



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • June 1, 2020

THE NEWS & OBSERVER

Hurricanes, Centennial Authority agree to extend PNC Arena lease for five years

By Chip Alexander

The Centennial Authority voted Thursday to extend the PNC Arena lease with the Carolina Hurricanes for five years, through July 1, 2029.

The authority, an appointed group representing the city, county and state that oversees the arena, approved a term sheet on the extension in a virtual meeting after an extended closed session. The motion passed by a 16-3 vote, with authority members Steve Stroud, Perry Safran and Bill Mullins in opposition. The Hurricanes approved the term sheet in April.

Provisions of the term sheet include:

- An agreement by the Hurricanes not to relocate the franchise during the current lease.
- The Hurricanes to receive lease termination rights on the lease as of June 30, 2024.
- A guarantee by the Hurricanes that their player payroll be above the midpoint of the NHL salary cap each year.
- An agreement the authority will pay 50 percent of the arena operating costs each year, up to \$3.885 million.
- A reduction of the rent for fiscal 2020 of \$1.78 million and no rent in following years.

"One of our goals was to get the Hurricanes to be in an average lease situation in the NHL," authority chairman Tom McCormick said in an interview Thursday. "And they clearly had one of the worst leases in the league. Their cost-to-occupy and so forth were higher than they should be."

Possible expansion of PNC Arena?

Don Waddell, Hurricanes president and general manager, noted the two sides had been discussing a new extension for more than a year; however, the past few months and the sudden challenges of the coronavirus pandemic caused some delays and readjustments.

"It has been a very professional, ongoing (process) and the end result is something I think we're both very excited about," Waddell said in a media briefing Thursday at PNC Arena.

Waddell said there were multiple pluses for the Hurricanes in the extension, financially and otherwise.

"We're talking with the Centennial Authority about the expansion of this building and property around the building," Waddell said. "It gives us an avenue to pursue that and also potentially look at other sites to determine what's the best place for this building to be for the next 25 years."

There is language in the profit-sharing section of the term sheet that mentions "if the parties reach a long-term agreement (major renovation or new arena)." It also makes a reference to Canes majority owner Tom Dundon's team purchase agreement and how money would be repaid by Dundon should there be a transfer in the majority ownership.

"It's great to get to the point where we are right now but we do have a long way to go," McCormick said. "We've got to take this term sheet and we've got to convert that into an actual contract lease amendment. It's the first step of doing that."

"The authority believes the Hurricanes are very important to the community. That's why we worked really hard to keep them here. ... I think it's a fair deal for the Hurricanes and a fair deal for the community."

Coronavirus pandemic slows term sheet approval

McCormick would not characterize the objections to the term sheet, saying, "I think it's like anything else in life now, people are concerned about COVID-19 and what that does with our lives going forward. I think it was based on that more than anything else."

The authority serves as the arena landlord while the arena is operated and managed by Gale Force Sports and Entertainment, the Canes' umbrella company. N.C. State shares the arena with the Canes, playing its men's basketball games and holding commencement exercises in the building opened in 1999.

The quick spread of the coronavirus resulted in the suspension of the NHL regular season on March 12 and the cancellation of the Canes' last eight home games. Concerts and other events at the arena were canceled or postponed.

McCormick said the term sheet likely would have been approved in April had the group not had to cancel a meeting because of COVID-19 concerns.

Authority asks for possible renovation options

The authority had asked architects Ratio and HOK to recommend possible renovation options but will reconsider



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • June 1, 2020

any moves until it has a better sense of the economy. The authority had been promised \$9 million per year in hotel and restaurant tax revenue through 2034.

The term sheet states that is contingent on the authority receiving the \$9 million per year.

"We want to focus on a long-term plan," Dundon said Thursday. "That's why this was important. It gave everybody the time and the breathing room to focus on the long term."

The authority hired a consultant from CAA Icon, Dan Barrett, to represent it in the negotiations. Barrett asked for, and received access to the Hurricanes' finances for assessment and compared it to other NHL leases.

"People always say 'we know they're losing money' or 'we know they're making money' but you don't know until you see," McCormick said. "Dan did a great job for us."

Carolina captain Jordan Staal says 'it's karma' that Canes could play the Rangers

By Chip Alexander

Jordan Staal once joked about leaving the New York Rangers out of NHL playoff plans if the season resumed. And now? Staal, captain of the Carolina Hurricanes, had to do a little back-tracking Wednesday in a media zoom call. Yes, he did tease brother Marc Staal, the veteran Rangers defenseman, during an NHL zoom call two weeks after the NHL suspended the season. Yes, his comments about playing out the season and playoff scenarios were along the lines of "screw the Rangers," who were out of playoff position when the long pause began March 12 because of the coronavirus pandemic.

"I guess I shouldn't have said that," Staal said, smiling. "That's karma, I guess."

The NHL's return to play plan has 24 teams in the mix. It also has the Canes and Rangers matched up in a best-of-five opening qualifying round, and Jordan Staal is well aware that Marc Staal and the Rangers won all four games they've played against each other this season.

"Yeah, we've texted a few times here and there," Staal said Wednesday. "They're excited obviously about being part of the playoffs. It's a team that struggled with, so it's a great challenge for us, jumping right into it. Hopefully we can do our best to find a way to win that and we'll be feeling good."

"It'll be fun. I haven't played against a brother in the playoffs in a while. I know my parents hate it but I think we're going to enjoy it and have some fun with it. But it is what it is. If that's the way we've got to do it, that's hockey."

Staal just wants to play, as do his teammates. His oldest brother, Eric, also will be involved with the Minnesota Wild also involved in a Western Conference qualifying round against the Vancouver Canucks.

The authority last met in person as a group on March 13, a special meeting to discuss the proposed term sheet in closed session. Its next scheduled meeting, on April 2, was canceled.

Later in April, the authority's building and construction committee met by phone and cut its capital project budget for the next fiscal year by \$2.6 million because of the lack of events in the building and expected decrease in tax funding.

Under the arena lease arrangement with Gale Force, the Centennial Authority was to receive additional rent should Gale Force top a \$60 million threshold. Under the new agreement the Canes no longer would pay additional rent.

"What we did today, to quote (Winston) Churchill, this is just the end of the beginning," McCormick said. "We've got a long way to go here. We've got to take this term sheet and reduce it to actual lease agreement contract language."

That last playoff matchup against a brother, Staal vs. Staal? It was 2009 and Jordan Staal a member of the Pittsburgh Penguins while Eric was the Canes' star center and later the captain. The Pens swept the Eastern Conference Finals and won the Stanley Cup.

But these are unprecedented times. The pandemic presents an everyday health-and-safety danger, something that must be dealt with in any NHL return to play plan. As NHL commissioner Gary Bettman said Tuesday, there will be testing and more testing, with the players being kept more or less in a "bubble" once at the playing site.

The NHL plans to use two "hub" cities, each hosting 12 teams. The top four teams in each conference will have a bye, competing against each other in a round-robin series while the other 16 face off in qualifying rounds to determine the 16-team Stanley Cup playoff bracket.

"It's going to be an unfortunate challenge, I guess, to be away from the families and all that other stuff that's going to come along with it," Staal said. "Obviously it's a different time. If we're going to want to play this game this is the way we're going to have to do it. Guys have to make some sacrifices and guys are willing to do it and ready to play."

Don Waddell, the Canes' president and general manager, said Wednesday that he would have preferred playing some regular-season games to resume the season, then the playoffs. That won't be the case, although Waddell said he anticipates the teams having a training camp of 17 to 20 days in Raleigh, then couple of exhibition games once at the hub sites as warmups.

No dates have been set for the start of training camps or start of game play. There's also the matter of having the NHL Players Association approve each of the phases' protocols and plans — all the news Tuesday came from Bettman and the NHL.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • June 1, 2020

Waddell said Wednesday that the Canes could be back at full strength, depending on the start of play. Defenseman Brett Pesce, who underwent shoulder surgery March 5, could be close to returning for the games, he said. Defensemen Dougie Hamilton and Sami Vatanen and goalie James Reimer all have recovered from their injuries and are ready to play.

The Canes ended a nine-year playoff drought in 2018-19, claiming a wild-card playoff spot and reaching the Eastern Conference finals before losing to the Boston Bruins. They again were in the first wild-card position when the season stopped March 12, with games-in-hand on most teams in the Eastern Conference.

"We all want to play hockey, we all want to finish this season," Waddell said.

Carolina Hurricanes' new lease about what's outside PNC Arena as much as what's inside

BY LUKE DECOCK

The real commodity brokered in Thursday's agreement between the Carolina Hurricanes and the PNC Arena authority to extend their lease through 2029 wasn't money, although there was plenty of that at stake.

It was time.

This buys five more years of peace. Five more years without Tom Dundon being able to threaten to move the team. Five more years to figure out the future of PNC, whether that's upgrading the 20-year-old arena and developing the open space around it — or looking back toward downtown.

In addition to financial support for the Hurricanes worth about \$6 million per season, the term sheet the Centennial Authority approved Thursday by a 16-3 vote includes new penalty provisions should Dundon try to move the team — they were essentially lacking from the current lease — and a "good faith" commitment to explore either a major renovation of PNC or a new arena as 2029 approaches.

The latter remains appealing — and expensive. The immediate challenge is making a 20-year-old building look new again. And if it is indeed too expensive to build a new arena downtown, the long-term challenge becomes bringing downtown — or at least something like it — to PNC.

"The long-term goal is to do the development around the arena," Dundon said. "Or it gives us time to work on something for the long term, whatever that is."

The development of the land around the arena isn't mentioned in the term sheet, but it's the key to this deal. It's the key to the arena's future.

"It's something we've talked about quite a bit and Tom Dundon is interested in doing," Centennial Authority chairman Tom McCormick said Thursday.

The NHL intends to play the 2020-21 season in its entirety and Bettman said the season could begin as late as early January. The Canes are scheduled to host a Stadium Series outdoor game on Feb. 21, 2021, and Waddell said Wednesday that nothing has happened to affect the playing of the game at Carter-Finley Stadium.

"We're moving forward right now that it's going to happen," he said. "Until someone tells us differently, we're going to continue to work to make sure we put this things together and showcase Raleigh and the Triangle area as best we can."

The arena has sat by itself, alone, isolated, for too long. People come by car and leave by car; a commuter arena. That's fine for tailgating, but in an era when urban arenas create a pre- and post-game community around them, PNC is almost completely lacking in eating and dining options.

It doesn't take much imagination to imagine what the plaza between PNC and Carter-Finley Stadium would look like as an outdoor mall full of bars and restaurants. There's enough space on the property for hotels, a second sheet of ice, even mixed-use development that could potentially include office space and apartments.

The problem is, and has always been, the numbers painted on each parking spot in the 80 acres the Centennial Authority controls to the west and north of the arena, which include thousands of assigned (and coveted) parking spots for N.C. State football. That's the hurdle that's going to have to be cleared for this to work.

In the traditional football-donor model, those assigned parking spots have extraordinary value, especially at a school with a tailgating culture as strong as N.C. State's. Over the years, N.C. State has gone as far as stationing an athletic department employee in Centennial Authority meetings to immediately voice objection to any discussion that might impact a single parking spot. (That did not, however, stop the university from plowing under hundreds of spots to build a new indoor practice facility in 2015.)

But since taking over as athletic director last year, Boo Corrigan has expressed a willingness to at least explore the conversion of some parking spots into other uses, especially if such development might benefit N.C. State by adding amenities like hotels, bars and restaurants to enhance the gameday experience for both football and basketball.

"I think you have to look at everything associated with it: Parking, crowd sizes, the introduction of ridesharing, all of those things," Corrigan said. "Clearly, tailgating means a lot to our fans. The event of a football game is a different kind of



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • June 1, 2020

event than going to a basketball game. But a lot of times, in that side of it, it's ever evolving. To say you felt some way 20 years ago or 10 years ago, whatever it is, you have to constantly be looking at it and talking to our fans and our partners."

If Corrigan is open to replacing some surface football parking with decks and can sell that unpopular option to fans — especially those who might not be as tailgating-focused — the possibilities become endless.

There are other areas on the surrounding property that could potentially be developed without any impact to parking, but have environmental issues. One has contaminated soil, another abuts a wetland. That makes development more complicated, but not impossible.

The parking lots are the key. Finding a way to turn some of that land into an entertainment district, without negatively altering the N.C. State football experience, is the path forward for PNC and all of its tenants. There's a nine-year window now to figure it out.

Canes, Rangers to play for shot at the playoffs. What we know about NHL's return to play

BY CHIP ALEXANDER

NHL commissioner Gary Bettman used the word "complicated" Tuesday while explaining the details of the league's format with 24 teams returning to play and resumption of the 2019-20 season.

There are a lot of moving parts and numerous decisions still to be made: Starting dates, hub cities, lengths of playoff series among them. That's to be expected as the NHL grapples with how best to get back onto the ice — safely, carefully and expediently — during a global coronavirus pandemic.

One thing Hurricanes fans should know: Carolina, which opposed the 24-team format, will face the New York Rangers in a best-of-five qualifying round. The Rangers won all four games in the regular-season series.

"Obviously these are extraordinary and unprecedented times," Bettman said. "Any plan for the resumption of play by definition cannot be perfect. "

Bettman said he believed the plan, which he called a "step back toward normalcy," would produce competitive playoffs and worthy Stanley Cup champion. There could be hockey games, he said, by late July although with no fans at the games.

Here's what else we know after Bettman's announcement:

- The top four seeds in the Eastern and Western Conferences will compete in a round-robin series to set their seeding for the opening round of the playoffs.
- Sixteen teams, seeded by their point percentage in the regular season, will go through best-of-five qualifying rounds to set the Stanley Cup playoff field. The Canes (38-25-5), as the sixth seed in the East, drew the No. 11 Rangers (37-28-5).

In the Eastern Conference, the top four seeds are the Boston Bruins, Tampa Bay Lightning, Washington Capitals and Philadelphia Flyers. The other Eastern qualifying rounds will have: Pittsburgh-Montreal, New York Islanders-Florida and Toronto-Columbus.

In the West, the top four teams are the 2019 Stanley Cup champion St. Louis Blues, Colorado, Vegas and Dallas. The qualifying rounds: Edmonton-Chicago, Nashville-Arizona, Vancouver-Minnesota and Calgary-Winnipeg.

- The conference finals and Stanley Cup Final will be decided in a traditional best-of-seven series, but the length of the first and second rounds of the playoffs has yet to be determined.
- Two hub cities will host the games and Raleigh is not in the mix. Bettman named Chicago, Columbus, Dallas, Edmonton, Las Vegas, Los Angeles, Minneapolis-St. Paul, Pittsburgh, Toronto and Vancouver as the 10 candidates as host cities. One complicating factor, for everything, is a time frame. No dates have been set for the NHL draft, the start of Phase 2 and small groups of players going through voluntary workouts, the start of team training camps and the first actual hockey games. The best guess by the league is the training camps could begin by mid- to late-July.

"We anticipate playing over the summer and into the fall," Bettman said, noting the 2020-21 season could begin as late as early January 2021.

Bettman said the qualifying rounds and first two rounds of the playoffs could be played in about a month. The plan, he added, was for the 2020-21 season to played in its entirety.

The NHL draft lottery, which has been set for June 26, could have two phases. If the top three spots in the lottery are won by three of the seven teams not in the 24-team format, there will be no second phase. If a spot is claimed by one of the eight teams losing out in the qualifying rounds, or a "placeholder" team, there would be a second phase. The NHL draft will be held after the playoffs, at a date to be determined.

Bettman stressed that "lots of testing and testing" will be needed for the players, coaches and staffs during the pandemic. The players will be tested each day once competition begins and results known before they leave their hotel rooms the next day -- Bettman estimated 25,000 to 30,000 tests could be needed, costing millions of dollars. NHL deputy commissioner Bill Daly said one positive test for COVID-19 would not "shut the whole process down" once



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • June 1, 2020

the qualifying rounds and playoffs begin while conceding there could not be an outbreak.

“The health and safety of our players, coaches, essential support staff and our communities are paramount,” Bettman said. “While nothing is without risk, ensuring health and safety has been central to all of our planning so far and will remain so.

“The reason we are doing this is because our fans have told us in overwhelming numbers that they want to complete the season if at all possible. And our players and our teams are clear that they want to play and bring the season to its rightful conclusion.”

CANES-RANGERS QUALIFYING ROUND

The matchup: The NHL announced that the Hurricanes and Rangers would face off in a best-of-five qualifying round, the winner advancing to the 16-team Stanley Cup playoffs. The site: Still to be determined. The NHL is considering 10 cities in picking two host sites.

The season series: The Rangers won all four games in the regular season, outscoring the Canes 17-9.

THE ATHLETIC

Bag of Jerks: The ‘playoffs,’ another defensive logjam, contracts

By Sara Civian

Hey, y’all. How are you doing?

Any Mad Libs introduction to this month’s Bag of Jerks talking about “unprecedented times” or (insert buzzword of choice here) feels incredibly tone-deaf to me. Our little niche feels so infinitesimal compared with everything going on in the world — and it is. But I also think this has become our weird little community over time, one that has kept me going through all this. And the monthly mailbag is sort of our time to check in on each other.

