



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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THE NEWS & OBSERVER

Charlotte Checkers win Game 3 at Chicago to take series lead in AHL Calder Cup Finals

By Steve Lyttle

Goalkeeper Alex Nedeljkovic shut down the Chicago attack Wednesday night, leading the Charlotte Checkers to a 4-1 victory over the Wolves in Game 3 of the American Hockey League's Calder Cup Finals.

The win gives the Checkers a 2-1 game lead in the best-of-7 series, which resumes with Game 4 at 8 p.m. Thursday at Allstate Arena in Rosemont, Illinois.

Nedeljkovic made 38 saves, including several spectacular stops in the first period, when the Wolves outshot Charlotte 15-6.

As was the case in the first two games of the series in Charlotte, the Checkers scored quickly. Julien Gauthier, who was injured in the final game of the Eastern Conference finals against Toronto and hadn't played since, scored at the 1:51 mark.

Jake Bean took a shot from the left point, and Gauthier, standing just outside the goal, deflected the puck past Chicago goaltender Oscar Dansk.

Nedeljkovic was the dominant figure of the period.

He made a big save on Chicago's Keegan Kolesar about 11 minutes into the period and then stopped back-to-back point-blank shots by Gage Quinney a minute later. But the most spectacular stop came with 2:20 left in the period. Chicago's Brooks Masek broke free, but his slap shot was kicked away by Nedeljkovic.

The Checkers' special teams accounted for two second-period goals.

With Chicago's T.J. Tynan in the penalty box, defenseman Jake Bean got his first goal of the playoffs, as his slap shot flew past four Wolves players, over Dansk's right shoulder and into the net. That came just 2:16 into the period.

The Checkers' penalty-kill unit accounted for the third goal. With Haydn Fleury in the penalty box for cross-checking, Charlotte's Patrick Brown stole the puck at center ice, muscled his way past a defender, and scored on a wrist shot.

It was the sixth short-handed goal in the past six games for Charlotte, which had the best penalty-kill unit in the AHL during the regular season.

Nedeljkovic made several outstanding saves early in the third period until the Wolves broke through, scoring on a Brooks Masek goal with 5:11 remaining.

Chicago pulled its goaltender with 3:55 left, and Martin Necas scored an empty-net goal to clinch the victory.

The Wolves played without Curtis McKenzie, their leading goal scorer in the playoffs, after he received a one-game suspension for his role in a fight near the end of Sunday's Game 2. And Chicago's Daniel Carr, the AHL Most Valuable Player during the regular season, did not play in the third period. There was no immediate word if he had been injured.

3 WHO MATTERED

Alex Nedeljkovic, Charlotte: He stopped 38 of 39 shots, with perhaps his best performance of the playoffs.

Patrick Brown, Charlotte: The Checkers' captain scored a short-handed goal in the second period and assisted on the team's final goal.

Jake Bean, Charlotte: Bean got an assist on Charlotte's first goal and scored the second goal on a power play.

WORTH MENTIONING

• Checkers coach Mike Vellucci told reporters in Rosemont that the team's play in the third period Sunday, when they held the Wolves to four shots, is the way to hold on to the lead. Chicago came back from 3-1 deficits in both of the first two games. "We didn't take any crazy chances," Vellucci said of the third period. "We managed the puck better. We were way smarter."

• Prior to Sunday night's 5-3 loss, Chicago was 11-0 in the playoffs and 40-3 this season when scoring three or more goals in a game.

• According to the AHL, the Checkers scored five short-handed goals in their first 11 games of the season, then just one in their next 76 games. Now they've scored six short-handed goals in their last six games.

WHAT'S NEXT?

The teams play Game 4 at 8 p.m. Thursday. The game will air on AHLTV but will be carried on a tape-delay (2 p.m. Friday) on the NHL Network because of a conflict with Game 5 of the Stanley Cup Final.



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THE ATHLETIC

Projecting the 2019-20 Hurricanes: A lot depends on futures of Justin Williams and Petr Mrazek

By Sara Civian

It'd been so long since the Hurricanes made the playoffs, that during their 2018-19 playoff run you could tell fans forgot how hostile the internet becomes when a team makes the playoffs. A lot of the actual players were dealing with this for the first time, too, Warren Foegele included. I was reading yet another death threat directed at Foegele for his hit on TJ Oshie and decided to ask a more seasoned veteran who is known for his Twitter chirps, Calvin de Haan, how he handles it.

"It just is what it is, I think (social media vitriol) picks up a little bit when the stakes are a little higher," he said. "But whatever, if someone is sitting at home being an armchair GM, you know they'd never say it to your face."

Sorry de Haan, but almost a month into the offseason and it's time to sit at home and be an armchair GM. Here are some projections for next season's roster, ranging from utopia to dystopia.

Send It

First of all, we've given Kasperii Kapanen a nice little bridge deal, because in this fun little fantasy players agree to that sort of thing, and Don Waddell traded Justin Faulk for him straight up. Second, you need to assume Waddell woke up one day feeling like this guy:

This hedonistic version of the Hurricanes has a lot of changes that probably aren't necessary, definitely are not realistic, but are super fun to think about regardless. There is a zero percent chance the Canes are about to go from the cap floor to the cap ceiling, but what if they did?

And what if Justin Williams came back for a year? What if Sebastian Aho centering Teuvo Teravainen and Mitch Marner was an actual line in the National Hockey League? What if Robin Lehner didn't want to stay on the Island? (re-signing Petr Mrazek to a reasonable contract and term is also an ideal scenario, but this particular timeline is all about changes).

Nothing personal to Brock McGinn, Saku Maenalanen and/or Greg McKegg here, Carolina would just be so stacked that they couldn't afford signing them at contracts other teams would. Mo Money Mo Problems, if you will.

A Marner offer sheet is a long shot, obviously. But if we're dreaming big, he is the perfect winger to give the Canes a trickle-down effect of depth scoring they so crave. Kapanen just makes it nasty, he plays fast and fun like a Hurricane, and

there's a photo of him on rollerblades in a Raleigh driveway as a kid! What more do you need?

In a way, this ridiculous lineup actually shows how close the Hurricanes are to being Stanley Cup contenders (what a time to be alive) to me because even with trading one of their assets in Faulk for a need, Fleury would be fine on the third pairing.

Realistic fun

This version of the 2019-20 Canes is more realistic, but still served with a dose of optimism. We're assuming Justin Williams will return for a season. We're assuming Gustav Nyquist would want to join the Jerks, and that the Jerks could successfully pursue him. Petr Mrazek and Curtis McElhinney return on raises, but they aren't anything too ridiculous. The Canes don't make any trades that would mess up chemistry.

In both of these scenarios, I've kind of just slotted Martin Necas at second-line center and assumed it's going to work out. That's a big "what if," but he's been improving away from the puck and in terms of play-making down in Charlotte enough to try it. We'll go into detail about that, and why I think he'll be fine in the NHL next season, very soon.

The Canes want to stick to what has been working for them and potentially add scoring danger for next season. This lineup is that plan in action.

Worst-case scenario

Let's prepare for the worst: Justin Williams retires, the Hurricanes can't get a deal with Petr Mrazek (or Robin Lehner, etc.) done, they can't trade for a 20-ish perennial goal-scoring winger.

Even here we're being optimistic — at least they don't make any stupid trades. They'll likely need to overpay a fourth-line winger like Devante Smith-Pelly in this scenario — but he'll still get the job done. Maybe Curtis McElhinney would like to stay and keep his family here with a hefty raise and a starting role pretty much on lock. That presents issues for the Canes obviously in terms of age and workload, but it might do up-and-coming AHL goalie of the year Alex Nedeljkovic good to be forced to get legitimate NHL reps.

This is hardly the worst NHL lineup I've ever seen, so this little exercise left me optimistic for the 2019-20 Canes. Do you feel the same?



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NHL Trade Board: Top 20 players who could move this summer

By Craig Custance

It's kind of like offer sheets, explained one executive. We hype them up every year and then the hype rarely delivers. This year, like the increased offer sheet speculation, there's a lot of talk about a more active trade market than usual. The salary cap isn't expected to move much. There are contenders who are squeezed. General managers seem to be more eager to make bold moves in the summer rather than the trade deadline.

