checks sent forward Bryan Rust and defenceman Justin Schultz to the dressing room, though both are coming to Ottawa.

With Schultz questionable for Game 3 after suffering an upper-body injury Monday, speculation began about which Penguins defenseman might move into the lineup with Kris Letang and Trevor Daley already on the sideline.

Mark Streit is the most likely option. Derrick Pouliot is the other defenseman to recently practice with the Penguins and serve as a healthy scratch.

## **St Louis Blues**

The Blues' lineup for next season doesn't figure to change much, but it's coaching staff will.

The team announced Tuesday that it will replace all of its assistant coaches. Gone will be Rick Wilson, Steve Thomas, Ray Bennett and Ty Conklin, the team's developmental goalie coach.

The Blues didn't name any replacements for the three assistant coaches released Tuesday, but their search may not last long or take them far.

Two of the most likely candidates are Craig Berube and Darryl Sydor, who were on the staff of the Blues' American Hockey League affiliate, the Chicago Wolves, this season.

The Blues' four-year affiliation with the Chicago Wolves ended Tuesday, when the American Hockey League club confirmed that it will align with the expansion Vegas Golden Knights in 2017-18.

That will leave the Blues as the only NHL team without a primary affiliate, an arrangement that is far from ideal. After having total control of the Wolves last season — hiring the coaching staff, implementing its system and allotting ice time — they will have no say next year.

The Blues will instead "associate" with Vegas, supplying the Wolves with some prospects, but there won't be enough roster spots for all of their prospects, so others will be loaned around the league.

General manager Doug Armstrong said Tuesday that the organization has seen this day coming but came up short in its efforts to secure an AHL affiliate. The plan is to have an agreement with one for 2018-19.

## **Toronto Maple Leafs**

The Maple Leafs have moved to address their deficiencies at defence by signing two European free agents: Calle Rosen and Andreas Borgman.

Overlooked in their draft years, the two blueliners have a chance to be NHL regulars after impressive starts in the Swedish Hockey League.

## **Vegas Golden Knights**

The Golden Knights announced they will have their American Hockey League affiliation with the Chicago Wolves.

The deal, which is for five years, has the Knights as the primary NHL team affiliated with the Wolves, replacing the St. Louis Blues, who had been the team's affiliate the last four years. The Knights were looking for an AHL team which was not owned by an NHL franchise and Chicago fit their needs.

## **Winnipeg Jets**

Finnish defenceman Sami Niku has signed a three-year, entry-level contract for an average \$916,700 at the NHL level.

Niku, 20, was a Jets seventh-round pick and is the fourth member of the team's 2015 draft class to sign, joining Kyle Connor, Jack Roslovic and Jansen Harkins.

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