So here we are, and I hope you’re well. If you’re just catching up on hockey news, here we go:

- [The Hurricanes were one of two NHL teams to vote “no” on a 24-team playoff format.](#)
- The NHL announced the details of that format, [and here’s what it all means for the Canes.](#)
- [Investigating our burning questions about return to play.](#)

Hey Sara! Love your articles. Apologies in advance for the dumb question I’m about to ask, you can tell what I’ve been watching during quarantine because of it. If players on the Hurricanes and writers from *The Athletic* were to be on an episode of “Family Feud” against each other, which five players and writers would we see and which team would win? — Whitney G.

This is an amazing question, Whitney. Probably Top 10 since the Bag of Jerks was born. Has to be.

Team Hurricanes has to include Justin Williams and Andrei Svechnikov to fill the elder statesman and youth roles. Next, Ryan Dzingel and Jordan Martinook strike me as two who can think outside the box for creative answers and provide

some entertainment. Can you imagine them in the lightning rounds? Let’s get James Reimer in there, too. I just feel like he knows a lot of random stuff and has a quick wit to him.

Boom.

As for Team *Athletic*?

The people would demand [Down Goes Brown](#), and for all the right reasons. [Justin Bourne](#) is hip to the right combination of old-school and new-school mentality to make an impact. [Dom Luszczyszyn](#) would crush it for the millennials. [Craig Custance](#) is too creative not to make the cut. [Katie Strang](#) is too sharp.

Who would win? Fans like you and me.

Hey Sara, I’ve been an *Athletic* subscriber for a few months and always enjoy your coverage. My question is: What’s the story behind the Canes ditching the Checkers? The news stories implied some dissatisfaction on the part of the Canes, but I haven’t seen any details. Thanks. — Douglas S.

Thanks so much for your continued support, Douglas. The story is that the story isn’t over yet. There are so many moving, complex parts of this situation, and obviously COVID-19 has complicated all of it. It seems like we’ll get some clear-cut answers this week, though. Stay tuned.

Sara — It’s fun to be following the Canes again! I missed them, and I missed your reports about them. Say, is Peter Mrazek good to go? Thanks — Don B.

Hi, Don! Mrazek is good to go. So is Reimer.

Sara, even if Pesce isn’t yet ready to play, it appears the Canes now have a surplus of defensemen — who plays against the Rangers? Also, when the 2020-21 season starts, who are the defense pairings? — Bill B.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • June 1, 2020

Bill, here is my prediction with Pesce:

- Jacob Slavin – Dougie Hamilton
- Jake Gardiner – Brett Pesce
- Haydn Fleury – Joel Edmundson/Brady Skjei

Here's my prediction without:

- Jacob Slavin – Dougie Hamilton
- Sami Vatanen/Haydn Fleury -Brady Skjei
- Jake Gardiner – Trevor Van Riemsdyk/Joel Edmundson

Regardless, I think they'll call up both Jake Bean and Joey Keane. Maybe they'll see some play, but as you said, there is once again a logjam on aisle Canes. I can definitely see some sort of rotation implemented as the Canes have in the past, especially with the uncertainty surrounding new players Skjei and Vatanen.

There's also the fact that the Canes could sit Vatanen through the playoffs and get their conditional pick back. That would seem a little crazy if Hamilton wasn't definite and Pesce wasn't a "maybe," but you're potentially getting two top-four defensemen back and calling two up who could play in the NHL yesterday. It's a fair question.

OK, not my idea — stole it like all great ideas. Caps fans (ugh) talking about what game picture would go up on the marquee. They settled on Holtby blocking Tuck's shot in the Finals. What would the Canes' picture be? In-game — can't be Brind'Amour holding the Cup. Too easy. — John Z.

Great question, and thanks for eliminating the Rod Brind'Amour Cup picture because that's way too easy. How about his game-winner in Game 7 against the Sabres?

Lines? Just kidding, but where do you think the Canes should strengthen in the draft (whenever it happens)? — Matt M.

Matt, I promise I will never complain about tweeting the lines ever again after this. It's so hard to strengthen in net via draft, but I would like to see the Hurricanes take a chance on a goaltender. I will obviously go more in-depth about their options when everything is more clear.

Thank you for your great article featuring THE LINES. It's amazing to see our abundance of defenseman (these are not your father's Canes), but isn't the forecasting of lines futile? Doesn't it ultimately come down with this team to who RB'A thinks comes back in the best shape? — Bernie P.

Speaking of THE LINES, you're absolutely right. We're potentially about to enter the most unique NHL postseason of all time, and there's no way to know what resources have been available to which players, who has been doing what,

who is able to adapt. It's going to be a lot of things just playing out in front of our eyes. Uncertainty is weird and, honestly, a little bit scary — but it will be fascinating to see how much deviation there is from an "ideal lineup" based on who is in the best shape.

At the same time, these guys are pros and they know the coach and training staff they're dealing with. I'm confident they're finding ways to come back in the best shape they possibly can.

If you could trade names with any Hurricane, which one would it be? — Cory F.

Give me fuel.

Give me fire.

Give me Nino Niederreiter.

What has been your Canes highlight of the year? — Howard H.

Not Andrei Svechnikov's lacrosse goals in themselves, but just the atmosphere after both of them happened. I remember being in the press box in Winnipeg, and the reporter next to me is basically screaming in my face: "Did you just see that?!"

They put the Hurricanes on a certain plane of relevancy based on the pure skill and style of play of the team alone. Then you have Andrei Svechnikov, who is so humble, being forced out of his shell a bit. He's cracking jokes and dishing out one-liners. Then you have Brind'Amour praising him without hesitation in a way Brind'Amour rarely speaks. I often think about the way he said "the sky is the limit" while describing Svechnikov.

I also love that, even though they're a flashy move, they're a sign of his hard work. He has practiced that move, sometimes for hours a day, since he saw Mikael Granlund pull it against Russia in 2011. If anyone was going to do it first in the NHL it was him, then he did it twice.

Have you spoken to any of the pending free agents re: their feelings around how this break could affect their next contract? How real is the concern around a potentially decreasing cap? How are they feeling around increased injury potential in the playoffs going into a new contract? — Michael F.

Great question. While I haven't spoken directly to players about this, I've talked to a few agents who have expressed how difficult navigating this situation is right now. There are so many questions and virtually no answers. It's a lot of anxiety and a lot of "be patient."

Who wins in a best-of-7 series: 38-year-old Justin Williams vs. 28-year-old Justin Williams? — Jessi T.

I think this is the exact point in our timeline where the asteroid hits Earth and we call it a day.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • June 1, 2020

Finally, some answers to our burning Hurricanes return to play questions

By Sara Civian

Hurricanes captain Jordan Staal nailed one of many moods in the air since [the NHL announced the approval of its 24-team format should the 2019-20 season continue](#).

“There’s a lot of limbo,” Staal said in a video conference call Wednesday. “It’s really hard to have anything concrete to say when there really is still no timeline. When there is a timeline, and when there is an opportunity to have a date, knowing guys are going to get together and making sure your bodies are where you need to be in your mind, that’s when the show starts.”

It’s strange to think about return to play without the promise of a when. We’re collectively starting to wrap our heads around how strange the 2019-20 playoffs will be in general — if they end up being. Zoom interviews are flooded with reporters asking if there will be an “asterisk” on the Stanley Cup-winning team this season. I say if there is, let it be a positive acknowledgment of how one team prevailed despite all the challenges this new world presents. [Hurricanes NHLPA rep Jordan Martinook said Monday](#) that it’ll be something to tell his kids about one day no matter what happens.

Why not start leaning into the strangeness now — without a when, but with our first glimpses of how. [We already broke down the basics of the best-of-five play-in series](#) that pits the Hurricanes against the Rangers in a currently undisclosed “Hub City.” What burning questions have we actually begun to answer this week?

Who might the Hurricanes call up?

The league announced that rosters will expand, allowing up to 28 skaters and unlimited goaltenders per team. Knowing Hurricanes coach Rod Brind’Amour’s love for efficiency, though, the Canes might not carry around too many fringe players. GM and President Don Waddell basically confirmed that Wednesday.

“Rod doesn’t want to have too many guys,” Waddell said. “The biggest thing in front of us is preparing ourselves to play hockey in a play-in round and then playoffs. You want to make sure when you go out, it’s your team practicing. Saying that, there is a benefit with guys like Jake Bean, who had a tremendous year this year, and some are other younger players down there, Joey Keane, and it will be a benefit for them to be around here and we will bring in some of those guys for sure.”

Jake Bean

It’s high-time for Bean’s actual chance to make it in the NHL at this point — and it probably would’ve already been time on a roster with a weaker blue line. The 21-year-old left shot was named AHL defenseman of the year — a feat

particularly impressive at his age (he was the third to do so before 22 in AHL history) — for good reason.

Bean led all AHL defensemen in scoring during the 2019-20 season, posting 48 points in 59 games, and he led *all* Checkers skaters in scoring. Perhaps the most promising improvement from the Hurricanes first-rounder is his play away from the puck, [something he’d been adamant about improving since the middle of last season](#). A scout and a prospect expert are both quick to point out how much his decision-making has improved throughout his two-season pro career. I’d take this with a grain of salt, knowing the coaching staff’s hesitation to mess with the power play quarterbacks, but Bean can thrive in that position with some experience.

He’s a no-brainer even if Brind’Amour isn’t looking for an overflowing roster.

Joey Keane

Remember how mad some of you were when the Hurricanes traded Julien Gauthier? While [I’ll be the first to validate that anger](#), and Gauthier is doing fine as a Ranger (revenge series, anyone?), the return ain’t too shabby. Keane was named to the AHL’s All-Rookie team at the conclusion of the league’s season, after leading all rookie defensemen in goals (9) and coming in at No. 2 in points (37). That was seventh overall among all AHL defensemen, by the way.

Only 20, the third-rounder has intriguing potential and would be an interesting call-up.

Morgan Geekie

It would only make sense for [the Manitoba boy who forced himself into Hurricanes lore](#) to emerge as some sort of asterisk playoff hero.

As much as we joke about how euphoric that whole situation was, what struck me the most is how comfortable he looked simply waltzing into the NHL and immediately making plays. And if you ask anyone in the Hurricanes front office, maybe they were surprised by the immediate impact on the scoresheet, but they saw Geekie coming. He’s someone they’ve considered a part of the organization’s NHL future for a while now, and what a start it was.

Clark Bishop

We know how many injuries happen in the Stanley Cup playoffs in regular life — the risk seems even higher with this ramped up, training camp return to play reality. Bishop is a perfectly serviceable fourth-line, insurance center

Alex Nedeljkovic

Why not?

Which injured players are good to go?



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • June 1, 2020

- I don't know what I have to do other than mention it in every single article and Tweet it once a day to get folks to understand: Dougie Hamilton will be back for the 2019-20 playoffs.

"As we know, (Dougie) Hamilton's been here and he's been skating," Waddell said. "He's allowed to skate because he's a rehab player. So we feel like we'll be in good shape that way."

"Dougie was playing the best I've seen him since he's been in Carolina before he went down. It was unfortunate," Staal said. "It's going to be a big, towering defenseman that knows how to score goals and run a power play. I just actually had him over the other night, so he's excited to get going and be a part of the group again."

- Brett Pesce's situation is murkier. Waddell said Wednesday that Pesce is going to see a surgeon for an update in 10 days. "He had the surgery on, I believe it was March 5. And they said it was, you know, five, six months. So if you take the calendar, it'll be sometime probably middle of August. "I'm not sure he's going to be ready when the season begins or not, depending on the timing of when the season begins, but he'll be really close.
- Waddell confirmed that "the others" (James Reimer and Sami Vatanen) are "100 percent."

What might a first crack at the lines look like?

Andrei Svechnikov – Sebastian Aho – Teuvo Teraveinen

Nino Niederreiter – Vincent Trocheck – Martin Necas

Brock McGinn – Jordan Staal – Justin Williams

Warren Foegele – Morgan Geekie / Jordan Martinook – Ryan Dzingel

... I know I put Geekie and Martinook as interchangeable, but that's just because they're centers. I'd expect Geekie and Dzingel to be the real "rotation," and I'd expect Dzingel to get first dibs at a playoff game.

Defense without Pesce:

Jacob Slavin – Dougie Hamilton

Sami Vatanen/Haydn Fleury -Brady Skjei

Jake Gardiner – Trevor Van Riemsdyk/Joel Edmundson

Sheesh, even without Pesce there are some really tough calls on defense. I'd expect a shakeup after every loss. We also don't know what resources every player has had to train, how mentally equipped each individual is for this type of situation, and/or if Vatanen really exists.

Defense with Pesce:

Jacob Slavin – Dougie Hamilton

Jake Gardiner – Brett Pesce

Haydn Fleury – Joel Edmundson/Brady Skjei

OK. I've thought about it and these are my defensive pairings, and I'm sticking to them.

Thoughts?

Hurricanes' return to play guide: How the NHL's 24-team format impacts Carolina

By Sara Civian

[It'll take plenty of time to pan out all the details](#), and as we've reiterated with every story on the subject at this point — the NHL's announcement of the approval of a 24-team playoff format Tuesday doesn't mean the 2019-20 Stanley Cup playoffs are an official guarantee. But the league and the players are trying to make it happen, and the announcement was a huge step.

There are no set dates or destinations, and NHL commissioner Gary Bettman offered an important reminder as to why that is during the announcement: "We will not set dates (playoffs or draft), choose sites or return to play until we know it is appropriate and prudent to do so."

But if they do happen, the NHL and the NHLPA have taken an important step in agreeing to a format, even if it wasn't necessarily the format the Hurricanes hoped for. They were one of two teams [to vote "no" on the 24-team return to play proposal](#). But Canes NHLPA rep Jordan Martinook effectively said it's better than nothing, and that "everyone on our team wants to come back and play."

"For 70 games, you put a ton of work and emotions into this and at the end of the year your goal is to win the Stanley Cup," Martinook said Monday. "Obviously this gives a lot more teams the chance at it. I'm sure every team wants to win it and they're going to do everything they can to win it. I know everybody on our team wants to win it, and wants to come back and play ... it's going to be different no matter what, it'll be something you can tell your kids one day that you got to play this crazy playoff and hopefully after all this we can go back to somewhat normalcy."

No one knows exactly what this will end up looking like, but Bettman confirmed a best-of-five play in series would pit the Hurricanes against the Rangers. And while a league source indicated Raleigh was initially in the mix as a potential hub city, it wasn't on the list of the 10 finalists Bettman announced Tuesday.

Let's dust off the cobwebs, here, and refresh ourselves on the Carolina Hurricanes ...

Where they were at the shutdown

[The Hurricanes were finally clicking](#) after some concerning post-trade deadline struggles [that continued at the beginning](#)



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • June 1, 2020

[of an absolutely crucial road trip](#), and that momentum is part of the reason they weren't thrilled about a play-in series. "Our team felt like we could have kept climbing and climbing in the standings, I'm not taking anything away from the top teams, but we felt like we could have kept climbing the ladder," Martinook said. "(This format) doesn't really benefit the teams that are in (the) 5, 6, 7 and 8 (playoff spots)."

The Canes squeaked into a wild-card spot and seemed to get their minds right towards the end of that trip, ahead of the busiest end-of-season schedule in the NHL. It's funny how a three-game win streak can change so much in the Metropolitan Division. But that's all it took to go from [one of the worst Canes locker room scenes I'd witnessed](#) to blasting "Mambo No. 5" in Detroit.

You saw all the trade-deadline moves and a bit of last season's magic peeking through again, between [Brock McGinn blocking 5,000 shots in a row leading to Vincent Trochek's dramatic first goal as a Hurricane, the Morgan Geekie game\(s\)](#) and a five-game goal streak for Justin Williams. I'm sure some Canes fans find comfort in the feel-good way the regular season ended. At the same time, the story wasn't over, and now it kind of feels like the TV show hasn't been renewed for the next season so we're compromising the plot to get some sense of closure.

I can promise you two things in this time of uncertainty: The Hurricanes are officially in the 2019-20 Stanley Cup Playoffs, if that's what we're calling this 24-team format. And it will not be boring.

What the new format means

This means welcomed havoc in my Twitter mentions, as the Canes will face their almost comically impossible-to-beat Metro foe in the Rangers. We'll go much further into depth about this matchup later (what else would we do with this time?), but the 2019-20 Canes went 0-4 against the team that was two games, two points and three teams behind them in the Metropolitan standings. They were outscored 17-9. A lot of apprehension might come from the curse of Madison Square Garden — the fact that the Hurricanes lost 17 consecutive games at Madison Square Garden until last season — but there are few on this young Canes team even aware of that. Regardless, the curse was reversed and these games won't happen at MSG.

An actually legitimate concern happens to be another running joke with Canes fans. While [Henrik Lundqvist won't necessarily get his storybook ending](#), this team has a way of making each and every Rangers goaltender look like a Vezina Trophy contender.

