



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • May 24, 2018

## THE NEWS & OBSERVER

### Canes GM has a jumbo-sized to-do list. Resolving goaltending quandary ranks right at the top.

By Chip Alexander

[calexander@newsobserver.com](mailto:calexander@newsobserver.com)

May 23, 2018 11:21 AM

Updated May 23, 2018 02:30 PM

Raleigh

Don Waddell, the man who wears two hats for the Carolina Hurricanes, has little down time these days.

Waddell, as president and general manager, has a lengthy to-do list that includes:

- Resolving a goaltending situation that feels like a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma.
- Taking calls from GMs interested in trades.
- Preparing for the NHL Draft next month in Dallas and deciding whether to use the No. 2 pick, or trade it.
- Deciding who that No. 2 pick will be, if used.
- Making decisions on re-signing goalie Cam Ward and forwards Derek Ryan and Lee Stempniak, who become unrestricted free agents July 1.
- Negotiating new contracts for players such as forward Elias Lindholm and defensemen Noah Hanifin and Trevor van Riemsdyk.
- Hiring an assistant coach to complete Rod Brind'Amour's coaching staff.
- And, on the business side, finding ways to sell more tickets for the 2018-19 season after missing the playoffs for the past nine years.

All that is being done in collaboration with owner Tom Dundon, whose eyes and hands are on everything.

The Hurricanes have made it clear they want a different goaltending look in the 2018-19 season, saying they will not have Scott Darling and Ward back as their goalie tandem. But it's problematic.

Darling, coming off a mostly miserable first season with Carolina, probably can't be traded given what's left on his contract: three years, \$12.45 million. Not unless they retain a big chunk of it, which Dundon may be loathe to do.

Ward, 34, wants to return to a team he has played for the past 13 seasons, winning 318 games, winning a Stanley Cup, but that would mean Darling-Ward again.

[Alex Nedeljkovic had a breakout season for the Charlotte Checkers](#), the Canes' AHL affiliate, but might need another year of development in the minors.

What to do?

"We're talking to teams and looking at the market and seeing what's out there," Waddell said. "We're going to turn over every stone to see what's available. You can't make a change for the sake of making a change."

Waddell was asked if he anticipated Darling being back with the team.

"As of now, yes," he said.

Which then means Ward leaving?

"I don't want to close any doors yet," Waddell said. "I want to keep all my options. We don't have to make a decision yet. We have some time on this."

A year ago, former general manager Ron Francis was able to deal goalie Eddie Lack, finding a taker in the Calgary Flames. That came after Francis had traded for Darling, the former Chicago Blackhawks backup, who was signed to a four-year, \$16.6 million deal.

Ward had one year left on an extension that paid him \$3.1 million last season. Everything seemed set — Darling and Ward.

But Darling, asked to be a No. 1 goalie for the first time, struggled from the start. He finished with a 13-21-7 record, a 3.18 goals-allowed average and an .888 save percentage. Ward was better, steadier, finishing with a 23-14-4 record, 2.73 goals-allowed average and .906 save percentage. He picked up his 300th career victory against the Vegas Golden Knights, and in Las Vegas.

"Cam would very much like to stay, as everyone knows," Rick Curran, Ward's agent, said this week. "But given the current situation, recognizing they've already made a commitment not to having the same goaltending duo, I guess our options are limited."

Before leaving for Toronto and the NHL Draft Lottery, before the Canes won the No. 2 overall pick, Waddell said he was a "lucky man." Now, the Canes need to be lucky again — with the No. 2 pick.

Most mock drafts have the Canes taking Russian forward Andrei Svechnikov, a 6-2, 188-pound power winger who played last season with Barrie in the Ontario Hockey League and scored 40 goals in 44 games.



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • May 24, 2018

While several GMs have called about obtaining the pick, Waddell said the Canes remain committed to making it in Dallas.

"I've told teams it's my job to listen and I won't hang up on someone if they want to make me an offer," Waddell said. "We think whatever direction we go we're going to get a heck of a player. If somebody is going to make an offer they're probably going to overpay for the pick."



## Tweetmail No. 189: Impact, Goal Song & Twitter

by Michael Smith [@MSmithCanes](https://twitter.com/MSmithCanes) / CarolinaHurricanes.com

May 23rd, 2018

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

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

Let's get to it.

Martin Necas.

After beginning the 2017-18 season with the Hurricanes, making his debut in Edmonton and getting a taste of NHL life before heading back overseas, I think there's potential for Necas to be an impact player with the Hurricanes in his first season in North America.

Still just a teenager, Necas played a key role with HC Kometa Brno of the Czech Extraliga. With nine points (4g, 5a) - including the championship-deciding goal - he helped the team capture its second straight league title. Then, at 19 years old, Necas notched five points (3g, 2a) and a plus-2 rating in seven games at the 2018 IIHF World Championship, as the Czechs were ousted by Team USA, eventual bronze medal winners.

Now, Necas enters an important offseason with Prospects Development Camp and the NHL Prospects Tournament in Traverse City, Mich., on the horizon.

TV's Mike Maniscalco and I had the chance to catch up with Hurricanes President and General Manager Don Waddell on this week's episode of CanesCast. In mentioning Necas, along with [Sebastian Aho](#) and the Hurricanes' potential second overall pick, Waddell said this: "Our best players are going to be our youngest players."

That's true, and Necas is going to be an integral part of that group, perhaps as early as this season. Where he fits in - whether its at his natural position of center or on the wing, or

maybe even starting the season in Charlotte - will be decided come training camp in the fall. But, he's certainly the name that jumps to the top of my list of players in the system who could make a big impact with the Hurricanes.

I've got a few suggestions. Before we get to that, some quick backstory for those unfamiliar: we're [soliciting fan opinions](#) on what could be the team's new goal song. Internally, we've compiled an initial list of 50-plus song options. After opening this up to the public on Monday evening, we've already received over 700 song suggestions. Over the next weeks and months, we'll be working to compare lists and pare down the suggestions to a final 5-10 for a fan vote later this summer.

"Raise Up" by Petey Pablo is an early favorite of mine. I am curious to hear how it fits in with the team's goal sequence, which includes the horn and Ric Flair's "Woo!", though - and that's important to consider in this whole process. The song is but one element in a larger sequence; how well does the 20-30 second splice of music play off the goal horn and wooing? "Jump Around" by House of Pain could work better in this sense, but we'll see.

One song I initially suggested internally was "Start the Commotion" by The Wiseguys. It's a funky little tune that *\*NERD ALERT\** I remember playing in middle school band. The bit from 25 seconds until 55 seconds has real potential, I think.

Have a suggestion for us? [Submit it here!](#)

Yep! That's definitely returning. In fact, [College & Military Rush](#) ticket numbers were up 20 percent in the 2017-18 season.

And speaking of college, look for [College Colors](#) to expand in year two to include more North Carolina schools.

Great question! I could probably dedicate an entire article or podcast to life in a social media world, but that's a different conversation for a different day.

Like you said, negative comments are inevitable, and I think that's the most important thing to consider. No matter if it's sports or a movie or a book or a piece of clothing or a sound bite or something you saw that you thought was share-



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • May 24, 2018

worthy, someone somewhere is probably going to disagree and make it known. Sometimes, disagreement can spark worthwhile, constructive discussion. Often times - especially on Twitter, where brevity reigns and nuance is easily lost - it just results in an echo chamber of noise.

I think the key to tuning out the noise is to simply understand that it's going to exist. That's way easier said than done in a lot of instances, but that's when I have to remind myself that acknowledging the noise only encourages it to become louder. There's a mute button. There's a block button. Or I could just close the app and move on with my day.

With that said, there is a lot of good that comes from Twitter and social media, which has connected the world in unparalleled ways. This very mailbag feature has roots in Twitter and continues to exist because you all follow along, read and engage on a weekly basis.

And I'm very thankful for that.

Congratulations, sir!

For those of us who work in hockey, August is the safe month. I got married in August, and it's also a great month to get away for vacation. If the wedding can't be that late in the summer, shoot for late June. Emphasis on late.

Just in case.

Join me next week for more questions and more answers!

If you have a question you'd like answered or you'd like to discuss the series finale of "The Middle" (a "Heck of a ride," indeed), you can find me on Twitter at [@MSmithCanes](#) or drop an email [here](#).



## Vellucci Shines In Return To Coaching

Written by Nicholas Niedzielski

Published: May 22, 2018

Coaching is in Mike Vellucci's blood.

After spending three years serving as Carolina's assistant general manager, Vellucci was named Charlotte's head coach last summer. In his introductory press conference he joked about almost instantly slipping back into coaching mode during a quick stint on the Charlotte bench.

"I filled in for two games [as an assistant coach with the Checkers in 2016-17] and I was on the bench and I said that I wasn't going to say anything for the first period," said Vellucci. "But five minutes into it I barked at the ref a little bit and felt pretty good."

It should come as no surprise then that the full-time transition back into coaching went pretty smoothly for Vellucci.

"It was like riding a bike," he said. "When you coach for 25 years, no matter if you take off a day or 10 years, there was nothing that changed. I enjoyed it."

Vellucci helmed the Plymouth Whalers for 14 years, turning them into a powerhouse that made the playoffs in each of his seasons as head coach. He made it clear he wanted to keep that perfect run going with his first coaching job in the pros

and pushed the Checkers to make that a reality.

"I really appreciated the way Mike handled everything," said forward Zack Stortini. "He's such a great coach, a great person. Guys love playing for him. He got the most out of us, he squeezed every last drop he could out of everybody."

When Vellucci took the coaching job in Charlotte, he brought a strong familiarity with him, not just of the personnel on the ice - many of whom he had a hand in drafting, but in the overarching goal of an AHL team. Vellucci valued the development side and the winning side, something evidenced by the team's success in both aspects.

"He's been awesome," said team captain Patrick Brown. "The communication has been great. He ran great practices. He was able to make adjustments during the game when we needed to and that's great to see out of a coach. It was really great to have him."

For Vellucci, the thrill of getting back behind the bench was immeasurable.

"I loved it," he said. "I had a lot of fun this year. The guys were great, they listened. We had a great relationship from coach to players. We worked well together. The fans were great, the atmosphere was awesome, the front office was great to work with, Michael Kahn is an outstanding owner and he gives the players everything they need to accomplish what their goals were. It was a great year and it's been very



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • May 24, 2018

fulfilling.”

Not wanting a distraction from his team’s Calder Cup run, Vellucci – who has another year left on his contract – had yet to have any conversations about what the future holds regarding Carolina’s front-office shuffle. But there was one

definitive takeaway from his successful first season in Charlotte.

“I am now a coach.”

## Career Years From Wallmark, Zykov and Miller Combine For Dominant Top Line

Written by Nicholas Niedzielski

Published: May 23, 2018

Across the AHL, no team was more prolific offensively than the Checkers. And propelling that historic attack was a top line that was near unrivaled league-wide.

The Checkers’ first line possessed the player with the league’s highest points per game average in Lucas Wallmark, the league’s leading goal scorer in Valentin Zykov and a player who was leading the league in scoring five months into the season before an injury sent him to the sidelines in Andrew Miller.

Together they formed a lethal combination.

“They all bring a different aspect to the game,” said head coach Mike Vellucci. “Millsy is a skill and thought-process guy who’s a playmaker, Wally is a thinker and a playmaker and Z is a net-front beast who you can’t take the puck away from.”

The trio began playing together toward the end of last season and showed flashes of brilliance. They were then able to carry that bond into this campaign, with their familiarity growing alongside their offensive production.

“We read the game the same way,” said Wallmark. “We work for each other out there and we’re good friends outside hockey too. We really like to play with each other.”

“I had chemistry with Wally and Millsy,” said Zykov. “It’s much easier to have guys around who know what you’re capable of doing and I know what they’re capable of.”

“Those guys are good players and most of all they’re smart,” said Miller. “It’s easiest to play with smart hockey players. We all contributed in different ways but we were good at moving the puck. We didn’t really care who scored, as long as we were putting the puck in it was good for our team. Those guys are great people to play with.”

In his second year as a North American pro, Wallmark scored at an unprecedented clip, leading the team in scoring despite only appearing in 45 games. A model of consistency, the Swede was held off the scoresheet only 13 times all year and just three times over the last three months of the season.

“I got a good opportunity and a lot of ice time in the offensive zone,” said Wallmark. “I played with a lot of confidence this

season and felt good out there. The confidence was a big key.”

For Zykov, this season saw him take a huge step on the offensive end, blossoming into one of the league’s premier threats.

“Every year I’m getting more comfortable and more experience,” said Zykov. “That definitely helps. I was very useful right there in front of the net.”

Taking home some hardware at the end as the goal-scoring champ is always a plus too.

“Of course,” said Zykov. “It was nice.”

Miller worked a bit more behind the scenes for much of the season, carrying the puck and orchestrating many of the top line’s attacks. That experienced presence helped the 29-year-old rack up his best scoring output since 2014-15 and sit atop the AHL in points as late as mid-February.

“A lot of good things contributed to it,” said Miller. “Good linemates who worked hard and moved the puck well and were easy to play with. That’s super beneficial. We had a good team and so it’s easier to do well. At the same time it’s kind of just doing what I always do. It was nice to get some recognition there on the AHL scoring rankings.”

It was when Miller took hold of the scoring lead that he suffered a blow, getting tangled up with an opponent and breaking his wrist, an injury that forced him to the sidelines for nearly two months.

“It was tough,” said Miller. “Especially missing the heart of the season, the end of the season there, you lose your legs and some coordination in your hands. It took me a couple weeks to get back to normal.”

Wallmark and Zykov represent two of Carolina’s top offensive prospects in the pipeline, and both were given a shot with the big club this season. The former spent more time than any Charlotte forward, logging 11 NHL games, while the latter made his debut and wowed with seven points in 10 games with the Hurricanes.

Those stints not only gave Carolina a glimpse into their future up front, they reinforced the work the duo has been putting in with the Checkers.

“You always want to play up there with the Hurricanes,” said Wallmark. “When you get the opportunity it gives you a little more confidence and you want to work harder every day. It



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • May 24, 2018

was fun and it was a big thing to get those games up there.”

“That gave me a lot of confidence,” said Zykov. “It helps you to believe in yourself that you’re capable of playing in that league.”

Wallmark and Zykov were dominant throughout the AHL season, especially when on the ice together, and proved that they both are quickly trending in the right direction.

“I don’t know if I would ever say anyone is beyond this league, but I would say Wally and Z are NHL ready,” said Vellucci. “They deserve the opportunity.”

That’s not to say their ticket to the NHL is guaranteed next season, as both forwards have their eyes set on a strong offseason.

“They’re going to have to have a good summer and make the most of it,” said Vellucci. “When it comes camp time, they’re going to have to earn their spot just like everyone else.”

“I want to be stronger and faster out there,” said Wallmark. “Hopefully I can work on that over the summer and come back and take the next step. I think I can do that.”

“I want to work on my quickness,” said Zykov. “Come back and be ready and be in good shape.”

For the veteran Miller, next season represents a new

challenge.

“I signed in Switzerland,” said Miller. “So I’m going to be in Fribourg next year, which I’m excited about.”

This marks the first overseas endeavor for the 29-year-old forward who has nearly 300 AHL games under his belt.

“A bunch of different things made it the right choice for me,” said Miller. “I’m really excited for the opportunity.”

After two seasons as an offensive catalyst for the Checkers, Miller will now aim to take his playmaking abilities with him to the top Swiss league.

“I’m hoping to be a real good offensive player over there,” he said. “My goal is to just play my game. It’ll definitely be a transition to a different style of hockey. It’s bigger ice, which I’ve been told will help me out a bit. But I’ll work hard to adapting to the new game and my new teammates.”

While their paths are splintering off as the offseason begins, the trio of Wallmark, Zykov and Miller will continue to stand as one of the franchise’s most dominant.

“They’re all smart hockey players,” said Vellucci. “They all brought something different to the table. It just clicked.”

## TODAY'S LINKS

<http://www.newsobserver.com/sports/article211727654.html>

<https://www.nhl.com/hurricanes/news/tweetmail-number-189-impact-goal-song-twitter/c-298756430>

<http://gocheckers.com/articles/features/vellucci-shines-in-return-to-coaching>

<http://gocheckers.com/articles/features/career-years-from-wallmark-zykov-and-miller-combine-for-dominant-top-line>



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • May 24, 2018

## SportScan

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

1097262 Carolina Hurricanes

Canes GM has a jumbo-sized to-do list. Resolving goaltending quandary ranks right at the top.

BY CHIP ALEXANDER

RALEIGH—Don Waddell, the man who wears two hats for the Carolina Hurricanes, has little down time these days.

Waddell, as president and general manager, has a lengthy to-do list that includes:

- Resolving a goaltending situation that feels like a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma.
- Taking calls from GMs interested in trades.
- Preparing for the NHL Draft next month in Dallas and deciding whether to use the No. 2 pick, or trade it.
- Deciding who that No. 2 pick will be, if used.
- Making decisions on re-signing goalie Cam Ward and forwards Derek Ryan and Lee Stempniak, who become unrestricted free agents July 1.
- Negotiating new contracts for players such as forward Elias Lindholm and defensemen Noah Hanifin and Trevor van Riemsdyk.
- Hiring an assistant coach to complete Rod Brind'Amour's coaching staff.
- And, on the business side, finding ways to sell more tickets for the 2018-19 season after missing the playoffs for the past nine years.

All that is being done in collaboration with owner Tom Dundon, whose eyes and hands are on everything.

The Hurricanes have made it clear they want a different goaltending look in the 2018-19 season, saying they will not have Scott Darling and Ward back as their goalie tandem. But it's problematic.

Darling, coming off a mostly miserable first season with Carolina, probably can't be traded given what's left on his contract: three years, \$12.45 million. Not unless they retain a big chunk of it, which Dundon may be loathe to do.

Ward, 34, wants to return to a team he has played for the past 13 seasons, winning 318 games, winning a Stanley Cup, but that would mean Darling-Ward again.

Alex Nedeljkovic had a breakout season for the Charlotte Checkers, the Canes' AHL affiliate, but might need another year of development in the minors.

What to do?

"We're talking to teams and looking at the market and seeing what's out there," Waddell said. "We're going to turn over every stone to see what's available. You can't make a change for the sake of making a change."

Waddell was asked if he anticipated Darling being back with the team.

"As of now, yes," he said.

Which then means Ward leaving?

"I don't want to close any doors yet," Waddell said. "I want to keep all my options. We don't have to make a decision yet. We have some time on this."

A year ago, former general manager Ron Francis was able to deal goalie Eddie Lack, finding a taker in the Calgary Flames. That came after Francis had traded for Darling, the former Chicago Blackhawks backup, who was signed to a four-year, \$16.6 million deal.

Ward had one year left on an extension that paid him \$3.1 million last season. Everything seemed set — Darling and Ward.

But Darling, asked to be a No. 1 goalie for the first time, struggled from the start. He finished with a 13-21-7 record, a 3.18 goals-allowed average and an .888 save percentage. Ward was better, steadier, finishing with a 23-14-4 record, 2.73 goals-allowed average and .906 save percentage. He picked up his 300th career victory against the Vegas Golden Knights, and in Las Vegas.

"Cam would very much like to stay, as everyone knows," Rick Curran, Ward's agent, said this week. "But given the current situation, recognizing they've already made a commitment not to having the same goaltending duo, I guess our options are limited."

Before leaving for Toronto and the NHL Draft Lottery, before the Canes won the No. 2 overall pick, Waddell said he was a "lucky man." Now, the Canes need to be lucky again — with the No. 2 pick.

Most mock drafts have the Canes taking Russian forward Andrei Svechnikov, a 6-2, 188-pound power winger who played last season with Barrie in the Ontario Hockey League and scored 40 goals in 44 games.

While several GMs have called about obtaining the pick, Waddell said the Canes remain committed to making it in Dallas.

"I've told teams it's my job to listen and I won't hang up on someone if they want to make me an offer," Waddell said. "We think whatever direction we go we're going to get a heck of a player. If somebody is going to make an offer they're probably going to overpay for the pick."

News Observer LOADED: 05.24.2018

1097350 Websites

The Athletic / Capitals complete improbable run to the Stanley Cup final: 'We've been waiting for this moment for a long time'

By Scott Burnside May 24, 2018 6

TAMPA, Fla. — The day began with a joyous hot lap by Washington Capitals head coach Barry Trotz during the morning skate and ended with the biggest win in franchise history.

Make no mistake one thing begets the other.



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • May 24, 2018

A moment of frivolity Wednesday morning as Trotz took over the ceremonial first lap before the morning skate on the road much to the delight of the Capitals players (and the media too) spoke volumes about the mood of a team whose history has been anything but frivolous in these moments.

A little more than eight hours later the Capitals continued their amazing spring by winning for the third time at Amalie Arena in the conference final, this time by a 4-0 count, with captain Alex Ovechkin scoring just 1:02 into the game to put his early mark on the kind of victory that has eluded him his entire career.

"We're going to the Stanley Cup final," the 32-year-old Ovechkin said after. "I think everybody is happy, but we still have unfinished, you know what I mean. I don't know, I'm emotional right now. I think we've been waiting for this moment for a long time. We understand what it has to take to be in the final. You can see this game was unbelievable. Everybody was all in."

The deal with the morning lap which takes place on the road is that if you win you keep taking the ceremonial first lap. Ovechkin was the hot lapper when the Capitals lost Game 5 here setting up two must-win games for the Capitals and so Trotz stepped into the breach.

He joked that he'll need to keep practicing. And that he might need to get his blades sharpened.

Then he talked about the satisfaction at having watched a team that endured a dramatic turnover in personnel after losing in seven games to eventual Stanley Cup champion Pittsburgh last May and somehow, improbably will be preparing to face expansion darlings Las Vegas in the final.

"I'm more happy for that group than I am personally. I always take personal pleasure in seeing young men grow, do something together," Trotz said. "I said to them all the time, if you want to go somewhere fast, go by yourself. If you want to go somewhere far, go with the group."

"All the things I've been talking about with this group, they did it," the coach added. "I'm really happy for this group. Playoffs are fun. They got to the next level and realized they're not going to be defined by anything they've done or not done in the past. They wanted this game, there's no question."

He's right. No longer defined by past failures, they are redefining themselves on an almost daily basis.

And this was no walk in the park in spite of the four-goal differential. And if you're after achieving something historic – and that's what this was as the Capitals will advance to their second-ever Stanley Cup final and first since Ovechkin joined the team after the 2004-05 lockout – then it's not supposed to be easy, right?