"So many teams are trying to do something. I guess it's more active than the past," said the Eastern Conference executive. "So many teams tight in there against the cap – Tampa, Vegas, Pittsburgh, Toronto – they're all right against the cap. They have to do something. And then you've got a team like Edmonton who is going to do whatever they can to change things up. (Ken Holland) is not going to sit back."

Said another executive: "Arizona is in on a lot of different guys. They're the most active. Minnesota has to figure something out."

And another: "Ottawa – I think they would be proactive. They're trying to get better and do something. Chicago – they do (have money to spend). It's very interesting."

Talk to a different person and they'll name different teams eager to deal. Florida wants to make a splash. Philadelphia has the ammunition to get better. Columbus will have some big pieces to replace. Nashville and Winnipeg have issues to address. Soon enough, you're talking about most of the league.

It makes for a potentially fun couple weeks leading into the draft in Vancouver as those conversations heat up.

"Whatever happens at the draft is starting now," said one GM. "There's a lot of talk."

And compiling a list of the top trade candidates is challenging because you KNOW it's larger than what we're hearing. It always is. But with all that in mind, and after numerous conversations to get the temperature around the league, here's Version 1.0 of our offseason NHL Trade Board.

1. Jacob Trouba, Winnipeg Jets – One way or the other, we're moving closer to some sort of finality on Trouba's future. He's one year removed from unrestricted free agency and this marriage can end with a one-year deal in arbitration and Trouba hitting the open market next year. It's not an ideal solution for the Jets, as the best asset management is a trade involving Trouba this summer. Trouba trade conversations have gone on for a long time but the difference now is that the Jets are more open to varied trade packages than they were in the past when the desire was to get a similar player in return – the kind of trade that is almost impossible to pull off.

That said, teams know how meticulous GM Kevin Cheveldayoff is when it comes to making a deal like this, and it'll be interesting to see if GMs interested in Trouba move on to another option if these conversations move too slowly.

"Chevy is the guy everyone is looking at right now," said one executive. "Who he's moving, who he's keeping. ... Everyone is looking at Chevy and waiting."

2. P.K. Subban, Nashville Predators – Changes are expected in Nashville this summer following the disappointing playoff series loss to the Dallas Stars, and Subban's name is at the center of speculation. There are a couple reasons. Don't shoot the messenger here but the topics that often come up when talking about Subban have returned, like the impact his big personality has on the dressing room. "Too much P.K. It's too much everything," said one NHL source this week. But more important than that is he hasn't performed at the same level as he has in the past. "I don't have him as a top two defenseman," said an NHL scout. "I have him as a second pairing. I think as the game continues to speed up, that's given him some trouble. I'm not sure his legs are as fresh as they used to be." If his game is declining as he hits his 30s, that \$9 million per year price tag starts to look awfully rich.

3. Phil Kessel, Pittsburgh Penguins – I certainly admire the ambition of colleague Josh Yohe, who examined the chances of every single NHL team acquiring Kessel. But this sure seems like a horse race with just a couple true contenders, with Arizona at the top of the list. The Coyotes and Penguins have engaged in Kessel talks but there is certainly a difference in opinion of what a potential deal would look like. The Penguins are looking to make a hockey trade and get a return that is worthy of a player who put up 82 points last year. The Coyotes would take Kessel off the Penguins' hands but only if there's little going back the other way. Ideally, the Coyotes would like the Penguins to retain some money, too. So yeah, that's not an easy one to get done.

4. T.J. Brodie, Calgary Flames – The belief from teams outside of Calgary is that GM Brad Treliving would move one of his defensemen in an attempt to provide salary cap flexibility, along with providing opportunity for some of the young defensemen coming up in the system. The almost 29-year-old Brodie has one year left on his deal that averages \$4.65 million per season before hitting unrestricted free agency, so now might be the best time to move. "I think Brad is going to move one of the two (Brodie or Travis Hamonic)," said one executive. "He needs space."

5. Justin Faulk, Carolina Hurricanes – Yes, the Hurricanes' season was wildly successful. And yes, Carolina is looking to build off that success and not blow anything up. There's still an internal appetite to add high-end skill into the forward group and moving one of its defensemen – Faulk, Dougie Hamilton or Brett Pesce – is still the best path to get there. The Hurricanes would love to find a match with the Maple Leafs for one of their young forwards, as has been speculated for a long time. But if there's a deal to be made outside of Toronto, Carolina is open to it, too.

6. Jason Zucker, Minnesota Wild – Teams really like Zucker, enough so that one NHL source openly wondered why Wild GM Paul Fenton seems so eager to deal him, with The Athletic's Michael Russo reporting twice on deals (with Calgary and Pittsburgh) involving Zucker that fell apart. "I love him," said the executive. "He's supposed to be a heck of a guy too. That's twice now he's essentially been traded." Said



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another executive: "Zucker is a pretty good player at that number."

7. Kyle Turris, Nashville Predators – Much of the Turris talk centers around the notion that the Predators are very much the front-runner for Matt Duchene and need to clear space to make it happen. Turris is coming off a 23-point season and is owed \$6 million per season through 2023-24, so Nashville would be selling low. That said, put in the right situation, it's easy to see him rebounding back to the player you could count on for 50 or 60 points per season. "You need someone who can get him the puck and get it to him in a shooting position," said one scout. "He has lots of skill, great shooter and is an offensively gifted player."

8. Chris Kreider, New York Rangers – The Rangers are getting to the point where they want to get out of the rental business at the trade deadline since the rebuild is turning the corner. So there will likely be a decision point for Kreider in the near future since he's entering the last year of his contract. The Rangers obviously like him, but if a long-term extension doesn't make sense for their competitive timeline, then a summer trade becomes a realistic scenario.

9. J.T. Miller, Tampa Bay Lightning – Tampa GM Julien BriseBois has to do something to free up cap space, with Miller, Ryan Callahan, Alex Killorn and Tyler Johnson all trade possibilities. Miller's offensive numbers are down since joining the Lightning, but people around the league believe he has more room for offense if given more opportunity on a team that doesn't have as stacked a lineup as Tampa. "When he's at his best, it's when he's being physical and dominating inside the blue line," said an NHL scout. "When he played with top-two-line guys, I thought he was good in Tampa and what they needed."

10. Connor Brown, Toronto Maple Leafs – According to one trade deadline seller, Brown was part of the conversation when Toronto was looking to buy at the deadline. Something has to give in Toronto, whether it be a trade involving Nazem Kadri, Kasper Kapanen, Brown or another young forward, as the Maple Leafs look for cap flexibility and an upgrade on defense. "I think the Leafs are open to anything," said an NHL executive. "But I think they'd move Kadri before Kapanen."

11. Colin Miller, Vegas Golden Knights – The Golden Knights need to shed salary and Miller's name, along with Cody Eakin, was mentioned by sources as a top candidate to help make it happen. Miller's numbers dropped after his breakout season in Vegas during the 2017-18 season, making him expendable, especially with cheaper options being developed in the system. "Miller is an offensive defenseman, but at the end of the year, he has three goals," said one NHL source. "I know they really like (defenseman prospect) Zach Whitecloud."

12. Patrick Marleau, Toronto Maple Leafs – Colleague Pierre LeBrun has been at the forefront of the Marleau news, reporting early that the Kings and Coyotes have had conversations with the Maple Leafs about the veteran forward. It would be a big coup for Toronto GM Kyle Dubas if he can get Marleau's \$6.25 million off the books, but it doesn't sound like it's completely impossible. "Marleau can still skate," said an Eastern Conference scout. "But he's not super hard, not super creative. He messes up (Toronto) up front because

Babs likes him so much. His value is as much off the ice as it is on it. He's such a pro. A great pro."

13. Shayne Gostisbehere, Philadelphia Flyers – Gostisbehere had a down year last season, so the Flyers would be selling low, which might be why teams are calling. This is a smart management group that would prefer to deal from a position of strength, and one that realizes Gostisbehere is a better player than he showed and that he's still young and capable of bouncing back. Because of that, it would be better to categorize Gostisbehere under the "teams are calling but they're not necessarily shopping him" category.