The Rangers have won 31 of 37 meetings with Carolina since Feb. 22, 2011. During that time, Lundqvist is 24-4-0 with a 1.73 goals-against average, a .947 save percentage and one shutout. The fact that he isn't even a no-brainer in net for this speaks volumes.

Does the new format hurt or help?

Before the Canes voted "no," I found a Magic 8-Ball simulator on the internet and asked: "Does the 24-team playoff format hurt or help the Carolina Hurricanes?" and I

got "Ask again later," which is exactly what I expected. The Hurricanes were already in a playoff spot by the end of the season, but just barely clinging to a wild-card spot in the tight Metro. Now they find themselves on an even playing field with a Rangers team that had significantly worse odds of qualifying for the playoffs before this. So if you want to ask yourself if this format helps or hurts the Canes, you have to ruminate on a few more questions.

1. **What did the rest of their schedule look like, and how were they trending?** The Canes had the busiest schedule of the entire NHL to finish the season, but coach Rod Brind'Amour had expressed that he wouldn't have had it any other way — their fate was in their hands. They were riding a three-game win streak showing twinges of last season's magic. Still, some of the slated opponents were tough: Pittsburgh *three* times, Boston twice, the Islanders, Toronto, Columbus, St. Louis. If the NHL was postponed before the three-game win streak, I think many would agree that this format helps the Canes. But that three-game streak was a heck of a three-game streak, and featured starting goaltender Petr Mrazek's return to play, and a huge confidence boost for Trochek. While the Canes have received a bit of a mixed reaction for voting "no" because of their wild-card status and opponents still to come, consider five of those 14 games were against the Devils (x2), the Sabres (x2) and Ottawa. And for whatever it's worth, the Hurricanes locker room vibe changed almost completely on that last trip. Martinook's assertion that they "could've kept climbing the ladder" is genuine.
2. **What were the other options on the table?** We know the return-to-play committee has discussed dozens of options to death, and we also know none of the options are going to seem ideal in our new normal. I'm sure at one point the committee discussed just doing a "normal," 16-team playoff with all the teams that were in at the pause, and that obviously would've benefited the Hurricanes more than facing an opponent they don't necessarily fare well against in a best-of-five play-in series. There were probably other scenarios that had the Hurricanes against a different opponent, as well. In the same vein, I'm sure there were options discussed that either outright excluded the Canes in the playoffs or were much less palpable than this one. We'll probably find out what the other options were eventually, but Martinook made a point to thank the return to play committee for combing through "hundreds" of scenarios, so that much we know.
3. **What are the differences between what would've been the "normal" path to the Stanley Cup Final and this one?** It's really impossible to say, and that's where the grey area in this situation that hasn't yet been answered.
- 4.

In conclusion, the Canes are one of those teams on the cusp that will be fascinating to look back on in retrospect of all this.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • June 1, 2020

How the time off impacted them

We don't have to defer to the Magic 8-Ball for this one — the time off helped the Canes. As I've previously reported, they welcome back a fully healthy, pre-injury Norris candidate Dougie Hamilton. And while "rust" presents an issue for every single playoff team, he'd been carrying much of the Canes on his back before his injury — I think time off could have Hamilton recharged. And I *definitely* do not want to make any promises that Brett Pesce will return in time for the playoffs, especially when we don't know their start date. But sources indicate his early March shoulder surgery, that had a projected 4-6 months projected recovery time, is going as well as it could possibly be going. So I wouldn't completely rule him out.

Sources indicate James Reimer and Sami Vatanen will be ready to go, and with colleague Michael Russo's report that [the NHL intends to slide expiring contracts through the end of the playoffs](#), Vatanen will still be a Hurricane.

It's a shame that Justin Williams was on a heater of a five-game goal streak at the NHL pause, but don't we know who he is by now? Knowing how well he executed his return to the NHL, knowing his mentality, and knowing this is almost certainly his last playoff run, I wouldn't even dare question his ability to get right back at it and make an impact. I also remember how Jordan Staal returned from injury last season and went on a tear — I think a little break will do him good. Again, though, it will be fascinating to see the techniques teams use when practicing and skating begin again. I think, more than any playoff run in NHL history, every last staff member has the opportunity to make an impact on the players. There's no doubt in my mind Brind'Amour and his staff will have these guys [running through hot coals](#) again in no time.

Their chances of winning it all

As good as anyone else.



Tweetmail No. 240: Hub Cities, Playoffs & Next Season

By Michael Smith

Hello and welcome to Tweetmail, a regular feature on Hurricanes.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.

This was supposed to land on Wednesday, as usual, but it was a newsy week with lots of questions to tackle. So, let's get to it.

How will they decide which teams will play in which hub city? - [@mynameisjork](#)

Two hub cities will exist. One will house the 12 Eastern Conference teams, and the other will house the 12 Western Conference teams. Each hub city will provide secure hotels, arena, practice facilities and in-market transportation for the teams. There won't necessarily be a hub city in the Eastern part of North America and one in the Western part, either; it could be any two of these 10 cities still under consideration: Chicago, Columbus, Dallas, Edmonton, Las Vegas, Los Angeles, Minneapolis/St. Paul, Pittsburgh, Toronto or Vancouver.

[A decision on the two hub cities](#) is likely to be finalized in the next month, and it will be based on a number of factors, including COVID-19 pandemic conditions, testing availability and local government regulations.

Do you think it's fair that a hub city could be the home city for one team? I almost think it would be better to have hub cities be teams that are out so that there isn't a home advantage for the host team. - [@LongSwimmer1](#)

I don't think there would be a competitive advantage one way or the other. Say Las Vegas is a hub city, as seems to be likely given the abundance of hotels nearby the rink. The Golden Knights would still have to quarantine in a hotel like the other 11 Western Conference teams in that city. Plus, when games are played at T-Mobile Arena, the building will be empty, so their home-ice advantage - and they have one of the biggest in the league with the crowd and energy in that place - is a non-factor.

With all that being said, it does sound like the league is trying to avoid placing a team in its home market in order to ensure as much competitive balance as possible.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • June 1, 2020

With Pesce having a 4-6 month timeline, any way or chance he could play in the playoffs? - @WTaylorA86

There is indeed a chance the Canes could have [Brett Pesce](#) back in time for the 2020 Stanley Cup Playoffs.

Who would have thought, in early March, that would have been the case?

With a shoulder surgery recovery timeline of 4-6 months, Pesce could be healthy "sometime probably in the middle of August," [President and General Manager Don Waddell said](#). Will that be in time for the start of the Canes' Qualifying Round series against the Rangers? Maybe. Maybe not. It all depends on the timing of Phase 4.

Imagine having both Pesce and [Dougie Hamilton](#) back in the mix on defense. Whew. Watch out.

Will Morgan Geekie be a part of these playoffs? - @flive22

Rosters will expand when the league returns to play, reportedly up to 28 skaters plus unlimited goaltenders (Dave Ayres, anyone?), and I could certainly see Morgan Geekie being in that mix. He made quite the splash in the NHL just before the pause, scoring two goals (plus an assist) in his NHL debut and adding another in Detroit. His style of play fits right in with the way Rod Brind'Amour wants his team to play.

"He's great, what he's doing. He knows how to play," Brind'Amour said after the Canes' 5-2 win in Detroit. "He's got some skill. He can rip the puck. He plays with a little bit of passion and desire. That's what you need to have at this level."

Will the 2020-21 season start on time with the unexpected time off during the pandemic? - @sec137seat15

The very earliest the league could enter into Phase 4 of its return to play plan would be late July or early August. With that in mind, plus the very abbreviated offseason that would follow, I think it's a foregone conclusion that the 2020-21 regular season will not begin in early October, as is typically the case. Instead, we could be looking at a December 2020 or even a January 2021 start date. In fact, earlier in the week, NHL Commissioner Gary Bettman floated the idea of kicking off the season with the Winter Classic.

In any case, the league intends to play a full 82-game slate in 2020-21. Some yearly events, like All-Star Weekend and the bye week, are likely to drop off the schedule, and the end of the regular season might stretch into May.

Any idea if the Stadium Series game will still be played next season, whether the date might change, or what the jerseys for the game could look like? - @MrCaniac22

The [2021 NHL Stadium Series](#), slated for February 20 at NC State's Carter-Finley Stadium, is still about nine months off, and as of right now, the Hurricanes and league are proceeding as if the event is still happening.

Waddell said he had three conference calls about the Stadium Series last week, with topics ranging from jerseys to corporate sponsorships to ticketing.

"We're moving forward right now that it's going to happen," he said. "Until somebody tells us differently, we're going to continue to work to put this thing together and showcase Raleigh and the Triangle area as best we can."

As far as what the jerseys for the game could look like, I'm not sure! Adidas likes to get creative and think a bit outside the box for the Stadium Series - just look at the kits the Kings and Avalanche wore this past season. So, I wouldn't be surprised to see something a little different.

How do you think Free Agency will be impacted/handled now that the season will continue past the July 1st date? - @xLittleCaitlinx

Contracts for the 2019-20 season are set to expire on June 30, but a conclusion to the 2019-20 season wouldn't start for at least a month after that. Common sense is to simply slide those expiring contracts through the end of the season, whenever that may be. Hopefully, that's a reasonably easy detail to hammer out between the NHL and NHLPA in the next month.

The beginning of free agency, typically noon on July 1, will then be pushed to a date later in the calendar year. Because of the return to play format and the intent to play a full 82-game schedule in 2020-21, the "offseason" is going to be truncated quite a bit, and there's going to be a good bit of activity in a relatively short amount of time. Free agent frenzy, indeed.

What are 5 "attractions" you'd like to see added to or around PNC Arena before 2029? - @theREALtern

Great question. After [news of the lease extension](#) hit on Thursday, Waddell mentioned this in regards to PNC Arena renovations: "It's a great building, it's clean, and it's been kept up to date as much as we can, but we just need some of the new amenities that new facilities offer. That's something we've been talking about for quite a bit of time now."



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • June 1, 2020

So, thinking out loud ...

1. Event-level premium space(s): This is a popular amenity in new buildings. Little Caesars Arena in Detroit knocked it out of the park here.
2. Rooftop bar: A bar on the roof on the south side of the arena would be dope and enhance that plaza space.
3. More development in the immediate area: Make the arena more of a destination with bars and restaurants and the like in the surrounding area.
4. In-N-Out: Hey, I can dream, right?
5. And, because PNC Arena itself mentioned it ... why not?!

More questions and more answers coming your way soon!

If you have a question you'd like answered or you have an attraction you'd like to see in or around PNC Arena, you can find me on Twitter at [@MSmithCanes](#), or you can [drop me an email](#).

Staal, Waddell React to Return to Play Plan

By Michael Smith

With the National Hockey League's announcement of the [24-team return to play plan](#), the Carolina Hurricanes' group chat has been more spirited and lively.

"The boys are ready," [Jordan Staal](#) said on a video conference call on Wednesday afternoon, "chomping at the bit for whenever we do get this thing going."

When continues to be the biggest unknown, the x-factor in the league's return to play plan. It's important, though, that a framework exists, which provides some structure for teams and players previously in limbo and a target - floating as it may be - for resumption of play.

Under the [outlined return to play format](#), the Hurricanes, as the sixth seed in the Eastern Conference based on points percentage, will face off with the New York Rangers (11th seed) in a best-of-five Qualifying Round.

Yes, that's Jordan vs. Marc, the first time a pair of Staal brothers will face off in the "playoffs" since 2009, when Eric's Canes were swept by Jordan's Penguins in the Eastern Conference Final.

"I haven't played against a brother in playoffs in a while," Jordan said. "I know my parents hate it, but I think we're going to enjoy it and have some fun with it."

The Rangers swept the four-game season series, outscoring the Canes 17-9. But, everything changes in a best-of-five series. Just think back to last year when the Canes dethroned the defending Stanley Cup champions in the First Round after going 0-3-1 against them in the regular season.

"[New York] is a team we've struggled with, so it's a great challenge for us jumping right into it," Staal said. "Roddy is going to do a great job preparing for it and making sure everyone is ready."

That preparation has already begun as the league nears an "early June" target date for Phase 2 of its transition protocol, allowing players to return to training facilities for voluntary, small-group on- and off-ice workouts.

"I know my skills are great right now," Staal joked. "Just being off the ice is difficult. That's the big thing, and that's why you want a little bit of cushion when we do get started just to get back on the ice."

Phase 3, the beginning of a formal training camp period, will begin no earlier than the first half of July. President and General Manager Don Waddell said he envisions a two- to three-week training camp, plus one or two exhibition games once teams arrive in the designated hub city.

Rosters will expand when the league returns to play, reportedly up to 28 players and unlimited goaltenders. That could open the door for players like Jake Bean, named the AHL's defenseman of the year, or Joey Keane, named to the AHL's All-Rookie Team, to join the big club.

"Rod doesn't want to have too many guys. ... You want to make sure when you go out, it's your team practicing," Waddell said. "Having said that, there is a benefit for them to be around here. We will bring in some of those guys, for sure."

The Canes will have a full complement of healthy bodies, too. [Doug Hamilton](#), who underwent surgery in January to repair a fractured fibula in his left leg, has been skating and will be ready to play when the puck drops.

"He's a big, towering defenseman who knows how to score goals and run a power play," Staal said. "I just actually had him over the other night, and he's excited to get going and be a part of the group again."

[James Reimer](#) and [Sami Vatanen](#), who were both sidelined with lower-body injuries at the time of the pause, are also healthy and ready.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • June 1, 2020

The only question mark remaining on the injured list is [Brett Pesce](#), who is recovering from shoulder surgery. He is expected to be healthy by "sometime probably in the middle of August," Waddell said, which could be very close to when the league resumes play.

If and when Phase 4 does indeed begin and 24 teams return to the ice, it will happen in two hub cities, one for each conference. Comprehensive testing will be regular. Contact with anything but the hotel, arena and practice facilities will be extremely limited. It's a delicate plan that requires buy-in from everyone in order to ensure the health and safety of all involved.

What the NHL's 24-Team Return to Play Format Means for the Canes

By Michael Smith

We don't know when. We don't know where. But, we at least now know how the National Hockey League intends to return to play and what it will look like when it does.

And the Carolina Hurricanes will be involved.

NHL Commissioner Gary Bettman outlined the league's 24-team return to play plan, in addition to the four-phased transition protocol and the format for the 2020 NHL Draft Lottery on Tuesday evening, making official much of what had been reported and clarifying some of the finer details of the plan.

So, what does it all mean? And, how does it affect the Canes?

Before we dive in, it's important to note that a return to play is not guaranteed; this is all contingent upon receiving medical clearance to proceed. COVID-19 conditions, testing ability and government regulations will all factor into decision making moving forward.

But, a plan is officially in place. Based on what the league announced, here's what we know.

The 2019-20 regular season is over.

On March 12, the NHL "paused" the regular season with the hope of resuming it at a later date. That is no longer a viable option, so "for the purposes of nomenclature, record keeping and NHL awards," as Bettman announced, the 2019-20 season is deemed completed through the games of March 11.

At the time of the pause, the Canes had completed 83 percent of their schedule (68 of 82 games). The remaining games, included among the 189 games originally on the league's schedule from March 12-April 4, will not be played. The Canes finish the regular season with a 38-25-5 record and 81 points.

[Sebastian Aho](#) finishes the regular season as the team leader in goals (38) and points (66), while [Teuvo Teravainen](#) paced the team in assists (48).

The NHL will return to play with 24 teams.

"It's going to be an unfortunate challenge being away from the families and all the other stuff that's going to come along with it," Staal said. "It's a different time, and, if we want to play these games, this is the way we're going to have to do it. So, guys are going to have to make some sacrifices, and guys are willing to do it. Everyone is ready to play."

Everyone is ready. A plan is in place. Now, we wait and hope to see the puck drop in a couple of short months.

"I'm feeling really confident about our team and what we can do," Staal said. "We've got a pretty solid group, and hopefully we'll make a good push."

If and when the NHL can resume play, it will do so in two hub cities with 24 teams - the top 12 teams in each conference, ranked by points percentage. With a points percentage of .596, the Hurricanes are the sixth seed in the Eastern Conference.

The Hurricanes (6th seed) will face off with the New York Rangers (11th seed) in the Qualifying Round.

The top four teams in each conference will play a round robin to determine seeding in the First Round of the 2020 Stanley Cup Playoffs. Regular-season overtime and shootout rules apply, and ties in standings will be broken by regular-season points percentage.

The remaining eight teams in each conference will go head-to-head in best-of-five series (playoff overtime rules apply) to advance to the First Round.

Playoffs will then continue in a conference-based format. The length of the First and Second Rounds, in addition to whether match-ups are based on seeding or a bracket are still to be determined by the Return to Play Committee. The Conference Finals and Stanley Cup Final will play out in a traditional best-of-seven series.

When will the playoffs take place?

Even with framework in place, there's a lot we still don't know. The "when" of it all is one of those things. What we do know is that the league has a four-phased return to play protocol.

Phase 1 - teams self-isolating as much as possible - has been active since the pause began. The league is targeting "early June" for Phase 2, during which teams will be permitted to return to home facilities for voluntary, small-group on- and off-ice workouts.