T.J. Oshie was hobbled early after blocking a shot but played on.

Devante Smith-Pelly, one of the heroes of Game 6 took a puck to the back of the neck. Later he got clobbered by a hard check and had to leave the game.

Veteran defenseman Brooks Orpik took a hard hit from behind late in the second period and left the game but returned in the third period.

And if it was somehow fitting that Ovechkin opened the scoring it was likewise fitting that the hero of Game 7 – apart from the unshakable Braden Holtby in goal who pitched back-to-back shutouts to close out a Tampa team many felt would breeze through Washington – was Andre Burakovsky.

Injured to start the playoffs and then a healthy scratch in Game 5, after which he admitted to having self-doubts and was thinking of seeking out a sports psychologist to help him deal with the ups and downs in his game, scored twice in the second period to put the game out of reach.

In the morning he told Per Bjurman, the dean of Swedish hockey writers, as well as Swedish teammate Nicklas Backstrom that he felt he could be the hero in Game 7 and then went out and made it happen.

"I've been out for a while a little bit, with the injury. It hasn't been easy for me," the 23-year-old first-round draft pick said. "It's been pretty hard. I was working really hard to get back as fast as possible. It feels really good to help the team to get a win, and be a part of this team."

This marks just another step on a journey that still has many twists and turns to come. But a night like this, a moment like this, deserves a pause, a moment of reflection on the path traveled and the memories created along the way.

What a moment like this means to the players, coaches, trainers most of whom were seen hugging each other and slapping each on the backs in the visitors' locker room at Amalie Arena.

Imagine, then, what it means to Ovechkin who will play in his first-ever Stanley Cup final and who has set a tone on the ice this spring that observers say is different, more mature this spring.

Trotz recalled how he was visiting his son in Russia last summer and spent some time with Ovechkin after Ovechkin got married.

"There were a lot of people doubting if he still had what it took," Trotz said. "The great players take exception to that. A lot of things were said at the end of last year in the press, Twitter, whatever. And they're hurtful and I think he took it personally. He said, I'm going to show you I'm still a great player. And he did."

Ovechkin's goal, the eventual game-winner, was his 12th of the post-season, second among all NHLers.

Imagine, too, what it means to Backstrom, Ovechkin's oftentimes linemate over the years. They have now shared 11 Game 7s. They'll remember this one forever and in fact, shared a look during the on-ice celebration that required no words to decipher.

"After it was done, I felt like it was you don't even have to say so much," an emotional Backstrom said. "You just have to look at each other. We've been waiting a long time for this, so now we're in the finals and we're going to do everything we can do something special here for us, for the team and for the city."

Backstrom missed four games with a hand injury suffered in Game 5 of the Pittsburgh series. He scored an empty-net goal Wednesday night and admitted that he wondered if there would ever be a moment like this for him.

"It's a great feeling. I still can't believe it. We worked so hard for this to be able to be in the finals and all it took was 11 years, but now we're there," Backstrom said.

Imagine, too, what it means to Holtby who wasn't even the starter when this playoff year began but who has come on to play the best playoff hockey of his career. Most of Holtby's playoff history has been marked by good to great play that was almost always bested by the opposing team's goaltending.

Not this spring. Not in this series.

"I've been around enough now to know that no matter what you just have to be a good teammate, you got to work, you got to set the right example and support your teammates," Holtby said. "When it's your turn to help the team in any way, you prepare and you be ready. And I think that's one thing that starts with our leadership, that we want to show our whole group is that you put egos out the window. We're here to win as a team no matter who gets credit. You're just prepared to play."

Maybe in the past the Capitals have had more skill or seemed to be better in some areas than this squad but there has been a metamorphosis in the team's identity, their character if you will. Didn't come from changing personnel necessarily but in changing a thought process.



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • May 24, 2018

"I think our group here really understands what it means to be a team and how to win," Holtby said. "Maybe in the past we've had more skill or been better on paper or whatever. But this team everyone knows their role and everyone wants to pitch in and everyone is comfortable with each other. I haven't been on a team like this where in any situation we're confident and confident in each other. Don't get down on each other. It's a strong group and that's extremely hard to come by and something that we're going need to have going forward to be our best and be a strong team."

In the end that comes from the top. It comes from the quiet leadership of GM Brian MacLellan and of course the fast legs of their head coach.

This is new territory for Trotz as well. Before this season he'd never coached an NHL team beyond the second round.

Now, the coach without a contract beyond this season has displayed an easy grace this spring and has helped the Capitals traverse potholes that have in the past derailed them. Like going down 2-0 in the first round against Columbus before winning four straight. Or dropping the opening game against Pittsburgh in the second round and ultimately winning in six on an overtime goal by Evgeny Kuznetsov. And in this conference final when the Caps won two to start the series and then lost three straight before emerging with two gritty performances in Games 6 and 7 during which they outscored the powerful Lightning 7-0.

One longtime NHL coach said he wasn't surprised by the outcome of the series.

"Washington was the better team in the series," he said. "Happy for Barry and his staff."

Another veteran coach echoed those sentiments.

"One team was ready to win. Good on Washington," he said. "He (Barry) deserves this win."

And a third coach added that Washington was just too fast for Tampa to handle.

It all came together for the Capitals, and the next stop is the Stanley Cup final.

"This is a group of young men, our trainers, staff, everyone's been all in all year," Trotz said. "We've kept growing. On and off the ice. And that to me is a sign of a team that's maturing, a team that believes in each other and that likes each other's company. They've had a real good mission this year."

The Athletic LOADED: 05.24.2018

1097351 Websites

The Athletic / Lightning season ends in 'gut-wrenching' fashion as they admit to being outplayed by Capitals

By Joe Smith May 24, 2018

TAMPA, Fla. – Lightning general manager Steve Yzerman stared straight ahead as he stood in a near-empty elevator at Amalie Arena Wednesday night.

On a small television to his left was Capitals captain Alex Ovechkin, who finally grabbed the Price of Wales Trophy, given to the Eastern Conference champions.

The Capitals had vanquished the Lightning, 4-0, in Game 7, with many in the sellout crowd of 19,902 having left for the exits midway through the

third period. This was the most talented, deepest and most experienced roster that Yzerman had built in his eight years as GM.

"You think when you get this far, for sure you're thinking, 'This is your year,'" coach Jon Cooper said.

Yet for all the Lightning accomplished – a franchise-record for wins and points – they went out with a whimper. The highest-scoring team in the league got shutout for the final 159 minutes, 27 seconds of its season. For the second time in three years, they held a 3-2 series lead in the conference final, only to lose back-to-back games.

This one will haunt the Lightning for a while. Maybe forever.

"It's just a very disappointing, gut-wrenching feeling knowing how special this group was and not ending the way we wanted it to," said captain Steven Stamkos, who remained without a point in seven career Game 7s. "It's going to take a few days to digest this. It's tough to sit here right now and think of positive things and how it was a great season. It doesn't seem that way when we have this group that's been to this position before and can't give yourself a chance to win.

"We thought we had that group. And it's just an empty feeling right now."

In reality, the Lightning got beat by a better team. A hungrier team. The Capitals, fueled by years of playoff heartbreak and underachievement, had exorcized their demons by unseating the two-time Cup champion Penguins in the previous round. And Washington, led by Ovechkin, wasn't going to be denied.

The Lightning lost the first two games of this series at home, putting its season on "life support," as Cooper said. The fact Tampa Bay rallied to win three straight – two in Washington – was impressive and admirable.

But the Lightning won Game 4 largely because goalie Andrei Vasilevski stole it for them. Vasilevski, like he was most of the season, was their best player, giving his team a chance.

Vasilevski was average Wednesday, but no one blamed him. You can't win if you don't score. And the last three goals in the Lightning's season belonged to Cedric Paquette, Ondrej Palat and Ryan Callahan.

Stamkos and Nikita Kucherov were shut out in the final three games.

"Sometimes you get beat by a team that's either better than you or executed better," Stamkos said. "For the majority of the series, let's not kid ourselves – 5-on-5, they held the advantage. We didn't quit. We found a way, have an unbelievable goaltender. You need to win as a team in the playoffs, and he gave us a spark. Their goaltender (Braden Holtby) gave them a spark the last two games. You get to Game 7, you never know what's going to happen."

It felt like the Lightning lost this series in Game 6. At least, the momentum. The Capitals, facing elimination, played with much more desperation and took it to Tampa Bay – both physically and mentally. The Lightning might have exhaled after winning three straight, knowing it had a Game 7 at home in their back pocket.

But the win gave Capitals some life, some swagger. It was like poking a bear. And you could sense how loose Washington was at Wednesday's morning skate, when coach Barry Trotz raced around for the team's ritual pre-workout fast lap.

"That Game 6 really hurt us," defenseman Dan Girardi said. "They gained a lot of confidence. They felt really good about their game and they should."

The beginning of Game 7 was actually some of the best 5-on-5 hockey the Lightning played in this series. Tampa Bay gave up a goal 62 seconds in on a knuckle puck shot by Ovechkin, but rebounded nicely and had the majority of chances. They just couldn't cash in.

A turning point came in the second period, with the Lightning still down 1-0. Victor Hedman had gotten past Holtby by the left post and slipped the puck back into the crease. Gourde, crashing the net, got his stick on the puck, but two Capitals met him there to thwart the golden opportunity.



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • May 24, 2018

"It hit my stick and went the other way," Gourde said. "I wish I had it back. Wished I scored on that chance. Frustrating. It's a 1-1 game if I score that goal."

Midway through the second, the Capitals scored the back-breaking goal. Lars Eller flipped the puck from mid-ice into the Lightning zone. Girardi tried to glove it, but lost control and Washington's Andre Burakovsky – who hadn't scored in the entire playoffs – snatched the puck before beating Vasilevskiy.

"It was a dump-in and it hits me in the chest," Girardi said. "I was just trying to not close my hand on it and take a penalty. It just trickled away from me, couldn't get it. it's a tough bounce."

Gourde was a two-foot tap-in from tying the game. The Burakovsky shot somehow slipped between Vasilevskiy's blocker and right pad. Did the Capitals get some breaks? Sure. But they deserved them.

"The hockey Gods will always reward you if you just stay with it and you earned it," Capitals coach Barry Trotz said. "I thought for a good portion of the series were a little bit of the better team."

The Capitals best players were their best players, from Ovechkin to Evgeny Kuznetsov. T.J. Oshie delivered a big goal in Game 6 to keep the season alive. Holtby posted back-to-back shutouts, his first of the season.

With the season on the line, the Lightning's core players – Stamkos, Kucherov, Hedman – weren't the difference makers they're capable of being. Hedman said the stinging feeling of losing in the Stanley Cup final in 2015 won't be forgotten until they win the Cup, and now the Lightning will have to wait at least another year for another crack at erasing it.

There will be some change in the offseason, but not an overhaul. Don't expect Cooper to go anywhere, leading the Lightning to three conference finals in four years should earn him some slack. Most of the core is under contract, with extensions for Kucherov and Vasilevskiy not likely for another year. Though you have to wonder if Tyler Johnson has played his last game with the Lightning, as his no-trade clause kicks in July 1.

As the Lightning players waved their final goodbyes to the remaining fans at Amalie Arena Wednesday night, and Yzerman popped on the elevator, they maintained it would take a few days to digest this loss. This lost season.

They vowed to be back.

"The window is not closed," Stamkos said. "This group is way too talented and is still very young when you look at it. Just look at the team we lost to. They've been continually building and building. They get over the hump against Pittsburgh and they have a ton of confidence. They come in and get a chance. You have a guy like (Vasilevskiy), your window is never closed."

The Athletic LOADED: 05.24.2018

1097352 Websites

The Athletic / Bourne: How Alex Ovechkin's game has changed when the games have mattered most

By Justin Bourne May 23, 2018 13

Almost a month ago, I wrote a little post-mortem on Auston Matthews' postseason run, and more generally on hitting in hockey. I made the point that out of 390 forwards who played regularly this past regular season, Matthews finished 377th in the league in hits per game. He averages 0.26 hits, roughly one every four games (tied with Connor McDavid).

The short form of that article was that in playoffs, Matthews averaged two hits per game (nearly an 800 per cent increase), good for a total of fourteen, just two shy of his entire regular season total. My point was simply that he got away from his game, and if he hopes to have more offensive success next postseason, he shouldn't bother trying to be a player he isn't. He should play his own game, which can be physical enough, just not when it comes to actual hitting.

That lesson, though, is not meant to be a blanket lesson for all players. Hitting may be on the (steep) decline in the NHL as the incoming generation of players has prioritized keeping their feet moving, but all that's going to do is up the value of players who can both play, and also intimidate opponents through hard contact. I've seen my share of talented young players fold up when the intensity of games ramps up to the point it looks like roller derby on ice. Hell, I've been one, albeit with less talent.

Which quite obviously brings us to Alexander Ovechkin, who combines being one of the greatest scorers to ever live with being a 235-pound human wrecking ball whenever he damn well pleases.

The knock on Ovechkin in playoffs of yore is maybe that he didn't quite "bring it" the way his rival Sidney Crosby did. That's probably sheer narrative, but in this postseason, you can safely say that narrative can take an elegant swan dive into a dumpster fire, never to be seen again. (At least when discussing the later years of his career ... but let's move past that well-beaten referendum for all our sakes here today, ya?).

He was Washington's unequivocal best player in a pivotal Game 6 for the Capitals on Monday, no ifs ands or buts about that. As a player, all you can control is your energy and effort and hope the breaks go your way on any given night. When you do bring those two things, you can contribute in myriad ways to your team without even putting up points.

In Game 6, that's exactly what happened with Ovechkin, who got boxcar-stab blanked. Despite that, a far less desperate Tampa team didn't seem to know what to do, as Tom Wilson, Brooks Orpik and the Caps captain completely physically dominated them, leading to a "hits" total of 39-14 in favour of Washington. Now, obviously arena bias can play into those numbers somewhat, as hits are a subjective stat, but it was plain as day to the naked eye who had the physical edge. That led to the Caps outshooting Tampa 34-24, to having the advantage at the face-off dot, to blocking more shots ... their leader was engaged, and it just seemed like everyone jumped on his back and road his wave to victory.

Just look at how he came out of the gate – most of this is in the first two periods:

Like ... I don't want a play a guy that big skating that fast who decided to take on the comportment of an angry rhinoceros. And from the looks of things, the Bolts didn't want to either. When you feel like your opponent is worried less about the puck and more about smashing into everything that moves, it can be a little tough to focus on the puck yourself.

What's interesting is how much Ovi ramps up his physical play when he's more engaged in the outcome of the game. I don't even think it's a conscious decision, it's just how he's wired.

In the regular season, Ovechkin tied for 75th among the 390 forwards who played regularly this season in hits-per-game, landing 1.7. In the postseason, he's just inside the top-20 of the nearly-200 forwards who've played in playoffs, exactly doubling the amounts of hits he's thrown to 3.4.

Of course, this is all while being tied for second in playoff points with 21 in 18 games, a points-per-game number that's incrementally better than his regular season total, and all while playing great teams every night (while often being their focal point). Ramping up his physical play hasn't come at the cost of his ability to contribute offensively.

As these playoff games have gotten even bigger and he gets more desperate to push his team over the duelling humps of the Pittsburgh Penguins and getting to the Stanley Cup final, his physical game has only continued to grow.



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • May 24, 2018

After six games against Columbus, Ovechkin had thrown just nine hits. After six games against Pittsburgh he had thrown a whopping 26, including seven in the deciding game. And again against Tampa, Ovechkin is up to 22 hits so far, with 14 coming over the past three games. (The Pittsburgh series was the same – the bulk of his hits came in Games 4, 5 and 6.)

None of this is to say that Ovechkin should come out Wednesday and focus on racking up hits, or simply worry about the physical side of the game. Tampa is likely good and softened up enough, and focusing on something like hitting in a Game 7 would seem borderline asinine. But as I said, when he's engaged, I don't think he has a choice. He's just wired to take out all that energy and desire to win on the shoulders of his opponents.

So when the puck drops for Game 7, I'm eager to see if Ovechkin has another night in him like he had on Monday. If you're a Caps fan, I have a hunch it'd make you feel pretty good to see him mow someone over early. Tampa certainly has the skill advantage in this series, but it's really tough to make plays while you're picking yourself up off the ice.

The Athletic LOADED: 05.24.2018

1097353 Websites

The Athletic / A moment in time for Alex Ovechkin and the Washington Capitals

By Scott Burnside May 23, 2018 22

TAMPA, Fla. – The labels we affixed to generational players like Sidney Crosby and Alex Ovechkin have always been unfair.

But life in general isn't fair, and anyone who followed the Washington Capitals with any kind of regularity over the past two decades sure knows that sports aren't fair.

Part of the reason that Crosby and Ovechkin were called the faces of the NHL after the 2004-05 lockout, the face of a league stepping from the ashes of a fire of their own setting, is that they were so damned good. The labels fit because it's exactly what they were.

Sure, no two players are greater than an entire game, and these two would be the last to elevate themselves above their teammates and colleagues, but they are who they are — special, purposeful, their greatness immediately separating them from the fray, the extra burden placed on them by their rare gifts shouldered more or less without complaint.

Crosby, of course, won a Stanley Cup in 2009, a year after his Penguins lost in the final to Detroit, and then won back-to-back championships in 2016 and 2017. He also led Canada to twin gold medals at the Olympics, including a dominating performance in Ovechkin's backyard in Sochi in 2014. Four years earlier, Crosby scored the golden goal in the gold medal game in Vancouver. Ovechkin's Russian squad, not unlike the Capitals team that Ovechkin has captained since during the 2009-10 season, was deep and talented but never managed to earn a medal.

Crosby's Penguins knocked off the Capitals en route to all three Stanley Cup wins, including one in Game 7 in Washington in 2009 and another in Game 7 last spring.

Maybe that's why we look at what will transpire on Wednesday night in Tampa as something if not defining then certainly memorable and potentially career-altering for Ovechkin and his teammates.

Because no matter what anyone says in the hours leading up to Game 7 of the 2018 Eastern Conference final, this is a moment in time for one of

the game's greatest players and sure-fire Hall of Famer. And it's a moment in time for the only franchise he has ever known.

"It doesn't matter which position we are, we just going to enjoy it and we're going to play our way," Ovechkin said Tuesday after the Capitals landed in Tampa. "It's fun. I don't think nobody thought like we're going to be fighting against the Tampa Bay Lightning for Stanley Cup final in Game 7."

"I don't think you guys felt you going to be here probably going to be on vacation somewhere. Now we here and we excited.

"Lots of people say we going to lose [to] Columbus. Lots of people say we going to lose Pittsburgh. Lots of people say we going to lose Tampa, and tomorrow is the biggest probably game in my life and this team organization, probably. We just want to be here and want to come back to Game 7 and win the game."

The Capitals advanced to the 1998 Stanley Cup final where they were swept by Detroit, but the franchise was in a different place in its evolution. They were a fourth place team that knocked off Boston, Ottawa and Buffalo. The fan base was spread over hither and yon, the national capital area barely aware there was a hockey team at all let alone one that had advanced to the Stanley Cup final.

The area around the Capitals' relatively new downtown arena was still an area very much in transition.

Ovechkin's arrival heralded a new era of hockey for the franchise. Youth hockey numbers soared after the energetic, rambunctious Ovechkin joined the team in the fall of 2005.

GM George McPhee and his successor Brian MacLellan built teams that would win three Presidents' Trophies in the Ovechkin era as the NHL's regular season champions. Fast, dynamic, talented. They were many things, but what they weren't was winners. Not in the true sense of the word. Not in the only sense that matters to hockey players.

Until this spring the Caps and Ovechkin had never advanced beyond the second round.

But they shouldered the Pittsburgh monkey off their collective backs in the second round after first winning four straight against Columbus after dropping the first two games of that series at home. Then on Monday, they delivered a clutch performance in a must-win Game 6 to earn a one-game chance at the Stanley Cup final.

"Yeah. Never been in this position before," Ovechkin acknowledged on Tuesday. "I'm excited. All the guys can't wait [for] tomorrow. We all want to be in this position. And we want to move forward."

But, he added, Game 7 is just another step.

"We don't have satisfaction yet. We still don't reach our goal," he said. "Tomorrow is going to be huge step forward. It's going to be fun, it's going to be exciting, and I'm excited. We can't wait 'til game start."

The Capitals captain didn't record a point in Game 6, but he was as good a player as there was on the ice.

He was a physical beast, knocking Lightning players to the ice and into the boards on almost every shift.

"Best all-around game in the playoffs," one NHL head coach said. "He didn't score, but he was a great leader tonight."

In the past, there was often grumbling about Ovechkin's ability to do just that — lead.

Many times, Ovechkin would be on a plane the morning after a playoff ousting to join the Russian national team at the World Championships. He's not the only player to transition quickly from NHL playoff losses to international competition, and we may never fully understand the pressures being brought to bear by top Russian officials to make his presence known with the national team at the tournament. But his quick



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • May 24, 2018

departures coupled with unfulfilled expectations in Washington left some to question — unfairly in our opinion — Ovechkin's heart.

One source familiar with the Capitals did say that he felt it has taken time for Ovechkin to understand what it means to be a good captain and a leader of players.

"The biggest difference, I think, is that over the years, the Stanley Cup or the lack of one has finally grown to have some meaning to him," he said.

"It's just the whole growing up thing. It means more to him now. He can see the end in sight type of thing."

It's always been our opinion that Ovechkin has always been engaged come playoff time. He might have at times tried to do too much, but that's hardly a character flaw.

And this spring, he has been as good as anyone could have expected him to be.

His 21 points are tied for second among all playoff performers. His 11 goals are likewise second among all skaters.

"I think this entire playoffs has been a redemption for Ovi," said longtime NHL executive and analyst Frank Provenzano. Provenzano was the assistant general manager for the Capitals when they drafted Ovechkin in 2004.

"But he has to get to the Stanley Cup final in order to truly change the narrative as a great goal scorer but a player that could never seem to deliver in big profile, high pressure games.

"The Caps and Pens are forever intertwined from a playoff success, misery standpoint, and Ovi-Crosby are just the most recent iteration of that. It's been basically a decade of profound playoff disappointment for Ovi's Caps, and a lifetime of such for the franchise. Their championship clock is ticking on this chapter of the Caps. There are too many teams with elite young cores that will displace them."