14. Vladislav Namestnikov, New York Rangers – The Rangers have a trio of young forwards in Jimmy Vesey, Pavel Buchnevich and Namestnikov who will eventually need new deals. Vesey, famously signed as a college free agent, and Namestnikov are unrestricted free agents after this season. So they fall under the same category as Kreider. Buchnevich is a restricted free agent who is most likely headed for a bridge deal with New York after winning over coach David Quinn with a strong finish. Namestnikov drew interest at the trade deadline, most notably from the San Jose Sharks before they made the deal for Gustav Nyquist, so it wouldn't be shocking if they circled back on this front.

15. Jared Spurgeon, Minnesota Wild – The inclusion of Spurgeon here might be more wishful thinking from other teams than reality, so we're sneaking him in a little further down the list. Minnesota management has said that getting a Spurgeon extension is a priority, as it should be. Spurgeon likes it in Minnesota but he also wants to win. He's represented by Eustace King, who represents the oft-almost traded Zucker, so if everything goes sideways in Minnesota, and at the current pace you can't rule that out, Spurgeon will become a hot commodity. "Spurgeon is the guy we need," said one executive from a team looking to add defense this summer. "I'm a big fan. A huge fan," said an NHL scout. Said another executive: "I don't know how you'd replace him. That doesn't make sense to me. He's terrific for them."

16. Brandon Saad, Chicago Blackhawks – Chicago is a team to watch this summer with GM Stan Bowman sitting in a good spot with the No. 3 pick in the draft and cap flexibility. The Blackhawks are going to get an infusion of talent one way or the other, and there's a belief out there that a Saad deal could be part of the formula. "They'd move him," said one executive. Said another source: "I think you can get him. His 'A' game is plenty good. I'm not sure he brings that 'A' game often enough."

17. Mike Hoffman, Florida Panthers – Florida is expected to be very active this summer, with the Panthers emerging as the favorite for top free agents Artemi Panarin and Sergei Bobrovsky. They'd also like to upgrade their defense and add depth up front, which makes a Hoffman trade a possibility. Hoffman is coming off a big season (36 goals) and teams have called at times looking to get him at a discount, something the Panthers have zero interest in doing. They're happy to bring him back next season if there's not a hockey trade that makes sense here.

18. Nikolaj Ehlers, Winnipeg Jets – Ehlers is a little further down this list because the likelihood of him being traded isn't necessarily high. That said, there are teams that believe an



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Ehlers deal may be an option the Jets turn to if Plans A or B don't work out. The Jets would rather move forward Mathieu Perreault or find the right Trouba deal. But if they can't find a taker for Perreault and Trouba gets a big raise in arbitration, while both Patrik Laine and Kyle Connor get huge contracts ... well, you can't keep everybody.

19. Nikita Zaitsev, Toronto Maple Leafs – The fact that Zaitsev's trade request became a public affair raised some eyebrows. Typically, a player asks for a trade and it's kept under wraps – most of them never hit the public conversation. But he's very much available and removing his \$4.5 million

from the books (through 2023-24) isn't going to be easy for Toronto. "He's an NHL player, that's not the question," said an Eastern Conference scout. "But the difference between 15 minutes and 22 minutes is monumental for a defenseman. Zaitsev, if he's in the five-hole – or four at the most – he's OK."

20. Olli Maatta, Pittsburgh Penguins – GM Jim Rutherford has to do something to fix the Penguins' defense with Maatta and Jack Johnson both candidates to be moved. The problem, besides Johnson's contract, is that injuries have slowed down Maatta. "I think that holds him back now," said an NHL scout. "I don't think he's a very good skater."

2019 NHL buyout rankings: 25 candidates and the financial ramifications of moving on

By Jonathan Willis

Last summer marked a down (or is that up?) year for buyouts: Just eight were made, a drop from double-digit figures the previous three years. The average number over that span is 12, with 25 of the NHL's 31 teams using the buyout at least once.

The reasons behind a buyout vary. Sometimes a team deliberately places itself in such a situation, taking on a problem contract for assets or accepting the eventual buyout as a way to lower cap hit in the short term. Sometimes a player gets hurt, and although he's able to return to the ice, is a shadow of his former self.

Garden variety incompetence figures in, too, though ironically it's often expressed in contracts which can't be bought out.

Perhaps every NHL front office should be tricked out with flashing red lights and a deafening klaxon keyed to trigger whenever a player agent starts talking about massive signing bonuses on his client's long-term contract. If said client is a grinding, physical forward entering his 30s, maybe the floors could also heave to-and-fro, hurling the executive group back and forth like the crew of the Enterprise.

Because signing bonuses cannot be bought out, they have become the method of choice for second-tier free agents looking to make sure they get every penny they signed on for.

Some of the most popular buyout candidates (going by CapFriendly's most-searched list) this year have their deal armored in exactly that way. Combine that group with some famously sticky over-35 contracts – sign a player that age and the cap hit stays on someone's books, no matter what – and we come up with a list of 10 virtually buyout-proof contracts.

It can't always be fun to be an overpaid/declining player, but it seems better to be the player than the general manager. In six of the 10 cases, the teams that signed these deals have since pushed out their GM.

Take a hypothetical Brent Seabrook buyout as an example of the way the process works, or rather doesn't work.

Over the five remaining years of his deal, Seabrook is paid \$15.5-million in signing bonuses, which he gets in full with or without a buyout. He is also paid \$12.5-million in base salary; if Chicago were to buy him out, he would get two-thirds of that figure. Therefore, in terms of real money, the Blackhawks would pay \$28-million for five years of Seabrook playing, or \$23.8-million for five years of him not playing.

The salary cap situation is, if anything, a little uglier. Seabrook's contract was front-loaded, and the NHL setup is designed to prevent rich teams from circumventing the cap through sneaky buyouts of cheap years. The result here is that Chicago gets the same amount of total cap savings as real money savings: \$4.2-million. Seabrook's total cap hit over those five years without a buyout comes out at \$34.4-million; with a buyout it sits at \$30.2-million.

The difference works out to about \$800,000 annually. It's conceivable that at some point Seabrook's game will fall so far that he can be replaced by a generic minimum-wage defenceman, and if that happens Chicago might reasonably consider a buyout. If he's even a No. 7 defenceman, though, it's going to be hard to justify paying him to go away.

The exact cap savings vary by the player on this list, from zero at the low end (the over-35 contracts) to roughly \$1-million annually for Okposo and Zaitsev. Okposo's deal was actually designed in such a way that Buffalo could reasonably buy out its final year, with no signing bonuses that season. For the most part, though, the money saved in these hypotheticals is just barely enough to add an end-of-roster player, which makes them unworkable without further decline.

There are other ways to soften the blow, especially if the player in question has grown unhappy and is willing to be flexible about the no-trade/no-move clause that is inevitably part of such a contract. Signing bonuses are lump sums, and careful timing can allow a rich team to eat some money without eating cap hit, making a trade more appealing to a cash-poor, cap space-rich rival. Retained salary and bribes in the form of prospects and draft picks have also helped lubricate some seemingly impossible trades.

If the teams above are to rid themselves of those contracts, it should be through one of those means rather than a buyout.

Most buyouts are short: 34 of the 48 players bought out over the last four years were in the final season of their respective deals. Just five had three-or-more years remaining and almost all of those players had suffered some kind of serious injury.

That takes us to the second part of this un-buyout-able list, and by far the trickiest: injured players.

It's a tough subject for a lot of reasons. Injuries suffered playing hockey can be life-altering, and while cap calculations are a part of the job for any NHL GM, the fact remains that the top priority has to be the long-term health of the person in question.



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It's something Anaheim Ducks GM Bob Murray understands. Asked about Ryan Kesler in March, he wasn't focusing on the hockey side of the issue.

"I'm concerned with his quality of life going forward," he told The Athletic's Eric Stephens. "I'm not worried about hockey whatsoever right now. OK? Can we all understand that? I'm worried about his quality of life and what he's going to go through in the next little while."