Phase 3 marks the beginning of formal training camps, something that won't begin earlier than the first half of July.

Finally, Phase 4 ushers in the return of hockey in the 24-team format. Timing and hub cities are still to be determined, but don't expect to see this happen until late July at the very earliest.

There are currently 10 cities in the mix to serve as one of the two hub cities.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • June 1, 2020

Raleigh did not make the cut for the short list of potential hub cities, a collection of which are scattered across North America. Each conference will be assigned to a hub city, where secure hotels, arena, practice facilities and transportation will be provided. Which two metropolitan areas will play host to the NHL's return is a decision that will have to be finalized in the coming month or so.

So, the Hurricanes are in the playoffs?

Yes? Sort of? Maybe? Not yet? Just how exactly the Qualifying Round is, well, qualified, is somewhat unclear at this point. The regular season is over, but teams that don't advance to the First Round could still win the first overall pick in the 2020 NHL Draft.

How? Well ...

The 2020 NHL Draft Lottery will feature 15 teams.

Though the explanation caused Bettman to joke that the format was "a bit complicated," the 2020 Draft Lottery, in its basic execution and structure, is somewhat familiar. Three draws will determine the first three overall picks in the 2020 NHL Draft, and the 15 teams not participating in at least the First Round of the 2020 Stanley Cup Playoffs will have a chance to move up in draft order.

The 15 teams involved will include the seven teams not returning to play plus the eight losing teams from the Qualifying Round.

So, eight teams currently have a chance to win either the Stanley Cup or the first overall pick?

Right now, yes, and the Canes are one of them. That's why I'm not sure you can truly call the Qualifying Round part of the playoffs.

Maybe that's GIF vs. Jif, but it's important for record keeping. And, the players who have performance-based bonuses built

into their contracts? They're going to want some clarification on what exactly the Qualifying Round is, too.

The 2020 NHL Draft Lottery - the first part of it, at least - will be held on Friday, June 26.

That's the one date in all of this that's been established. If necessary, a second part of the Draft Lottery will take place in between the Qualifying Round and First Round. That is, if any of the three drawings are won by any of the eight teams in the Qualifying Round (denoted currently as Teams A-H), a second phase of the lottery will be necessary.

This is where it gets "[a bit complicated.](#)" While odds in the first phase of the lottery are consistent with years past, say one of Teams A-H wins one of the drawings. Then, in the second lottery phase, all eight eliminated teams would have a 12.5 percent chance of winning that placeholder spot.

Once the drawings are completed, the draft order will be set in inverse order of points percentage.

That's a lot.

It is, and there are still a lot of questions to be answered and logistics to finalize in order to make this return to play plan a reality.

And, most importantly, it all hinges on an OK from trusted medical professionals and government authorities. There is a possibility we never get to Phase 4.

But, in the hopeful case we have NHL hockey back in our lives within the next two months or so, this is what it will look like. We have some finality with the 2019-20 regular season, and we know there is a plan in place for the immediate future.

That, in itself, is something worth cheering about.



Rod Brind'Amour's take on the NHL's playoff format, empty arena games and his training camp plan

By Emily Kaplan

With the [NHL announcing its plans to return this summer](#), we caught up with [Carolina Hurricanes](#) coach [Rod Brind'Amour](#) to see how he's approaching the unconventional postseason.

In an appearance on [ESPN on Ice this week](#), Brind'Amour discussed why his team was one of two to vote against the 24-team format, how he'll handle the return of European players, his thoughts on drawing the [New York Rangers](#) in the first round, the impact of crowdless games and, of course, what a post-pandemic training camp looks like under the guidance of Rod the Bod.

ESPN: What's your reaction to the 24-team format?

Brind'Amour: Well, I mean, hopefully it happens and it'll be great. I think the easiest thing was getting this part done, quite frankly. I mean, I think we all kind of figured this out -- whether it was 16 teams or 20 teams or 24 or everybody. I mean, that seems to be the easy thing. The hard part now, to me, is going to be how they figure all this out logistically. That's the work in progress part. I think it is going to be interesting how it all shakes out.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • June 1, 2020

ESPN: [Jordan Martinook](#) admitted you guys were one of the teams [that didn't vote for the NHLPA's approval of this format](#). From what I gather, it has to do with the fact that you guys are a wild-card team and this format does not give you much benefit for your accomplishments in the regular season.

Brind'Amour: Well, I think that's pretty clear. First of all, his comments are dead-on. We want to play. And we understood that there might have been some teams, you know -- whether 16 or 18 -- you understood that that was really the issue. I think the bigger issue, especially for our guys, was what was the 68 games we played for? What did we grind for? The bulk of the season was completed, and they just threw that out. And I think that's how they felt. I think that's a little bit justifiable in a way. Why not carry the points over that you had?

I think that the thought was if you're playing in five, six, seven games, we could easily have all had the same amount of games, figured that out. That would've been your play-in, and then take your points with you and see how you end up. That's probably the way that I think the guys felt would be fair, I guess is the best way to put it.

But we understand. Nobody really cares. At the end of the day, they want to see hockey. We want to get back to playing. Is it the best way to do it? Probably not, in my opinion. But I hope we can play. And once they get this format figured out -- as far as not the format necessarily but how we're going to do it -- nobody is going to talk about this. Whether it's fair or not fair, it doesn't matter. We're moving on and we're going to try to do our best.

ESPN: Do you have any injured players that you think could come back?

Brind'Amour: We were one of those teams that -- we had a lot of injuries actually at the end, even though we were playing pretty well. [Dougie Hamilton](#) was out. He'll probably be able to return now, especially if we don't start until when it sounds like.

So he'll definitely be ready to go. That's a huge bonus. And then we traded for [Sami Vatanen](#) at the trade deadline, but he was actually injured and we kind of thought he was gonna be able to play. We were told he was going to be able to play, but he wasn't. So he would have been iffy at best had we started [at the regularly scheduled time]. And now that takes that out of the equation. So that's an interesting one, just because we've never seen him play with us or practice even. That is a wild card, but that's a pretty good wild card. I like having that one in the hole there.

So those two guys, that's a big addition. [Brett Pesce](#) went down for the year. That's a long, long shot because his injury was almost a six-month injury. But if you go back to when we did it -- and I think it was in March when he had a surgery -- suddenly now you start thinking, well, maybe, who knows? How does it look if he's available? So that one is more of a long shot. But for sure, those two guys I mentioned, Dougie and Sami, it will be interesting to see how that works out, where they're at when we get ready to go.

ESPN: I have to ask you about this return to training facilities that's gonna be happening within the next

couple of weeks. What are your expectations for that? It's voluntary for the players. Very small groups of guys can be there at the same time. You can't be on the ice, right?

Brind'Amour: Right. Well, the league sent out a pretty intense protocol, and I'm like, how are we going to do that? How are you going to manage that and figure that out? Bring in people to monitor the people coming in the door. And just to me, it's just a lot. And as a group we're trying to figure that out. It's going to be interesting, obviously. But the stuff you have to do, the times, they are what they are. Trying to navigate, it sounds really like there's really nothing the coaches can do, so it's up to the players to figure out how they're gonna go for a while.

I think really what we need, to be quite honest, is some dates. We need some dates as far as, OK, training camp's going to start on this date. Do you really want guys coming in? If we're talking July 15 as a training camp, we're not even in June yet. You know, you've gotta remember, for me, the bigger issue is guys away from their families and stuff like, I mean, that's to me the biggest issue here.

Guys in Europe, are they coming back? Do you have to quarantine them? Are they going to be away from their families that whole time? Then they should probably stay home until the last minute because this could be a long run, hopefully. To me, that's the bigger concern that we're trying to figure.

But until you have a date, then it's kind of hard to really sink your teeth into planning for that stuff. But really my major concern honestly is just the guys and how they're gonna handle their families. And no one's really figured that out. So that's the big question.

ESPN: How many guys are around the Raleigh area right now that you do believe will be able to participate in Phase 2?

Brind'Amour: I think right about now we have about eight guys that stayed, pretty much from the get-go didn't go anywhere. I mentioned Dougie Hamilton. He was injured, so he was rehabbing. So he is the one guy that is still trying to kind of go through the daily routine. Everyone else is kind of doing their own thing and waiting for things to open up. So we have a decent amount of guys around here.

Again, those guys I'm less concerned about, it's the guys that are far away that have to travel here. What are the restrictions to be put on when they do get here? Because that's the planning part. And if you have to quarantine a guy for two weeks, well, then he better get here sooner than later. But then my other point was, if you're going to be away from your family for that long, how is this all going to shake out? So those are the issues that are not even hockey-related that are really the biggest concern.

ESPN: You draw the Rangers in the first round, who went 4-0 against you this season. Does that matchup give you pause?

Brind'Amour: The stats don't look very good. And if you pull up the last 40 games we've played them, that doesn't look good either. Trust me, you don't have to look them up. I'll tell



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • June 1, 2020

you, I think we're like 9-31 or something. That's not a good stat.

Then if you want to really pinch the numbers a little bit and watch the games -- obviously, we've already done that -- but three of the four games, I thought we were the better team this year. So, again, it's a bit skewed. And does it really matter when we hit the playoffs? I'm not sure. I mean, we went against Washington last year in the playoffs and we were 0-3-1 when we hit them [and won the series in seven games].

I think they'll say the same thing. It's a whole new season. And it is. I mean, this is literally a whole new season when and if we get going. So I think you can throw a lot of that out the window.

ESPN: The NHL still has to decide if it will reseed after the first round or go bracket style. Do you have a preference?

Brind'Amour: I don't care. I'll be quite honest with you. I guess this goes back to your first question and the comments Martinook made. The hardest thing about winning the Stanley Cup is getting into the playoffs. That's your first stage. We play 82 games, you go seven months or six months to get into that, then I think it's wide open. I mean, I think getting in is the hardest thing.

So they've established that 24 teams essentially have gotten in, in my opinion. You can reseed, you can do whatever you want. I really don't know that it's going to make much difference. Especially when you're taking away -- well, I think you would take away -- home-ice advantage. There's just so many other variables now that are popping in that I don't think that it matters much.

ESPN: It's crazy to me to think about you guys going on a postseason run and not having that crowd. I can't even conceive what that's like because you feed off of it, and it's such a part of what the Hurricanes are right now.

Brind'Amour: Yeah. That, to me, is something that hasn't been talked about enough. I think that's just a big, big factor. In our sport, especially, I don't know, maybe I'm a little biased. But the emotional impact that that has, especially playoff hockey, in a building in the NHL is something special. And it's hard to weigh it. It's hard to tell you how much impact it has on the game, you know.

And I do think the competitive nature of the players will kind of take over at some point. But I think there's going to be a big lull at the start of these games. And it's gonna be interesting to see if it carries over or does that competitive nature fire up the guys? It's kind of like you do when you're playing in the summer. There's nothing on the line, and kids

are fighting each other just over a Gatorade, you know what I mean? Like, I just wonder how, when and if that all kicks in.

But it's going to be really tough, I think, at first to play when there's absolutely zero emotion in the building.

ESPN: What does a Rod Brind'Amour pandemic training camp look like? How tough is this conditioning? What can the guys expect?

Brind'Amour: That's a good question. There's no [conditioning] testing, from what I've read. I read that right away. So the players got that in right away. They knew. They were smart. They don't want any part of that. And I agree. That's good.

I think it's going to be way different, only because it's not like a training camp where you got 50 guys and you have three weeks to practice and then play six meaningless games in preseason and you got all that buildup before things start ramping up. It's going to be way more, almost as if you just pick up where you left off. You can't come out of the gate and go hard, you'll have to ramp it up. I'll have to rely a lot on my strength coaches to say how are we going to do this, because I think I'd probably err on being a little too aggressive at the beginning.

But it's all about peaking right away at the first game. I can't see that they're going to play a bunch of meaningless games.

ESPN: Can you allow yourself to get excited about this, knowing that there's so much uncertainty left to be settled?

Brind'Amour: I think initially it was excitement, just because it felt like, "Oh, it's going to happen." You watch the press conference and you say "Oh, it looks pretty exciting. We're going to have some hockey." The next day, we're figuring out how we're going to do all of this, and then I'm like, "Oh my gosh. How is this actually going to work?"

And then this is just us here, with the variables you can control, you know, putting all these people and teams in a place and, how are you going to work out? Where are you going to go? Where are you going to stay? What's the practice like? All the questions just start coming in and you're like, "I've no idea how that's going to work."

So somebody, I assume, is trying to figure this out. To me, that's the hardest part. Figuring out the format, like I said, I think that's pretty easy to do. But now the work begins for everybody to try to figure out how we can make this work.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • June 1, 2020

SportScan

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

The Athletic / LeBrun: The NHL's ruling on conditional trades is the right call

Pierre LeBrun
May 30, 2020

We finally have an answer on the mystery of the Vancouver Canucks' conditional first-round pick.

They still own it — for now.

The NHL sent out a memo to clubs over the past week, and part of it dealt with the conditional trades for the 2020 NHL Draft.

At the heart of it: deals affected by teams making or not making the playoffs and what being in the 24-team tournament means in that regard.

Take the Canucks, whose first-round pick was dealt to Tampa Bay last June for J.T. Miller. That pick was then moved again by the Cup-hungry Lightning before the Feb. 24 trade deadline for Blake Coleman from the Devils.

So the question the Devils and Canucks had this past week after commissioner Gary Bettman announced the 2019-20 regular season over was what that meant for this conditional first-round pick.

Did Vancouver's presence in the tournament mean the Devils already had the pick? Or do the Canucks have to win their play-in round against the Wild and qualify for the 16-team playoffs for that 2020 pick to officially transfer to New Jersey?

They got their answer from the league a few days later, in the memo:

"More specifically, for Trade condition purposes, a Club will not be deemed to have qualified for the Playoffs unless or until they have progressed into the Round of 16, and 'Playoff Games/Rounds' will only include the games/rounds played in the Round of 16 or later. We believe this interpretation will best reflect the intentions of the parties at the time of the Trade," the league stipulated.

So, there you go. That first-round pick is still in flux until that Canucks-Wild play-in series is completed. If Vancouver loses, New Jersey instead gets the Canucks' unprotected 2021 first-round pick.

There are a few other deals also affected by the league ruling.

Take the Jason Zucker deal between Pittsburgh and Minnesota. The condition on that first-round pick swapping hands from the Penguins to the Wild is if Pittsburgh were to miss the playoffs this season, which seemed rather ridiculous to think about when the deal was completed on Feb. 10, the Penguins would have the option to keep the first-round pick for 2020 and send their unprotected 2021 first-round pick instead.

Well, if the fifth-seeded Penguins were to be upset by the 12th-seeded Canadiens in the play-in round this summer, Pittsburgh would be in that very position of deciding whether to hand the Wild this year's pick or next year's pick. And given that losing to Montreal would mean being in the draft lottery, you would assume Pittsburgh would probably keep this year's pick, which would stink for Minnesota. Wild GM Bill Guerin will be cheering for his old NHL team in that play-in series versus the Habs.

In any case, the league's interpretation of this underlines what we've been reporting for a while now: The NHL doesn't view the qualifying round as constituting playoff hockey, and the actual playoffs consist of just 16 teams. In my opinion, when it comes to conditional trades affected by this ruling, it's the right call from the league. Nobody made an NHL trade contemplating anything other than 16 teams in the playoffs. So for the spirit and integrity of those trades, this is the right ruling.

In the meantime, the official end of the regular season should allow for some housekeeping on other trades, although the league still hasn't ruled on much of this.

For example, there's the James Neal-Milan Lucic trade between Alberta rivals Edmonton and Calgary. The Flames were to get a third-round pick from the Oilers in this year's draft if Neal scored 21 goals and Lucic scored 10 or fewer goals than Neal this season. Well, Neal was at 19 goals and Lucic was at eight when the season got paused (talk about a clairvoyant condition from GMs Ken Holland and Brad Treliving). So, the regular season is over. Now what? A source said this weekend that the league has not yet provided clarity on that.

I mean, there's time. The NHL draft won't be until fall, at the earliest. If I had to guess, I'd say the Flames will get the third-round pick from the Oilers; common sense would dictate you prorate what Neal and Lucic did, and that the condition would have been met over a full season.

Here's another interesting one: The Devils traded pending unrestricted free-agent defenseman Sami Vatanen to the Hurricanes on deadline day for Fredrik Claesson, Janne Kuokkanen and a conditional 2020 fourth-round pick.

The conditions on the pick: New Jersey receives a fourth-round selection if Vatanen plays in five regular-season games. There's also a playoff component to it.

Well, the injured Vatanen never played a regular-season game for the Hurricanes before the season was put on pause March 12. So, presumably, the Canes don't have to trade away a draft pick to the Devils in this deal. The No. 1 contention was the five regular-season games played — unless New Jersey can make the argument that should Vatanen play in a certain number of the Canes' playoff games this summer, they should get a pick. I can see both teams making different arguments here and the league having to step in and make a call.