Hard to believe but this game will mark Ovechkin's 11th Game 7 opportunity. He is a disappointing 3-7 in the previous 10, which presumably has little impact on Wednesday's outcome.

Dean Evason was in his first year as an assistant coach in Washington when Ovechkin broke into the league. He recalls a player who was excited, happy.

"Just really energetic, just loved the game, just played the game free," Evason said Tuesday.

Over the better part of eight years, Evason saw the weight of expectation and disappointment bear down on the Capitals captain.

But even when he was the first player out of the locker room and on the way to the World Championships, the depth of Ovechkin's character was still reflected in a way that maybe people didn't appreciate, Evason said.

"I think that shows his loyalty to his country and the kind of person he is deep down," Evason said. "He doesn't want to let anybody down."

And learning to lead is a process.

"I think Ovi's certainly over those years, every year got more appreciative of how hard and how tough it was to win the Stanley Cup, to compete for it," said Evason, who now is the head coach of the Milwaukee Admirals, the top farm team of the Nashville Predators.

This spring might be the ultimate reflection of that process.

"His game has evolved into not only being the best scorer in the game today and possibly all-time, but it's evolved into an all-around player. You can see the leadership qualities finally coming out in him and the maturity factor. It's fun to watch," Evason said.

Former Washington Capitals captain Chris Clark was with the Capitals when Ovechkin joined the team after the 2004-05 lockout and the two played on a line for a couple of seasons.

Sometimes Clark would look up to see Ovechkin standing beside him on the right side of the rink far from where a normal left wing might be expected to be.

"It was challenging at times," Clark said with a laugh. "But it was fun to watch. He went 100 miles an hour all the time his first couple of years."

To have a front row seat to history is something that Clark, now a development coach with the Columbus Blue Jackets, continues to appreciate more than a decade later.

From the get go, Clark said, Ovechkin was always as happy for teammates' successes as his own. In fact, Clark recalled you had to brace yourself if you happened to score because Ovechkin had a propensity for launching himself into teammates in celebration.

Clark admits some surprise that the Capitals and Ovechkin are on the verge of something unknown for them.

"They've had such a good team for so long," he said.

But it's all about timing and myriad factors, and for some teams and players, it just doesn't happen.

Like many observers, Clark sees a difference in Ovechkin's personality.

"He's matured a lot in the last four, five, six years, and I think that shows on the ice as well," Clark said. "He knows the best players have to be the best players to win the game. I think he takes that to heart."

No question in Clark's mind that Ovechkin would trade in all of his personal hardware for one Stanley Cup.

"One hundred percent," he said.

There are only two ways this turns out Wednesday in the showdown in Tampa. What the outcome means, well, that's where there will be many and varied opinions.

Win and there will be at least a subtle change in how Ovechkin is perceived by the greater hockey community. Again, fair or not, it will be so. That's what it means to get to a final.

Lose?

"And he is an NHL Tony Romo, great numbers (both franchises and career) but not considered in the class of the truly all-time greats because he could never climb all the way to the top of the mountain," Provenzano said.

Barry Trotz has been asked about Ovechkin, oh just a few times since taking over as head coach in May of 2014.

Indeed the perception of both men is likewise interconnected. A win Wednesday will have great meaning for both as it would mean a first-ever trip to the final for both.

"The opportunity is not only for Alex, it's for everybody," Trotz said Tuesday. "The chance to get into a Game 7, which will allow you to go to the finals, it's exciting, it's fun, it's all those things. It's a life experience. It's a professional experience."

Still, Trotz views defining a career in a different way.

"One game, one moment in time doesn't define you," Trotz said Tuesday.

"The longevity of stuff you have to battle through. Toughness is not the one moment; toughness is getting up from many moments that don't go your way. To me, that's mental toughness, is grinding through stuff. They've done that all year. This group has dealt with lots of stuff and it's ready to deal with tomorrow night."

The Athletic LOADED: 05.24.2018



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • May 24, 2018

The Athletic / Pronman: Top 10 goalie prospects for the 2018 NHL draft

By Corey Pronman May 23, 2018 15

This year's goalie crop isn't too exciting, and there isn't a clear No. 1 choice. A lot of the talent is overseas this season. My top four goalies would be the ones I'd advocate for a draft pick. I'm very conservative in valuing young goalies though, so I wouldn't take any until the third/fourth round at the earliest. I suspect Lukas Dostal and Jakub Skarek will be gone by then, but Amir Miftakhov could go around that range.

Check out Corey Pronman's complete preview of the 2018 NHL draft and all of The Athletic's draft coverage.

### 1. Amir Miftakhov, Kazan-MHL

April 26, 2000 | six-foot | 158 pounds

GP: 26 | GAA: 1.91 | Save %: .934

Miftakhov has shown me the most upside of any goalie in this class. He doesn't have the size of Jakub Skarek, or the steadiness of Lukas Dostal, but he has the innate ability to steal a game I value in goaltenders. He moves really quick in the net, has a great glove hand and can make the tough stops. While he has the dynamic athletic elements, Miftakhov also gets praise from goalie scouts for how smart he is and how sound his positional play is. His main issue is his size. He's slightly on the short side for a goalie and isn't that bulky. He gets beat high a little too much as a result, but you do see him try to read high shots so he can make saves standing up. He plays how I want a short goalie to, with aggressiveness. He's up at the top of his crease, and he uses his quickness to challenge shooters.

### 2. Lukas Dostal, Trebic-Czech-2

June 22, 2000 | 6-foot-1 | 158 pounds

GP: 20 | GAA: 2.43 | Save %: .921

Dostal has been one of the top goalies in his age group for the last few years and has performed well seemingly wherever he's gone. He's not a goalie who blows you away with highlight reel saves, but he's very smart and technically sound. Dostal has this awareness to his game where he sees plays developing and can stop tough chances by making proper reads. I've seen more than one occasion where he stops a cross crease pass and made it seem simple. He can react fine to tough saves and battles when pucks get close to him, but I don't find he's able to get to pucks far away from his body. Dostal is also quite light, barely weighing 160 at the moment so he needs to bulk up quite a bit.

### 3. Jakub Skarek, Jihlava-Czech Extraliga

Nov. 10, 1999 | 6-foot-3 | 196 pounds

GP: 21 | GAA: 2.41 | Save %: .913

I've been impressed by Skarek for a few years as he is a goalie with a lot of upside. Skarek moves very well for a 6-3 goalie, and can make difficult saves seem routine based on how quickly he can take shooting lanes away. I've seen the occasional soft goal from Skarek, but generally I like his focus and his reads are decent. He's shown enough intelligence in his game to be able to make a seamless transition to the pro game as a 17-year-old. He can be a little over-aggressive and his positioning will be off as a result, I've also talked to some goalie coaches who feel he's a little too suspect on his glove hand, but the raw tools are there and I'd prefer my goalies to be too aggressive rather than not enough.

### 4. Olof Lindbom, Djurgarden-J20 SuperElit

July 23, 2000 | 6-foot-1 | 173 pounds

GP: 20 | GAA: 3.10 | Save %: .897

Olinbom was just ok during club play this season, but looked good for Sweden's U18 team, including being fantastic during IIHF U18's and being the top goalie there. He has multiple interesting elements to his game. Lindbom is a reasonably athletic goalie who can make the occasional tough save. He has enough explosiveness to get to pucks but also battles when he needs to make a second save. Lindbom's hockey IQ is good if not great. He never seems to be out of position. His technique is also refined enough to not let bad shots squeeze through. He doesn't look incredibly big in net, in part due to his average size, and in part due to the fact he's a little conservative in how he positions himself.

### 5. Olivier Rodrigue, Drummondville-QMJHL

July 6, 2000 | 6-foot-1 | 159 pounds

GP: 53 | GAA: 2.54 | Save %: .903

Rodrigue had a very solid season for a top QMJHL team in Drummondville. He was also very good internationally, leading Canada to a gold at the Ivan Hlinka and had a brief yet brilliant performance for Canada at the U18's. Rodrigue is a very calm goalie in between the pipes. You never see him break out of his stance and always seems to be in control moving around the crease. He's a very smart goalie who always seems to find a way to square up pucks and tracks pucks quite well. His quickness is ok, more average than above-average, as he's a goalie who relies on his brain to make stops. You'd like to see him be a bigger goalie for his style of play, but he's gotten the job done at the junior level.

### 6. Daniil Isayev, Lokomotiv-MHL

Jan. 7, 2000 | six-foot | 165 pounds

GP: 19 | GAA: 1.56 | Save %: .936

Watching Isaev took a little bit of effort given he wasn't the starting goalie for his MHL team nor for Russia's U18 team. However, when I did watch him I saw very good glimpses. Isaev has high-end side to side explosiveness, and a strong glove hand. He can be a little all over the place, but with that jumpy nature he can make dazzling stops in desperation. He has active feet and generates good power off his push offs. He's going to need to learn how to be a little more in control and get some bulk on his frame. Still, there's upside in his game, and if coaches can refine the way he plays, he could be a player.

### 7. Justus Annunen, Karpat-Jr. A. Liiga

March 11, 2000 | 6-foot-4 | 217 pounds

GP: 26 | GAA: 2.31 | Save %: .907

Annenen had a good season, with his best moments coming during his playoff run for his club team. He was named the best goalie in Finland's junior league and helped lead Finland to a gold medal at the U18's. He's a big goalie at 6-foot-4 with a calm demeanor in the net and quality hockey sense. Annunen makes a lot of saves seem easy, absorbing pucks into his chest and being in the right spot a lot. Despite his size, he doesn't shy away from cutting off angles. My concern with him is he doesn't have the quickness to get across especially when he does decide to play aggressive.

### 8. Akira Schmid, Langnau- Swiss Jr.

May 12, 2000 | 6-foot-4 | 165 pounds

GP: 32 | GAA: 2.60

Schmid had a decent season. He's an interesting goalie talent-wise with a lot of projection. His athleticism is about average, but fine for his size. He moves around in his crease well and make the odd tough save. I like his IQ. He's very aware processing the play going on around him and anticipating how teams will attack. The thing with Schmid is he's very physically underdeveloped. A few too many pucks squeeze through him



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • May 24, 2018

that shouldn't due to a lack of bulk. He's 6-foot-4 but barely 170 pounds. In talking with goalie coaches, they feel like his lack of strength hurts him on second chances and seeing through screens as he's not strong enough to battle through traffic. He doesn't show a ton of effort though at times in that regard.

9. Alexis Gravel, Halifax-QMJHL

March 21, 2000 | 6-foot-3 | 219 pounds

GP: 39 | GAA: 3.38 | Save %: .890

Gravel's development stagnated a bit this season, but he still remains an interesting goalie prospect going forward. Gravel stands in at 6-foot-3 and moves reasonably well for a goalie his size. He can get side to side at a solid level and has a strong glove hand. When he's on, he's making tough stops and playing a sound positional game at his size can make him a big factor in the game. The big issue with Gravel is between the ears. I don't like the reads he makes a lot of the times, and mentally it seems like when the first bad play happens, he loses grasp of his game quickly.

10. Kevin Mandolese, Cape Breton-QMJHL

Aug. 22, 2000 | 6-foot-4 | 180 pounds

GP: 37 | GAA: 3.46 | Save %: .884

Mandolese has a very safe feel to him as a prospect. He never wows you, but he's 6-foot-4, smart and makes the stops he needs to kind of goalie. He's calm in net, does a good job of squaring up shooters and not giving them much to shoot at. I think he does have a little explosiveness in his game. You see the odd great glove he makes going across his crease or away from his body but those tools grade out as average. Mandolese tends not to be that aggressive with his positioning, using his big frame to cover up the net and giving him leeway to get across if he needs to.

Just Missed:

Drew DeRidder, USNTDP-USHL

Samuel Harvey, Rouyn-Noranda-QMJHL

Jacob Ingham, Mississauga-OHL

Carl Stankowski, Seattle-WHL

David Tendeck, Vancouver-WHL

Ivan Prosvetov, Youngstown-USHL

The Athletic LOADED: 05.24.2018

1097355 Websites

The Athletic / Oliver Wahlstrom has been in the spotlight a long time but his desire to be 'special' burns deep

By Sunaya Sapurji May 23, 2018 11

By the time he was nine years old, he had already gone viral with a shootout video. At 13 he made headlines as the youngest player to commit to an NCAA program with Maine. He decommitted at 14. Then at 15, he announced he'd given his word to play for the Harvard Crimson.

Now, at the advanced age of 17, he's one of the most sought-after goal scorers for the 2018 NHL draft.

Living in the spotlight hasn't always been easy for Oliver Wahlstrom.

When the clip of him scoring a lacrosse-style goal during a shootout before a Boston Bruins game first hit the internet, it was fun. As a kid, the native of Yarmouth, Maine, appeared on ESPN and CBS to talk about the video that has now garnered more than 6.7 million views. Once the cameras left, however, the attention didn't and Wahlstrom quickly found himself becoming an easy target in the cutthroat realm of minor hockey.

"The attention was there wherever he went and whatever he did," said Joakim Wahlstrom, Oliver's father. "It was tough on him for a long time.

"We tried to protect him as much as we could. We said no to most media at the time to protect him, but you couldn't protect him on the ice. And what happened — and I think it was a huge help for him — was he got a lot of attention so all the other kids on other teams and all the other parents got on him when he was on the ice. That really helped him — be quicker, be faster, work harder — to survive."

Joakim, who coached Oliver in minor hockey until age 10, would often find himself putting Oliver on the blue line and having him play defence when things got too hectic. The elder Wahlstrom said he liked his son playing defence because it "calmed him down" — there was no focus on trying to do too much in terms of putting up points.

It was also important for Oliver to learn responsibility and accountability, so Joakim would leave his son in charge of packing his own hockey bag. Seeing as they travelled to tournaments all over North America, it was a big, important task. One summer he played for the Toronto Bulldogs in preparation for the annual Brick Tournament in Edmonton.

"It was very tempting to take a look in the bag to see if everything was there before we drove 13 hours to Toronto," said Joakim. "For him to find out what he missed packing when we entered practice in Canada was pretty interesting. ... He had to figure out how to find the teammate, coach, the Zamboni driver, to see if they had any leftover items at the rink."

Oliver would go into his dad's office and run through a list of things he'd packed — shoulder pads, shin pads, gloves, skates, helmet. Still, he admits it took him a long time to learn, the hard way.

"I would try so hard," said Wahlstrom. "I'd pack the rest of my bag and we'd drive 13 hours to Toronto and I'd look in my bag and my socks would be missing, or my Under Armour, or my left glove and I'd be like, 'You've gotta be kidding me.' From all those experiences I learned and I became more organized."

It was at many of these tournaments that his older sister, Alexandra, would stand with the other railbirds at the rink. Not realizing she was related to the young star, rival parents would make snide comments about her baby brother right in front of her.

"Hockey parents are ruthless," said Alexandra of the kind of things she'd hear about her brother. "It was constant bad-mouthing Oliver and talking him down. I don't know if it was jealousy or what, but it was crazy."

It took him a long time for Wahlstrom to shake the label of being a trick-shot artist and prove to people that there was more to his game than just fancy goals.

"It was people saying, 'This kid can only do one move, he's not good at anything else,'" said Wahlstrom, of what he'd hear as a youngster. "It was vicious. I dealt with a lot of negativity from people. I would take that stuff to heart and try to prove people wrong. I'd always keep it in the back of my mind.

"People are always going to look for the negatives. I'm just a kid who loves playing hockey"

Seth Appert wants to cut through all the hype. As the head coach of the U.S. National Team Development Program's (NTDP) under-18 team, he knows Wahlstrom's capabilities better than most.

And as much as he's one of the purest goal scorers eligible for the 2018 NHL draft, it's the other things in the 6-foot-1, 204-pound forward's game that Appert likes the most.



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • May 24, 2018

"He was able to win puck battles against much older Division I defencemen," said Appert, who was in Denmark as an assistant coach with the U.S. men's team at the World Championship. "It's more his strength on the puck and his shot that continue to surprise you at how effective he is."

Yeah, but winning puck battles isn't really as sexy as scoring goals.

"No, it's not and you know we talk about this a lot," said Appert. "Once you get to the elite level your skill at winning a puck battle is probably the most important skill you can have — if you don't have it, it doesn't matter what you can do with the puck because the other team has the puck more than you do. That willingness to compete to have (the puck) and keep it — as talented as he is in all those other areas — that's probably the most important thing he can have."

With NTDP under-18 team this season the right winger scored 40 goals in 54 games, finishing the season with 83 points (he scored 22 goals and 23 assists in 26 USHL games). He averaged 0.85 goals and 1.73 points per game in the USHL, where he also averaged close to five shots per game.

For the first half of the season Wahlstrom, who turns 18 on June 13, played with a number of different linemates including fellow draft prospects Joel Farabee and Jonathan Gruden. It wasn't until mid-January that Appert put him on a line with centre Jack Hughes — the top ranked prospect for the 2019 NHL draft. Their chemistry was instant and undeniable.

"In scoring situations you obviously want Ollie to get the puck and having a teammate that can do those things and get him the puck in different situations — like Jack can as a centre — then that accentuates Ollie's strengths," said Appert.

One of the biggest knocks against Wahlstrom has been his defensive game. And while Appert thinks the criticism is fair, he's quick to point out how much he's seen Wahlstrom improve noting the 17-year-old has paid closer attention to that aspect of his game — which has also included time on Team USA's penalty kill.

The Athletic's Corey Pronman has Wahlstrom listed at No. 6 on his draft board, while NHL central scouting has him ranked seventh among North American skaters. Scouts have noticed him getting better defensively too, though it's not the only weakness they see.

"It's just a matter of competing consistently," said one NHL scout with multiple viewings. "When he decides to go he can take over the game."

During a conversation, Wahlstrom is asked about his defensive game and some of what scouts have flagged as lacking. Those questions are nothing new, so he asks — genuinely — if there's anything else the scouts have mentioned while dissecting his game.

"I love hearing the stuff I need to work on," said Wahlstrom. "I'm not good right now — I'm not anything special I don't think — so I need to keep working. The thing I struggle with right now is playing without the puck. I've got to bear down and work that out and stay consistent in my (defensive) zone and not get too rushed to get to the offensive zone."

Do you really want NHL general managers to hear you saying you're not special?

"I know who I am," said Wahlstrom. "You've got to keep working every day, because it has to be earned. I know there are people who think that I'm special, but I know I can get better — I have a lot to improve on."

It's that kind of attitude that Appert says makes Wahlstrom "a blast" to coach because he was always open to critiques without ever taking it personally.

Under Appert at the NTDP, Wahlstrom played exclusively on the right side despite having played many years as a centre. Appert believes that the Maine native could successfully play as a centre at the pro level, though he's probably best suited to play wing. Wahlstrom agrees, saying it's where he feels most comfortable now.

"There's every reason for me to believe after coaching him that he's going to be a top-two line forward in the NHL," said Appert. "He's going to play on the power play and he's going to score tons of goals in the NHL. I have no doubt about that. He's too talented, he works too hard and he wants to be a player too much."

"He's going to score a lot of goals in the NHL."

Joakim Wahlstrom came to the U.S. from Stockholm, Sweden as a teenager. His father, Olle, wanted him to learn English, so he was sent to the Salisbury School, a private all-boys school in Salisbury, Conn.

It was there that he was first noticed playing hockey by a scout. Not long after he was recruited to play at the University of Maine. After playing in the NCAA with the Black Bears, he returned home to Sweden with the dream of playing pro hockey. He played for a few years in Sweden's Division I (now Allsvenskan) before putting aside that dream and returning to Maine, where he saw more opportunities.

Joakim and his former wife, Penny, had two kids: Alexandra and Oliver.

As kids, they would use tape to mark a mini rink on the floor inside the house. Alex would be the one enlisted to play net while Oliver, a constant sight in his red JOFA helmet, would — naturally — be the shooter.

"He had such a hard shot even when he was younger," said Alex. "I'd have bruises on my arms and welts on my legs but it was so fun."

"She got hit in the face a few times," said Wahlstrom of his sister. "There was a lot of crying, but she'd always come back and play goalie. She'd rough me up, too. She has a real feisty side and I think I got that from her."

Today the Wahlstrom kids are as thick as thieves.

"We're about as tight as you can get," said Wahlstrom. "We've been through a lot together in the past couple of years and we've always been there for each other."

Alex, 20, who plays NCAA lacrosse at Trinity College, compares their bond to that of the fictitious siblings — Dale and Brennan — from one of their favourite movies: Step Brothers. Since both Alex and Oliver are away from home most of the year, they spend most of their time texting or seeing each other over FaceTime.

Just as when they were little, Alex still looks out for her brother and even pushes him to be better. It's not uncommon when they're home together for Alex to wake up and say, 'I'm going for a run' convincing her brother to join her. Much like when they were kids playing hockey, soccer and lacrosse together, they're still competitive.

"She's the one that keeps me in line," said Wahlstrom. "She's the one that's always checking, 'Did you get your homework done?' My sister is amazing. We have so much fun together."

"I think she's the most talented one in our family. I play lacrosse with her too sometimes but I can't keep up with her she's too good."

After the draft, the plan for Wahlstrom is to head to school. He had intended to go to Harvard but couldn't finish the requisite courses to get past admissions. With the Crimson out of the picture, his choices came down to Boston College and the University of Michigan. Though no formal announcement has been made, sources tell The Athletic that Wahlstrom has chosen Jerry York's B.C. Eagles.

But first, there's the draft combine and the interview process. It's clear all the time spent in the spotlight has given Wahlstrom an easiness when it comes to dealing with the chaotic draft process.

"It was scary for me when I was nine," Wahlstrom said of the media. "It was intimidating at that age but now that I'm getting older it's almost second nature. I can relax and just be myself because I've been doing it for so long."

Battle-tested by minor hockey, he's also at the point where he no longer cares what anyone thinks — except for those closest to him. On June 22



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • May 24, 2018

in Dallas, both Joakim and Alex should be sitting alongside him. Both siblings say they're certain their dad will cry when Oliver's name is called.

"For me to get this opportunity to make my dream come true I know it's going to be a happy moment for him," said Wahlstrom. "It might be my dream, but my family has been such a huge part of it.

"It's going to be exciting for all of us."

The Athletic LOADED: 05.24.2018

1097356 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / 'Emotional' Ovechkin, Capitals finally break through to Stanley Cup Final

Kristina Rutherford | @KrRutherford May 24, 2018, 2:13 AM

TAMPA, Fla. — Alex Ovechkin is talking, but he's basically speechless, sitting here with an Eastern Conference champions t-shirt on his back and an Eastern Conference champions hat on his head, a gap-toothed smile plastered on his bearded face.