Any GM naturally has a responsibility to dispassionately handle his team's finances, too, but even that side of the issue can be difficult. The line between staying on long-term injured reserve and being healthy but diminished enough to force a buyout isn't clearly defined, especially from the outside.

Where in that grey area Kesler will fall is unclear. The same is true for teammate Patrick Eaves, and for Dallas centre Martin Hanzal. It's possible that all three will finish their contracts on long-term injured reserve.

Enough, though, about the players who cannot be bought out. How do we determine which players should be?

The biggest problem with most buyouts is that they still force teams to pay out a lot of money: Two-thirds of the contract in most cases, though spread out over twice the term of the original. In the absence of some kind of salary cap crisis, for a buyout to make total sense the bought-out player needs to be replaceable at one-third of his original AAV (something I'm going to call the "replacement rate" throughout the list below).

As we look at teams around the league, the primary question we're going to ask is this one: Can the hypothetical buyout candidate be replaced for less than one-third of his current cap hit? We'll also look at other factors — when the teams in question need financial wiggle room, the odds of the player rebounding, and so on.

One thing to keep in mind: This is a list of my assessments, not a prediction of what teams will do. They cover a spectrum, from worth thinking about but impractical all the way to extremely sensible.

Not really on the list

NL. Victor Rask, Minnesota Wild

Rask's name is a popular one when it comes to buyout searches and it's easy to understand why, even though such a move would be ill-advised.

Last year's craziest mid-season deal was the swap of Nino Niederreiter for Rask. "El Nino" scored 30 points in the land of Hurricanes and Storm Surges; Rask had three wandering through the wilderness.

It probably doesn't represent his true value. Rask had 31 points just a year ago, 45 the season before that and he's only 26 years old. A lot of players have trouble adapting after a midseason trade.

If he's equally ineffective next season, then this will be a possibility worth talking about.

Weak candidates

25. Dale Weise, Montreal Canadiens

Welcome to the most boring section on this list: a group of five players on one-year deals who offer more cap relief via minor-league burial than they do a buyout. Still, they all belong here, because as easy as it is for fans staring at cap hits to forget, they are paid real money and occasionally an NHL team decides it would rather have the dollars than the cap space.

Weise is the least palatable as a buyout in this group, both because Montreal has money and because there's a chance he's still capable of playing fourth-line minutes. With all of these players, an AHL assignment clears \$1,075,000 off the salary cap, which is a smaller number than the replacement space cleared by a buyout.

24. Matt Hunwick, Buffalo Sabres

The math on Hunwick is basically the same as with Weise. The Sabres took his contract off Pittsburgh's hands in exchange for Conor Sheary. He was generally either hurt or in the press box in his first year in Buffalo.

23. David Schlemko, Philadelphia Flyers

Schlemko played 18 games in the NHL last season and 26 in the minors. He might be the best player in this section of the list — he was averaging a whopping 19:51 per game for Montreal before he fell out of favour — but health has been an issue and two different NHL teams made it clear what they thought of him last year.

22. Matt Beleskey, New York Rangers

Most of the players in this range are at least useful as system pieces, depth players on the NHL bubble. Despite playing four games for New York last year, Beleskey seems less serviceable than that.

He scored just five times in 53 AHL contests and now has 10 goals in 88 minor-league games over the last two seasons. Still, New York has money and isn't likely to mess with its cap situation just to save a half-million.

21. Brandon Manning, Edmonton Oilers

Manning's placement at the top of this group isn't an indication that he's the worst player of the bunch. Rather, it's a reflection of his team: the Oilers have recently shown a willingness to put real money ahead of cap situation with this sort of contract. Last summer, Edmonton bought out Eric Gryba's entirely buriable contract. The move saved them \$300,000 in real money and added \$600,000 in cap hit to the roster, spaced out over two seasons.

With Manning listed, we move into more interesting territory.

20. Justin Abdelkader, Detroit Red Wings

Abdelkader just had his second bad year in three seasons, which means he deserves a place on this list. If that's the new normal, a buyout makes sense.

It's unlikely to happen, though, for a bunch of reasons. For one, 54-year-old Steve Yzerman undoubtedly plans to be at the helm of a competitive team in the late years of an Abdelkader buyout, and the more time he can trim from the end, the better off he'll be.

There's also the matter of Abdelkader's contract structure. The combination of a back-diving contract and a relaxation (or



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under certain conditions, even elimination) of his no-trade clause means that starting in 2020-21, there will be all kinds of things a creative GM can do to get rid of the contract other than just buying it out.

Most importantly, Abdelkader is just one year removed from a 35-point, 174-hit campaign in which he played in all situations and had decent underlying numbers. Most 30-something players decline, but that decline tends to have peaks and valleys and there's a reasonable chance he's worth \$1.42-million next year.

19. Dion Phaneuf, Los Angeles Kings

One-quarter of Phaneuf's contract is still on the books in Ottawa, meaning that L.A. would only have to pay three-quarters of any buyout, with the Senators picking up the remainder. The numbers above reflect only the Kings' portion of that cost since they will be the team making the decision.

Although he's frequently listed as a buyout candidate, this math suggests such a move would be a mistake. Phaneuf got hammered on goal differential last year (minus-19 at even-strength, in large part to owing to a career-worst 96.6 PDO) in a third-pairing role, but had positive shot metrics and even at 34 seems a reasonable third-pair defenceman.

Can the Kings get a better player for \$1.06-million? Maybe, but it's dicey, and Josh Cooper writes that Phaneuf's "leadership is noticeable and his practice habits are exemplary." With Los Angeles retooling in the present anyway, it doesn't really make sense to extend the pain with a buyout. Better to deal with it in the present than spread it out over a hopefully brighter future.

18. James Neal, Calgary Flames

General managers don't turn around and buy out pricey free agent signings a single year into a long-term contract.

There are a lot of good reasons for that. After one rough year, there's always hope for a turnaround, especially since the adjustment to a new city and a new team can be a difficult one for the player. Besides that, such a rapid 180 by management very much sends the wrong message to ownership.

Nevertheless, it's hard to avoid playing around with the idea for Neal, who went from 25 goals at age 30 to just 19 points at age 31. If that's what he is, Calgary can get a similar player for less than the \$1.92-million replacement cost that comes with a buyout.

If things haven't improved a year down the road, we will be talking about this more seriously.

17. Andrej Sekera, Edmonton Oilers

If the Oilers are going to buy someone out, Sekera is the logical candidate. It would save the team \$3-million against the cap this season, which is far more significant than the space opened up by any of their other potential options.

It's still not a great idea. Edmonton isn't particularly gunning for a Cup next year, so the short term incentives are limited. Furthermore, the team is unlikely to get a better defenceman in free agency for \$1.5-million annually. Sekera had the best on-ice numbers of any Oilers defenceman upon his return from injury this year, which surely counts for something.

16. Ryan Spooner, Vancouver Canucks

This one actually makes a certain degree of sense, in that Spooner put up just nine points in 52 NHL games last season. There will probably be late-free agency opportunities to secure similar wingers for less money than the replacement value attached to Spooner's buyout.

Yet the Canucks have a lot of cap space to play with this season. It's been one bad year; in 2017-18 Spooner put up 41 points in 59 games. If Vancouver basically shrugs and rolls the dice rather than stretching out a buyout over two years, it would be hard to blame the Canucks.

15. Jonathan Ericsson, Detroit Red Wings

Ericsson saw his role reduced late last season. Some of it was the result of injury, but he did see time in the press box and had a reduced role when he did play. In his first 30 games he had five points and averaged 18:47 per game; in his last 22 contests, he was pointless and played just 15:05 per night.

In a vacuum, the Red Wings might be able to get a better player for \$1.42-million. However, Detroit isn't particularly in a cap crunch and given where the team is at in its competitive cycle, it has to take the long view. Does it really make more sense to buy Ericsson out and spend his money elsewhere, or to shop the 6-foot-4 veteran at the deadline to a GM who values size and experience?

14. Bobby Ryan, Ottawa Senators

We are getting close to the point where a Ryan buyout makes sense. His power-play work rebounded this year but he took steps backward at even strength. He was particularly bad without Matt Duchene, with the Sens posting just a 39 percent shot share when Ryan was without the star center.