And another trade of note that's clear now as far as the conditions: The Kings have a conditional 2021 third-round pick from the Maple Leafs from the Jack Campbell-Kyle Clifford deal (plus, Los Angeles got Trevor Moore). The pick becomes a second-round pick if the Leafs re-sign Clifford or make the playoffs (which means winning their play-in round versus Columbus) and Campbell wins six regular-season games. He won three. So the second criterion is now toast. The Kings can upgrade to a second-round pick only if Clifford re-signs with the Leafs.

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The Athletic / Sources: MGM submits proposal to NHL showcasing Vegas' ability to be a hub city



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • June 1, 2020

Jesse Granger

May 29, 2020

As the NHL continues its process to resume the 2019-20 season, one of the next big decisions it must make is where the games will be played.

On Tuesday the league announced its 24-team Return to Play format and with it a list of 10 potential cities to serve as hubs for the games. The league hopes to choose two cities – one for each conference – in about three weeks, according to NHL commissioner Gary Bettman. With conditions and climates of the COVID-19 pandemic changing daily, Bettman hopes to gain as much information as possible before choosing a city.

Las Vegas was listed among the cities being considered, which makes sense for a number of reasons. The city is built to host large events and has ample hotel rooms in the direct vicinity of T-Mobile Arena to not only house all 12 teams, but house them while keeping them as separate as the league wants.

Sources close to the situation have indicated that MGM Resorts International submitted a detailed proposal to the NHL, showcasing its ability to host the postseason in Las Vegas.

The intersection of Las Vegas Boulevard and Tropicana Avenue alone has more than 14,000 hotel rooms between the MGM Grand, New York-New York, Tropicana and Excalibur. Add in another 2,700 at the Park MGM, which is right next to the arena, and 3,209 at the Mandalay Bay down the street.

Aside from the sheer volume of rooms, those resorts also boast thousands of suites, ranging from 1,000 square feet to upward of 6,000 square feet per room. If the NHL intends on pulling players away from their families for weeks, having larger-than-usual rooms with full amenities may be an attractive option. The Delano, for example, is a separate tower connected to Mandalay Bay that has 1,117 suites, each with at least 725 square feet.

MGM Resorts International owns all of the hotels mentioned above except for the Tropicana. It also owns 42.5 percent of T-Mobile Arena. While the specific details of the MGM's proposal to the NHL are unknown, one of the biggest pitches could be its ability to provide lodging, food, and ice rinks all under its umbrella – theoretically making it a much more controlled environment.

With nearly a dozen hotels on the Las Vegas Strip alone, MGM has the resources of all of the restaurants in each property. Many of those restaurants — especially the buffets — are either closed or operating at minimal capacity at the moment. Those employees would have no issues feeding 12 NHL teams in a controlled environment for as long as the NHL needs. This isn't to say the other nine cities listed as potential hubs can't accomplish the same thing, but in most cases it would be more complex, with multiple companies involved.

One of the biggest questions surrounding Las Vegas as a potential host is the number of ice rinks in the valley. Other markets like Toronto, Vancouver, Minneapolis and Edmonton have more sheets of ice in town, making it easier to schedule practices for 12 NHL teams.

Las Vegas currently has six sheets of ice.

T-Mobile Arena (1)

City National Arena (2)

Las Vegas Ice Center (2)

Sobe Ice Arena in the Fiesta Rancho Casino (1)

Three of those sheets – T-Mobile Arena and City National Arena – are clearly NHL-quality, and ready to go when needed. The Las Vegas Ice center is designed for public skating and recreational hockey, so it's not at the level of City National Arena, but could be used if needed. The

Golden Knights held their first rookie development camp there in 2017, and the facility just recently laid brand new sheets of ice. Sobe Ice Arena isn't optimal, especially considering its distance from the Strip, and the fact that it's in a casino.

However, Las Vegas is able to add additional sheets of ice (much closer to the Strip) if needed.

The MGM Grand Garden Arena – directly across the street from T-Mobile Arena – is built to hold hockey. It hosted "Frozen Fury" preseason games between the Los Angeles Kings and Colorado Avalanche every year from 1997 to 2016.

About 1.5 miles down Tropicana Avenue is the Orleans Arena, which can also host hockey. Not only was the arena home to the Las Vegas Wranglers ECHL team from 2003 to 2014, but it also just hosted two UNLV college hockey games in January, and will be the home of the Henderson Silver Knights AHL team for the next two seasons.

These are full arenas, not practice facilities or public rinks, so in theory they should be able to host NHL games, and not just team practices. This would give the NHL three game-ready rinks within two miles of each other. That opens the possibility of scheduling at least three games each day without the threat of an overtime running into the following matchup.

Las Vegas has the ability to house and feed the players. It appears to have ample ice surfaces for the games and practices — even if that means laying a couple more sheets of ice. The final and most important factor remaining will be the city's status in terms of COVID-19.

"Things are evolving rapidly, and when we decide on locations we want it to be on the best available information at the time," Bettman said during the NHL's unveiling of its plan. "The final determination will depend on COVID-19 conditions, testing availability and government regulations."

Right now Las Vegas appears to be doing extremely well on those fronts. Governor Steve Sisolak gave the casinos the green light to open on June 4. He also announced that sporting events can be held without fans. The UFC is scheduled to host multiple events in Las Vegas over the next few weeks, as is Top Rank boxing.

How the reopening of Nevada's gaming industry impacts COVID-19 conditions could be the determining factor for whether or not Las Vegas hosts NHL games this summer. If all goes well, there aren't many downsides to the setup in Las Vegas. But if it prompts a spike in numbers, it would likely rule the city out, especially considering the location of the arenas.

Another wrinkle that could rule Las Vegas out is the potential of all of the resorts discussed above actually opening up to the public. As of now, MGM only plans on opening some of its properties, but other resort companies like Caesars Entertainment are already opening additional hotels due to higher customer demand than initially anticipated. The NHL's plan of keeping players isolated from the general public could become a major issue if every hotel on the Las Vegas Strip is open for business.

The NHL has plenty of time to make a decision. Sportsnet's Elliotte Friedman reported players have been informed that Phase 3 (training camp) won't begin until July 10 at the earliest. Vegas' status as a potential host should be much clearer by then, if not earlier.

"I think Vegas is a great destination," Golden Knights owner Bill Foley said Thursday. "We have the hotels all around T-Mobile Arena to satisfy the needs. I believe it would be great for Vegas. The downside is that possibly we (the Golden Knights) wouldn't be able to play in Vegas. They tend to think that's an unfair advantage."

"But if Vegas is a hub city, I know the resort industry will do a great job, and we'll make sure everyone gets as much ice time as they need around town."

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CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • June 1, 2020

The Athletic / Duhatschek Notebook: Expanded Hart field, dark horse Cup picks and more

Eric Duhatschek

May 29, 2020

Almost every year, the Hart Trophy vote pivots on one critical question: Did the candidate for the NHL's de facto MVP award play on a team that made the playoffs?

And if the answer was no, that usually disqualifies that candidate from contention in the eyes of most voters. Often, a player who accomplished a lot on a non-playoff team might earn a fourth- or fifth-place courtesy nod on a ballot to acknowledge his excellent performance.

But to actually be in contention for the award while playing on a non-playoff team?

It rarely occurred.

But now here we are, at the end of May, in uncharted waters — and that will add an interesting, unusual wrinkle to the Hart Trophy conversation.

The NHL's regular season was deemed complete by commissioner Gary Bettman on Tuesday. Two days later, the league confirmed the winners of the trophies awarded purely on a statistical basis: Leon Draisaitl won the Art Ross; Alex Ovechkin and David Pastrnak were co-winners of the Rocket Richard; Tuukka Rask and Jaroslav Halak shared the Jennings; the Bruins won the Presidents' for having the best overall record.

Of the remaining awards, five are selected in a poll of the Professional Hockey Writers' Association (Hart, Calder, Norris, Selke and Lady Byng). The Jack Adams is chosen by the NHL Broadcasters Association while a panel of NHL GMs selects the Vezina winner.

Normally, ballots are distributed to eligible voters at the end of the regular season and must be completed by the time the puck drops for the first playoff game. In effect, there is about a 96-hour window for voters to make selections. Any ballots returned late are deemed "spoiled" and are rejected.

This year, however, there'll be a new layer of complexity to the voting because under the NHL's proposal, 24 teams remain in contention for the Stanley Cup. Eight received automatic byes into the 16-team playoff round, while 16 additional clubs are scheduled to participate in a play-in round to determine the final eight playoff spots.

Assuming voters are asked to cast their ballots before the play-in round occurs, the usual preconceptions about Hart voting can be thrown out the window.

What fun that's going to be!

The favorite is Draisaitl, the scoring champion, who — in conjunction with the second-place finisher, Connor McDavid — had his team nicely in the playoff mix when the season was put on hold. Edmonton lost out on one of the Western Conference's four direct berths in the playoff tournament by the smallest of margins (the Dallas Stars had a .594 winning percentage based on a 37-24-8 record; Edmonton was at .585, with a 37-25-9 record).

The difference between the Stars and the Oilers was a single regulation (as opposed to overtime) loss. Close.

As a result, Edmonton drew 12th-place Chicago as a play-in opponent. Any best-of-five after such a lengthy absence is going to make those preliminary series impossible to forecast — a real crapshoot. You could easily imagine a scenario in which the Blackhawks eliminate the Oilers in the play-in round.

Technically, that would mean Edmonton didn't qualify for the playoffs and yet, Draisaitl could — and frankly should — still win the MVP award.

But that would only be the fifth time in league history that a player from a non-playoff team won the Hart.

The other four: Mario Lemieux with the 1988 Pittsburgh Penguins; Andy Bathgate with the 1959 Rangers; Al Rollins with the 1954 Blackhawks; Tom Anderson with the 1942 New York Americans.

Where will Draisaitl's main competition come from? Well, here's where it will get even more complex.

Many thought Artemi Panarin's contributions to the Rangers' success this season warranted Hart attention, but considering New York was a long shot to make the playoffs before the pause, his chances of winning were severely hampered.

But now?

The world has shifted and the Rangers are still alive, scheduled to face the Hurricanes in the play-in round. It is theoretically possible New York could take out Carolina and then go on a long run. A lot of teams have ridden a young, relatively unknown goaltender (in New York's case, Igor Shesterkin) to unimaginable playoff heights.

Presumably, Panarin's candidacy for the Hart Trophy is going to get far more support now than if the season had ended after 82 games and the Rangers were on the outside of the playoff picture looking in.

Moreover, a couple of other players having exceptional seasons on teams that were destined to miss the playoffs (Florida's Jonathan Huberdeau and Chicago's Patrick Kane) could also be more of a factor in the voting than they otherwise might have been. And we haven't even talked about other viable candidates such as Pastrnak (Boston), McDavid or even Winnipeg Jets goaltender Connor Hellebuyck, who was getting support in some quarters.

Just as a reminder, the Hart goes to "the player adjudged most valuable to his team," which is technically not the same as "the league's best player."

The precise wording of the trophy's definition has added a layer of confusion and/or nuance to the voting most years — and resulted in some unusual results.

In 2002, for example, Montreal's Jose Theodore won over Calgary's Jarome Iginla, even though Iginla was the runaway winner of the Art Ross as the leading scorer and was also the Rocket Richard winner.

The two tied in voting points, but Theodore got the nod because he had more first-place votes than Iginla. Half a dozen voters left Iginla off their ballots, which seemed oddly arbitrary given how dominant he was that season. But that's how it goes in awards season. Voting results can be unpredictable — and this year, it has a chance to be even more puzzling than usual.

Race for the rest of the hardware

Just because there is more than the usual 96-hour voting window this year, I'll put this out as a challenge to readers for a possible discussion in the comments section.

Beyond the Hart race, who would you select to win the Calder ("to the player selected as the most proficient in his first year of competition in the NHL"), the Norris ("to the defense player who demonstrates throughout the season, the greatest all-around ability in the position") and the Jack Adams ("to the NHL coach adjudged to have contributed the most to his team's success")?

I've included the formal definition of the awards because that's how I normally start the process of preparing my ballot every year: I read the specific criteria of the award to remind myself of exactly what I'm voting for.

Voters sometimes get tripped up by the wording of the Hart criteria, but I'm convinced some don't look hard enough at the specific definition for the Norris, either. It's supposed to go to the player who demonstrated the



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • June 1, 2020

greatest all-around ability at the position, not necessarily to the defenceman who piled up the most points.

In all three of those trophy races, there are multiple deserving candidates.

For the Calder, it's primarily between Vancouver's Quinn Hughes and Colorado's Cale Makar.

For the Norris, there are two frontrunners in Washington's John Carlson and Nashville's Roman Josi with Alex Pietrangolo of the St. Louis Blues hovering just behind.

I'm glad I don't have a Jack Adams ballot because I would have no logical way of separating the top four: Columbus's John Tortorella, Philadelphia's Alain Vigneault, Winnipeg's Paul Maurice and Edmonton's Dave Tippett. There are also nuanced arguments to be made on behalf of Pittsburgh's Mike Sullivan and Vancouver's Travis Green, among others.

NHL voting is always a fun exercise. I've had a vote since 1980-81, when the ballots were on paper and filed out in triplicate, so you had to press really hard with your pen to penetrate the two sheets of carbon paper in between. Once upon a time, you mailed them in. Eventually, the league asked voters to hand the sealed envelopes to a team's public relations staffer and they would then be forwarded to head office. The approach has changed a few times over the years — there's a larger voting pool, you vote for five candidates per award as opposed to three — but the complexities remain.

Looking for a dark horse?

According to the betting service BetOnline, Boston and Tampa Bay are listed as the co-favourites to win the Stanley Cup at 13-2, followed by Colorado at 7-1 and Philly and Vegas at 8-1. Eleven of the 24 teams that remain in contention for the Cup are listed at 50-1 odds or greater, with five teams (Columbus, Chicago, Florida, Montreal and Winnipeg) all going off at 66-1.

Who do you like? I think there was very little to differentiate most of the contenders, even if there hadn't been a break in the schedule that's 2 1/2 months long and counting. It's hard enough to handicap the field in a regular year.

Trying to pick a winner with so many different variables that apply to this year's format seems like a job for your Ouija board. You can make a genuine case for every team — and a path they could successfully navigate to the winner's circle — given the short amount of time they'll have to get up to full speed.

This past week, on a Calgary radio show, host Pat Steinberg asked me for a sleeper pick. Without giving it too much thought, I blurted out:

"How about Florida?"

The more I thought about it, the more I realized: Why not Florida?

Consider: The Panthers' head coach is Joel Quenneville and in 2012-13, when Quenneville was running the Blackhawks, he figured out a way to get them out of the starting blocks lightning fast.

Chicago went 21-0-3 in its first 24 games of a lockout-shortened season that resumed in January after a long hiatus. Quenneville needs to tap into that magic again. Probably not everyone remembers, but the Blackhawks did it with goaltending that year as Corey Crawford and Ray Emery shared the Jennings. Crawford went 19-5-5 with a 1.94 GAA. Emery was an eye-popping 17-1 with an identical 1.94 GAA.

This year, Quenneville's starting goaltender in Florida, Sergei Bobrovsky, has had a disastrous first season after leaving Columbus and signing with the Panthers. But one of the reasons Bobrovsky was so appealing to Florida was how well he played for Columbus in its opening-round elimination of Tampa Bay last spring. Bobrovsky is a good goalie having a bad year in Florida. He could salvage a lot with a good, deep playoff run. And everything else about Florida — a dynamic offensive team, solid

if unspectacular on the blue line — could click into place if the goaltending measures up.

Jets on fire

On the day before the NHL paused, I was formulating a notebook item on why Winnipeg was a team to watch in the West. It had won four in a row and had seemingly overcome all those losses on the right side of its blue line (Dustin Byfuglien, Tyler Myers, Jacob Trouba). Maurice was a coach of the year candidate, Hellebuyck was in the running for the Vezina and while three of the Jets' dynamic offensive players (Mark Scheifele, Blake Wheeler, Patrik Laine) were having just OK seasons, two others (Kyle Connor and Nik Ehlers) had been excellent throughout. I liked the addition of Cody Eakin. They grabbed Dylan DeMelo at the trade deadline to reinforce the back end. They looked as if they were cresting at the right time. Now, lots can change in a multi-month absence and Laine was talking on a Zoom call how he isn't normally the fastest starter. But if everyone around Laine starts well — and they win a few rounds and then he finds his stride — yeah, the Jets could be a dangerous lurker. The Jets and the Panthers represent two of the longest odds on the board. I think they have the personnel to surprise people.

And finally ...

As much as I'm a writer at The Athletic, I'm also a reader — and like a lot of people, I enjoyed Sean McIndoe's piece this week in which he imagined what it would be like if every team still in contention for the Cup could temporarily add a player from an eliminated team to shore up its lineup.

Sean was good enough to include a link in his story to something I'd written 15 years ago about a time when that actually did happen.

Once upon a time, the Canadian Hockey League had a rule in place that permitted teams heading to the Memorial Cup to add a goaltender from an eliminated team.

John Davidson, my old "Satellite Hot Stove" and Hockey Hall of Fame running mate, did it twice in his career: Once with the Edmonton Oil Kings and once, in his Tier 2 days, with the Red Deer Rustlers, with whom he won the 1971 Centennial Cup as a backup behind Dale Henwood.