"Just ask Holts," Ovechkin says, calling on the guy who just recorded a shutout in the biggest game of either of their lives to try to capture this moment, because he really can't.

"This kind of emotion," Ovechkin says, still trying, "it's hard to explain what I'm feeling."

Well, no kidding. Ovechkin, Braden Holtby and the Washington Capitals have finally done it. They have earned a berth in the Stanley Cup Final, accomplished Wednesday on a quiet night in Tampa, a 4-0 resounding Game 7 victory that saw them lead for all but 62 seconds of a 60-minute Eastern Conference Final finale.

And how fitting that it's Ovechkin who scored on the Capitals' first shot of this game, just 1:02 in, which stands as the winner to carry this franchise to its first Stanley Cup Final in 20 years, and only its second in team history.

"I saw it all," Capitals coach Barry Trotz said, of Game 7. "I saw it first shift. Ovi's been on a mission, Kuzi [Evgeny Kuznetsov], they stepped up big time."

And if you want to know what this all means to the Capitals captain, you don't need Ovechkin to describe his emotion. Just watch him, after Andre Burakovsky made it 3-0, hop up and down on the bench and then throw out his arms and hug as many of his teammates as he could. He basically turned the bench into a hug train, and that was late in the second period, with still the third to go.

When Burakovsky skated by the bench after beating Andrei Vasilevskiy five-hole, with about four minutes to go in the second — his second goal of the game, no less — Ovechkin pointed at his teammate and yelled: "Yeah, baby!"

He said some other things, too.

"He said [expletive] right.' That's just his word," Burakovsky said. "He said, 'Stick with it, you're playing good.' And then he said 'keep your shifts down a little bit,' so he was joking a little bit too."

Hey, why not. There was more than a period to play, still, but the Capitals were in control of this Game 7, with a three-goal lead in a deflated and quiet Amalie Arena that had been earlier bringing the thunder, but was reduced to muted 'Let's go Lightning!' cheers, to sounds of sadness.

And while this game wasn't what you'd call close, it was hardly without good old-fashioned Game 7 drama. Kuznetsov had his jersey ripped off

by Lightning defenceman Braydon Coburn in the first period. Tom Wilson then defended his linemate by brawling with Coburn at centre ice, leaving the Capitals winger with bloody and painful-looking knuckles.

Wilson will have five days before the Final starts against Vegas, to heal those knuckles up.

And it was Wilson who spurred the first goal, causing a turnover, then dishing the puck to Kuznetsov, who put a cross-ice pass right in Ovechkin's wheel-house. Ovechkin one-timed it, a real knuckleball that fluttered over and off of Vasilevskiy's blocker. Ovechkin yelled "Yeah!" for a really long time, looked at the sad crowd and pumped a fist, and it was 1-0, Capitals.

"I think tonight we had a very good start," Ovechkin said. "First goal was very important and after that you can see we had all the momentum on our side and Holts was unstoppable today, our goalie was something special. Everybody was all in, everybody was sacrificing their bodies. That's all it takes, little details, little things. Give emotionally."

While it was 1-0 Capitals through one, it's a wonder how the Lightning didn't score in the second. The period was all Tampa Bay early on, and Washington needed nearly five minutes to register its first shot, on an Ovechkin backhand.

Victor Hedman hit a post, then later the big Lightning defender drove the net and put a puck on the doorstep of an open net for Yanni Gourde, who was too tied up to tap it in.

"They had some pucks behind us but I kept saying, the hockey gods even things out for you," said Trotz, who's a big believer in those hockey dieties. "There was a lot of will."

And while the Lightning were buzzing in the second, it was the Capitals who struck about half way in, when Burakovsky jumped on a puck that Lightning defenceman Dan Girardi was trying to handle off his chest.

"I was just trying to not close my hand on it and take a penalty," Girardi explained. "It just trickled away from me, couldn't get it. it's a tough bounce."

The 23-year-old Burakovsky picked up that tough bounce and he put it over Vasilevskiy's far pad, for his first of these playoffs. After missing time due to injury, the Austrian says it felt even sweeter to get back and contribute.

"I meant a lot for the team," he said. "I've been out for a while a little bit, with the injury. It hasn't been easy for me. It's been pretty hard. I was working really hard to get back as fast as possible. It feels really good to help the team to get a win, and be a part of this team."

Tampa Bay continued to get its chances in the second, including on an Alex Killorn breakaway, but Holtby was solid. And then Burakovsky struck yet again, beating Vailevskiy five-hole on a breakaway, seemingly crushing all hope in Amalie Arena.

Fans booed the Lightning as they left the ice through two periods, which saw Tampa Bay with the 22-15 edge in shots, but nothing to show for it.

"You can't expect to win at this time of the year if you can't score," said Lightning captain, Steven Stamkos. "We have to give them some credit, that's a very good team over there, their goaltender played extremely well the last two games and we probably felt how they felt for a couple of those games when Vasy stole some from them."

Holtby recorded his second straight shutout, with 29 saves in all, very few of which he had to make in the third. Tampa came out flat, and didn't register a shot until past the mid-way point.

While this isn't the most skilled team he's been a part of, Holtby says there's something a little different about this version of the Capitals.

"I think our group here really understands what it really means to be a team and how to win. Maybe in the past we've had more skill, we're better on paper, whatever but this team, everyone knows their role," Holtby said. "I haven't been on a team like this where in any situation



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • May 24, 2018

we're confident and we're confident in each other. Don't get down on each other. It's stronger, and so it's extremely hard to come by and it's something we're going to need to have moving forward."

The team is easier to describe, certainly, than the moment.

But these Capitals, these long-defeated in the playoffs Capitals, they sure tried to capture what it all means.

"Playoffs are fun," Trotz said. "They're not not fun."

"I still can't believe it," said Nicklas Backstrom, who potted the empty-netter. "We worked so hard for this to be able to be in the finals and all it took was 11 years, but now we're there."

All it took was 11 years, indeed.

Ovechkin pretty well nailed it, sort of.

"We're going to the Stanley Cup Final," he said, flashing that gap-toothed smile. "I think everybody is happy, but we still have unfinished — you know what I mean.

"I don't know, I'm emotional right now."

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 05.24.2018

1097357 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / 2018 Stanley Cup Final Preview: Golden Knights vs. Capitals

Rory Boylen | @RoryBoylen May 24, 2018, 1:51 AM

Of all the potential Stanley Cup finals, this had to be among the most unlikely in 2018.

In one corner you have the Washington Capitals, who, though they've been one of the best NHL teams for the better part of a decade, were supposed to be having a reset year. GM Brian MacLellan's team was all-in the past two years, but was forced by salary cap constraints to shed some experience and skill over the summer, which projected a thinner, weaker lineup. Head coach Barry Trotz has been a lame duck coach all season and still doesn't have an extension.

Despite all this, the Caps won their third-straight division title, defeated their nemesis in the Pittsburgh Penguins to reach their first conference final of the Alex Ovechkin era, and are now in their first Stanley Cup Final since 1998.

In the other corner we have a team that didn't even have a roster one year ago. The Vegas Golden Knights are writing one of the more improbable stories in NHL and North American sports history, drawing some comparisons to Leicester City's Premier League championship in 2015.

When Vegas finally did pick its team last June, no one saw this kind of immediate success. Part of the expansion draft process was about accumulating assets and, especially, futures in the form of draft picks and prospects to set the team up for long-term stability. And though they intended to build a competitive and exciting team right away, a Stanley Cup finalist was out of the question. Yet, here we are.

There are all sorts of great storylines in this series. Marc-Andre Fleury is having an historically excellent playoff run that could put him in the Conn Smythe running, win or lose. The entire Golden Knights roster is made up of players cast off from other teams, but those like Jonathan Marchessault and Alex Tuch — whose former teams paid Vegas extra assets to make sure they took them — have an even bigger chip on their shoulder and are coming through. Ovechkin, defined by some for his

team's playoff failures, is now four wins away from Stanley Cup immortality and has been a key performer for the Caps, scoring the series-winning goal versus the Lightning. Trotz, after 15 years building a successful Nashville Predators franchise from the ground up, is in his first Cup Final in his fourth year as Washington's bench boss. Both GMs are from Guelph, Ont., and were teammates at Bowling Green University in the 1980s.

Washington, which for years prided itself on an explosive offence, has mostly found this success with a focus on team defence and the excellent netminding from Braden Holtby. The Golden Knights are here because of their excellent forecheck, the quick looseness with which they play the game and Fleury's otherworldly performance.

Something's gotta give. Either way, one terrific story will come to a sad ending, and the other will write history.

Livestream every single game of the 2018 Stanley Cup Playoffs—blackout free—plus the Toronto Blue Jays, key Raptors & NBA Playoffs matchups and the 100th Mastercard Memorial Cup, all in one subscription.

### POWER NUMBERS

Determined by percentiles created for a variety of statistics and weighed equally to give each team a grade out of 10 for offence and defence (seven for 5-on-5 and three for special teams). These numbers are then averaged to come up with a power number to measure a team's all-around play.

TEAM (rank)	OFFENCE (rank)	DEFENCE (rank)	POWER NUMBER (rank)
Vegas	5.21 (16th)	5.61 (11th)	5.41 (12th)
Washington (19th)	5.62 (13th)	3.56 (23rd)	4.59 (19th)

### ADVANCED STATS (Playoffs)

Vegas: 49.82 5on5 CF% (8th), .960 5on5 Sv% (1st), 8.53 5on5 Sh% (3rd)

Washington: 50.35 5on5 CF% (7th), .930 5on5 Sv% (6th), 7.69 5on5 Sh% (8th)

### TEAM STATS (Playoffs)

Vegas: 17.6 PP% (10th), 82.5 PK% (4th), 2.87 GF/GP (9th), 1.80 GA/GP (2nd)

Washington: 29.8 PP% (2nd), 75.0 PK% (10th), 3.44 GF/GP (2nd), 2.61 GA/GP (5th)

### HEAD-TO-HEAD RECORD

Vegas: 2-0-0

Washington: 0-2-0

### INJURY NOTES

Vegas: Amazingly, the Golden Knights haven't been bitten too badly by the injury bug. The biggest loss so far has been left winger William Carrier, who recorded three points in 37 regular-season games and didn't have a point through the first two rounds. Carrier missed Game 6 against the Sharks and the entirety of the Winnipeg Jets series. He's skating again and could be available, though Vegas hasn't missed a beat without him and could ride a winning lineup.

David Perron missed two games of the Western Conference Final, but that was due to illness and not injury. In the two games since he returned, his workload was slashed, but as he gets back to full health those minutes should return to normal levels, as should his production.



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • May 24, 2018

Vegas has been so lucky with injuries mostly because they've gotten through to the final so fast. The Golden Knights haven't had a Game 7 yet, and only one of their three series have gone beyond Game 5.

"You have to have a healthy hockey team, and I think the biggest thing is we've won our series in four games, six games and five games," coach Gerard Gallant told media. "We had a lot of rest between series to heal up some minor injuries, and our team is fresh.

"There's not too often you can say going into the Stanley Cup Final that your team is pretty fresh, and has very few minor injuries. Having time between series to get ready for the next one is a big part of having a chance to win."

If injuries do hit, Vegas has some decent options to turn to. Tomas Tatar scored once in two games when he filled in for Perron and if Carrier is healthy, either he would return or Ryan Reaves would stay on the fourth line for a physical presence.

While I'm on it, there's one player, one man among them all who stands out from the crowd. William Carrier. He's only been on the ice for 65 minutes and his Corsi is only 46% but man, he lays out a lot of hits. Watch him next game. #VegasBorn pic.twitter.com/b458tEKwTM

— Bill Comeau (@billius27) May 15, 2018

Washington: When top-six centre Nicklas Backstrom was injured against Pittsburgh and had to miss Game 6, it seemed to set the Penguins up for a comeback. The Caps headed to Game 6 with a 3-2 series advantage, but it was the kind of situation they had been in and blown before. Without Backstrom, Washington was down one of its best players.

The Caps went on to win that game and clinched the series, but Backstrom missed the first three games of the East Final with the hand injury as well. What appeared to be a death knell turned into nothing more than a minor inconvenience as the Capitals went 3-1 without the Swede. They lost the first two games after he returned against Tampa Bay, but in Game 6 Backstrom record two primary assists to help lead the Caps to a 3-0 win, before potting the empty-netter in Game 7.

The Capitals also missed 23-year-old Andre Burakovsky for most of the Columbus series and all of the Pittsburgh series. Much was expected from Burakovsky this season, after he notched 17 goals two years ago. But he played through a few injuries and was limited to 56 games, so he's become more of a third-liner for this team and was even a healthy scratch in Game 5 of the East Final. Prior to Game 7, he talked about how he struggled mentally to stay on his game as he returned from injury — but he scored two huge goals in the Conference Final series-clincher and you have to wonder if that inspires renewed confidence just in time for the Cup Final.

Two days ago, Burakovsky told us he's hired a sports psychologist because of how hard he is on himself.

— Isabelle Khurshudyan (@ikhurshudyan) May 24, 2018

Devante Smith-Pelly blocked a shot in Game 7 versus the Lightning and did not return. After the game, Trotz seemed optimistic that the grinder would be good to go on Monday.

Trotz said he \*thinks\* Smith-Pelly will be fine. Added that he thought it was precautionary to keep him out.

— Isabelle Khurshudyan (@ikhurshudyan) May 24, 2018

## TOP STORY

Vegas: The top story for the Vegas Golden Knights is, simply, that the Vegas Golden Knights are in the Stanley Cup Final. It is, of course, revisionist history for anyone to suggest this team was set up for instant success by team-friendly expansion draft rules because most projected Vegas to miss the playoffs in Year 1. Even owner Bill Foley, the most optimistic fan of them all, expected his team to make the playoffs in Year 3 and challenge for the Cup by Year 6. Now, they're just four wins away from lifting it right away.

"We don't have high expectations for this year," Foley told ESPN.com back in August. "We're going to be competitive. If we're going to lose a game, we'd like to lose by a goal or two, not lose by five or six. We don't want to be a walkover team. We want to be competitive, we want to be entertaining on the ice, we want to score some goals.

"We have some really good players, but we're not deep like a lot of teams are in terms of four lines of forwards and two or three lines of defencemen. But we got some really good players in the expansion draft. So we just need do well for a couple years, then make the playoffs in three years as we start transitioning in some of these younger guys — like Shea Theodore and Alex Tuch and Jake Bischoff. We'll be pretty good in three years and we'll make a run in five or six."

The Golden Knights are a relentless team on the forecheck and that creates high-quality chances on the offensive end. They are great at getting other teams out of position, creating havoc and buzzing all over with tremendous speed. Vegas brings that quickness and intensity across all four lines, but when it comes to scoring, they are far closer to being a one-line team.

It's not only shocking that Vegas is here, but incredible how easily they disposed of the Western Conference. They've lost just three games to this point and have shocked the hockey world and shaken it to the core.

The Golden Knights started the season as 500-1 long shots to win the Cup and are now so close to paying out huge to their early adopters. If they can win four more, the Golden Knights would complete perhaps the greatest, most improbable season in NHL history.

Washington: The franchise has never won the Stanley Cup, but this is all about Ovechkin. Entering the NHL at the same time as Sidney Crosby, The Great 8 has watched his rival win multiple Cups and gold medals, while Ovechkin has settled for individual awards and a terrific career that likely already has him Hall of Fame-bound. But although he always showed up in the post-season, he gained the reputation in some corners for not being a playoff player because his teams were never able to break through.

Most Postseason Goals In #Caps History:

1. Alex Ovechkin 58
- T2. Nicklas Backstrom 30 (Including tonight's 4-0 goal)
- T2. Peter Bondra 30
4. Dale Hunter 25

— Sportsnet Stats (@SNstats) May 24, 2018

It's fitting, then, that Ovechkin got this iteration of the Caps to the final, an underdog group with lower expectations than almost any Caps team since they won their first of three Presidents' Trophies in 2010. Ovechkin's 12 goals this post-season lead the Caps and he's the highest-scoring player still alive in these playoffs. Ovechkin has been a playoff player the entire time and is without a doubt the best active player who hasn't yet won a Stanley Cup. This is his moment.

"Can't wait. We all can't wait. We're all excited. It's huge," Ovechkin told Sportsnet's Kyle Bukauskas in his post-Game 7 interview.

"It means everything."

## CONN SMYTHE CANDIDATES

Vegas:

1. Marc-Andre Fleury: We're at the point now where even if Vegas loses in the Stanley Cup Final, its goalie could still win playoff MVP if he finishes strong and the series goes six or seven games. As good as Vegas' forecheck has been this post-season it's hard to imagine the Golden Knights would have made as quick work of their opponents as they have through three rounds without Fleury playing at the top of his game. Last year Fleury was thrust into the starting job when Matt Murray sustained an injury prior to Game 1 in Round 1 and he helped carry the



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • May 24, 2018

Penguins a few rounds before Murray returned, ending Fleury's time in Pittsburgh. His performance this season has not only dwarfed what he did last year, but Fleury has a chance to finish with the best playoff save percentage of any goalie to appear in at least 10 games since 1969.

Fleury has a league-best .947 save percentage to this point, facing an average of 33.6 shots per game. A few goalies have been over .940 in the past and the best salary-cap era playoff save percentage is Jonathan Quick's .946 mark from 2011-12. But nobody with at least 10 games has finished the playoffs with a save percentage better than Fleury's .947 since Jacques Plante in 1968-69 with the St. Louis Blues. Fleury also leads all goalies with four shutouts. It's unlikely he'll tie or break Martin Brodeur's record of seven, but with one more, Fleury would be just the sixth netminder in NHL history to record five shutouts in a Stanley Cup playoff run.

2. Jonathan Marchessault: If anyone on this Golden Knights team leaps Fleury, something amazing needs to happen. But Marchessault certainly appears capable of it. The Florida Panthers cast off leads the Golden Knights with eight goals and 18 points in 15 games and had three multi-point games against both the Jets and Sharks.

3. William Karlsson: The most surprising breakout performer for Vegas, Karlsson has continued his unfathomably good season with six goals and 13 points in 15 games. His shooting percentage, which everyone expects to tumble next season, has started to come down in the playoffs (23.4 to 13.6), but by averaging nearly three shots a game he's still getting enough chances to be in good positions to score. It's a long shot that either Marchessault or Karlsson will eclipse what Fleury has done, but both have shown game-breaking potential that could shift the series and radically change the Conn Smythe outlook.

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.

Washington:

1. Braden Holtby: When the Caps started their Round 1 series against Columbus, Philipp Grubauer was in net, usurping the No. 1 job from Holtby, who struggled through his worst NHL season to date. But after dropping the first two games of that series, Trotz went back to his ace and Holtby has been lights-out since. With a .925 save percentage, Holtby isn't having the best post-season of his career, but he's been up to the task when the Caps have needed him and closed out the high-scoring Lightning with back-to-back shutouts.

In both the 2015 and 2016 playoffs Holtby led the league in save percentage for all goalies with at least 10 games played, and both times he was over .940. In fact, Holtby has the third-best post-season save percentage over the past four seasons combined at .930, behind only Craig Anderson (.932) and, you guessed it, Fleury (.933).

2. Alex Ovechkin: He's got the second-most points overall and most goals of anyone left standing, so Ovechkin is front and centre for Conn Smythe consideration among Caps skaters. If he does it, Ovechkin will need to loom large in the Cup Final, with a few more goals at key times. Ovechkin has goals in 10 of Washington's 19 playoff games and points in 14 of them. His whole career has led to this series, so expect him to be hungry and a difference-maker.

3. Evgeny Kuznetsov: If Ovechkin does have a hard time producing against the Golden Knights, the Capitals have another star Russian forward scoring and playing at a high level who is dangerous enough to take over a series. Kuznetsov is actually the points (24) leader on the Caps and averages the most time on ice among their forwards (21:31). And for all the shots Ovechkin takes, Kuznetsov is neck and neck with him there, too, registering 78 shots (Ovechkin has 80). Kuznetsov is also on a 10-game point streak, coming in hot to the Final.

X-FACTOR

Vegas: Fleury has been the team's backbone and the top line has driven the offence, but the Golden Knights need more offensive pop from their

second line. For as much as Vegas has been lauded as a four-line team, most of the goals came from the top two lines all season. Only one player in the bottom-six, Alex Tuch, scored more than 11 goals and 30 points on the season. Tuch, a 22-year-old plucked from the Minnesota Wild, had two goals against the Jets, which was second to only Marchessault in Round 3.

Against a Washington team defence that has been stifling these playoffs, the Golden Knights will need to get offensive contributions from more than just their top line, if only to lighten the load on Fleury. It would make life easier if Line 2 — with James Neal, David Perron and Erik Haula — got going, but if it doesn't, Tuch could put together an unforgettable performance that helps the expansion team win it all. The 18th-overall pick in the 2014 draft, Tuch, like many on this team, hadn't been given much of a shot by his former team. It's happening now and on the NHL's biggest stage.

Washington: The Los Angeles Kings were supposed to be too big and tough for the Golden Knights, and they were swept away. The Sharks were supposed to have more skill and be able to skate with Vegas and they were dispatched in six. The Winnipeg Jets were supposed to be the complete package and lopsided favourites to get to the Cup Final, but Vegas delivered Winnipeg its first four-game losing streak of the season and eliminated them in five.

Well, there is nothing obviously special or unique about this Capitals team, but they've found a way here with not just terrific netminding, but a renewed focus on defence. Washington is allowing an average of just 28.2 shots-against per game, the second-lowest rate in these playoffs after Pittsburgh, and one of just three teams below 30. But Vegas will challenge this with how aggressively they attack their opponent and force them into mistakes. The Golden Knights don't take a ton of shots on net, but they tend to get more high-quality chances. Can this Washington defence withstand the relentless Golden Knights or, if not, will Holtby be able to steal a Cup? The Capitals have beaten three tough offences to get here, but they haven't yet seen the kind of attack Vegas will throw their way.

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 05.24.2018

1097358 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / 2018 Stanley Cup Final Preview: Golden Knights vs. Capitals

Rory Boylen | @RoryBoylen May 24, 2018, 1:51 AM

Of all the potential Stanley Cup finals, this had to be among the most unlikely in 2018.