Ryan has never particularly been known for speed, and as the league's pace increases and the 32-year-old's declines, that seems unlikely to change.

It's difficult to imagine Ottawa buying him out after a 42-point season, though, especially given that they might have trouble making the cap floor as is.

Credible candidates

13. Marco Scandella, Buffalo Sabres

Scandella arrived in Buffalo in summer of 2017 and averaged more than 23 minutes per game his first year with the team. In the first month of 2018-19, he was down to 19:51 per night and by the end of the season, he was barely playing more than 16 minutes per game. His on-ice metrics were among the worst on the team.

On the surface, that's enough to buy him out. The Sabres can find a No. 6 defenceman for the \$1.58-million replacement cost associated with a buyout.

The arguments against are more varied. Buffalo has a new coach coming, and that might help. Scandella was particularly bad with Rasmus Ristolainen: the duo played 10 hours together and had a 41 percent Corsi, but both Ristolainen (51 percent) and Scandella (49 percent) were better with other partners.



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Buffalo has a lot to get done this year (most notably a Jeff Skinner extension) but also has a big pile of money to play with, so there's a case to just leave this alone, see if the new coach helps and wait for the last season of this deal to tick off.

12. Corey Perry, Anaheim Ducks

There is a lot that gets tied into this discussion. Anyone who doesn't understand instinctively what Perry means to the Ducks merely needs to just look at the round table my California colleagues put together asking this very question.

For our purposes, though, the question is much simpler: can Perry be replaced for \$2-million on the open market?

Obviously, he's 34 and coming off a terrible year. Yet he was also trying to come back at midseason from knee surgery, and it's fair to wonder if a healthy 34-year-old Perry can put together a repeat of his rather useful campaign at 32.

11. Brendan Smith, New York Rangers

The Rangers have three high-priced defencemen considered for this list, but given that the savings are pretty similar regardless of which of Smith, Marc Staal or Kevin Shattenkirk we look at it's hard to rank anyone higher than Smith, who carved out a role in New York late last season as a utility defenceman/winger.

New York has a bunch of money to play with and is still on a rebuild track so in a lot of ways it makes sense to let old deals expire on their own, but if the Rangers decide they need to free up some money for big game hunting Smith is the obvious choice.

10. Karl Alzner, Montreal Canadiens

In their lengthy and excellent road map piece posted in April, my colleagues Arpon Basu and Marc Antoine Godin argued that it makes more sense to buy Alzner out next summer than it does this one.

"An Alzner buyout would be more punitive this summer than next, both in terms of cap space and the two extra years his buyout would be on the cap," they wrote. "If there's someone who would be able to look past his own situation for another year to help mentor the kids arriving in Laval, it is Alzner."

It's a reasonable argument, especially because Montreal has money to play with this year. Their approach may well be both the correct one and the one the Canadiens end up taking.

The counterargument runs something like this: he's overpaid right now, cap space today can be weaponized – as the Canadiens did last year with Steve Mason – and the season Montreal would knock off a buyout by waiting is 2024-25, which is so far in the future that it doesn't even show up on a manager's five-year plan.

It isn't a no-brainer, but depending on what else is available to the Habs it might make sense to just make the decision now.

9. Michael Stone, Calgary Flames

Ordinarily, the argument with a player like Stone is that he has one year left and provides a useful veteran depth option so it's better to leave him alone than look to a buyout. While that's all true, the fact is that Calgary knows it can replace him for less than the replacement cost on a buyout, because the Flames

broke in three rookie defencemen last year and all are on six-figure entry-level deals.

Moreover, Calgary's defense is its position of greatest strength, to the point where Stone likely sits fourth on the team's internal right-side depth chart.

A 107-point season, the Pacific title and the humiliation of a first-round playoff exit all argue against patience. If the Flames want money to upgrade somewhere they could use the help, Stone is the easiest sacrifice.

8. Valeri Nichushkin, Dallas Stars

The thing most working against Nichushkin is the NHL rule allowing teams to buy players younger than 26 out at just one-third of their remaining salary, as opposed to the usual two-thirds. If the Stars were to save \$900,000 with a buyout, it wouldn't be worthwhile. \$1.8-million, on the other hand, for a 24-year-old who barely played in the playoffs – that's tempting.

Nichushkin certainly has enough going for him to be worth another look somewhere, despite a goalless season, but probably at closer to \$900,000 than \$1.8-million.

7. Brandon Dubinsky, Columbus Blue Jackets

Dubinsky is still a useful player defensively. He wins draws, his penalty kill numbers are first-rate and he was buried on a defensive zone line last season that under the circumstances did a pretty good job of keeping shots against to a minimum.

He's also 33, suffered through a series of injuries last season and is coming off his second consecutive six-goal year.

Columbus has some money to play with this offseason – potentially a lot, if their high-profile UFAs all jump ship – and won't be forced to make a move, but it's certainly possible the team can find a competent depth center for less than the replacement cost attached to this buyout.

Strong candidates

6. Vladimir Sobotka, Buffalo Sabres

Sobotka hasn't been the same since his sojourn to the KHL. The Blues appear to have realized that after a single year, and managed to lump him in as an "asset" in Buffalo's ill-fated Ryan O'Reilly trade. The Sabres ended up with an expensive player who didn't add much offensively, wasn't able to stem the tide defensively and dragged down the performance of virtually every regular linemate he had all year.

The Sabres could roll the dice, hoping that a new coach and a year to adapt to a new team will make all the difference for the soon-to-be-32-year-old. Or they could get out now and spend the savings on someone coming off a better season.

One alternative would be burying Sobotka in the minors, which would save the Sabres \$75,000 more in total cap than a buyout would. The difference is so marginal, however, that it's not worth giving up the \$1-million in real money savings.

5. Andrew MacDonald, Philadelphia Flyers

As late as January, MacDonald was averaging 18 minutes per game for the Flyers. In February that fell to 14:23, and by March he was a frequent healthy scratch and even when he



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did play it was even money that he'd get 10 minutes of ice time.

Philadelphia has enough money to play with this summer that it could theoretically just let the last year tick off MacDonald's deal, but why bother? Not only do the Flyers have plenty of defencemen to take his minutes, but his actual value is far lower than the replacement cost associated with a buyout.

4. Dmitry Kulikov, Winnipeg Jets

It's going to be a difficult summer in Winnipeg, where a good chunk of the Jets' critical young core is bound for restricted free agency. There will be sacrifices along the way and Kulikov seems destined to be one of them.

Ideally, the Jets would get out from under his entire cap hit, including some kind of sweetener a la last summer's Steve Mason trade. The trouble with that scenario is that Winnipeg is already down to just three picks in the 2019 draft and would ideally keep its NHL-ready talent in the system to replace some of its many free agents.

Failing a trade, buying out Kulikov and replacing him with a \$700,000 No. 7 defenceman would clear \$2.19-million off the books for next year, and the team needs that money.

3. Ryan Callahan, Tampa Bay Lightning

The Lightning aren't in a terrible cap position: Brayden Point is the one major contract they have to get done and they have the money to do it. Nevertheless, an aggressive summer should be in the cards for the NHL's best regular season team after a humiliating first-round sweep.

That means clearing money, and Callahan is at the top of the list. The 34-year-old is a shadow of the gritty scorer he was in New York and isn't likely to play a top-nine role elsewhere in the league after putting up a combined 39 points over his last three seasons.

A trade would certainly be preferable from the Bolts' perspective, but if not, a buyout is a logical consideration. It would clear a total of \$1.57-million in cap hit over two years, and Tampa is one of those teams that should prioritize spreading the money out over multiple seasons. Assuming a

league-minimum replacement, a Callahan buyout would give the Lightning \$2.43-million to spend somewhere else.

2. Mike Condon, Ottawa Senators

Condon played just three games due to injury in 2018-19. Prior to that, he was a .902 save percentage stopper for the Sens over 31 appearances in 2017-18, posting a 5-17-5 record. Ottawa cares less about cap hit and more about real dollars, and that's where Condon's \$3-million salary hurts them.