Mike Vernon did something similar, joining the Portland Winter Hawks in back-to-back years (1982 and 1983), and the second time, it resulted in a Memorial Cup.

Sean's piece gave me the perfect excuse to ring up Davidson and Vernon on Thursday to discuss those experiences — and specifically, so I could ask what it was like to join an opponent at the 11th hour after spending all season with another team.

In 1983, Vernon was put in an awkward position because Portland and Lethbridge, who were competing for the WHL crown, tried to recruit him.

Think about that for a moment — to illustrate how different times were.

They didn't approach Vernon through his team.

They didn't approach him through the league.

They didn't approach him through his agent.

They just called him up on the telephone and made their pitches, which really put him on the spot.

Vernon said he chose Portland for two reasons: One, he was guaranteed a chance to play, and two, he disliked Lethbridge immensely because of its heated rivalry with his team, the Calgary Wranglers.

"I can tell you — I hated the Lethbridge Broncos," Vernon said. "For two years, they ran me every chance they could — and then when this happens. Now Brent Sutter's calling me, Chappy (coach John Chapman) is calling me, and I get it. They want to win a championship. But why would I want to go play for somebody who has run the shit out of me for two years?"



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • June 1, 2020

"Realistically, it would be like me going to play for the Edmonton Oilers. I mean, really? You know there's been a bit of rivalry here, right? A little hate? It would have been a tough thing to do."

There's a collegiality in today's NHL that didn't exist in hockey half a century ago, when the rivalries, especially in the junior ranks, were so intense — and the brawls so common — that it might have been more difficult for a position player to join a team at that late stage for a championship push than it was for a goaltender, according to Davidson.

"Even when I started in the NHL, when John Ferguson was running the Rangers, you didn't dare talk to someone on the other team — after a game, before a game, during warmup — that's just the way it was," Davidson said. "Nowadays, when a game is over, the players play hard, but after a game, before they get on the bus, they're all chatting in the bowels of the arena. It's not like it was in the old days. Those were battles."

"You get young players, watching those old games on tape, they would just cringe. I get texts all the time from people when classic games are on TV that say, 'My God, what a battle that was!' The referees didn't call anything. They just let 'em play. You can imagine what it was like back in the day when the Rangers when down to Philadelphia to play the Bullies. But I personally loved it — because that's kind of how we played junior hockey out West. You were always into it."

But joining the Oil Kings was a fun experience, Davidson said. Phil Russell and Tom Bladon made him feel welcome and his only regret was he didn't play all that well for Edmonton and they didn't manage to win the Memorial Cup.

"They were terrific to me," Davidson said. "This was a great group of people and they made me feel very welcome. Doug Soetaert was one of the goalies. I'd been out a couple of weeks and they ended up picking me up — and I didn't play very well. That was very disappointing. ... I had great memories of that experience — but I just wish I'd played better."

With Vernon in 1983, Lethbridge made a second push to add him after its starter, Ken Wregget, was injured before the Memorial Cup. By then, he'd already made up his mind — and he wasn't about to reconsider.

From that moment on, the Canadian Hockey League did away with the policy. It was, in effect, the Mike Vernon rule.

"The rule should have been, after the fact, you get to declare who you want to play with you in the Memorial — not before, when the series was still going on," Vernon said. "Portland promised me a chance to play every game. Lethbridge had Kenny Wregget, a great goalie. I was going to sit on the bench — until he got hurt."

"It's interesting because the most important job on the planet when it comes to playoffs is goaltending. And this (process) actually made sense when it comes to an injury because what's the alternative? Call up a 16-year-old kid that's in your system and throw him into the fire in a Memorial Cup? That could make your career — or it could break your career."

"The first or second year when I got called up to the Calgary Flames, I got thrown into a game by Badger Bob (Johnson), played 11 minutes, gave up four goals. I think my goals-against for the year was like 22.22. I can't believe that it didn't destroy my life — I don't know how I overcame that. But it was a tough thing to do."

Vernon was intrigued when I explained why we were talking about something that happened in the long-ago past — and said he wouldn't mind seeing it go back to the way it once was because his experience of winning the Memorial Cup with Portland was pivotal to his development as a goalie.

"Anytime you can get into that atmosphere, it helps you later in life," Vernon said. "It gives you the feeling of playing in a pressure-packed situation. In hockey, you can't just expect to win. You have to learn to win. In Detroit, we lost in '96 when everyone thought we would win, but

we won a year later. In Calgary, we lost in '86 but won in '89. I'm not sure people understand how that works. You've got to earn your stripes to win."

"When the pressure's on, people react differently — and it takes time to get used to it."

The Athletic LOADED: 05.30.2020

The Athletic / Many NHL players not planning on returning to team facility for Phase 2

Joe Smith and Sean Shapiro

May 29, 2020

Luke Schenn returned to Kelowna, B.C., three weeks ago, figuring his offseason home near family was a much better place to be with his baby boy, Weston, who was born on April 21 in Tampa.

The Lightning's veteran defenseman said there's about 15 NHL players in the surrounding area, which should make for a good practice group when Phase 2 of the NHL's Return to Play plan begins next week.

While Schenn, 30, plans to stay in Canada until there's an agreement on a training camp schedule, he realizes he'll eventually have to leave his wife, Jessica, 3-year-old son Kingston and Weston. Schenn just doesn't know how the process is going to work, with the NHL essentially leaving it up to players and teams — with a \$1,500 stipend for travel — to get across the border and safely back for camp.

"You know more than I do," Schenn said by phone Wednesday. "I haven't heard anything."

Schenn is far from alone. Nearly 15 percent of NHL players are outside the United States during this quarantine, everywhere from Siberia and Sweden to Finland and Russia. Talking to more than a dozen players around the world for this story, none of them had a plan to get back to their respective club at this point.

"No, we haven't yet," Stars defenseman Esa Lindell said via text from Finland. "Maybe we'll get some updates in a couple days?"

Once they start making plans there will be a checklist. They'll have to work through any visa issues, navigate connecting flights and figure out their quarantine situation once they arrive in their team's city.

NHL deputy commissioner Bill Dally said, while the league is involved from a "big picture" perspective, "the nuts and bolts of actual travel" has been left to the club and players. There's no mega charter being set up to bring all the Swedes or Fins back. And if they want to bring their families, that's up to the player — and their pocketbook.

"You don't know what your emotions will be," Schenn said. "On one hand you're excited to get back and compete for a Stanley Cup. But on the other hand, your family is a big part of it. All those issues haven't been resolved yet. It's crazy times right now. There's a lot of moving parts and families will be in the forefront for a ton of guys. You want to make sure they're safe and all that. I don't think you can know what emotions are until the situation actually arises."

The NHL is already working on a document to extend contracts for players set to be free agents on June 30 to the conclusion of the 2019-20 season, but international players without a contract for the 2020-21 season will have to work through visa hoops.

Typically visas expire with the contract on June 30, so for a multitude of pending restricted and unrestricted free agents, there will be paperwork required to make sure they can legally work when the NHL resumes play.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • June 1, 2020

Agent Dan Milstein, who has several Russian players as clients, said the NHL has been working with the U.S. government on extending the international players' visas to the end of the resumed playoffs. Each country will be different, but Milstein said the Russian border should be opening next week. Milstein's clients include Nikita Kucherov and Andrei Vasilevskiy, who have remained in Tampa during the shutdown, but also Lightning prospect Alex Volkov, who will be returning from Russia as one of the likely callups for the 28-man roster.

"The (visas) shouldn't be an issue, at least that's what I've been told," Milstein said.

It certainly helps that the United States already made itself a willing partner with acting secretary of homeland security Chad Wolf signing an order to allow foreign-born pro athletes into the country with relaxed travel restrictions.

Wolf issued a statement after signing the order, stating "it's time we get our professional athletes back to work."

Daly said via email the NHL is "focused on assisting the Clubs with work visa issues, particularly related to Players on expiring contracts," while team services directors throughout the NHL has started to have conversations with their typical contacts at the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services.

The NHL did get ahead of this as early as possible, reaching out to teams in March about the visa and green card status of each player and coach.

There's also the major question of when players should report back to their home cities. Phase 2 is optional, and while the NHL announced its return to play plan, many players are still waiting for more certainty that there will be a Phase 3 and a training camp before committing to traveling.

This is creating situations like Schenn's in Kelowna all around the world. There are groups of NHL players in Stockholm and Helsinki that plan to skate together, while similar groups are likely being formed in other locales.

NHL clubs aren't worried about this setup. Stars general manager Jim Nill said he and other GMs have had discussions with players to gauge whether it might be more beneficial to have them handle Phase 2 in their current location.

Fewer players taking part in Phase 2 at team facilities might alleviate some of the logistical problems in the short-term. Each group of six players is to be assigned its own trainer and equipment staff – for some teams there may not be enough personnel for that to work.

Each player getting extensive ice time is paramount in this process. For many players, this is the longest they've gone without skating in their careers. Boston Bruins captain Zdeno Chara, the NHL's oldest player at 42, told reporters in a conference call on Thursday it's the longest he's ever gone without skating.

Many have supplemented with creative workouts, by using rollerblades around town and, like Kucherov, shooting on nets on the synthetic ice in his garage in Tampa. In Dallas, Tyler Seguin ordered a net for the tennis court on his property. Seguin highlighted his struggles building the net on Instagram.

Schenn said he has a Peloton bike in Kelowna he uses, and with most of the weights for purchase on backorder, he's thankful that Stars winger Blake Comeau let him borrow his equipment.

"I was thinking back to last summer when I wasn't in the playoffs, and I think I was already skating for the coming season probably towards the end of May," Schenn said. "It's unusual for sure as far as not skating as much as you would have. You can stickhandle in your driveway here and there, but it's not the same."

Schenn and defenseman Victor Hedman are the only two Lightning regulars who are out of the country now, with several others like Pat

Maroon (St. Louis) in their offseason spots. Hedman is back in Sweden, where the rules of social distancing have been more relaxed than in North America, freeing up players to skate and work out.

For the Stars, more than half the regulars have left the country, leaving only nine players on the NHL roster at the time of the stoppage not having to return to the United States. In general, most teams have at least a handful of players flung across the world.

A key question that will have to be answered is the two-week mandated quarantine for players arriving from foreign countries. If Hedman, for example, takes a flight from Sweden to Tampa through New York, will he have to quarantine near the JFK or Lughardia airport, or can he fly safely to Tampa and quarantine there?

"Quarantines in-market may be imposed based on where the players are traveling from, as specifically referenced in the Phase 2 protocol," Daly said. "The precise mechanics of the league-imposed quarantines are being developed."

There's also the question of what quarantine will be necessary, it's something the GM's have raised with the league. If a player is tested and tests negative, why would they need to quarantine?

"It's a great question, the answer I've gotten is we don't know how this virus works totally," Nill said. "Can you pick up the virus on an airplane coming over ... and get tested a day later and it doesn't show up in the test? The whole idea behind the two-week quarantine is within the 10 to 14 days, the virus will show itself, so we need a safe period. I've asked the same question, if you've tested negative, why do you have to quarantine?"

Canadian quarantine rules are more strict than the United States. By government order anyone entering the country has to quarantine for two weeks – there are no exceptions – which is why the Vancouver Canucks have already floated the idea of holding training camp in the United States.

"It's a big concern," Vancouver GM Jim Benning said in a conference call. "We worry about it because that's 14 days before we're going to start a grueling training camp and get into playing playoff-style games. Basically, we're telling our players that they've gotta sit around their homes or apartments and they can't do the type of training they need."

Benning did say, while he might not like what the restriction means, the Canucks would respect the order if they hold camp in British Columbia.

The more-strict Canadian quarantine could also lead to both hub cities being in the United States, meaning the Canucks could simply be starting a trend other Canadian teams might follow if they have to bring an entire roster to the United States right after camp.

Schenn said they are still pretty careful in Kelowna when it comes to quarantining, noting he's rarely left the house.

When you have two young kids, the more you wander out, the more you put the family at risk.

Schenn and his wife will order food online, but in the times he's popped by the grocery store, he wears a mask and a worker always sprays shoppers' hands with hand sanitizer on the way in. While nobody checked in on Schenn during the NHL-mandated two weeks he had to quarantine after leaving Florida, he heard of a bunch of players who experienced that.

"They've been pretty strict about it," he said.

Schenn has been enjoying some downtime with his family, with Kingston relishing in the big backyard after being limited to mini-stick hockey in the bedroom of their Tampa townhome.

The Lightning were one of two NHL teams to vote no in the NHLPA's vote on the 24-team Return to Play format, with Schenn noting there was spirited debate in the players' group text. While the format is not



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • June 1, 2020

"traditional," Schenn compared it to the previous lockouts, saying "Whoever wins the Cup, I don't think they'll complain."

Schenn is going to stay in Kelowna with the other 15 NHL players, sticking to the rules of the Phase 2 groups of six workouts. They haven't really talked about how they're going to get back to their teams for when – and if – there's a camp.

"We don't know what the future conditions are going to be like, if we're leaving our family and for how long?" Schenn said. "It's like another offseason, although you don't know when the deadline is. You work out on your own and get together when camp starts."

"For the most part, everyone is in the same boat – which is a good and a bad thing."

The Athletic LOADED: 05.30.2020

Sportsnet.ca / 31 Thoughts: Fun week, but high hurdles remain for NHL resumption

Elliotte Friedman

May 28, 2020, 1:15 PM

It was nice to talk about the fun stuff. Playoff matchups, lottery odds, votes of confidence, players recovering from injury — all of the great things we miss pontificating about. The last few days have been a good public-relations burst for the NHL and its players.

There are people who grinded hard to get things done. They deserved that reward.

The Return to Play committee put in legit work. It wasn't easy, and not everyone was happy, but no one faulted the effort. And, as difficult as that was, putting together the 22-page protocol for Stage II of the return process might have been even more challenging. It doesn't even require mandatory attendance for players, so imagine what it will take to complete the protocols for Stages III and IV, which involve training camps and games, respectively.

The process will be detail-oriented and intense.

There are no guarantees. There are so many unknowns about COVID-19, so many assurances necessary about safety and testing for players, coaches, officials, executives, team staff and all workers located at either the rink or elsewhere in the "bubble."

As the players discussed their vote for the playoff system, there was plenty of debate about whether or not they should play at all. Finally, they separated that conversation into, "Let's vote on the playoff format now, and get to the other question after."

Now, decisions are getting a little more "real." There is a playoff system. On Tuesday, Commissioner Gary Bettman said the league is three to four weeks away from selecting the two hub cities that will host potential games. At that point, we are talking about contractual agreements. Maybe there will be incentives for the NHL to come. There will certainly be costs to the league.

While you have to believe there will be protection in case the pandemic does not allow competition, the league is going to have to know whether or not the players are truly committed to play.

You can't possibly talk to every player, but you try to get a pulse for what's happening. When news leaked out that the bottom seven teams were going to be eliminated from the playoffs, it seemed that the percentage of players willing to play significantly grew. But, in the last few days, there've been more rumours of ... let's call it uncertainty.

As I write this, it's hard to determine just how widespread those feelings are. I suspect there is going to be plenty of work over the next few days to determine that.

The family issue is a big one. During a conference call on Wednesday, Columbus captain Nick Foligno said, "If somebody tells me I can't see my family, there's going to be a fight."

The NBA is working on bringing all returning teams to Disney World in Orlando. ESPN reported Wednesday that it and the National Basketball Players Association are formulating a plan to allow some family to join early-round winners once some opponents are eliminated in the playoffs. That would keep the numbers relatively low. And you can assume that if one league is looking at something, they all are.

Obviously, health is another huge issue. By the time players are expected to report to camp (Stage III), there's going to have to be some clarity on immune-compromised players and/or staff. Interestingly, when asked on Tim & Sid about making sure players are covered by long-term insurance, NHLPA Executive Director Donald Fehr said, "I really don't believe in the end that'll be a major issue."

At times, it's been suggested by not only players, but team executives, that we wait until the end of the summer before returning to training camps and playing games. I can understand why the players would want that. They are creatures of habit, and it is what they are used to.

The fear there is the second wave during flu season. According to multiple sources, the epidemiologists advising both the NHL and NHLPA have advised against waiting, and Bettman, in particular, sees it as a major reason to target late-July/August/September as prime playing time.

I'm not going to judge anyone else's choice. I'm ready to go back to work, but not everyone would make the same decision. Is not playing this summer a preference or a health choice? It's not an easy question to ask, but if it is a health reason, why would they be any more comfortable playing in December or January without a vaccine? What would we be looking at then?

The NHL and NHLPA deserve a ton of credit for keeping the financials private, so far. Baseball is going through a very ugly, public spat with players openly taking social-media aim at ownership. Fans despise labour disputes when life is good. It's incredibly tone-deaf now.

NHLers have been told that coming back to finish this year might save them seven or eight points on escrow (probably moving it down from 35 to 27 or 28). There are some — again, I'm not sure how many — who don't think that's worth it. I do believe the league is willing to ease that number by collecting those payments over several years. But I'm not sure a full CBA can be done by the time games will be played, and is the NHL prepared to make that deal without a long-term commitment? It's a delicate dance, because the owners will argue (if pushed) that their bottom lines are getting hit hard, too.