In one corner you have the Washington Capitals, who, though they've been one of the best NHL teams for the better part of a decade, were supposed to be having a reset year. GM Brian MacLellan's team was all-in the past two years, but was forced by salary cap constraints to shed some experience and skill over the summer, which projected a thinner, weaker lineup. Head coach Barry Trotz has been a lame duck coach all season and still doesn't have an extension.

Despite all this, the Caps won their third-straight division title, defeated their nemesis in the Pittsburgh Penguins to reach their first conference final of the Alex Ovechkin era, and are now in their first Stanley Cup Final since 1998.

In the other corner we have a team that didn't even have a roster one year ago. The Vegas Golden Knights are writing one of the more improbable stories in NHL and North American sports history, drawing



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • May 24, 2018

some comparisons to Leicester City's Premier League championship in 2015.

When Vegas finally did pick its team last June, no one saw this kind of immediate success. Part of the expansion draft process was about accumulating assets and, especially, futures in the form of draft picks and prospects to set the team up for long-term stability. And though they intended to build a competitive and exciting team right away, a Stanley Cup finalist was out of the question. Yet, here we are.

There are all sorts of great storylines in this series. Marc-Andre Fleury is having an historically excellent playoff run that could put him in the Conn Smythe running, win or lose. The entire Golden Knights roster is made up of players cast off from other teams, but those like Jonathan Marchessault and Alex Tuch — whose former teams paid Vegas extra assets to make sure they took them — have an even bigger chip on their shoulder and are coming through. Ovechkin, defined by some for his team's playoff failures, is now four wins away from Stanley Cup immortality and has been a key performer for the Caps, scoring the series-winning goal versus the Lightning. Trotz, after 15 years building a successful Nashville Predators franchise from the ground up, is in his first Cup Final in his fourth year as Washington's bench boss. Both GMs are from Guelph, Ont., and were teammates at Bowling Green University in the 1980s.

Washington, which for years prided itself on an explosive offence, has mostly found this success with a focus on team defence and the excellent netminding from Braden Holtby. The Golden Knights are here because of their excellent forecheck, the quick looseness with which they play the game and Fleury's otherworldly performance.

Something's gotta give. Either way, one terrific story will come to a sad ending, and the other will write history.

Livestream every single game of the 2018 Stanley Cup Playoffs—blackout free—plus the Toronto Blue Jays, key Raptors & NBA Playoffs matchups and the 100th Mastercard Memorial Cup, all in one subscription.

### POWER NUMBERS

Determined by percentiles created for a variety of statistics and weighed equally to give each team a grade out of 10 for offence and defence (seven for 5-on-5 and three for special teams). These numbers are then averaged to come up with a power number to measure a team's all-around play.

TEAM (rank)	OFFENCE (rank)	DEFENCE (rank)	POWER NUMBER
Vegas	5.21 (16th)	5.61 (11th)	5.41 (12th)
Washington (19th)	5.62 (13th)	3.56 (23rd)	4.59

### ADVANCED STATS (Playoffs)

Vegas: 49.82 5on5 CF% (8th), .960 5on5 Sv% (1st), 8.53 5on5 Sh% (3rd)

Washington: 50.35 5on5 CF% (7th), .930 5on5 Sv% (6th), 7.69 5on5 Sh% (8th)

### TEAM STATS (Playoffs)

Vegas: 17.6 PP% (10th), 82.5 PK% (4th), 2.87 GF/GP (9th), 1.80 GA/GP (2nd)

Washington: 29.8 PP% (2nd), 75.0 PK% (10th), 3.44 GF/GP (2nd), 2.61 GA/GP (5th)

### HEAD-TO-HEAD RECORD

Vegas: 2-0-0

Washington: 0-2-0

### INJURY NOTES

Vegas: Amazingly, the Golden Knights haven't been bitten too badly by the injury bug. The biggest loss so far has been left winger William Carrier, who recorded three points in 37 regular-season games and didn't have a point through the first two rounds. Carrier missed Game 6 against the Sharks and the entirety of the Winnipeg Jets series. He's skating again and could be available, though Vegas hasn't missed a beat without him and could ride a winning lineup.

David Perron missed two games of the Western Conference Final, but that was due to illness and not injury. In the two games since he returned, his workload was slashed, but as he gets back to full health those minutes should return to normal levels, as should his production.

Vegas has been so lucky with injuries mostly because they've gotten through to the final so fast. The Golden Knights haven't had a Game 7 yet, and only one of their three series have gone beyond Game 5.

"You have to have a healthy hockey team, and I think the biggest thing is we've won our series in four games, six games and five games," coach Gerard Gallant told media. "We had a lot of rest between series to heal up some minor injuries, and our team is fresh."

"There's not too often you can say going into the Stanley Cup Final that your team is pretty fresh, and has very few minor injuries. Having time between series to get ready for the next one is a big part of having a chance to win."

If injuries do hit, Vegas has some decent options to turn to. Tomas Tatar scored once in two games when he filled in for Perron and if Carrier is healthy, either he would return or Ryan Reaves would stay on the fourth line for a physical presence.

While I'm on it, there's one player, one man among them all who stands out from the crowd. William Carrier. He's only been on the ice for 65 minutes and his Corsi is only 46% but man, he lays out a lot of hits. Watch him next game. #VegasBorn pic.twitter.com/b458EKwTM

— Bill Comeau (@billius27) May 15, 2018

Washington: When top-six centre Nicklas Backstrom was injured against Pittsburgh and had to miss Game 6, it seemed to set the Penguins up for a comeback. The Caps headed to Game 6 with a 3-2 series advantage, but it was the kind of situation they had been in and blown before. Without Backstrom, Washington was down one of its best players.

The Caps went on to win that game and clinched the series, but Backstrom missed the first three games of the East Final with the hand injury as well. What appeared to be a death knell turned into nothing more than a minor inconvenience as the Capitals went 3-1 without the Swede. They lost the first two games after he returned against Tampa Bay, but in Game 6 Backstrom record two primary assists to help lead the Caps to a 3-0 win, before potting the empty-netter in Game 7.

The Capitals also missed 23-year-old Andre Burakovsky for most of the Columbus series and all of the Pittsburgh series. Much was expected from Burakovsky this season, after he notched 17 goals two years ago. But he played through a few injuries and was limited to 56 games, so he's become more of a third-liner for this team and was even a healthy scratch in Game 5 of the East Final. Prior to Game 7, he talked about how he struggled mentally to stay on his game as he returned from injury — but he scored two huge goals in the Conference Final series-clincher and you have to wonder if that inspires renewed confidence just in time for the Cup Final.

Two days ago, Burakovsky told us he's hired a sports psychologist because of how hard he is on himself.

— Isabelle Khurshudyan (@ikhurshudyan) May 24, 2018

Devante Smith-Pelly blocked a shot in Game 7 versus the Lightning and did not return. After the game, Trotz seemed optimistic that the grinder would be good to go on Monday.



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • May 24, 2018

Trotz said he \*thinks\* Smith-Pelly will be fine. Added that he thought it was precautionary to keep him out.

— Isabelle Khurshudyan (@ikhurshudyan) May 24, 2018

## TOP STORY

Vegas: The top story for the Vegas Golden Knights is, simply, that the Vegas Golden Knights are in the Stanley Cup Final. It is, of course, revisionist history for anyone to suggest this team was set up for instant success by team-friendly expansion draft rules because most projected Vegas to miss the playoffs in Year 1. Even owner Bill Foley, the most optimistic fan of them all, expected his team to make the playoffs in Year 3 and challenge for the Cup by Year 6. Now, they're just four wins away from lifting it right away.

"We don't have high expectations for this year," Foley told ESPN.com back in August. "We're going to be competitive. If we're going to lose a game, we'd like to lose by a goal or two, not lose by five or six. We don't want to be a walkover team. We want to be competitive, we want to be entertaining on the ice, we want to score some goals.

"We have some really good players, but we're not deep like a lot of teams are in terms of four lines of forwards and two or three lines of defencemen. But we got some really good players in the expansion draft. So we just need to do well for a couple years, then make the playoffs in three years as we start transitioning in some of these younger guys — like Shea Theodore and Alex Tuch and Jake Bischoff. We'll be pretty good in three years and we'll make a run in five or six."

The Golden Knights are a relentless team on the forecheck and that creates high-quality chances on the offensive end. They are great at getting other teams out of position, creating havoc and buzzing all over with tremendous speed. Vegas brings that quickness and intensity across all four lines, but when it comes to scoring, they are far closer to being a one-line team.

It's not only shocking that Vegas is here, but incredible how easily they disposed of the Western Conference. They've lost just three games to this point and have shocked the hockey world and shaken it to the core.

The Golden Knights started the season as 500-1 long shots to win the Cup and are now so close to paying out huge to their early adopters. If they can win four more, the Golden Knights would complete perhaps the greatest, most improbable season in NHL history.

Washington: The franchise has never won the Stanley Cup, but this is all about Ovechkin. Entering the NHL at the same time as Sidney Crosby, The Great 8 has watched his rival win multiple Cups and gold medals, while Ovechkin has settled for individual awards and a terrific career that likely already has him Hall of Fame-bound. But although he always showed up in the post-season, he gained the reputation in some corners for not being a playoff player because his teams were never able to break through.

Most Postseason Goals In #Caps History:

1. Alex Ovechkin 58
- T2. Nicklas Backstrom 30 (Including tonight's 4-0 goal).
- T2. Peter Bondra 30
4. Dale Hunter 25

— Sportsnet Stats (@SNstats) May 24, 2018

It's fitting, then, that Ovechkin got this iteration of the Caps to the final, an underdog group with lower expectations than almost any Caps team since they won their first of three Presidents' Trophies in 2010. Ovechkin's 12 goals this post-season lead the Caps and he's the highest-scoring player still alive in these playoffs. Ovechkin has been a playoff player the entire time and is without a doubt the best active player who hasn't yet won a Stanley Cup. This is his moment.

"Can't wait. We all can't wait. We're all excited. It's huge," Ovechkin told Sportsnet's Kyle Bukauskas in his post-Game 7 interview.

"It means everything."

## CONN SMYTHE CANDIDATES

Vegas:

1. Marc-Andre Fleury: We're at the point now where even if Vegas loses in the Stanley Cup Final, its goalie could still win playoff MVP if he finishes strong and the series goes six or seven games. As good as Vegas' forecheck has been this post-season it's hard to imagine the Golden Knights would have made as quick work of their opponents as they have through three rounds without Fleury playing at the top of his game. Last year Fleury was thrust into the starting job when Matt Murray sustained an injury prior to Game 1 in Round 1 and he helped carry the Penguins a few rounds before Murray returned, ending Fleury's time in Pittsburgh. His performance this season has not only dwarfed what he did last year, but Fleury has a chance to finish with the best playoff save percentage of any goalie to appear in at least 10 games since 1969.

Fleury has a league-best .947 save percentage to this point, facing an average of 33.6 shots per game. A few goalies have been over .940 in the past and the best salary-cap era playoff save percentage is Jonathan Quick's .946 mark from 2011-12. But nobody with at least 10 games has finished the playoffs with a save percentage better than Fleury's .947 since Jacques Plante in 1968-69 with the St. Louis Blues. Fleury also leads all goalies with four shutouts. It's unlikely he'll tie or break Martin Brodeur's record of seven, but with one more, Fleury would be just the sixth netminder in NHL history to record five shutouts in a Stanley Cup playoff run.

2. Jonathan Marchessault: If anyone on this Golden Knights team leaps Fleury, something amazing needs to happen. But Marchessault certainly appears capable of it. The Florida Panthers cast off leads the Golden Knights with eight goals and 18 points in 15 games and had three multi-point games against both the Jets and Sharks.

3. William Karlsson: The most surprising breakout performer for Vegas, Karlsson has continued his unfathomably good season with six goals and 13 points in 15 games. His shooting percentage, which everyone expects to tumble next season, has started to come down in the playoffs (23.4 to 13.6), but by averaging nearly three shots a game he's still getting enough chances to be in good positions to score. It's a long shot that either Marchessault or Karlsson will eclipse what Fleury has done, but both have shown game-breaking potential that could shift the series and radically change the Conn Smythe outlook.

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.

Washington:

1. Braden Holtby: When the Caps started their Round 1 series against Columbus, Philipp Grubauer was in net, usurping the No. 1 job from Holtby, who struggled through his worst NHL season to date. But after dropping the first two games of that series, Trotz went back to his ace and Holtby has been lights-out since. With a .925 save percentage, Holtby isn't having the best post-season of his career, but he's been up to the task when the Caps have needed him and closed out the high-scoring Lightning with back-to-back shutouts.

In both the 2015 and 2016 playoffs Holtby led the league in save percentage for all goalies with at least 10 games played, and both times he was over .940. In fact, Holtby has the third-best post-season save percentage over the past four seasons combined at .930, behind only Craig Anderson (.932) and, you guessed it, Fleury (.933).

2. Alex Ovechkin: He's got the second-most points overall and most goals of anyone left standing, so Ovechkin is front and centre for Conn Smythe consideration among Caps skaters. If he does it, Ovechkin will need to loom large in the Cup Final, with a few more goals at key times.



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • May 24, 2018

Ovechkin has goals in 10 of Washington's 19 playoff games and points in 14 of them. His whole career has led to this series, so expect him to be hungry and a difference-maker.

3. Evgeny Kuznetsov: If Ovechkin does have a hard time producing against the Golden Knights, the Capitals have another star Russian forward scoring and playing at a high level who is dangerous enough to take over a series. Kuznetsov is actually the points (24) leader on the Caps and averages the most time on ice among their forwards (21:31). And for all the shots Ovechkin takes, Kuznetsov is neck and neck with him there, too, registering 78 shots (Ovechkin has 80). Kuznetsov is also on a 10-game point streak, coming in hot to the Final.

### X-FACTOR

Vegas: Fleury has been the team's backbone and the top line has driven the offence, but the Golden Knights need more offensive pop from their second line. For as much as Vegas has been lauded as a four-line team, most of the goals came from the top two lines all season. Only one player in the bottom-six, Alex Tuch, scored more than 11 goals and 30 points on the season. Tuch, a 22-year-old plucked from the Minnesota Wild, had two goals against the Jets, which was second to only Marchessault in Round 3.

Against a Washington team defence that has been stifling these playoffs, the Golden Knights will need to get offensive contributions from more than just their top line, if only to lighten the load on Fleury. It would make life easier if Line 2 — with James Neal, David Perron and Erik Haula — got going, but if it doesn't, Tuch could put together an unforgettable performance that helps the expansion team win it all. The 18th-overall pick in the 2014 draft, Tuch, like many on this team, hadn't been given much of a shot by his former team. It's happening now and on the NHL's biggest stage.

Washington: The Los Angeles Kings were supposed to be too big and tough for the Golden Knights, and they were swept away. The Sharks were supposed to have more skill and be able to skate with Vegas and they were dispatched in six. The Winnipeg Jets were supposed to be the complete package and lopsided favourites to get to the Cup Final, but Vegas delivered Winnipeg its first four-game losing streak of the season and eliminated them in five.

Well, there is nothing obviously special or unique about this Capitals team, but they've found a way here with not just terrific netminding, but a renewed focus on defence. Washington is allowing an average of just 28.2 shots-against per game, the second-lowest rate in these playoffs after Pittsburgh, and one of just three teams below 30. But Vegas will challenge this with how aggressively they attack their opponent and force them into mistakes. The Golden Knights don't take a ton of shots on net, but they tend to get more high-quality chances. Can this Washington defence withstand the relentless Golden Knights or, if not, will Holtby be able to steal a Cup? The Capitals have beaten three tough offences to get here, but they haven't yet seen the kind of attack Vegas will throw their way.

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 05.24.2018

1097359 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Winnipeg Jets playoff report card: Did the depth guys deliver?

Mark Spector | @sportsnetspec May 23, 2018, 8:20 PM

School's out for the Winnipeg Jets. That means the report card is in.

Sure, the Jets overachieved this spring, getting more out of the roster than most thought they would. Great.

But let's break that down a bit. Did the depth guys deliver? What if Bryan Little and Mathieu Perreault had scored more than once? What if Jacob Trouba had been better in the O-zone? Would that have changed things?

What happened to Paul Stastny in Round 3? Was Connor Hellebuyck really better than the other guy, all spring long?

Here are some final grades. Have a great summer!

Blake Wheeler: A+

The Jets captain was exactly that: An unselfish, productive, tone-setting veteran who gave his younger teammates a template they could follow from Game 1 of Round 1 through to the final game of Round 3. His 18 assists are a playoff-high this spring, after Wheeler tied atop the NHL with 68 regular-season assists. You simply could not ask for more from Wheeler than what he gave the Jets during this run.

Mark Scheifele: A+

The next Jets captain was Wheeler's right hand this spring, and he too leads the playoffs with 14 goals through three rounds. That 11 of those goals came on the road — a record-setting seven in the Nashville series — tells you something about what a gamer Scheifele is. He is to Winnipeg what Auston Matthews is to Toronto, Connor McDavid is to Edmonton, and Sidney Crosby is to Pittsburgh. Scheifele is the Jets' best player, and he played like it this spring.

Connor Hellebuyck: A

The Jets goalie just turned 25 this past weekend, and had never played an NHL playoff game before this spring. He was the better goalie in series against veterans Devan Dubnyk and Pekka Rinne, and we're not going to cast any stones about him being out-duelled by Marc-Andre Fleury, whose game is out of this world right now. Hellebuyck's other-worldly confidence level is what you want in a goalie, and he'll learn how to express it more prudently as time passes. He misplayed two crucial pucks in the Vegas series that cost his team. That is something else he'll have to eliminate.

Patrik Laine: B+

For a 20-year-old on his first playoff run, I don't see how you could ask for more from Laine. Is he a bit of a one-trick pony? For now, sure, even though that 'trick' accounted for 44 goals and five more in the playoffs. He was firing all spring long, and just because it's harder to score, the big Finn wasn't deterred. He'll mature and be every bit as good as Winnipeg hopes he'll be. Don't worry for a second.

Dustin Byfuglien: B+

Same old story with Byfuglien: When he's on, he's great. When he's not, he can really have you scratching your head. In these playoffs Byfuglien was on 90 per cent of the time. He led the Jets in ice time by nearly five minutes, averaging 26:30 per night, and his game wandered far less than at points in the regular season. Big Buff was locked in, and there's an excellent player there when that is the case.

Josh Morrissey and Tyler Myers: B

As a pair of 20-minute defencemen charged with defending more than creating, both players allowed the Jets offensive-minded players room to roam. Myers was far more mobile than we recollect, adding 4-3-7 during the run, and defended physically and responsibly. Morrissey never met a shot he wouldn't block, and skates the puck out of trouble better than we thought. Two pillars of a winning team here.

Paul Stastny: C+

Stastny was on his way to an A+ until the third round came and went, and he went pointless in the last four games — all Jets losses — against Vegas. Certain players get to certain levels, and then the tap turns off, and Stastny's rap in St. Louis was that he would level off at times like these. That's what happened in Round 3, and the absence of a second line was the biggest reason they lost four straight for the only time all season.



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • May 24, 2018

Jacob Trouba: C

He played 21:39 per night and was plus-three, but Trouba is supposed to add some offence. He had points in two of 17 games (2-1-3), and went pointless in the final nine outings. He didn't hurt the Jets, but a player with Trouba's size and talent should help more in big games. He had three goals this season. We don't get how Trouba is in for a big pay day this summer.

Bryan Little, Mathieu Perreault, and Adam Lowry: C-

These depth forwards aren't going to score much. But scoring some is the difference, when a guy like Ryan Reaves scores the series winner for Vegas. I put Lowry (0 goals) in with Connor and Ehlers as inexperienced. He'll be a hell of a third-line centre one day. But Little's \$5.3-million salary kicks in next season, and he had one goal in 17 playoff games. Perreault (one goal, \$4.125 million) had grade-A chances that he couldn't finish, and could have made a huge difference had he cashed in against Fleury.

Kyle Connor and Nikolaj Ehlers: D

Connor, 21, and Ehlers, 22, looked very much like two skilled players figuring out how the playoffs work. Or rather, trying to figure it out. Both were perimeter players all spring long — particularly Connor — and in 32 games Connor scored the pair's measly three goals. They'll get better. It was just a lesson that the playoffs are for older players, and these two had never seen a level like this before.

Toby Enstrom: N/A

He missed too much time this season and never really caught up. It was an unfair ask and Enstrom did just okay.

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 05.24.2018

1097360 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / NHL's Top 12 UFAs of 2018: Latest rumours, reports

Luke Fox | @lukefoxjokebox May 23, 2018, 3:19 PM

Most of the best ones, as per league-wide trend, were crossed off the list well before puck drop. Or received juicy extensions mid-season.

The unrestricted free agent class of 2018 was set to include Carey Price, Cam Fowler, Bryan Little, Martin Jones, Craig Anderson, Marc Edouard-Vlasic and Mikko Koivu. But that group all inked long-term extensions with their current clubs in the off-season.

Message reinforced: If you have a good goalie, defenceman or centreman, keep him now and worry about the future later. (By then, he might be another GM's problem.)

A second wave of forwards — Kyle Turriss, Cam Atkinson, Jonathan Marchessault, Josh Bailey, Mikael Backlund, Patric Hornqvist — landed their paydays in-season.

The remaining impending UFAs of 2018 — a group headlined by Islanders face John Tavares — still have much to offer.

It pains us to leave active legend Joe Thornton off our top 12, but age and injury won't make him quite as desirable in 2018-19.

Summer 2018 will also provide a measure of fiscal relief for a few front offices, as hefty contracts belonging to Joffrey Lupul, Mikhail Grabovski, Kari Lehtonen, and Ryane Clowe will come off the books.

Here is an early look at the NHL's top 12 unrestricted free agents of 2018 and the rumours surrounding them with the negotiating window opening up in just a few weeks.

1. John Tavares

Age on July 1: 27

Position: Centre

2017-18 salary cap hit: \$5.5 million

Bargaining chips: The best 20-something impending unrestricted free-agent centre to come along since Steven Stamkos (and we know how calm everyone acted in 2016). Islanders' captain, best player and the reason they snapped their playoff series victory drought in 2016. Gold medallist at the Olympics, World Cup and world junior championship (twice). May hit 80 points for the third season. Improving on the defensive end, too. Did we mention the Spengler Cup gold?

The latest: Through good times and bad, Tavares and the Islanders have always maintained they'd like to extend their marriage when the time comes.