It may also offer a trade opportunity, though. No team is better positioned than the Sens to take on someone else's contract with a big cap hit and lower salary, and Condon (whose \$2.4-million cap hit is \$600,000 lower than his actual compensation) is a logical trade chip.

Remember that chart of signing bonus-laden players in the preamble to this list? Ottawa is exactly the kind of team that might be receptive to a trade involving careful timing, which would leave them with lots of cap hit and little real financial obligation. Getting someone to waive a no-trade clause to play for the Sens is the hard part in this scenario, but if Ottawa could do it, Condon is a great candidate to go the other way.

If not, a buyout just makes sense.

1. Scott Darling, Carolina Hurricanes

Darling made 57 saves on 60 shots against in the preseason, good for a .950 save percentage. He started the regular season 2-2-1 with a .913 save percentage. Early on, he looked a lot like the player that Carolina had gambled on as its starting goalie.

Then it all went away. Injury, poor play, a demotion to the minors followed by more poor play, and then a leave of absence all worked to derail Darling's second consecutive season with the Canes. He has two years left on his contract, but at this point, Carolina would be hard-pressed to rely on him as anything more than a No. 3 goalie.

He's replaceable for less money than the \$1.18-million annually the Hurricanes would free up with a buyout.



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Charlotte defeats Chicago in Game 3 of AHL's Calder Cup Finals

Nedeljkovic made 38 saves for Hurricanes affiliate, which takes series lead

by Patrick Williams

ROSEMONT, ILL. -- Alex Nedeljkovic made 38 saves for the Charlotte Checkers in a 4-1 win against the Chicago Wolves in Game 3 of the American Hockey League's Calder Cup Finals on Wednesday.

Charlotte, the AHL affiliate of the Carolina Hurricanes, leads the best-of-7 series 2-1. Game 4 is here Thursday (8 p.m. ET).

"[Nedeljkovic has] worked extremely hard to be in the top shape of his career," Charlotte coach Mike Vellucci said. "He's been consistent, and we talked about that at the beginning of the year. Just be consistent game in, game out."

Jake Bean, Patrick Brown, and Martin Necas each had a goal and an assist, and Tomas Jurco had two assists for the Checkers.

Brooks Macek scored, and Oscar Dansk made 22 saves for Chicago, the AHL affiliate of the Vegas Golden Knights.

Julien Gauthier, who missed the first two games of the series because of an undisclosed injury, redirected Bean's initial shot 1:51 into the first period to give Charlotte a 1-0 lead.

Chicago outshot Charlotte 15-6 in the first period, but Nedeljkovic stopped Gage Quinney on a partial breakaway at 4:11 and Macek on a 2-on-1 with 37 seconds left in the period.

"I thought we gave ourselves an opportunity to win with how we played," Wolves coach Rocky Thompson said. "We just ran into a really good goaltender."

Bean scored his first goal of the playoffs to make it 2-0 on the power play 2:16 into the second period when his shot from the point beat a screened Dansk.

Brown stripped the puck from Chicago defenseman Zac Leslie in the neutral zone before scoring shorthanded to extend the lead to 3-0 at 11:46. It was Charlotte's sixth shorthanded goal in its past six games.

Macek cut it to 3-1 at 14:49 of the third period on a rebound in the crease, but Necas scored an empty-net goal with 3:05 remaining to make it 4-1.

Charlotte is 48-0-0-0 in the regular season and Calder Cup Playoffs when leading after two periods.

The Hockey News

Seven players who will be prime buyout candidates when the window opens

The first buyout window for NHL teams opens in mid-June, and there are several notable players, particularly those on high-priced deals who have failed to deliver, who could be bought out in order to get their contracts off the books.

By Jared Clinton

With contracts to sign, roster adjustments to be made and considerations that need to be given to their individual cap situations, NHL GMs have at least 10 more days before they can begin to make decisions about potential buyouts. But come June 15, the first buyout window will officially open, and there are several players whose contracts could get the axe.

Last season, it took several days before the first buyouts came down in what was, comparatively, a somewhat slow window. It wasn't until June 21, nearly a full week after the window opened, that the Edmonton Oilers bought out defenseman Eric Gryba, who was one of seven players who were essentially paid to go away during the first window. Others included veteran defensemen Paul Martin and Brooks Orpik, and netminder Steve Mason and winger Tyler Ennis were

bought in the hours just before the window closed. (Note that Troy Brouwer isn't included in that group. His buyout came during the second window.)

In past years, though, we've seen the buyouts come early and often during the first window. Take 2017, for instance. From June 15 through June 30, when the first buyout period officially closes each season, 13 players were given walking papers. That was one fewer than the 14 players who were bought out in June 2016, but up two from the 11 buyouts that came during the first window in June 2015.

So, could we see similar action this June? There are certainly enough players whose contracts will be considered for buyouts. Here are several prime candidates:

Milan Lucic, Edmonton Oilers
It's been talked about often enough that you have to imagine the Oilers are giving serious consideration to pulling the trigger on buying out Lucic's deal. After a decent debut campaign in Edmonton, during which he scored 23 goals and 50 points, the 30-year-old has scored 16 goals and 54 points across the



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past two seasons combined and he's done so while collecting \$15-million in total salary. Yikes and double-yikes. Making matters worse, the Oilers are somewhat handcuffed given Lucic possesses a no-movement clause for the next two seasons. So, if they want to trade him, Lucic has to agree.

The issue in buying out Lucic is that the savings, especially in 2020-21 and 2022-23, are a mere \$375,000. That said, the Oilers would save \$2.375-million against the cap and free up another \$1.875-million in cap space in 2019-20 and 2021-22, respectively. After that, it's four years at a \$625,000 cap hit, but that's the equivalent of one league-minimum player. Edmonton should be able to live with that.

Loui Eriksson, Vancouver Canucks
There exists the possibility that once restricted free agent Brock Boeser puts pen to paper on a new pact, he will be the Canucks' highest-paid player. For the time being, though, that distinction belongs to Eriksson, and given his lack of production, it makes his \$6-million cap hit stick out like a sore thumb. Truly, Eriksson's time in Vancouver has been an unmitigated disaster. In not one season since joining the team has the two-time 30-goal scorer registered even a dozen goals, and his best output came this season when he scored 11 goals and 29 points while playing in a bottom-six role.

That said, the 33-year-old is probably only a buyout consideration if the Canucks have designs on spending big this summer. With Boeser not yet locked up, Vancouver has \$30.5-million in cap space, and it's not as though buying out Eriksson is going to do the Canucks many favors. It will only save Vancouver \$444,444 this season and next before a savings of \$2.4 million in 2021-22. A buyout this season does represent the biggest savings in that third year, however, which is when Calder Trophy favorite Elias Pettersson will be up for an extension.

Ryan Callahan, Tampa Bay Lightning
It's no secret the Lightning are facing a considerable cap crunch. With Brayden Point due a substantial raise after a star-making campaign, need for an upgrade on the blueline and the desire to make a few other minor tweaks, Tampa Bay's projected \$8.6-million in cap space simply doesn't leave them with the available balance to check off everything on their summer to-do list. Clearing the final year of Callahan's contract might help significantly, though, especially in the short term. Buying him out in this window would offer the Lightning \$3.13-million in spending room, though it does come with a \$1.57-million cap hit next season.

Ideally, of course, the Lightning would love to move Callahan, 34, out by himself or as part of a package to clear cap space. However, with a 16-team no-trade list, Callahan has some control over his future and it could limit Tampa Bay's options. A buyout might be the best option.

Karl Alzner, Montreal Canadiens
It didn't take long for the Canadiens to regret the big-money deal they handed Alzner. After a sub-par campaign as a second-pairing rearguard in Montreal in 2017-18, Alzner spent all but nine games as a scratch or in the minors this season. Not exactly how the Habs saw that five-year, \$23.125-million deal shaking out. Alas, the Canadiens now need to find a way out from under the contract. The \$4.625-million cap hit, not to mention the 30-year-old's seven-team no-trade list,

complicates matters, and it might mean a buyout is the best course of action.