I'm always optimistic, and that's important — especially now. This is not impossible, but it is challenging. Tuesday and Wednesday were fun days, a respite from doom and gloom. Time to roll up the sleeves once again, more problems to solve.

Jeff Marek and Elliotte Friedman talk to a lot of people around the hockey world, and then they tell listeners all about what they've heard and what they think about it.

31 THOUGHTS

1. CBA talks are expected to ramp up enough that the NHLPA will soon form a negotiating committee. Still active from the 2012–13 version: Ron Hainsey and Ryan Miller.
2. Commissioner Bettman hinted at big costs to the league for the testing procedure. Word is the NHL is looking at \$120–\$130 per test. At 25,000 tests, that's more than \$3 million. Not insignificant.
3. Thing I didn't like this week: the online beatdown Tampa Bay's Alex Killorn and Carolina's Jordan Martinook got for explaining their team's



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • June 1, 2020

"no" votes on the Return to Play protocol. The Hurricanes and Lightning were the lone dissenters. We complain that hockey players are too boring or too conservative, then we complain when they don't conform to the majority. We can't have it both ways. Killorn/Martinook ate it for their teammates, too, since they didn't vote solely on their own feelings.

4. A few sources hinted at a "Carolina plan" setting up the playoffs. The Hurricanes politely declined to share a copy of what was proposed, but I've asked around and got two different ideas. Some of it was submitted directly by the team to the league, some of it via players through the union.

One suggestion: Instead of a play-in round, weight the 12 teams in each conference by the percentage chance they had to make the final 16. Each team would then play three games, leading to the "final" regular-season standings. Therefore, instead of Chicago and Montreal getting closer to a 50 per cent chance of making the playoffs, their odds would remain at three per cent and 0.1 per cent, respectively.

A second suggestion was to force their play-in opponent, the Rangers, to win four of the five games. If Carolina won twice in that scenario, the series would have been over and the Hurricanes would have automatically advanced. Both proposals were rejected.

5. Nothing is certain, but I do think there's a decent chance re-seeding becomes the playoff setup as opposed to bracketing.

6. I don't profess to know the CBA as well as some of the people involved, but I was talking to a team affected by the NHL's desire not to allow anyone to sign players for the remainder of the 2019–20 season. This includes valuable KHL transplants like Kirill Kaprizov (Minnesota), Alexander Romanov (Montreal) and Ilya Sorokin (Islanders). His position was, "If it is allowed every other year, what in our agreement prevents it this year?" I honestly don't know if he's got a legit beef or not, but the June 1 entry-level deadline will be pushed back to July 1 to give everyone more time to figure this out.

7. Vancouver GM Jim Benning said Wednesday the Canucks are considering a U.S.-based training camp if crossing the Canadian border requires quarantine when Stage III begins. I don't think the Canucks are alone on that.

Richard Deitsch and Donovan Bennett host a podcast about how COVID-19 is impacting sports around the world. They talk to experts, athletes and personalities, offering a window into the lives of people we normally root for in entirely different ways.

8. I'd said earlier this week that Los Angeles was a "late entry" into the hub race, but it was pointed out that although we didn't hear about the Kings' interest, they were one of the first teams to pitch. The league and players love the L.A. Live setup — it's super-convenient. Biggest challenge is practice availability, and that's why Anaheim's beautiful new practice rink would be part of this bid. It's a 45-minute bus ride between them.

9. Buffalo owner Kim Pegula announced this week that GM Jason Botterill will return. I checked in on New Jersey, but the Devils are not yet ready to make any proclamations. Interim GM Tom Fitzgerald said earlier this week that "the organization has been fantastic to me. They are allowing me to be the GM of this team, whether it's an interim tag or not."

But I do think ownership is continuing its search at the executive level. Admittedly, I find it hard to read and am not sure about where this will go. Personally, I feel that, at some point, you have to make your call and end the uncertainty.

10. As for the coaching search, word is the Devils are eyeing at least four candidates. I believe that includes incumbent Alain Nasreddine, along with Gerard Gallant, Peter Laviolette and John Stevens. There may be one more. The wrinkle here is that Fitzgerald did the initial interviews, and will any of them want him as their boss should they be choice? It's also possible ownership will want a conversation before any decision is made. It's a unique time to try and hire someone.

11. For almost 35 years, Les Jackson's been a Star. Hired as an assistant coach when the franchise was still in Minnesota in 1985, he stayed with the organization every season but one since. His contract will not be renewed. End of an era, for sure. He's been a huge part of that organization's success.

12. Chicago had one of the largest scouting staffs in the NHL (if not the largest). They will also be making some cuts, mostly on the pro side.

13. It's eye-opening to hear Buffalo's Jack Eichel vent his frustration, but I don't think it will surprise the Sabres. Everything he says publicly, they've heard privately.

Eichel: "Look, I'm fed up with the losing & I'm frustrated. ... It's been a tough couple of months. It's been a tough five years. ... I want to win the Stanley Cup every time I start a season. ... I'd be lying if I said I'm not getting frustrated with the way things are going."

— Lance Lysowski (@LLysowski) May 28, 2020

14. Other things you may have missed from an active Wednesday: Detroit GM Steve Yzerman confirmed Jeff Blashill will remain as head coach and that the Wings will name a captain before next season. (You're not going to get great betting odds on Dylan Larkin for that.) Great news for Carolina and the Islanders as Dougie Hamilton and Adam Pelech will be ready to return from what were supposed to be season-ending injuries. Same for Jonathan Drouin in Montreal. Pittsburgh's Nick Bjugstad had a setback and is out for the season, while Winnipeg does not yet have clarity on Bryan Little. San Jose GM Doug Wilson did not commit to Bob Boughner's return as head coach.

15. When I began a conversation with Detroit's Sam Gagner, he was finishing a 75-minute online Harvard Business School class. Dominic Moore sold him on the idea, and Gagner was reviewing a case study. Is he thinking about his life after hockey?

"More recently than I ever have in the past," Gagner answered. "I'm always going to try and stay in the game in some capacity, and the development side appeals to me. I've had to try and develop myself — grow in a lot of different ways — and I like the idea of helping other kids. I'm not sure I'd want to coach."

Make no mistake about it, though — he still wants to play.

"I'd play another 10 years if I could, although I'm not sure they'll let me," he laughed.

16. I reached out to Gagner because he's part of a group in a weird situation: unrestricted free agent, no possible games until at least December, a long time before he'll be able to sort out his future.

"It's a lot," Gagner said. "Not only is it up in the air when you're going to play or where you're going to play, but having a family of three kids, there's that other factor of school starting in September. So there's a lot on your mind."

The best way to power through that is enjoying the time with your family, and he's doing that. But Gagner has also come up with an interesting way to approach the time. A few years ago, he read about Tom Brady's routine — and will adopt it.

"No matter when his season ends, he keeps training until the Super Bowl champion is crowned, because he approaches every year as if he will be playing then. So now I'm training as if I'm in the playoffs.... Yes, it's hard to recreate (that intensity), but it will keep me busy and ready."

I thought it was an interesting, smart idea.

17. I asked Gagner about trying to find a month-to-month deal if the European leagues start on time.

"Remember the lockout-shortened year (2012–13)? Some guys took time off, others went and played. I played and it really helped me. At that time, I didn't have a family.... I'm not sure my wife will let me go."

He laughed.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • June 1, 2020

"I do want to play in the NHL, so I haven't thought a lot about it."

Gagner said there hasn't been much discussion about an extension with Detroit, but he understands why because there's so much up in the air. They will need good pros. What's for sure: He's making a plan to be ready.

This is a long, uncertain stretch for UFAs on the non-playoff teams.

18. Gagner's family is still in Edmonton. His summer home is in Ontario's cottage country. Will he drive cross-country in an RV like Connor McDavid?

"That is the plan," he answered. "Although we'll need a bigger one than he did."

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19. Hockeysverige editor-in-chief Uffe Bodin was an excellent guest on 31 Thoughts: The Podcast this week. He pointed out that one prospect who decided to stay home because of the uncertainty is San Jose's Jonathan Dahlen. Bodin mentioned Lias Andersson as another possibility, but because Andersson has another year on his entry-level contract with the Rangers, New York has a say in that. Dahlen is a restricted free agent.

20. So, what happens if one of the eight "play-in" losers wins one of the top three draft selections, and, unfortunately, we never get to the playoffs. Canadiens GM Marc Bergevin said during his conference call it is his understanding that the second-phase odds would be determined by regular-season points percentage. That helps the Canadiens.

21. Calgary's Elias Lindholm has switched agencies to Newport. He has four seasons remaining on his current contract.

22. The NHL officially announced its regular-season award winners on Thursday: Alex Ovechkin and David Pastrnak for the Rocket Richard; Leon Draisaitl for the Art Ross; Tuukka Rask and Jaroslav Halak for the Jennings.

I'm really fascinated to see how the play-in games get handled, because of one particular case: Carson Soucy. The Minnesota defender had a really nice season, making the good jump at 25. Because he's played only 62 regular-season and playoff games so far, he can become a Group VI unrestricted free agent. If he gets up to 80, he moves to a restricted free agent. So the Wild would need to play 18 games to get there. Debate the odds amongst yourselves, but you have to think any play-in games count. With the cap squeeze coming, a cost-efficient, improving option like Soucy has value.

23. I thought someone was pulling my leg with this, but it's apparently true: One kind of funny issue is the NHL and NHLPA schedule the arbitrators they want for the summer, when they normally hold the process. Now that it may be moved into the fall, they're worried they won't get the arbitrators they want, because they'll be committed elsewhere. It's being worked on, but I smile at things I don't realize become problems.

24. Daniel Briere told some good stories on our #Ask31 on Tuesday. The 307-goal scorer has one thing in common with all of us: In his new life as vice president of operations for ECHL Maine, he hates shipping fees.

"I'm a big stickler with shipping fees," he said. "So we have our jersey [nameplates]. They will cost you \$20 to \$25 and the shipping fees will be \$75 to \$80 sometimes. It drives me absolutely nuts when I see that coming in."

25. A few years ago, Sportsnet's features department did a fantastic piece on Briere's wife, Misha, a pilot and surgeon in the Air Force.

"She separated from the Air Force two years ago," he said. "(She's) back in internal medicine, it's her intern year."

Normally, interns are around 27 or 28, but Misha's previous travels mean she's a little older.

"It's funny — she was a major in the Air Force, bossing people around... She had a lot of people under her. And now she's at the bottom of the pile, being bossed to. She works extremely hard — a lot of her patients are COVID-19 patients in the Philly area."

Misha's doing God's work, we wish her — and the patients — all the best.

26. Reminder that this GoFundMe has until tomorrow to save the Alabama-Huntsville hockey program.

Senior Writer Ryan Dixon and NHL Editor Rory Boylen always give it 110%, but never rely on clichés when it comes to podcasting. Instead, they use a mix of facts, fun and a varied group of hockey voices to cover Canada's most beloved game.

27. There are always people looking for ways to break into hockey, and this week I came across 30-year-old Montrealer Ian Beckenstein. Who is he?

"I'm a normal guy pursuing my dream," he said.

Beckenstein used to work in digital advertising sales, but it wasn't for him. He did some statistical stuff for the well-known Lac St. Louis hockey program, and when he heard about the Canadiens' AHL team moving from Hamilton to Laval a few years ago, he reached out to the team's goalie/video coach, Marco Marciano, over LinkedIn. Beckenstein's now spent three years with them on a part-time basis (in addition to a full-time job at Sportlogiq, although that's dissipated due to the pandemic). Earlier this week, he published a blog post entitled, "How to Start Your Video Coaching Career." I enjoyed the read.

28. For Laval, Beckenstein charts home time-on-ice and face-off winning percentage, including how successful everyone is in each particular dot. Every game day at 9:00 a.m., he presents a report to assistant coach Alex Burrows.

"If we're playing Toronto, it's a combination of all the face-off stats versus the Marlies to that point of the season."

That wasn't initially one of his responsibilities, but, as Beckenstein says, when you're starting out, "You're always trying to find a way to add value to what you do. You learn a lot of lessons about the right approach. When I started in Lac St. Louis, they told me to 'be a superstar in your role.' So, if you're going to be the video coach, be the best video coach you can be. You must do your initial task properly, because if you can't do that, you're not getting other opportunities."

Beckenstein's done some IIHF work, and wants to move up the ladder using a combination of video and analytics.

"I don't want to be preachy. I just want to give back — give people an idea of the software, equipment [and] cost for people who want to try this."

29. Beckenstein on Burrows: "He's super detailed, super sharp, not afraid to say, 'Why is this like this?' And he's not asking to be mean — he wants to understand."

He added that Burrows talks about Sami Salo quite a bit, because he's set up a power-play strategy based on something the Finnish defender used to do. It's called "The Salo."

30. True or false: Jim Hughson missed a hole in one last week at Fairview Mountain's golf course because the "noodle" on the pin got in the way?

31. Via video, Jeff Blashill addressed the graduates at De La Salle Collegiate in Warren, Mich. It was really good, and I wanted to end the blog with it. Blashill:

"(COVID-19) has robbed you of some great life experiences. But turbulence is part of life. No doubt you will face it (again) in your future."



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • June 1, 2020

The question you have to answer then — as you do now — is, ‘When you get knocked down, will you get back up?’ The greatest people in our history all have one thing in common: They faced incredible hardships, and had a choice to make. They chose to persevere and always get back up. I urge you to do the same. Turbulent times are also great opportunities to learn and to grow, to strengthen your faith, and to gain perspective on what’s truly important in life. I am sure you have done all three. Don’t waste one day to be the best version of yourself. Never compare yourself to others. Be the best you. Chase your passion, whatever that may be. Never chase money and fame, for if you chase your passions, you will never work one day in your life. Enrich the lives of those around you; it’s amazing the impact you have on the people you touch. Make sure it’s a positive impact. Finally, live your life with an ‘earn this’ philosophy. Wake up every day trying to earn the great opportunities you have in life. You are not entitled to anything in this life, you simply get what you earn. Wake up and earn it.”

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 05.30.2020

Sportsnet.ca / How NHL could transition from paused to handing out Stanley Cup

Chris Johnston

May 29, 2020, 12:47 PM

“There’s no magic to starting in October,” Gary Bettman said this week, but there may be some found in finishing then.

For it looks increasingly like that’s when the commissioner will be handing over the Stanley Cup if health conditions allow the NHL to go ahead with a 24-team tournament to crown a champion at the end of its coronavirus-interrupted season.

Bettman was reluctant to attach specific dates to his league’s return-to-play plan after Tuesday’s unveiling and said anybody who did would be “guessing.”

So let’s stick with the known facts, as best we can, in sketching out how the NHL might transition from paused to completing the playoffs.

The earliest players will be required to report to their teams for training camp is July 10. That was communicated to them in a Thursday afternoon memo. While there’s no certainty the league will be ready to transition to Phase 3 at that point — camps could conceivably open later in the month instead — let’s use the best-case scenario as a baseline.

Senior Writer Ryan Dixon and NHL Editor Rory Boylen always give it 110%, but never rely on clichés when it comes to podcasting. Instead, they use a mix of facts, fun and a varied group of hockey voices to cover Canada’s most beloved game.

Now the NHL is granting the players a fair bit of latitude in helping shape how the resumption unfolds, including final say on the length of training camps. The players on the “Return To Play Committee” have indicated a need for at least three weeks to get back in game shape, although there seems to be some flexibility on their part now that team facilities are expected to open late next week for small-group workouts.

Perhaps, with ice available to everyone for somewhere in the neighbourhood of five weeks before camps officially open, they won’t require as much time as initially thought.

“We really want it to be more on the cautious side than obviously kind of being aggressive,” said Toronto Maple Leafs captain John Tavares, one of five players serving on the ‘Return To Play Committee.’

“I really think we’re going to get a better sense ... as we get into Phase 2: How guys are feeling, how long that phase is going to be, really what we’re going to need. It’s not an exact science.”

In sticking with an optimistic view, let’s say they end up needing two weeks on the ice together in their playing cities. That takes us to July 24. The next step will see teams travel to their hub cities to complete training camps and play two exhibition games apiece, which is expected to last another week.

Now we’re sitting at July 31.

How long the tournament itself takes to play is currently resting in the hands of the NHL Players’ Association as it decides on the remaining format issues. It could be completed in as few as 59 days if best-of-fives are used for Rounds 1 and 2 followed by best-of-sevens in the conference finals and Stanley Cup final.

An additional nine days are required to play four rounds of best-of-seven, like usual, following the best-of-five play-in series.

It’s not an easy choice given the concerns many players have about being separated from their families to complete the season. However, the signs seem to point to them electing to commit to the longer tournament to preserve the integrity of the Stanley Cup.

“I think anyone who gets their name on it wants to earn it like the players that did before them,” said Tavares. “I think the sense I got, and I think my own personal view, is it would be nice to play all four rounds of the playoffs as a best-of-7. As what we’re used to.”