Tavares is likely encouraged by the club's 2017 trade for buddy Jordan Eberle, the development of Mathew Barzal, and his chemistry with Josh Bailey, who was extended in-season. The Isles' securing of a new arena at Belmont Park can't hurt, but that rink isn't projected to open until 2021-22.

Thing is, Tavares is driven to win, and he's had a stellar season personally — but the Isles will miss the playoffs in back-to-back seasons. He needs to believe the Islanders can win a Cup.

"To me, it's separate — the season and my contract situation. I don't really see them going hand-in-hand or having an effect on one or the other," Tavares told The New York Post in late March.

The loyal superstar is content to play the waiting game, and he's earned the right to weigh his options. In the words of friend Matt Martin: "He knows his contract situation can be solved quickly, so he's taking his time."

GM Garth Snow has come under fire for sitting on his hands at the deadline, Isles fans are restless, teams like Montreal, Toronto and San Jose will be ready to open the coffers, and coach Doug Weight even experimented with Tavares on the wing.

Still, we have a list of five reasons why we think, ultimately, he'll stay.

The Islanders' hiring of Lou Lamoriello to run all things hockey is a great sign for retaining Tavares. The two met last Wednesday face-to-face in New York, according to Elliotte Friedman.

A "league source" told Newsday Tuesday that Lamoriello's hiring has pleased Tavares.

Lou Lamoriello: "Everyone in the National Hockey League knows about John Tavares. He's one of the elite players, a gentleman both on and off the ice. He's a quality individual as well as a quality player. I don't know any better way of describing him."

— New York Islanders (@NYIslanders) May 22, 2018

Something to remember about Mark Hunter: He was owner, Vice President and General Manager of the London Knights when John Tavares played there before being drafted in 2009. Keep that in mind over the next few weeks. #Isles

— Rob Taub (@RTaub\_) May 23, 2018

2. John Carlson

Age on July 1: 28

Position: Defence

2017-18 salary cap hit: \$3.97 million

Bargaining chips: World junior gold medallist. Member of Team USA. Washington Capitals' ice-time leader at a whopping 24:58 per game.



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • May 24, 2018

Power-play threat. Put up between 32 and 55 points in seven straight full seasons. Led all D-men in 2017-18 with 68 points.

The latest: A skilled and experienced puck-moving, right-shot defenceman under the age of 30?

"Yes, please," says the entire NHL.

While Carlson has been an important fixture in Washington since getting drafted in 2008's first round, GM Brian MacLellan's long list of contractual decisions in the summer pushed an extension to the back burner.

With the Caps reaching the conference final and Carlson the most productive playoff defenceman in the East (15 points through 18 games), he's shot to the top of Washington's priority list.

"In the beginning, we were wondering where we were going to be as a team," MacLellan told NHL.com on Jan. 11. "[Now], we're going to want him back no matter what, so we're going to make our best effort to bring him back."

With the Ducks locking up Fowler and the Sharks committing to Vlasic, does Carlson pass up a chance to become the undisputed No. 1 UFA defenceman of 2018 and create a lucrative bidding war?

Carlson has said he's not thinking too much about his next contract yet.

"I've got enough to worry about right now," Carlson told NHL.com on April 30. "I don't need to be worrying about that, that's for sure."

"I would like to think that I play my best hockey now, and pride myself on when it's needed most to do whatever it takes."

\$8 million per year is not out of the question.

**PAY JOHN CARLSON \$100 BILLION EARTH DOLLARS A YEAR**

— Jason Rogers (@HeyJayJRogers) March 16, 2018

### 3. James van Riemsdyk

Age on July 1: 29

Position: Left-wing

2017-18 salary cap hit: \$4.25 million

Bargaining chips: Second-overall pick in 2007. Member of Team USA. Four-time 20-goal scorer, two-time 30-goal man. Building off his most productive NHL season (62 points in 2016-17) with his greatest goal-getting burst (36). Big body, sick mitts. A power-play beast. Belief he can still improve.

The latest: The Maple Leafs' most dangerous left-wing says he wants to remain with the team long-term, but with JVR's next contract expected to be a monster, Toronto is unlikely to shell out knowing it will soon have to pony up big bucks for younger forwards Auston Matthews, Mitch Marner and William Nylander.

Affordable bottom-six wingers Andreas Johnsson and Kasper Kapanen should push to move up the lineup, and Toronto would be wise to spend its cap space on defencemen.

"I've loved playing here ever since I came here. How I've been treated is great. It's a place I want to play for as long as I can," van Riemsdyk told us. "Where that takes things, we'll see what happens. I love playing here. I want to be here."

The Leafs offered van Riemsdyk as part of a failed trade package for then-Islanders defenceman Travis Hamonic at the draft, and Toronto's investment in LW Patrick Marleau essentially sealed van Riemsdyk's fate in 2017.

Van Riemsdyk was integral to the Leafs' potent first power-play unit but was otherwise seeing third-line minutes. On another squad — Carolina? Vegas? New York? New Jersey? San Jose? — he'd be a top-six fixture again.

Extension talks are nonexistent, and JVR, as Chris Johnston reported, has long been doing his due diligence by consulting with fellow players about how best to approach free agency.

"I enjoy everything here: this city, this team, all of it has a lot to offer. It's been great for me, and just having the unwavering support of the fans and the city of Toronto. There's lots of different emotions there now," van Riemsdyk said at the Leafs locker cleanout.

"Definitely a weird feeling, possibly walking out of here for the last time."

### 4. Paul Stastny

Age on July 1: 32

Position: Centre

2017-18 salary cap hit: \$7 million

Bargaining chips: Second-line centre on the Western Conference finalist. Great face-off man, passer and penalty killer. Defensively responsible. A lock for 50 points if healthy. Will travel to win.

The latest: Stastny hit pay dirt as one of the best UFA forwards in 2014, but there's no way he commands another \$7 million per year deal with a no-trade clause. Is there?

The Quebec native has a knack for great timing when it comes to contract years, because if Tavares re-ups on Long Island, Stastny suddenly becomes the best centreman on the free market.

By dealing Stastny to the Jets, Doug Armstrong continued a pattern of letting his veterans go — Kevin Shattenkirk, Troy Brouwer, David Backes — in favour of youth when payday comes knocking.

After his surprise deadline deal, Stastny put up 15 points through 17 playoff games. He was the smartest deadline pickup.

Regarding his future, Stastny told me, "It's always good to keep everything open. Every time you think something is going to happen, life throws a curveball at you."

Having already committed big bucks and heavy term to centre Bryan Little, and with RFAs Jacob Trouba and Connor Hellebuyck knocking for long-term deals, Stastny will likely be too expensive for the Jets to keep beyond the rental stage.

"There's a lot of good players here. A good mix of veterans, young guys, skilled guys, hardworking guys, scorers, playmakers, checkers," Stastny told Winnipeg reporters upon elimination.

"From what I've seen, if they just watch a guy like Wheels [Blake Wheeler], day in and day out, watch guys like Scheif [Mark Scheifele]... then they're going to be fine."

They, not we.

"It was a great experience talking to [Stastny] in the exit meeting and hearing about his decision-making process in coming here, and his thought process after being here and moving forward," Jets GM Kevin Cheveldayoff said. "First and foremost, we have to wait for the [NHL salary] cap to be set. We have a lot of work ahead of us from the business side."

Paul Stastny says probably the best decision he's ever made was to waive his no-trade clause and come to the #NHLJets.

— Scott Billeck (@ScottBilleck) May 20, 2018

### 5. Ilya Kovalchuk

Age on July 1: 35

Position: Left-wing

Bargaining chips: 2018 Olympic champion. KHL champion. Led KHL in scoring in each of past two seasons. Wicked shot — his .511 goals per



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • May 24, 2018

game place him 12th all-time in NHL scorers with a minimum of 400 goals. Inspired to become a member of the Triple Gold Club.

The latest: Kovalchuk was interested in an NHL return last summer, but as property of the New Jersey Devils, there was too much red tape to slice through. This coming off-season, he's free and clear. And with an Olympic medal and Gagarin Cup to his name, there's nothing left to accomplish in his homeland.

The New York Rangers are reportedly the best bet to sign the sniper and GM Jeff Gorton has already reached out to Kovalchuk, but after seeing Alexander Radulov's success in Montreal and Dallas, there will be other suitors.

"Kovy is one of the best teammates I've ever had," Martin Brodeur told Larry Brooks of The New York Post this month. "And I'm not talking about just his play on the ice.

"He was one of our most engaged guys in the room. He was great that way. He really cares about winning, and he cares about guys on his team. Away from the rink, and I think it's unusual in the NHL for someone from Russia, but his wife organized dinners and was great with the team.

"If he comes back, and it sounds like he might — I think he would have this year if it weren't for the Olympics — he's going to be a very good player for whoever signs him."

With Lamoriello taking over the Islanders and Kovalchuk preferring to return to the Big Apple, the Isles have suddenly emerged as a speculated landing spot.

I wonder if Lamoriello's presence makes the Islanders a darkhorse suitor for Ilya Kovalchuk. Between Lou there and Don Waddell in Carolina, would not be surprised if people who know Kovalchuk are the most interested.

— Matt Larkin (@THNMattLarkin) May 21, 2018

Ilya Kovalchuk told @MatchTV he wouldn't forgive himself if he doesn't return to the NHL this year and play there several years. Again cited the Triple Gold club as a goal

— Igor Eronko (@IgorEronko) March 16, 2018

## 6. Evander Kane

Age on July 1: 26

Position: Left-wing

2017-18 salary cap hit: \$5.25 million

Bargaining chips: The youngest UFA forward in 2018, period. In 2016-17, enjoyed his most productive season — 28 goals, 43 points — since 2011-12 and has followed it up with an even better 2017-18 (29 goals, 54 points). Deadly shot. Common belief that he still hasn't reached his ceiling.

The latest: Sportsnet's Irfaan Gaffar dropped a Twitter bomb Tuesday when he tweeted that Evander Kane and the San Jose Sharks were nearing an agreement that would pay the shooter nearly \$49 million over seven years. (The Associated Press doubled down.)

Kane's future is a compelling subject because his off-ice track record isn't the most positive and he's already battled through several injuries, yet his skills and athleticism are top notch. We've seen many an NHLer mature with age, so there is potential for a reasonable deal here.

Rookie Sabres GM Jason Botterill tried to fetch as much as possible for Kane before the deadline — one report had his asking price at four pieces — but the return from San Jose was underwhelming.

That trade will get slightly more favourable for the Sabres if Kane indeed inks an extension with the Sharks — a 2019 second-round pick gets upgraded to Round 1.

Still in the honeymoon period, Kane has excelled in California, registering his first four-goal game and notching four goals in nine playoff games. The Mercury News went into detail on why keeping Kane in the Bay Area makes sense, and Doug Wilson will have the cap space to make it happen.

"He's fit in well," teammate Logan Couture told reporters. "You don't listen to what people say about him before. Getting to know him over these last few months, he's a great teammate. He cares and he wants to win. He was fun to play with."

Hearing the Sharks and Evander Kane have agreed to a long-term contract extension. Numbers may be in the 7-years 7-million per range.

— Irfaan Gaffar (@sportsnetirf) May 22, 2018

From what I'm told, the Sharks are prepared to offer Evander Kane a mid-to-long term contract extension (no word yet on specifics). That doesn't assure something will get done, but the team does appear to be committed to keeping Kane around for the future, if possible.

— Kevin Kurz (@KKurzNHL) May 21, 2018

## 7. James Neal

Age on July 1: 30

Position: Left-wing

2017-18 salary cap hit: \$5 million

Bargaining chips: Ten straight seasons as a 20-goal man. Named to 2018 All-Star Game. Wicked shot. 2018 Stanley Cup finalist.

The latest: Sportsnet's Nick Kypreos has suggested that Neal will be asking for as much as \$6.5 million or \$7 million per season on a long-term deal. Despite having the cap space to make that work, the belief is that Vegas is hesitant to commit long-term to players 30 and older.

Golden Knights GM George McPhee already made extending 27-year-old Jonathan Marchessault (\$5 million times six years) his priority. Neal is older and will be more expensive.

McPhee had initially considered flipping Neal at the trade deadline for futures, but plans changed once Vegas became a contender. Neal suffered an upper-body injury in late February, but a strong showing (nine points and counting) in the post-season will only boost his value on the open market.

"I just try to stay in the moment," Neal told NHL.com. "It's hard, for sure. You don't want to look too far ahead, but I'm just so excited to be back here. It was so hard last year to lose it. You get that taste of winning, and you just want to come back and you want to win. You want to win. No better group of guys to do it with, and we'll see what happens."

James Neal (VGS): scored his 20th goal; 10th straight season with 20 goals to start career; joins Ovechkin & Phil Kessel as the only players to score at least 20 goals in each of the last 10 seasons. UFA this summer. [pic.twitter.com/iNiEoCsc0k](https://pic.twitter.com/iNiEoCsc0k)

— Bucci Mane (@Buccigross) January 20, 2018

## 8. David Perron

Age on July 1: 30

Position: Left-wing

2017-18 salary cap hit: \$3.75 million

Bargaining chips: Sixty-six points marked a career season. Strong-on-the-puck winger with enviable possession metrics. A beast in the corners. Ability to draw penalties.

The latest: Of Vegas's two stud UFA wingers, Neal has the more familiar resume, but Perron actually enjoyed the more productive season — crushing it with career-highs in assists (50) and points (66).



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • May 24, 2018

McPhee is keeping mum publicly with his plans for these veteran wingers. There is value in keeping Perron beyond 2017-18, but the temptation to let Perron walk and use his cap space on younger, cheaper talent will be there.

There's no guarantee Perron produces this well again, and he's still looking for his first playoff goal. He does have seven assists in 11 games and was dealing with an illness.

"I'm looking for eight years, \$10 million a year," Perron told the Las Vegas Review-Journal. He was joking. "I don't really want to touch on [my next contract]. I think it would be unfair for everyone to talk about that. I don't want to jinx anything."

9. Mike Green

Age on July 1: 32

Position: Defence

2017-18 salary cap hit: \$6 million

Bargaining chips: Named to 2018 all-star game. Experienced, durable top-four right shot who can log 24 minutes a night. In his prime, he had a 30-goal season and two 70-point seasons from the blue line.

The latest: Coming off a 36-point campaign as the best defenceman on a bad Red Wings team, Green came out of the gates flying, only to cool off considerably (33 points in 66 games). To be fair, he suffered a neck injury in February and Detroit has had little to play for down the stretch. Green's season was shut down on March 22.

With a rebuild in the Wings' future and cap problems firmly in their present, Green appeared like an obvious trade chip but was retained at the deadline despite reportedly being open to waving his no-trade protection for Tampa or Washington.

Health is an issue.

On April 5, Green is scheduled for surgery on his cervical spine in New York City. His recovery time is estimated at two months minimum.

Asked Lamoriello about a report Mike Green invoked a no-trade clause to block a move to Leafs. The GM replied "that's an unfair question for Mike Green, but we were not interested".

— Lance Hornby (@sunhornby) February 26, 2018

10. John Moore

Age on July 1: 27

Position: Defence

2017-18 salary cap hit: \$1.67 million

Bargaining chips: Plays nearly 20 minutes per night. Entering prime. First-round, stay-at-home D-man with size (6-foot-3, 210 pounds) and smarts. Bronze medallist for Team USA at 2015 IIHF World Championship.

The latest: A slick skater who likely has, um, more room to grow his all-around game, Moore was relied upon heavily in his third full campaign in New Jersey and contributed some clutch overtime goals.

His possession metrics (below 50 per cent Corsi) and production (18 points) don't do him favours, especially when he's placed in more than a fair share of offensive situations.

Top-four, under-30 defencemen on playoff teams don't hit the market often, however, which means you'll hear Moore's name in the rumour mill as July 1 nears.

Moore will double if not triple his salary.

"I want to [stay]. It's not up to me. I haven't really talked to Ray [Shero]," Moore told NJ.com on locker cleanout day. "Just in our meeting now, we

said we'll get together and talk. I really like it here, my family likes it here. It's a good team, a lot of good guys and I want to be here."

11. Riley Nash

Age on July 1: 29

Position: Centre / Right-wing

2017-18 salary cap hit: \$900,00

Bargaining chips: Plays a position in which UFAs are scarce. Solid third-line centre on a contending team. First-round pick. Posted career-highs in goals (15), assists (26), points (41) and plus/minus (plus-16).

The latest: The Bruins' other R. Nash enjoyed a career season in the bottom six but failed to produce in the second season. Nash only managed a single assist (no goals) in nine playoff contests.

That said, centres — especially those under the age of 30 whose best hockey may still lie ahead — will be in high demand this summer, and Nash could well be had for a three- or four-year commitment.

"Haven't definitively ruled anybody out," Bruins GM Don Sweeney said, regarding his UFA crop.

"We would like to bring everyone back, but that's not realistic in cap environment."

As offseason moves on, the #Flyers plans will become more clear. At the moment, I keep hearing Brock Nelson & Riley Nash names popping up. Both guys would be a great #3C to complement Coutts & Patrick. Another plus? Both are great PK guys. #FlyersTalk #LetsGoFlyers #EarnTomorrow

— Brandon Sommermann (@PFL\_BSommermann) May 16, 2018

12. Rick Nash

Age on July 1: 34

Position: Right-wing

2017-18 salary cap hit: \$7.8 million

Bargaining chips: Two-time Olympic gold medallist. World championships gold medallist and MVP. Rocket Richard Trophy winner. Celebrated his 13th 20-goal season. Good hands. Improved defensively.

The latest: An emotional Nash departed New York as part of the Rangers' dramatic February fire sale and put up five points as a complementary piece of the Bruins' two-round post-season run.

There's been some speculation that Nash would be open to returning to either of his former teams this summer, Columbus or New York.

Nash is already the 16th-highest-paid NHLer and enjoyed a whopping \$8.2 million base salary this season. Unlike most on this list, he's in for a pay cut.

The power forward, who has never hit unrestricted free agency, failed to wow in his new uniform. He'll bring a concussion history to the open market.

"It was disappointing with having a concussion, and having some effects during it, and only playing a certain amount of games, and then coming back for the playoffs," Nash told reporters on break-up day. "But everything was positive. The organization was great, guys were awesome, so it was a great chapter here and hopefully it can continue."

Bruins haven't told any pending UFA's that they won't be returning, and Don Sweeney sounds like he'll be taking a run at re-signing Anton Khudobin to fortify their goaltending situation

— Joe Haggerty (@HackswithHags) May 10, 2018

More notable UFAs of 2018: Michael Grabner, Thomas Vanek, Joe Thornton, Brian Gibbons, Toby Enstrom, Jack Johnson, Jonathan



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • May 24, 2018

Bernier, Carter Hutton, Cam Ward, Derek Ryan, Brandon Manning, Greg Pateryn, Jaroslav Halak, Kari Lehtonen, Tyler Bozak, Calvin De Haan, Dan Hamhuis, Leo Komarov, Patrick Maroon, Tomas Plekanec, Kari Lehtonen, Ryan Reaves, Jannik Hansen, Anton Khudobin, Derek Grant, Luca Sbisa

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 05.24.2018

1097361 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Holtby is the key factor in Capitals-Lightning Game 7

Andrew Berkshire May 23, 2018, 11:33 AM

The Washington Capitals and Tampa Bay Lightning each have a chance to advance to the Stanley Cup Final in game seven on Wednesday, with the Capitals pushing the series to a one-game playoff behind a dominant Game 6 victory, a major rebound after dropping three straight to the Lightning.

There's not much that's predictable about Game 7 performances, outside of Justin Williams being great of course, but based on the series so far, what kind of game should we expect to see from each team?

To find out, let's take a look at how each team has put their shots on and at the net.

There has been a lot of talk about the defensive ability of the Tampa Bay Lightning in this series, and in a way it's not wrong. The Lightning have frustrated the Capitals at times, especially Alex Ovechkin.

Ovechkin's average shot distance has gone from 29.5 feet in the first two rounds, to 35.7 feet out against the Lightning. You can often see him set up for one-timers near the blue line instead of his usual spot at the top of the left circle while trying to avoid the tight checking the Lightning are applying.

However, Ovechkin still leads all players in the conference finals in scoring chances with 30, and only Brayden Point and Mark Scheifele put more on net than his 13 shots from the slot, both with 14.

And while Ovechkin has been limited a bit, the rest of the Capitals have been excellent, leading the Lightning by significant margins in shots from every area, while creating more pre-shot movement with passes to the slot, and over double the puck movement off the rush.

Predictably, that has made Andrei Vasilevskiy's job in this series much more difficult than Braden Holtby's so their similar save percentages overall don't really tell the whole story.

From the most dangerous areas on the ice, Vasilevskiy has been much better than Holtby overall in the series, though he has been more prone to letting in weaker goals from the perimeter, where Holtby has been excellent.

These performances aren't static though, where the run of play from the skaters each game has been relatively consistent, Holtby has been a little up and down, which is where things get really interesting in this series.

Vasilevskiy's overall numbers look pedestrian, but considering the locations of the shots he's facing, how many have pre-shot movement, and how many of those shots are off the rush, you could argue that he's been heroic. His high danger save percentage has been 6.4 per cent better than the playoff average for goaltenders, the kind of gap you see between average and a league leader in the regular season.

However because the Capitals have been so relentless from all areas of the ice, they've found ways to beat Vasilevskiy anyway, even with how

well the Lightning have covered Ovechkin, better than any other team in these playoffs.

I think we can expect a similar level from Washington in Game 7 to what we saw in Game 6, and while I expect the Lightning to be much better after Jon Cooper didn't pull any punches in assessing their performance in that one, a huge percentage of this game comes down to Holtby.

Holtby stole the series against the Penguins, and he was excellent against the Blue Jackets as the Capitals fought their way back into and through that series, but he hasn't been able to match Vasilevskiy's level on a consistent basis. If the Caps get the good Holtby, they probably win this game and series, but if he's only okay the Lightning have too many shooters that can punish on few opportunities.

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 05.24.2018

1097362 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Marlies leaning on strength in numbers to win Calder Cup

Luke Fox | @lukefoxjokebox May 23, 2018, 9:39 AM

Canada's last professional winter sports team standing is accustomed to operating in the shadows of the centre of the hockey universe.

Yet, with the Maple Leafs and Raptors bowing out of once-hopeful postseasons in agonizing fashion and the Blue Jays floundering below .500, the Toronto Marlies deserve their moment in the sun as they seek that elusive first Calder Cup.