There is some benefit in taking such a tack, too. Montreal would save \$3.56 million next season, \$430,556 in 2020-21 and \$2.43 million in 2021-22. After that comes three consecutive seasons of a \$1.07-million cap hit, but that shouldn't be impossible for the Canadiens to work around. Biting the bullet now and freeing up some space for when Brendan Gallagher, Phillip Danault and Jesperi Kotkaniemi become free agents in two seasons' time could prove worthwhile.

Brendan Smith, New York Rangers
It's only fitting to list Smith, 30, after Alzner because the defenders find themselves in similar situations. A deadline acquisition by the Rangers during the 2016-17 season, Smith inked a four-year, \$17.4-million extension in New York and then everything went south. After impressing in a middle-pairing role down the stretch in 2017, Smith was in and out of the lineup with the Rangers before an eventual demotion to the AHL in 2017-18, where he spent the final two months of the campaign. He recovered somewhat this season, but not enough to remove his name from buyout consideration.

In the midst of a rebuild, New York has ample cap space, but there's a logjam of high-priced and underperforming defensemen on the roster. Axing Smith's deal is likely the easiest move to make. Doing so would free up \$3.4 million for the Rangers next season, \$1.2 million in 2020-21 and then cost them little more than \$1.1 million the two seasons after that. Careful planning would ensure those aren't difficult waters to navigate.

Dion Phaneuf, Los Angeles Kings
The Kings' acquisition of Phaneuf was a head-scratcher when it happened and an outright disaster in the aftermath. The former Norris Trophy finalist quickly fell out of favor with Los Angeles' coaching staff this season, resulting in the lowest average ice time of his career, a mere 15 minutes per game across 67 contests. Not only did he see less ice, he was made a healthy scratch eight times this season. With the Kings' need to get younger and faster, Phaneuf is no longer a fit and a prime buyout candidate.

If Los Angeles were to rid themselves of Phaneuf's contract by way of a buyout, the Kings would add another \$4.08 million to their coffers this summer, though the defenseman's deal would then count against the cap for \$5.42 million the following season and \$1.42 million in 2021-22 and 2022-23. So, if the Kings want to buy Phaneuf, 34, out, they're going to need to weigh the savings now against the cost later.

Scott Darling, Carolina Hurricanes
It wasn't long ago Darling was one of the best stories in the NHL, a backup who battled his way to prominence from deep in the minor leagues and earned himself a starting goaltender's wage and the top spot in the Hurricanes' crease. Unfortunately, there was no fairytale ending in Carolina. His first campaign was disastrous and his second season, which lasted all of nine starts, was even worse. Darling was ultimately demoted to the AHL before taking a leave of absence late in the season.

Given how disappointing his time in Carolina has been, it's time for Darling, 30, to get a fresh start. It's unlikely, too, that



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any team is going to be willing to take on the final two years of his contract, which comes with a \$4.15-million cap hit for a goaltender who has an .887 SP over his past 51 appearances. A buyout seems likely, and it would free up \$2.92-million in spending room for the Hurricanes this summer, as well as \$1.82 million next off-season. There would be a cap hit of

\$1.18 million in 2021-22 and 2022-23, but that should be fairly easy for a budget team such as Carolina to maneuver.

Other Candidates: Andy MacDonald (PHI), Zach Bogosian (BUF), Marc Staal (NYR)



Inside Rod Brind'Amour's First Season as Hurricanes Coach: Part 1

The franchise legend took on a new challenge this season, and sat down with Canes Country for an exclusive interview that looks both back and forward.

By Brian LeBlanc

Thirteen months ago, Rod Brind'Amour walked into a press conference, sat at a table atop a dais flanked by the owner and general manager, and started taking questions in a position he had never been in before: head coach of a professional hockey team.

But to Brind'Amour, the Carolina Hurricanes aren't just any hockey team. For nearly two decades, Brind'Amour and the Hurricanes have been nearly synonymous. His number hangs in the PNC Arena rafters. You can scarcely turn around anywhere in the arena without seeing an image of him hoisting the Stanley Cup. For better or worse, the Hurricanes are his team, more than just about anyone else.

And so began a fascinating experiment: could the man who captained the team to a championship get that same team back to those heights again, this time in a role he'd never taken on before? What had he learned from previous regimes? Could he learn on the job, for lack of a better phrase, while raising expectations around him at the same time?

Canes Country recently sat down with Brind'Amour for an in-depth conversation about his first year as head coach. Over the next three days, you'll see what he had to say about the Hurricanes' cultural shift, the players he thought took a step forward this season, how high the ceiling was and will be, and much more. Today, we begin with the first part of three, which starts well before a head-coaching career had ever entered Brind'Amour's mind.

Canes Country: When you talked about deciding to take this job, you talked to Justin [Williams]. I want to go back before that, to when you first decided to apply for it. What made you decide that coaching was something you wanted to do considering you'd never done it before?

Rod Brind'Amour: I stopped playing, then took a year when Jimmy [Rutherford] was here and I kind of said "what am I going to do?" He gave me the "take a year before you get into stuff." I didn't - I came down right away and said "no, I need to do something." So I started going down to Charlotte and was kind of in development. I could tell I wanted to get more involved, and really wanted to get into the management side of things. I'd been doing the player thing for so long, I wanted

to go upstairs. That's really where, I feel, everything has to happen. You've got to get the players.

Anyway, that morphed into Jimmy grabbing me one day when I was in Charlotte and he goes "I need you to coach." Now, at the time, he meant assistant coach, one way to pull me in. Halfway through that first year is when we made the change and brought in Kirk Muller. I was down at a game in Charlotte, Milwaukee was playing, Jim shows up and I was like "what are you doing here?" I was oblivious, [but] he was interviewing Kirk for the job. Kirk comes in, takes over, and Jimmy says "I want you to help him," more on a full time basis, and I didn't want to get involved much at that time.

So this is all kind of leading into the coaching thing. They made a nice deal for me. I was coaching my son then, Skyler, and [they said] "you could do the home games, come to practices, don't have to travel."

CC: That was the time you were the eye in the sky, right?

RBA: Yeah, I did that for a while. So that was really good, except what I realized is when you're that guy, your input is limited. You're working with players, which is great, doing faceoffs, stuff that matters, but you're not putting a stamp on what you want to do. You want to get more involved. So I took it on full time when Bill [Peters] came in, but then same thing. Four years of it, and you're an assistant. You're not getting to say what you want, nothing that you want to do is happening. You're taking someone else's words and trying to do it.

So it really came up, the job opens up, Bill decides to leave, and I'm sitting there going "OK, you're either going to keep doing this, or it's time to put your name in the hat and see if they'll consider you to take the job." Again, I'm getting older, you're not going to do this forever. To me, it's the old saying, get on with it, or get off it. So that led me to call Don [Waddell] and say "hey, give me a crack at this."

CC: You have said before how important this organization and this area is to you. Obviously that played into this decision, but if there were other jobs open, would you have considered going to one of those?

RBA: Right around that time, what really made me decide was that at some point I've got to either stop coaching or go for it, meaning be a head coach. You can't keep being an assistant. That was clear to me, for me. I was not happy - not unhappy, but I just needed more. I didn't want to regret not trying.

So what's interesting is that there was a college hockey job that I had a lot of interest in. It's funny how things work out. I



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actually got calls from alumni saying "you've got to apply." They wanted me to take this job, a lot of people. So I called, and they wouldn't take my call. They said it's because I hadn't finished my degree. So I thought "what does that have to do with coaching? I have a coaching degree. I've been doing this for a long time. I've been playing, I've been coaching, isn't that what you're hiring a guy to do?" It was really weird to me.

I actually had thought about leaving to do more. I felt like being an assistant - I'd done that, and it was time to do more. Nobody was going to give me a head coaching job in the NHL, I didn't think, just because I'd never done it - meaning somewhere else. I didn't want to coach in the NHL somewhere else. I wanted to be here or nowhere. So that's why I said, if I go to another level, kids are kind of where I feel I have the most impact. So I actually looked into it, that got shot down, so I said (shrugs) "OK."

That was before this job opened up, actually.

CC: So, earlier in the summer?

RBA: Yeah, it was the end of the year.