Kris Letang, the NHLPA rep for the Pittsburgh Penguins, expressed a similar sentiment after discussing the matter with his teammates.

“One thing that comes up often is the fact that everybody is used to the best-of-7,” said Letang. “You know how it’s structured, you know how it feels if you lose the first two [games] or you win the first two. You kind of know all the scenarios that can go through a best-of-7.”

“I don’t think there’s any players in this league right now that played back in the day in the best three-of-five. So I think it’s just an easier thing to just put a best-of-7 because everybody knows what to expect and you have no excuses of not being prepared for that.”

Should that end up being the case, a tournament starting Aug. 1 could see Game 7 of the Stanley Cup Final played on Oct. 7.

And that’s assuming everything proceeds in a timely manner between then and now — far from a guarantee, despite the big strides already made by completing the playoff framework and getting a good handle on how the COVID-19 testing will be handled.

There’s still a lot of back and forth coming on key issues that need to be negotiated between the league and players.

All of which points to one conclusion: If the NHL manages to complete this unusual 2019-20 season, it will have to do so more than a calendar year after it initially started.

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 05.30.2020

TSN.CA / Zoom becomes a training tool for NHLers during pandemic

Frank Seravalli

With restrictions loosening, National Hockey League players have begun to trickle into privately owned rinks around the continent in recent weeks.

But in the 78 days since the NHL hit pause, some have turned to the video-first communications platform Zoom — like many of us in the working world — as a vehicle to both improve and keep their head in the game without access to ice.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • June 1, 2020

Brandon Naurato, a player development consultant with the Detroit Red Wings who also works with individual clients, has helped engage players, both physically and mentally, via Zoom.

One day, Naurato is working with clients like Quinn and Jack Hughes to help transform their shot with the help of video.

Another day, Naurato is breaking down game tape with narration from James van Riemsdyk in a Zoom chat with younger clients from the same R4PA agency that represents the Philadelphia Flyers winger.

"This hasn't been an easy time for anyone, but I've been working with a lot of players from afar to try and help them get better," Naurato said. "When you're not able to get on the ice, sometimes this is the next best thing."

Naurato recently began working with the Hughes brothers, but he has also worked with Zach Werenski, Kyle Connor and Dylan Larkin.

For the Hughes boys, Naurato is like a golf swing coach who does technical analysis through video. Quinn and Jack will send him video of shooting drills from their driveway. Naurato will break down their mechanics, even draw on the screen and give specifics tips, then send the video back so that they know what to attack the next day.

"It's a new way of teaching," Naurato said. "My big thing is movement and the way you shoot the puck. If you don't have that movement, it's a bigger project."

"I'm not going to be able to turn a 12-year-old into a 40-goal scorer. But a lot of these NHL players have that already. I've seen guys completely change their shot and be able to add 10 miles per hour over the course of a summer. That can become a significant weapon."

There is no conflict of interest for Naurato, who has permission from the Red Wings to engage clients much in the same way Maple Leafs consultant Darryl Belfry works with his own clients.

A recent film session with Naurato and van Riemsdyk provided fellow R4PA clients, including recently signed Canucks prospect Will Lockwood, with a window into JVR's hockey mind. The Zoom call was the brain child of R4PA partners and certified agents Alec Schall and Shawn Hunwick.

Naurato stoked an hour's worth of conversation, queuing up clips with van Riemsdyk narrating sequences from this season. They focused on puck protection, puck play below the goal line and net-front presence.

"James is the type of guy that challenges you, he wants to know why," Naurato said. "He wants to know all of the details and to see a high-end NHL player giving back is really cool."

Van Riemsdyk, who finished the season with 40 points in 66 games, let the younger players in on intricate details.

They learned that he uses a 100-flex CCM stick that's a little stiffer than most goal scorers, who prefer more whip. His explanation: "I like to feel strong on it. I don't like going into battles in certain areas of the ice with it feeling flimsy."

On one goal sequence, van Riemsdyk knew he only needed to beat one Winnipeg Jet to the net to score. "A lot of times in front of the net, I like to initiate contact first," he said as the clip ran. "It throws them off a little bit, puts them on their heels a little bit more, and it just gives you space to operate."

On another goal, a sly redirect between a goalie's legs, van Riemsdyk revealed that the Flyers found in a pre-scout meeting that this certain netminder typically created an opening in his five-hole because of his eagerness to poke check.

Van Riemsdyk's message to the group was: "The more you watch yourself play, the more you watch hockey in general and watch successful players, you start to pick up on things, on what they do – and you see these opportunities where you can find ways to create more and be more dynamic out there."

He called it "putting yourself in position to use your brain more."

In the middle of a pandemic, that's exactly what van Riemsdyk was doing – thinking and talking about hockey at a time when he wasn't allowed to work on his game on the ice.

That helped the young players on Zoom, but also put him in a position to succeed whenever hockey returns.

"Development in general is something I've always been really interested in and I've seen the benefits firsthand," van Riemsdyk said after the call. "Trying to help players find an edge is maybe something I'd like to do when my career is over, so it was cool to do something like that and hear the questions and comments they had."

TSN.CA LOADED: 05.30.2020

The Athletic / LeBrun: The possibility of trades this summer and Canada's training camp concern

By Pierre LeBrun

May 28, 2020

The draft and the trade deadline.

Those are the two heaviest trade periods in the NHL year.

This year's trade deadline back on Feb. 24 for once didn't disappoint, it was a doozie.

But what hits you as the NHL and NHL Players' Association forge ahead on trying to pull together this 24-team tournament to be played later this summer is that the next busy trade period won't be until the fall if there's indeed hockey.

It's just so bizarre to go 6-7 months between the trade deadline and the crazy trade period that is the draft. But that's where we are.

Well, except for seven teams.

As confirmed with a league source Thursday, there's nothing stopping Detroit, Ottawa, New Jersey, Buffalo, Anaheim, San Jose and Los Angeles from making trades with each other since their seasons were officially put to rest by commissioner Gary Bettman on Tuesday.

That's right, those seven teams could make trades with each other now if they see fit.

Which is no different than when the 15 teams that miss the playoffs in a normal NHL season begin their offseason in April. Except for the most part, those teams normally use the two-month playoffs as a time to plant seeds, make calls, but not really get cooking on actual trades until closer to the June draft when all 31 teams can get in on the action, not just half the league.

That's why it would make more sense, obviously, for these seven teams whose seasons are over to wait it out until they can get more dance partners and flesh out a bigger trade market.

Except for this one thought: This is an unparalleled time. It's crazy how much longer the offseason will be for these seven teams compared to the other 24. Potentially 9-10 months between actual games depending on how delayed next season is.

So the question I ask is this: Is there any advantage to these seven teams trying to see if there's a way to help each other sooner rather than later? To get a jump on the rest of the league that has to wait a few months before making trades?



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • June 1, 2020

For example, can the Sabres find a market among those six teams for Rasmus Ristolainen? This feels like the offseason where he finally gets dealt after about two years of on-again, off-again speculation.

My guess is the Sabres will need a wider pool of teams before getting serious on those trade talks.

Then there's the uncertainty of the salary cap.

Depending on what kind of player contracts could change hands, these seven teams would want to have at least some inkling as to what's going to happen with the salary cap next season.

The NHL and NHLPA are going to at least try and hammer away at a CBA extension through all this — who knows if it gets done — and there will be rules and wrinkles from that CBA extension important to know before teams start making roster changes.

But what if CBA talks drag on into next fall?

So much uncertainty. But we know this: there are seven teams that can get a leg up trade-wise in the interim.

The Canadian team conundrum

Kudos to Jim Benning for thinking outside the box when it comes to training camp.

Not to say the Canucks will definitely go ahead and hold their July camp in the U.S., but the Vancouver GM at least brought up the possibility this week when asked about Canada's 14-day quarantine rules for people entering the country.

After all, the Canucks have 12 players either in Europe or the U.S., all of whom would face a 14-day quarantine upon entering Canada. At least according to the rules right now. Who knows what the rules will be come July?

But with the likes of Elias Pettersson and Jacob Markstrom in Sweden, Brock Boeser in Minnesota and Quinn Hughes skating in Michigan right now, I don't think any of them will be in a hurry to come back to Vancouver, not with a 14-day quarantine awaiting them.

Same goes for Auston Matthews and Frederik Andersen; the two Maple Leafs teammates have been hanging out in Arizona during the pause. They've got a real good workout regime going. No one will say for sure, but I'd be shocked if they haven't been skating. And as I reported on TSN's Insider Trading on Thursday, neither will be in a hurry to jump on a plane back to Toronto given the 14-day quarantine that awaits them.

Remember, when Phase 2 starts at some point in June, the small-group workouts at NHL team facilities are voluntary. Players do not have to come back for them.

Given how good the setup is for Matthews and Andersen in Arizona, it makes sense for them to wait a bit at the very least until there's more concrete information regarding Phase 3 and Phase 4 (the NHLPA will have to negotiate those details with the NHL and there will be an NHLPA Executive Board vote on hub cities/protocol, etc.)

Sources confirmed Thursday that training camps won't open before July 10, which isn't to say camps will open that day, but simply that the league is saying camps won't open before then.

So lots of time for Matthews, for example, to continue his Phase 2 workouts in Arizona before deciding when he needs to get his 14-day quarantine done in Toronto before camp.

Sources indicate Leafs GM Kyle Dubas and Matthews' agent Judd Moldaver have chatted regularly over the matter this week and they're on the same page. So the point here is that Leafs fans shouldn't freak out if Matthews and Andersen aren't in Toronto when small-group workouts begin sometime over the next few weeks. It'll be the same for certain other players on the Jets, Canadiens, Flames, Oilers and Canucks. I don't expect full NHL rosters anywhere in Canada during Phase 2, or least not at the beginning.

There's always hope for them that by the time we know when training camps are officially starting in July that those Canadian quarantine rules will have been relaxed or at least for professional athletes. The NHL has been talking to the Canadian government about this. Then again, those rules may not bend at all anytime soon. In which case players such as Matthews and Andersen would probably return and fit their 14-day quarantine before the end of Phase 2 so that it doesn't interfere with their training camp availability.

The Athletic LOADED: 05.29.2020

The Athletic / Darkened seats? Virtual fans? What sports on TV could be like with no spectators

By Daniel Kaplan

May 28, 2020

John Madden called back Fred Gaudelli on Tuesday with an answer. The veteran executive producer of NBC Sports' Sunday Night Football had asked his old colleague the previous night how to handle games potentially played in front of no fans, kept away by COVID-19-related restrictions.

The conventional wisdom is that broadcasters, to mimic games of the past, will pipe in artificial crowd noise during the telecast. The Hall of Fame coach and broadcaster's reply, Gaudelli recounted: Don't.

"He said, 'When I first left the coaching profession and went to broadcasting, there was something about it that I just felt was missing and I couldn't really put my finger on it,'" Gaudelli recalled. "He said, 'Then I realized that I wasn't hearing the sound that I had grown accustomed to hearing — as a player and as a coach. I never coached from the box, I coached from the field.' He said to me, 'Fred, you're going to hear things that even you have never heard, so I'd be really trying to figure out how to best capture those sounds, and present them to the audience and not worry as much about artificial sound.'"

Piped-in crowd noise is just one of many options on the table for producing games with no spectators as the major sports eye returning, or in the case of the NFL, starting a new season in the COVID-19 era. The sports that have returned, such as UFC, NASCAR, and to a lesser extent, golf and tennis (exhibitions), have experimented with more audio. And WWE has gone so far as to place up-and-coming wrestlers in seats as fans, with plexiglass between them and the ring.

The NBA, which is considering playing the remainder of its season and playoffs at Walt Disney World Resort in Orlando, said all options are on the table for how to televise games, including using virtual fans. Some overseas sports have placed video monitors in the stands with fans essentially taking part in a big Zoom-like call and cheering from the screens.

"We are right now looking at a number of different technologies," said Sara Zuckert, the NBA's senior director of domestic programming and content strategy. "We are looking at all ways for fans to engage, whether that is virtual cheering and other options, we are really considering many options."

Asked whether the NBA would consider using cardboard cutouts of fans or life-size dolls, as some international games have done such as in the Korea Baseball Organization, Zuckert replied the NBA would lean toward a technological answer.

The NHL, which announced this week that if it returns play would commence with a 24-team playoff, is not expecting to place fake or virtual fans in arenas, said Bill Daly, the NHL's deputy commissioner.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • June 1, 2020

Instead, the league plans to place cameras and microphones around the rink where they could not have been with fans in attendance.

"These playoffs with no fans in the stands, likely finishing these playoffs with no fans in the stands, I do think it does create a unique opportunity to capture content, to capture video footage from unique angles not having to worry about line of sight for fans in the building, audio devices in places where they might not normally exist," Daly said. "I just think it'll provide a canvas to paint maybe a little bit different picture.

"And in particular, fans pay lots of money for seats, you don't want to obstruct their view, we won't have the same set of constraints in terms of not obstructing views. So I think it's pretty much open season on camera location, and probably even camera size to capture in a world where types of cameras are different... I don't know exactly how much different or better it will look. But I do expect a lot of experimentation on that side to make a better broadcast."

MLB, which is having ongoing conversations with teams and broadcasters about modifying various aspects of the game presentation with no fans in the ballpark, declined to comment on those talks.

Mark Gross, senior vice president of production at ESPN, which broadcasts MLB and has been televising Korean baseball games, said he couldn't yet talk in detail about how he would approach the return of the national pastime. (MLB and MLBPA appear no closer to an agreement to return.) But he offered that there are differences between the smaller South Korean baseball stadiums, which typically max out at 30,000 seat capacity, and the larger North American ones. Larger stadiums would echo more with no fans, and perhaps lend themselves to piped-in crowd noise. If there are MLB games, ESPN will experiment with different camera angles, and perhaps station announcers remotely, Gross said.

Who decides when to pipe in crowd noise — the teams, league or broadcasters — is unclear. NBC's Gaudelli said conversations are ongoing with the NFL on this point, but he expects it to be a league role.

"If the NFL says, 'Hey, look, we want our games presented with crowd noise,' I think they would produce that, what's called a loop right now or a mix," Gaudelli said. "And then they would distribute that to the broadcaster doing the game, I think, control that so (it doesn't) get out of hand and get crazy and get wild."

Gaudelli has been watching the return of the German Bundesliga, which has been playing in front of no fans with no crowd noises pumped into the stadiums. Fans at home in Germany can choose between a broadcast with fan noise and one without, he said, and that might be the option for the NFL unless the league chooses to pump in noise into the stadium.

Night NFL games could present a unique opportunity, Gaudelli said. He is considering asking the league to darken the seats so that only the field is illuminated, creating a theater-style setting.

Officially the NFL has said publicly it expects to play games in front of fans, though whether that is just marketing talk or a realistic prediction is unknown given the uncertainty of the trajectory of the pandemic.

The United States Tennis Association will decide next month whether to stage the U.S. Open, the largest annually paid attended sporting event in the world, but it has already begun mapping out what a broadcast of the event with no fans would look like (given its location in New York City if the event occurs, it almost certainly would be without fans). ESPN is the U.S. broadcaster.

Digitally inserting sponsor logos, graphics, animations and statistics over the empty seats is one possibility, said Lew Sherr, the USTA's chief revenue officer. And looking to replicate the shots of celebrities in the crowd, the USTA is considering remote cameras in stars' homes as they watch the Open. While tennis is known as a quiet sport, the Open is the outlier, and so Sherr sees piping in crowd noise.

"It's not lost on us that every year we have 850,000 fans that attend the U.S. Open and that's a staggering number," Sherr said. "But the reality is we've got hundreds of millions of viewers around the world that will never step foot on the grounds and have only consumed the U.S. Open through broadcast, and we want to make sure that is a great experience for them and in many cases, it is not going to be different for them."

Part of the spectacle of sports on TV is of course the crowds, their cheering, and interaction with the athletes. So despite a nation starved for entertainment, WWE, which has moved production to its Florida training site, saw ratings decline for its Raw events. WWE CEO Vince McMahon noted on a recent earnings call how hard it is to replicate the fan energy on TV. WWE considered piping in crowd noise but decided against it.

"It would have been incredibly phony, you know, it just wouldn't have worked," said Kevin Dunn, executive vice president of TV production. And on a fake crowd, he added, "So, and believe me, we talked about it... I've seen these cutouts of people that I forget what sport that is, when they're putting it out, people in the stands, whatever the Bundesliga has done, has done that. The Korean baseball has done dolls... it wouldn't be authentic."

ESPN's broadcast of UFC, which also doesn't use artificial noise, has picked up a lot more conversations, the network's Gross said, from the fighters to the trainers.

And that was Madden's point to Gaudelli — on-field conversations heretofore masked by crowd noise would now become part of the show.

"There's talk among offensive linemen you never hear or seldom hear," the producer said. "There's talk among defensive linemen, and really the inside linebackers... There's communication between the safeties, there are coaches yelling, especially when the ball's between the 35s, the coaches are right there on the line of scrimmage. So I think there's a lot of the sounds that ... are not in the forefront of a telecast."

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