In swiping the first two games of the AHL's Eastern Conference final from the Lehigh Valley Phantoms over the weekend, the Baby Leafs (and the baby of new Leafs GM Kyle Dubas, who can still be seen patrolling Ricoh Coliseum with a coffee in one hand and a smartphone in the other) have now won seven straight playoff games and are a perfect 7-0 at home this postseason.

Hey, Vancouver, hop aboard the bandwagon for Canada's team!

To dub any farm club (or its fans) as "long-suffering" is a tad rich. Building a culture of winning is important, sure, but it's secondary to developing NHL graduates like William Nylander, Kasperii Kapanen, Nazem Kadri and Jake Gardiner.

Despite claiming two regular-season titles in the past three years and five divisional crowns in the past seven, the junior Leafs have never gone all the way — a drought that dates back four relocations ago, to the New Brunswick Hawks of the 1970s.

The nearest miss came in 2012, when coach Jon Cooper's Norfolk Admirals swept Dallas Eakins' Marlies in the Calder final, ousting them quicker than you can say "Mike Zigomanis."

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

The longest-serving Marlie and the AHL's most outstanding goaltender, Garret Sparks, is in his fifth tour with one of the most respected hockey teams that still does the bulk of its travelling by bus.

"There's a team that had a lot of success and got to the conference finals my first full year with the Marlies. To even say that team was reminiscent of this team isn't fair because I'm the only remaining member," says Sparks, who set six franchise goaltending records this season.

"We've had a huge transition period, we've put up great numbers in this league the last three years, we've gone far in the playoffs, and we've run into good teams and we've learned a lot of lessons from that, and we're



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • May 24, 2018

trying to continue the ride we've created this season. Play some hard hockey down the stretch and just enjoy it."

Sparks stood tall in the weekend set, which saw game-winners from fourth-line rookie Adam Brooks and top-line centre Miro Aaltonen.

The depth of contributions is as remarkable as the offensive explosion. Toronto tops all with 40 playoff goals. Nine different Marlies have registered at least seven points through 11 playoff contests. That group doesn't include defencemen Andreas Borgman, Travis Dermott, Calle Rosen, and Justin Holl, all of whom made appearances with the Maple Leafs at various points in the past eight months.

"These guys make it easy," says Dermott. He and Leafs winger Andreas Johnsson have been able to flush the disappointment of Game 7 in Boston with a winning streak. "It's good playing with this team we have, the players we have. We feel like we're bringing it every day."

Highly touted 21-year-old prospect Jeremy Bracco, a 2017 Memorial Cup winner who put up 32 points in 50 games as a first-year pro, is a healthy scratch. That's how deep.

We don't speak enough about Marlies GM Dubas's work in building a perennial AHL contender leading to his Maple Leafs GM promotion, and now Marlies coach Sheldon Keefe is gaining buzz as a potential NHL bench boss. ("It's inevitable," Sparks tells us.)

So flush is the blue line, Toronto let T.J. Brennan walk to Lehigh Valley in 2016, despite his setting the AHL record for points by a D-man.

"We know he's one of the most elite defencemen in this league in history," Sparks says. "You respect him; you don't fear him."

The talent level and consistency of these Marlies thrusts them on a championship collision course with Texas (up 3-0 in the Western final). With home ice on lock, there's a swelling sense these Marlies not only can but should go all the way.

"This team is different," Sparks explains. "We may not have the big names up front that we had in the past, but we've got a core of guys who are dedicated to doing the right things, doing it every day. We've had a lot of success this year with our system and playing the way we know we should play. If we just stick to our game plan, we should be OK."

The Eastern final shifts to Pennsylvania for games 3, 4 and 5, starting Wednesday, meaning the sides will clash five times in eight days.

"You really have to be locked in, motivated and excited," captain Ben Smith says of the compact schedule. "When it comes to this time of year, it's who shows up, who's competitive, who plays to their game plan and finds a way to win."

To that end, Keefe points to Round 2, Game 3 in Syracuse, a 7-1 romp, as the defining 60 minutes of this Marlies run.

"Just the way that we came out on the road and took a stranglehold in the series and won a game on the road when we hadn't done that in the first round in a very difficult place to play against a very good team," Keefe says.

"We just like the process that we went through in that game so if we could replicate that, that will certainly help our cause."

No one is more familiar with the farm prospects than Dubas, and with the 32-year-old now running the show, the belief is that Marlies at all positions will vie for starting jobs on Bay Street this fall, perhaps as Calder champions.

In net, both Sparks and Calvin Pickard ("Sparky and Picks—we've been lucky to have two of the best goalies in the league all year long," Smith boasts) are good enough for a major-league look somewhere.

More grooming won't hurt AHL rookie Timothy Liljegren, but Dermott, Holl, Borgman and Rosen could all battle for spots that may be vacated by free agents Roman Polak and Connor Carrick.

Up front, Johnsson looks like a shoe-in, while Aaltonen, Carl Grundstrom, and perhaps Pierre Engvall will all make their case to fill the roles left by UFAs James van Riemsdyk, Tyler Bozak, Leo Komarov, Tomas Plekanec and Dominic Moore with cap-friendly youth and ambition.

For now, however, the Marlies are simply drinking in the opportunity to play a cold sport this late into springtime.

"Good weather, the excitement of the crowd, and the high stakes—that's why we're all here. That's what we train for in the summer, to have a chance to play this late in the season and a chance to lift a trophy," says Smith, 29 and striving for his own NHL return.

"To put that on the resume collectively and as individuals, that's a huge opportunity for us to advance our careers and build some excitement around this organization."

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 05.24.2018

1097363 Websites

TSN.CA / Statistically Speaking: The Capitals are going to play for the Stanley Cup

Scott Cullen

Alex Ovechkin and the Washington Capitals are headed to the Stanley Cup Final; Holtby, Burakovsky and more in Scott Cullen's Statistically Speaking.

HEROES

Braden Holtby – Washington's goaltender recorded a 29-save shutout, his second straight goose-egg, in a 4-0 Game Seven win at Tampa Bay. He has a .923 save percentage in the postseason.

Andre Burakovsky – The Capitals winger buried a pair of goals, his first two of the playoffs in his eighth game, to lead the attack in Game Seven.

ZEROES

Ryan Callahan – The Lightning winger was on the ice for three even-strength goals against in a 4-0 Game Seven loss against Washington.

Devante Smith-Pelly – After a strong contribution in Game Six, the Capitals winger had a tough night in Game Seven, blocking a shot with the back of his neck and getting blanked on shot differentials (0 for, 12 against).

STANLEY CUP HALF FULL/HALF EMPTY

Anton Stralman – Tampa Bay's veteran blueliner had game-best possession stats (18 for, 5 against, 78.3 CF%, 8-3 scoring chances), but also failed to step up soon enough on Alex Ovechkin before Ovi scored the first goal of the game 1:02 into the first period.

LIGHTNING CRASHES

They were favoured coming into the Eastern Conference Final, and favoured in Game Seven at home, but the Tampa Bay Lightning were eliminated by the Washington Capitals in a 4-0 Game Seven loss.

While the Lightning could score on the power play, they had a hard time generating even-strength offence in the series. Most notably, their top players weren't producing at evens. Steven Stamkos scored all six of his points, including four goals, on the power play. Nikita Kucherov and Brayden Point had two even-strength points in seven games and Victor Hedman had one.

Stamkos was limited to just 14 shots on goal in seven games.



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • May 24, 2018

Tyler Johnson had team-worst possession stats (41.4 CF%) while Victor Hedman, Anton Stralman and Nikita Kucherov were each on the ice for four more goals against than for during 5-on-5 play.

Alex Killorn had the best possession stats (60.5 CF%) among Lightning skaters.

Kucherov (17), Point (16), and Stamkos (16) ended up as Tampa Bay's top playoff scorers and rookie defenceman Mikhail Sergachev (64.6 CF%) had the best possession numbers in sheltered minutes during the Lightning postseason.

Washington's big guns were firing in the series. Evgeny Kuznetsov finished the seven games with 10 points (4 G, 6 A). Alex Ovechkin and T.J. Oshie both had seven points and Lars Eller (!) had six. Eller stepped up early, while Nicklas Backstrom was out, but Backstrom contributed three points in four games once he returned to the lineup. Backstrom also owned team-best possession stats (56.4 CF%) in the series; Oshie, Dmitry Orlov, Matt Niskanen and rookie Jakub Vrana were all north of 55 CF%.

Eller, Kuznetsov and Brooks Orpik led the Capitals in goal differential, as they were each on the ice for four more goals for than against during 5-on-5 play.

The bottom line of the series is that the Capitals' best players could produce at even strength, and Braden Holtby delivered back-to-back shutouts with Washington's season on the line.

This leads to a fun Stanley Cup Final, one in which the Vegas GM, George McPhee, used to hold that position in Washington. The Golden Knights' top defenceman, Nate Schmidt, was the player that Vegas plucked from Washington in the expansion draft.

It also guarantees a great story. Either Vegas completes the most improbable expansion season in league history or the Capitals and the oft-maligned Ovechkin finally get over the hump, even if it's with a team that is objectively not as strong as some of the clubs they've had in recent years.

Ovechkin and Kuznetsov are leading the Capitals' attack in the postseason, combining for 23 goals and 46 points in 19 games.

Like all players who can't get it done when it matters, that reputation holds...until it doesn't.

TSN.CA LOADED: 05.24.2018

1097364 Websites

TSN.CA / Statistically Speaking: Vegas is going to the Cup Final

Scott Cullen

Fleury and Reaves, yes Reaves, make the difference for the Golden Knights in Scott Cullen's Statistically Speaking.

### HEROES

Marc-Andre Fleury – The Flower was the difference in the series and it continues in Game Five, as he stopped 31 of 32 shots in a 2-1 series-clinching victory at Winnipeg. He had a .938 save percentage in the series, and sits at .947 in 15 playoff starts.

Ryan Reaves – The series-winning goal went to the Golden Knights enforcer, who notched his first goal since joining Vegas at the trade deadline, a span during which he played in 27 games. To his credit, Reaves held his own (33 for, 33 against, 50.0 CF%, 14-11 scoring chances) in a fourth-line role in the series.

### ZEROES

Kyle Connor, Mark Scheifele, Blake Wheeler – Winnipeg's top line was on the wrong side of the puck (11 for, 16 against, 40.7 CF%) in a 2-1 series-clinching Game Five loss to Vegas.

Paul Stastny – For the first time in the postseason, the Jets centre failed to record a shot attempt and was on for a goal against in Game Five against Vegas.

### STANLEY CUP HALF FULL/HALF EMPTY

Josh Morrissey – The young defenceman scored Winnipeg's only goal, but had team-worst possession stats (10 for, 18 against, 35.7 CF%, 3-13 scoring chances) in a Game Five loss to Vegas.

### VITAL SIGNS

Dmitry Kulikov and Joe Morrow – Winnipeg got wild with their lineup in Game Five, inserting Kulikov and Morrow on the blueline, taking out Toby Enstrom and Ben Chiarot. In the series, Chiarot had the best shot differentials (60.7 CF%) among Jets defencemen.

Joel Armia – The Jets put Armia back in the lineup for Game Five, taking out Andrew Copp.

### JETS GROUNDED

Even though they were the favoured team, and even though they held large portions of territorial edge in the series, the Winnipeg Jets were quickly eliminated by the Vegas Golden Knights in five games. The Golden Knights are on their way to the Stanley Cup Final as an expansion team and the Winnipeg Jets are going home.

It wasn't all bad news for the Jets. Some of their top players rose to the challenge in the Western Conference Final. Team captain Blake Wheeler recorded eight assists and had spectacular possession stats (55.2 CF%, 73.0 SCF%) in the series.

Mark Scheifele scored five goals and added an assist for the Jets, and is eliminated from the postseason with a league-leading 14 goals, a total that very well may finish as best in the league this year.

On the other hand, Winnipeg was supposed to be a team with excellent forward depth, and Bryan Little and Mathieu Perreault both failed to record a point in the series. The playoff story isn't pretty for Nikolaj Ehlers, who didn't record a goal on 26 shots in 14 games.

Connor Hellebuyck was excellent for the Jets this season, and performed well through the first two rounds of the playoffs, but posted a mediocre .906 save percentage in the series against Vegas.

At the other end of the rink was Fleury who, after losing Game One, posted a .956 save percentage in four straight Vegas victories. It's possible to beat a goaltender stopping better than 95% of the shots, but it sure isn't easy.

According to @NatStatTrick, Winnipeg has advantages in every shot/scoring chance metric vs. Vegas. But, one team has a goalie stopping 93% of shots and the other is stopping 89%. That's the difference, because that's a big difference!

— Scott Cullen (@tsnscottcullen) May 19, 2018

While Vegas got some timely goals from unlikely sources, like Ryan Reaves, Tomas Nosek and even Tomas Tatar in his limited action, but the attack was led by their top line. Jonathan Marchessault had seven points (4 G, 3 A) and Reilly Smith had five points (1 G, 4 A) to lead the way.

The series ending in five games looks lopsided in favour of Vegas, but that's not quite how the series played out. Winnipeg had 53.3% of the shot attempts and 50.5% of the scoring chances, and they were outscored 14-10.

But consider the difference between Fleury and Hellebuyck. Fleury's .938 save percentage, compared to Hellebuyck's .906 save percentage is a



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • May 24, 2018

difference of .032. In Fleury's case, over 161 shots in the series, that difference equaled 5.15 goals. In Hellebuyck's case, that would mean 139 shots in the series and a difference of 4.45 goals.

Here are a couple of examples from the Vegas lineup to show how the results tilts in the Golden Knights' direction. Defenceman Luca Sbisa had a 42.8 CF% in the series, yet the Golden Knights outscored the Jets 5-1 at 5-on-5 with Sbisa on the ice.

Right winger Alex Tuch, who scored the first goal of Game Five, had a miserable 38.1 CF% in the series, yet Vegas outscored the Jets 4-1 with Tuch on the ice. Outshooting the opponent will tend towards better results, but it offers no guarantees.

When we're dealing with the Vegas Golden Knights, the only guarantee is that they made a lot of people look foolish, and they're headed to the Stanley Cup Final.

TSN.CA LOADED: 05.24.2018

1097365 Websites

TSN.CA / Canucks pleased with progress reports on Boeser & Pettersson injuries

Jeff Paterson

VANCOUVER – In Jim Benning's world, no news is good news when it comes to off-season reports on injured players. The Vancouver Canucks general manager says he usually only hears from his medical staff in the summer months if there have been setbacks to players on the mend. With budding stars Brock Boeser and Elias Pettersson both recovering from late-season injuries, Benning tells tsn1040.ca that it's his understanding both players are progressing as expected.

Boeser's season ended when he suffered a non-displaced fracture of his lower back late in a March 5th home game against the New York Islanders. The 21-year-old, who led the team with 29 goals and 55 points, also suffered a wrist injury in a February game in Tampa Bay. Boeser played through significant pain over the final month of his season before undergoing a non-surgical procedure in early April to help speed the wrist recovery.

"My understanding is the cast was taken off a week ago," Benning said in a Wednesday morning interview. "I haven't talk to Brock about it, but I believe the cast had to be on a month. The doctor that he went back to see in Minnesota is the Vikings hand specialist and that's the doctor that did Brock's surgery two years ago. We were able to get an appointment for him and we wanted to get him in there and have the doctor have a look at him. The worst-case scenario was that he would require another surgery, but he didn't need to do that."

Benning says he gets general updates on a regular basis from the team's medical and training personnel and all reports on Boeser have been positive. And until he hears otherwise, he's fully confident that the rookie sniper will make a full recovery from both injuries.

In the meantime, Benning says the Canucks are handling Boeser's situation like they would any other player who heads into the off-season with an injury.

"Rick Celebrini heads up that department for us and I don't know if he has daily conversations or every a few days with the player and the therapists working with the player in that region and they keep up with the day to day recovery and stay on top of that," Benning explains. "I only hear about it if a player has a new injury or something crops up along the way. That's when they let me know. If everything is going well, I don't

hear from those guys. They're just doing their work getting the player back where he needs to be."

Benning says if the healing continues, he doesn't expect Boeser to have to return to Vancouver at any point over the summer.

"We can monitor him remotely now until he shows up for camp," the general manager says. "I don't know what his schedule is right now. My understanding is he'll be one-hundred percent for training camp."

Benning says it's much the same for Elias Pettersson who is on the mend after suffering a broken left thumb at the world hockey championship in Denmark last week. Pettersson returned to Sweden to have the thumb surgically repaired and Benning says the Canucks are pleased with the progress he's making.

"Our medical staff took a look at the X-rays and the surgery he needed was a pretty straightforward surgery," he says. "They did it over there and everything went well. As far as any physical therapy is concerned, we'll be in constant contact with his therapists over there to make sure everything is on schedule."

The 19-year-old Swedish Hockey League scoring leader is expected to be in a cast for a month but should be able to resume summer workouts to prepare for next season. Benning says the Canucks are doing everything they can to sign last year's first round draft pick to an entry level contract but didn't want to discuss where the two sides were in the process.

Benning did reveal that it's uncertain whether Pettersson will make an appearance at the Canucks annual summer prospects camp slated for early July at Rogers Arena. He gave Canuck fans a glimpse of his potential at last year's event just weeks after being selected at the draft in Chicago, but Pettersson may not be back for an encore.

"We're just going through that right now and deciding who is going to be here and who isn't," Benning says. "We haven't decided that 100 per cent yet. If he's not here, it's because he's going to be back home training with his group getting ready for next season. This has nothing to do with the contract. He came to development camp last year and he may come in this year. We're in conversations with his agent to figure out what's best for his training so he shows up at camp ready to go."

Benning says he was pleased with the format of last year's prospects camp which was open to the public and expects this year's event to use the same blueprint. Full details are expected to be released by the end of June. Benning also says after modifications were made to accommodate the team's pre-season trip to China last September, he expects this year's main training camp to have a more traditional look and feel. Benning refused to speculate on where camp will be held.

CH-CH-CHANGES: There may still be changes coming to the Canucks coaching staff for next season. Benning was asked if Travis Green's entire staff would return intact next fall: "I don't want to comment on that. We're working on that right now. We're talking to Travis to figure out his staff. Once we get that figured out, we'll share that with everybody."

SET THEM FREE: Benning confirmed earlier reports that the Canucks had informed veteran Jussi Jokinen's agent that the team would not be offering him a contract for next season. The general manager would not comment on the team's plans for its other pending unrestricted free agents including Darren Archibald, Nic Dowd and Utica farmhands Patrick Wiercioch, Joe LaBate, Jayson Megna and Richard Bachman

ON THE ROAD: Benning also says it's too soon to know the full impact of Vancouver hosting the 2019 World Junior Championship next December and January. With the event taking over Rogers Arena, the Canucks will be forced out on the road prior to Christmas and again for 10 days after Christmas and into early January: "We're in the process of doing the scheduling for next season now. We'll be out of the building for that period of time, so we'll be on the road. The league does the schedule, we've instructed them about the dates we need to be out on the road and we'll let them figure that out for us. I haven't seen anything concrete yet, but I know the league is working on that now."



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • May 24, 2018

TSN.CA LOADED: 05.24.2018

1097366 Websites

TSN.CA / Off-Season Game Plan: Calgary Flames

Scott Cullen

The Calgary Flames missed the playoffs for the seventh time in the past nine seasons, and they have brought in a new coach to help turn the tide.

Off-Season Game Plan looks at a Flames team that has good talent at the top of the roster, but may be in line for another major deal or two to shake up the squad.

The first big change of the offseason was to bring in a new head coach, and Bill Peters comes from a Carolina team that had the best shot differentials in the league, but couldn't buy a save (or a goal, for that matter). If Peters can keep the Flames on the right side of the shot counts then they will have a chance to be in the playoff picture.

There is also a long-term consideration that goes into this summer, as the Flames currently have no picks in the first three rounds of the draft, a terrible situation for a team that didn't even make the playoffs. But, the Flames also have the wherewithal to acquire picks, if they wish, by moving out a proven player or two.

Generally, there should be enough talent here to compete for a playoff spot, but their goaltending situation was precarious last season and their depth wasn't effective enough when it mattered.

With a new coach and potentially a handful of new players, though, they could enter next season with elevated expectations.

### HOCKEY OPS/COACH

Brad Treiving/Bill Peters

### HEROES

Johnny Gaudreau – The 24-year-old winger had the best season of his career, putting up a career-best 84 points while generating a career-best 2.84 shots per game.

Sean Monahan – Despite playing through injuries that required post-season surgery, the 23-year-old centre tied a career-high with 31 goals and set a new career-best with 64 points.

Mark Giordano – Alongside Dougie Hamilton, Giordano anchored what may have been the best defence pairing in the league. Even without massive point totals, Giordano had a dominant season.

### ZEROES

Troy Brouwer – The downward trend of his career has accelerated and the veteran winger managed just six goals and 22 points last season, the worst production of his career.

Curtis Lazar – On one hand, it was fairly unreasonable to have significant expectations for Lazar, but the Flames thought enough of him to spend a second-round pick to acquire him from Ottawa and protected him in the expansion draft. So, two goals in 65 games was less than ideal.

Sam Bennett – Following a tough 2016-2017 season, Bennett didn't see his production rebound, managing just 11 goals and 26 points. The Flames were surely expecting more at this point from the fourth pick in the 2014 Draft.

Johnny Gaudreau	80	24	60	84	54.2
	1.2	101.1	58.2	19:25	\$6.75M

Sean Monahan	74	31	33	64	54.7
	1.9	101.3	57.6	18:41	\$6.375M
Matthew Tkachuk	68	24	25	49	57.3
	5.5	97.5	45.2	17:15	\$925K
Mikael Backlund	82	14	31	45	56.2
	3.8	95.1	46.2	19:01	\$5.35M
Micheal Ferland	77	21	20	41	51.9
	-2.0	101.6	56.1	15:01	\$1.75M
Sam Bennett	82	11	15	26	52.6
	-1.3	97.4	59.2	14:24	\$1.95M
Michael Frolik	70	10	15	25	56.9
	4.1	94.9	47.7	16:55	\$4.3M
Troy Brouwer	76	6	16	22	50.8
	-3.7	98.5	41.6	13:56	\$4.5M
Curtis Lazar	65	2	10	12	51.6
	-3.4	96.9	50.7	9:51	\$950K
Mark Jankowski	72	17	8	25	51.7
	-2.5	98.3	61.6	13:21	\$925K RFA
Nick Shore	64	5	14	19	53.4
	3.2	98.2	38.9	14:10	\$925K RFA
Chris Stewart	54	10	6	16	42.4
	-6.7	100.2	51.7	10:45	\$1.15M UFA
Garnet Hathaway	59	4	9	13	53.5
	-0.5	99.9	54.2	11:32	\$775K RFA
Matt Stajan	68	4	8	12	52.2
	-1.4	101.6	39.8	10:56	\$3.125M UFA
Kris Versteeg	24	3	5	8	47.6
	-5.5	99.7	47.0	13:11	\$950K UFA
Tanner Glass	16	0	0	0	51.0
	-2.5	93.4	44.7	9:23	\$650K UFA

He's small, but Johnny Gaudreau has established that it doesn't hold him back at the highest level. He's quick, elusive and creative, and his 287 points over the past four seasons ranks 13th in the league. He's the star that drives the Flames attack.

It's one thing that Sean Monahan put up 31 goals and 64 points, another fine offensive season that fits with that he's done in his career, but he also required four surgeries (wrist, groin, hips x 2) after the season. He's been a solid complement to Gaudreau on the top line, and now it's time for the Flames to find a suitable right winger to really make this line click.

In two NHL seasons, Matthew Tkachuk has established that he's both an impressive productive two-way winger, but he's also one of the most aggravating players to play against. He took a step forward offensively in his second season, and he's only 20-years-old, so Tkachuk should continue to get better.

Mikael Backlund is a top-notch two-way centre.

He probably doesn't get the requisite amount of public recognition, because he's never scored more than 53 points in a season, but Mikael Backlund is one of the top two-way centres in the game. He starts more of his shifts in the defensive zone, faces top competition, and consistently generates the best shot differentials – over the past five seasons, only eight forwards have a better relative Corsi than Backlund among those that have played at least 3,000 5-on-5 minutes.

Micheal Ferland has taken major steps forward and had a career-best 21 goals and 41 points last season, but the Flames may be better off with a more skilled option alongside Gaudreau and Monahan, leaving Ferland to still have a positive impact on the third line, where his physical presence and heavy shot can provide value.



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • May 24, 2018

A feisty player who has good skills, Sam Bennett has not been able to put his game together at the NHL level, effectively regressing since his rookie season. He's still only 21, so maybe patience is going to be rewarded at some point, but after back-to-back down seasons, it's hard to be anything more than cautiously optimistic about Bennett's future (and it's certainly possible to feel that it could be worse).

Dreger Café: Gaudreau looking to push it to another level next season

Johnny Gaudreau is the latest to stop by the Dreger Café where he discusses what he's looking forward to most about getting the chance to play under Bill Peters next season, how he plans to do more next year to get the Flames back into the playoffs, why consistency against division rivals is key to Calgary's success in 2018-19, and much more.

In a season with miserable percentages (6.0 SH%, 94.9 PDO), Michael Frolik saw his point production drop from 44 to 25, year-over-year, but he's still a solid contributor to the Flames' great two-way line with Backlund and Tkachuk.

A 32-year-old winger who seems to have been passed by the faster game, Troy Brouwer still has two years left on his deal. He could be bought out, but may still be kept in a fourth-line role.

Curtis Lazar has good speed, but hasn't been able to fulfill his potential at the NHL level, managing 15 goals in 245 career games. He's probably fighting for an NHL job at this point, but is still under contract for next season.

2012 first-round pick Mark Jankowski was on a relatively slow development plan, playing four years at Providence College plus a year in the AHL, before getting called up early last season. He did score 17 goals in 72 games, which is a good start, but the question is whether he's capable of handling more responsibility, or with Monahan and Backlund already in-house, whether Jankowski will even get that opportunity.

Picked up from Ottawa after starting his career in L.A., Nick Shore has been an intriguing fourth-line centre. He does typically post solid possession numbers, with very little offence (15 goals in 236 career games), but he's an entirely reasonable option to fill that spot with the Flames.

An agitator who plays a physical game, Garnet Hathaway played a career-high 59 games last season and the 26-year-old could very well hold down a regular job, but the 26-year-old is probably still at the stage of his career where he's battling for a roster spot.

The one major need for the Flames is to find a right winger to play with Gaudreau and Monahan on the top line. Via free agency, maybe James Neal would fit that spot; that would also likely be an expensive proposition, but the Flames do have cap space. It's possible, too, that left wing prospect Andrew Mangiapane warrants a look in a scoring role because he had 46 points in 39 AHL games.

Otherwise, Calgary could venture into the trade market. The Flames don't have a pick in the first three rounds of this year's draft, so they can't very well offer up picks to acquire talent, but if they use some of their defensive depth, they could possibly find a suitable winger, and maybe even recoup a pick or two.

Teams like Detroit (7), N.Y. Rangers (7) and Montreal (6) have excess picks in the first three rounds of this year's draft, so those might be suitable teams to target. Montreal, with four second-round picks, could offer a young winger and a couple of picks and that might reasonably address needs for both clubs.

Dougie Hamilton	82	17	27	44	57.6
	6.7	98.7	53.0	21:32	\$5.75M
Mark Giordano	82	13	25	38	57.7
	6.7	98.6	53.5	24:47	\$6.75M
T.J. Brodie	73	4	28	32	50.7
	-3.9	99.1	50.0	23:41	\$4.65M

Travis Hamonic	74	1	10	11	51.4
	-3.3	98.9	50.0	20:42	\$3.857M
Michael Stone	82	3	7	10	49.7
	-5.4	98.1	51.0	16:45	\$3.5M
Brett Kulak	71	2	6	8	52.3
	-2.3	98.6	51.6	12:59	\$650K RFA
Matt Bartkowski	18	0	3	3	46.2
	-7.3	98.1	52.5	13:21	\$660K UFA

A rare talent, 24-year-old Dougie Hamilton is a smooth-skating, 6-foot-6, right-shot rearguard who tied for the lead among defencemen with 17 goals last season. Paired with Mark Giordano, Hamilton was part of what may have been the league's best defensive pairing, and was the more offensive component of the duo, generating a career-high 3.29 shots per game. He has also missed just one game in three seasons since arriving in Calgary.

Dougie Hamilton and Mark Giordano may be the league's top defence pairing.

There are occasionally rumours about Hamilton being available in trade, and presumably it's because he would bring a massive return, and for a team missing its first three picks in the draft, Hamilton would offer some hope of recouping some picks as well as adding additional young talent. That would be some blockbuster deal if it ever came to pass.

34-year-old captain Mark Giordano has been a steadying influence in Calgary, and even though last season's total of 38 points counted as his fewest in a full season since 2011-2012, Giordano remained a two-way force and he played more than 23 minutes per game for the eighth consecutive season. There may come a time when age catches up to Giordano, and he is under contract for four more seasons, but he's still really effective.

A puck-moving defenceman who surpassed 30 points for the fifth straight season, T.J. Brodie struggled with new partner Travis Hamonic, and that could make Brodie an expendable piece on the Calgary blueline. For one thing, the Flames have some prospects looking to push for a spot and Brodie, a 27-year-old on a very reasonable contract for two more seasons, would likely yield a decent return.

His first season in Calgary did not go well, and that's troubling since his last season with the Islanders was no prize either, but Travis Hamonic seems likely to get another shot for redemption under a new coach. At the very least, it would seem that the Flames have to try Hamonic with a different partner because the Brodie-Hamonic pairing was a problem area for the Flames.

The Flames obviously have some affinity for Michael Stone, but he's now an overpaid third-pair defenceman, making \$3.5-million against the cap while playing less than 17 minutes per game last season. He's still under contract for two more years and his numbers on the third pair didn't suggest that he should be getting more responsibility.

24-year-old Brett Kulak made it as an NHL regular last season, playing in 71 games, but he also played 13 minutes per game, so he's still on the roster bubble, especially with some quality prospects on the way.

Two of those prospects may be ready for NHL jobs next season. 21-year-old Rasmus Andersson has put in two strong developmental seasons in the AHL and is due for a long look next season. 2017 first-round pick Juuso Valimäki had an outstanding season in the WHL, and he may be talented enough to make the jump. Those would be two significant, and cost-effective, additions.

Mike Smith	55	25	22	6	.916
	.923	\$4.25M			
David Rittich	21	8	6	3	.904
	.911	\$725K	RFA		



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • May 24, 2018

Jon Gillies	11	3	5	1	.896
.886	\$725K	RFA			

Before suffering a groin injury, Mike Smith was having one of the best seasons of his career, posting a .921 save percentage in 47 games through mid-February. Once he got hurt, though, the Flames' season fell apart and Smith wasn't the same when he came back from injury, managing a .880 save percentage in eight starts.

Mike Smith was great for the Flames, until he got hurt, then the season went downhill.

The 36-year-old is heading into the final year of his deal, and is probably set to be the starter next season. Given what happened last season, though, there will be pressure on the backup to be better.

25-year-old David Rittich emerged as the top backup for the Flames, but he ran hot and cold. He could very well be a bona fide backup, but there were some bumps in the road during his rookie season.

The expectation for some time has been that 24-year-old Jon Gillies would be the goaltender of the future for the Flames, and he's been solid in the American Hockey League. He got into 11 games with the Flames last season, and had some trouble, but he's still in competition with Rittich for that spot. Calgary needs one of them to show that they can play at an NHL level.

Juuso Valimaki	D	43	14	31	45
+15	Tri-City (WHL)				
Adam Fox	D	29	6	22	28
+3	Harvard (ECAC)				
Tyler Parsons	G	28			
.902	Kansas City (ECHL)				
Dillon Dube	C	53	38	46	84
+17	Kelowna (WHL)				
Rasmus Andersson	D	56	9	30	39
+20	Stockton (AHL)				
Oliver Kyllington	D	62	7	28	35
-12	Stockton (AHL)				
Jon Gillies	G	39			
.917	Stockton (AHL)				
Andrew Mangiapane	LW	39	21	25	46
+17	Stockton (AHL)				
Morgan Klimchuk	LW	62	19	21	40
+1	Stockton (AHL)				
Matthew Phillips	C	71	48	64	112
+20	Victoria (WHL)				
Glenn Gawdin	C	67	56	69	125
+61	Swift Current (WHL)				
Brandon Hickey	D	35	6	8	14
-5	Boston University (HE)				
Adam Ruzicka	C	63	36	36	72
+21	Sarnia (OHL)				
Spencer Foo	RW	62	20	19	39
+6	Stockton (AHL)				
Hunter Shinkaruk	LW	63	17	15	32
+3	Stockton (AHL)				

### DRAFT

No first-round pick

FREE AGENCY

The Flames have approximately \$62.5M committed to the 2018-2019 salary cap for 15 players.

### NEEDS

First-line right winger, depth wingers and defence

### WHAT I SAID THE FLAMES NEEDED LAST YEAR

One top-nine forward, one top-four defenceman, two more defencemen, two goaltenders

### THEY ADDED

Travis Hamonic, Brett Kulak, Mike Smith, Eddie Lack

### TRADE MARKET

Sam Bennett, Curtis Lazar, T.J. Brodie, Dougie Hamilton, Rasmus Andersson

Johnny Gaudreau	Sean Monahan	James Neal*
Matthew Tkachuk	Mikael Backlund	Michael Frolik
Sam Bennett	Mark Jankowski	Micheal Ferland
Garnet Hathaway	Nick Shore	Troy Brouwer
Andrew Mangiapane	Dillon Dube	Curtis Lazar
Morgan Klimchuk	Glenn Gawdin	Spencer Foo
Mark Giordano	Dougie Hamilton	Mike Smith
Rasmus Andersson	Travis Hamonic	David Rittich
Brett Kulak	Michael Stone	Jon Gillies
Juuso Valimaki	Justin Falk*	
Oliver Kyllington	Josh Healey	

TSN.CA LOADED: 05.24.2018

1097367 Websites

USA TODAY / Capitals player Devante Smith-Pelly blocks Lightning shot in Game 7 with his neck

Kevin Allen, USA TODAY Sports Published 8:49 p.m. ET May 23, 2018 | Updated 1:05 a.m. ET May 24, 2018

TAMPA — Devante Smith-Pelly, a key Washington Capitals role player, had to leave during the first period of Game 7 against the Lightning after being struck on the neck by Tampa Bay defenseman Ryan McDonagh's slap shot.

Smith-Pelly was sprawled on his belly on the ice when the puck struck him on the side of his neck with just over 13 minutes remaining. Play was immediately stopped and the wobbly Smith-Pelly needed to be helped from the ice. The 25-year-old would return to the bench with about seven minutes left in the period.

With four goals in the playoffs, the rugged Smith-Pelly has been one of the surprise heroes for Washington during the playoffs. He plays a physical game and has been among Washington's big hitters and crucial penalty killers.

Smith-Pelly gets hit by McDonagh's shot, ouch  
pic.twitter.com/TKzdeOhHJ2

— Shayna (@hayyyshayyy) May 24, 2018



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

## NEWS CLIPPINGS • May 24, 2018

The Capitals took an early 1-0 lead in the game on a goal by Alex Ovechkin en route to a 4-0 victory.

Smith-Pelly would leave the Capitals bench again later in the game. It was unclear exactly what his status was, but reporters on the scene quoted Capitals coach Barry Trotz as saying he is "fine" and that the move was "precautionary."

USA TODAY LOADED: 05.24.2018

1097368 Websites

USA TODAY / Capitals defeat Lightning in Game 7 to reach first Stanley Cup Final since 1998

Kevin Allen, USA TODAY Sports Published 10:44 p.m. ET May 23, 2018 | Updated 12:35 a.m. ET May 24, 2018

TAMPA — Last fall, defenseman Matt Niskanen could foresee unprecedented success for this Washington Capitals team for the oddest of reasons.

"I said to my wife, 'On paper, we're not as good this year, but watch, this will be the year we do something,'" he recalled. "Just the way it works. Hockey is a funny sport."

The Capitals had both tears and laughter Wednesday night when they downed the Tampa Bay Lightning 4-0 in Game 7 of the Eastern Conference final to earn the franchise's first trip to the Stanley Cup Final since 1998.

Washington will face the Vegas Golden Knights in an unlikely best-of-seven Stanley Cup Final starting Monday in Las Vegas.

The Capitals are trying to win their first Stanley Cup in their 44-year history and the Golden Knights have qualified for the Final in their first NHL season.

"I'm happy for the fans because they've been through some tough times with us and teams of the past," Washington winger T.J. Oshie said.

Nobody on the Capitals was happier than captain Alex Ovechkin, 32, who had never been beyond the second round of the playoffs before this season. He has often been blamed for the Capitals' poor playoff performances in recent years.

But Washington's playoff misery started long before Ovechkin's arrival in 2005. Before downing the Lightning, the Capitals were 4-11 in Game 7s. In their one Stanley Cup Final appearance 20 years ago, they were swept by the Detroit Red Wings.

When he was interviewed on television, immediately after beating the Lightning, Ovechkin said he was having trouble sorting through his emotions.

But then he put everything into perspective by saying: "Finally."

"I think everybody is happy, but we still have unfinished (business)," Ovechkin said. "I'm emotional. I think we've been waiting for this moment for a long time."

Ovechkin, the NHL's most dangerous scorer in this era, is considered to be among the greatest players never to have won a Stanley Cup.

Andre Burakovsky, born in Austria and raised in Sweden, was Washington's offensive hero with a pair of goals, but it was Ovechkin who launched the win by scoring the first goal of the game just 1:02 in. He also led his team with five hits in Game 7.

With 12 goals, 10 assists and 66 hits, Ovechkin has been beastly in the postseason. He is one of the top Conn Smythe Trophy candidates going into the Final.

Just by the way Ovechkin has talked about this team, it was clear that he believed the Capitals had the right mix to be successful even though general manager Brian MacLellan made several changes last summer to ease salary cap concerns. The Capitals were supposed to take a half-step back, but ended up taking a step forward in terms of being ready for the playoffs.

Coach Barry Trotz, whose contract expires at the completion of the season, has been vocal about how much he believed in this team. He apparently told his players that again before Game 7.

"When a coach comes in without a cheat sheet in his hand and speaks from the heart and you see in his eyes that he believes what he's saying it gives you a lift," Oshie said. "It shows you he's all in, and the only thing left is for us to do our job. We did that."

The hallmark of this Capitals team is their ability to dig deep when they need to the most. They trailed 3-2 in this series, and then won Games 6 and 7 on shutouts by Braden Holtby. He has gone more than 157 minutes without giving up a goal.

"Holtby was fantastic back there," Oshie said. "Back to back shutouts against a team like that on this stage is special."

This team has been special, according to the Capitals. "We have a good mix of everything. We have some old players with experience," Washington center Nicklas Backstrom said. "We've got some new, young players, which is great. I feel like everyone has been stepping up during the playoffs. We were doing all right during the regular season, but I feel like we've been playing even better as a team in the playoffs."

He shared a moment with Ovechkin as the team celebrated on the ice.

this amazing moment... [pic.twitter.com/a9xOc6QV86](https://pic.twitter.com/a9xOc6QV86)

— NBC Sports Capitals (@NBCSCapitals) May 24, 2018

"After it was done, I felt like you don't even have to say so much," Backstrom said. "You just have to look at each other. We've been waiting a long time for this. Now we're in the finals and we're going to do everything we can to do something special here for us, for the team and for the city."

USA TODAY LOADED: 05.24.2018

1097369 Websites

USA TODAY / Capitals' Tom Wilson goes berserk, then punches off Lightning player's helmet in Game 7 fight

Kevin Allen, USA TODAY Sports Published 9:23 p.m. ET May 23, 2018 | Updated 10:03 p.m. ET May 23, 2018

TAMPA — Washington Capitals tough guy Tom Wilson lost his temper to the point that he seemed to forget that he was playing in a Game 7 with a Stanley Cup Final berth on the line.

After Lightning goalie Andrei Vasilevskiy made a doorstep save on Alex Ovechkin in the first period of the final game of the Eastern Conference final, Tampa Bay defenseman Braydon Coburn, during his effort to push away Evgeny Kuznetsov, ripped off Kuznetsov's jersey.

Defending his teammate, Wilson went after Coburn. But after a linesman stepped up to prevent a fight, Wilson went berserk. He threw around the linesman, attempting to get free. An added penalty could have, or should



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • May 24, 2018

have, been called. He seemed out of control. While Wilson was flailing about, Coburn stood calmly on the ice.

They both went to the penalty box for two minutes for unsportsmanlike conduct at 12:59.

Wilson then came out ready to scrap and Coburn obliged. Wilson landed the hardest punch -- and knocked off Coburn's helmet in the process. Both received fighting majors at 15:07.

Tom Wilson punch Braydon Coburn's helmet off  
[pic.twitter.com/QZ2y9TZwqB](https://pic.twitter.com/QZ2y9TZwqB)

— Ian Oland (@ianoland) May 24, 2018

But what was lost in the scene was that the Capitals, with a 1-0 advantage, had possession of the puck in the offensive zone when the play had to be stopped to deal with the fight.

Given this is a winner-take-all game to reach the Stanley Cup Final, it would have been customary to pick another time to settle a score. But the enraged Wilson seemed oblivious to the situation. It was clear he wanted to fight immediately.

USA TODAY LOADED: 05.24.2018

1097370 Websites

USA TODAY / Alex Ovechkin finally has the right mix that could take Capitals to Stanley Cup Final

Kevin Allen, USA TODAY Sports Published 6:59 a.m. ET May 23, 2018 | Updated 1:06 p.m. ET May 23, 2018

Alex Ovechkin's Washington teammates may not be counting on him to be the difference in Wednesday's Game 7 of the NHL's Eastern Conference final against the Lightning as much as he is counting on them.

The one noticeable difference between today's Capitals and past Capitals teams is that Ovechkin seems to believe the mix is finally right.

"(This Game 7) is probably biggest game in my life, this team, organization probably. ... We still haven't reached our goal. (Wednesday) is going to be a huge step forward," Ovechkin told reporters on Tuesday.

Those teams of the past arguably boasted more talent, but this one seems to have the swagger, confidence and urgency that past teams lacked.

While Ovechkin is still the team's face and most important player, the Capitals' identity has been broadened beyond his ability.

Look at the last game when Ovechkin had no points and the Capitals recorded a 3-0 win to stay alive. The story in that game is Capitals out-hit the Lightning by a 2-1 margin. Their physical play, and Ovechkin is an important contributor to that, was a critical aspect of the game plan.

The advantage of hitting isn't intimidation. It's about creating energy and wearing down the opposition. Tom Wilson leads all playoff competitors with 67 hits. Devante Smith-Pelly has 66, Ovechkin 61 and Brooks Orpik 59. Even T.J. Oshie has 50 hits.

While Ovechkin's strong offensive contributions (21 points in 18 games) have received considerable attention, his center Evgeny Kuznetsov has been even more productive. Kuznetsov leads all playoff scorers with 23 points.

And no one is more important to Washington's success than defenseman John Carlson, who plays 26-plus minutes a night. He might log 28 minutes in Game 7 if it is close.

The Capitals have a power play clicking at 29.8%, plus goalie Braden Holtby with a 2.16 goals-against average and .919 save percentage, Nicklas Backstrom as one of the NHL's top playmakers, Oshie with a history of scoring important goals and Jay Beagle with a 63% faceoff percentage and a reputation as one of the NHL's best role players.

Lars Eller stepped up when Backstrom was out with an injury. Brett Connolly, Jakub Vrana and Chandler Stephenson have all made important plays during this Capitals' run. Everyone seems to have done something to contribute at the right time this season. Isn't that how Pittsburgh won the last two Stanley Cups?

That certainly wasn't what was happening to the Capitals in recent years when every playoff was marked by a disappointing exit.

Ovechkin has played like a Conn Smythe Trophy candidate in these playoffs. Maybe one reason why Ovechkin has raised his level is he senses this is one of his best chances to win a Cup. The Capitals can reach the Stanley Cup Final for the first time since 1998.

Today's Capitals seem to have more collective strength than Caps teams we've seen in the past. Everyone seems to understand and appreciate their roles. Ovechkin clearly sees that. If you listen to him talk, you can feel the respect he has for this group. He's been a quality leader. He has driven hard to the net, barreled over opponents, blocked shots and scored goals. Maybe he's inspired by how well his teammates are playing.

It's not all on him whether this team wins or loses Game 7. It never should have been anyway.

USA TODAY LOADED: 05.24.2018