CC: Right after the season ended.

RBA: Yeah. So this opened up and I thought "I've got to try." This is different to me. It's a job, yes, and I can't tell you that I wouldn't take [an NHL] job somewhere else. It's just never entered my mind. I want to make it work here. It means too much. My family's from here, my kids - this is where I want to be.

I was part of something special a long time ago here that it was great. We didn't win a ton, but we could have. We had that group, in my opinion, that went on a run for 7-8 years with a good group. There were a lot of reasons why we didn't make it - mostly injuries, in my opinion, why that team we were a part of didn't do better for longer. But everything was right down here. We were dialed in.

In those seven years I was a part of it as an assistant coach, I'm watching us go "what are we doing here?" Even in management, in my opinion, we were not shooting for the

stars. We were trying to be mediocre, and I couldn't believe it. Tom [Dundon], I've got to give him tons of credit, he thinks kind of the way I was: "what are we doing here? Are we trying to be average?" No, we're going to try to be the best we can. I think that partially clicked with him and me. I think we felt the same. And that's part of why they hired me.

CC: A lot of the scuttlebutt around the job when it opened up was that Tom had this collaborative process that he wanted to go through, where you're involved, Don's involved, Eric [Tulsky]'s involved, everybody kind of gets to say their piece. That's kind of unusual for a coach. There are so many coaches - you played for a few of them - who say "I want to coach the team, what you guys do is your business, just give me the guys you want me to coach." Was that a change for you?

RBA: Yeah, it was a change, because for the seven years that I had been here before nobody asked me my opinion. When they did, and I gave it, it got shot down. Which is fine - listen, there's a hierarchy of things. But it was very strange, because a lot of things I as suggesting, I look back on now and I'm like "well, if we'd have drafted that guy, if we'd have done this, where would we be?"

It's a total change now with Tom. He came in and he does want everyone's opinion. I just talked to him before I was in here - I was talking to him for 20 minutes, and you can't get off the phone with him. It's unbelievable.

But I've never been around a guy who works as hard as Tom does with hockey. It's crazy, the stuff he talks about with teams, he knows all their players, he knows their contract status, he knows who could maybe help us. Sometimes he's way off - and I'll tell him - but sometimes he makes me go "oh man, that could be a good addition." But he talks to everybody. Everyone on our staff, he'll call and say "what do you think about these guys?"

Why wouldn't you? If we have coaches that watch players as much as we do, why wouldn't you be coming down here and going "what do you think about these guys?" It just makes sense.

About Last Season: Andrei Svechnikov Performance Review and Grade

The Canes rookie was eased in slowly, hit his stride late in the year, and the best part: he is just getting started.

By Jake Lerch

Andrei Svechnikov: 2018-2019 By The Numbers

- Age: 19
- NHL Seasons: 1
- Games Played: 82
- Scoring: 20 goals, 17 assists, 37 points
- Ice Time: 14:39 all situations, 12:43 ES, 1:55 PP, 0:01 PK
- 5 on 5 Stats: 56.4% CF, 50.0% GF

- Contract: Signed through 2020-21 on entry-level contract with \$0.925m AAV

Making the Grade

Victor Hedman, Drew Doughty, Evgeni Malkin, Jack Eichel, Tyler Seguin, Patrik Laine, Gabriel Landeskog - these are the peers against who Andrei Svechnikov will draw comparisons throughout his career. Fair or not, expectations are sky high for any player selected 2nd overall in the 2018 NHL draft. With those expectations in mind, the 2018-19 season can be viewed as a solid start on a long journey.

Svechnikov played in all 82 regular season games and 9 of the Hurricanes' 15 playoff games. Most of his season was spent on the third line where he was often paired with Jordan Martinook and Lucas Wallmark. While somewhat unexpected for a player of his skill level, the third line duty seemed to be part of a broader strategy to work Svechnikov into his role slowly. In addition to his youth - he was the first player born in



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the 2000s to score a goal in the NHL - early season issues with penalties (offensive zone stick infractions in particular) made it difficult for the coaching staff to give him much in the way of top six minutes.

What was more, Micheal Ferland's early season success meant there was no reason to rush Svechnikov into the top two lines. As the season progressed - and Ferland's production dropped off - Svechnikov found his way into the top six with greater regularity. With Ferland likely on his way out of Raleigh this summer via free agency, a regular spot in the top six seems a given for Svechnikov next year.

His 20 goals (fourth on the team) are all the more impressive when you consider that none came on the power play (only Sebastian Aho had more even strength goals with 23). Although he was a constant on the Canes' 2nd unit, a promotion to the top unit would be welcome next season. His vision, perhaps his best attribute at this stage in his career, along with a spontaneity that was sometimes lacking in his

teammates would shake up a top power play unit that crashed and burned in the playoffs.

In terms of intangibles, all indications are that he is well-liked by his teammates and a hard-worker off the ice. Along with his buddies Dougie Hamilton and Warren Foegele, it was Svechnikov who was one of the Canes' best players in the first half of the series against the Capitals. He scored the Canes' only two goals in game one including the beauty below:

It was his fight with Alex Ovechkin in game three, however detrimental to his own health, which was the turning point in the series. The Canes won that game, and three of the next four, to eliminate the Caps in seven.

Looking forward to next year, an increase in ice time should allow Svechnikov to make a run towards 30 goals if he remains healthy. After a thrilling end to the 2018-19 season, Svechnikov is another reason why Canes fans should be excited about what the 2019-20 season will bring.



Checkers win Game 3 in Chicago to take 2-1 lead in Calder Cup Finals

by Nicholas Niedzielski

Heading to Chicago for the first time this season, the Checkers took control of the series with a convincing 4-1 victory over the Wolves.

The home side came out firing pucks on net early and often, but it was the Checkers offense that was able to break through. Jake Bean fired a puck into a crowd out front less than two minutes into regulation that was redirected in by Julien Gauthier, then threaded another point shot through traffic early in the second to light the lamp himself and give the Checkers a 2-0 advantage.

Patrick Brown kept Charlotte's red-hot penalty kill rolling later in the middle frame by busting through on a shorthanded breakaway and roofing a shot to extend the visitor's lead even further. The Wolves would finally find the back of the net with just over five minutes to play, but there would be no comeback as the Checkers slammed the door and Martin Necas added one final empty-net nail to the coffin, sealing the win and shifting the series lead to Charlotte.

Making a return to the crease after Dustin Tokarski won Game 2 for Charlotte, Alex Nedeljkovic was stellar in Game 3. The AHL's top goalie in the regular season, Nedeljkovic soared with 38 saves on the night, including several grade-A chances from a potent Chicago offense.

QUOTES

Coach Mike Vellucci on the game

I think we got off to a good start, and that was a big part of it.

We got a couple of goals and then Ned held us in there in the first period. After we scored they took it to us pretty good there and he made some incredible saves.

Vellucci on Alex Nedeljkovic

He was the goalie of the year for a reason, right? I've had him since he was 16. He's a great goalie and he makes the big saves. I thought he was exceptional tonight.

Vellucci on what's made Nedeljkovic successful this season
He always played the puck well and he's worked extremely hard to be in the top shape of his career. He's been really consistent and we talked about that the beginning of the year. Just be consistent game in and game out. He always has the bounce-back game and he's a complete pro right now.

Nedeljkovic on his game

They just had a lot of shots, and it's easy to stay in the game when they're getting shots every shift. Usually it's those games where you're not getting a shot for a couple of minutes are the mentally tougher ones. More shots is almost a little easier to mentally stay sharp.

Patrick Brown on Nedeljkovic

He's been doing that all year for us. Any time we get hemmed in our zone for over a minute or something like that, Ned is always there backing us up. He knows when to play the puck, he can play the puck and he can make a big save when you need it.

Vellucci on addressing the incident at the end of Game 2



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There's no need. It's playoffs. It's the finals. There's no need to address that. We play hard, they play hard and it's the finals.

Nedeljkovic on his highlight-reel save in the first period
It's just trying to read the play. I think it was a 3-on-1 and there was a lane and he was able to make that pass across. At that point it's just trying to do whatever you can to get your body over to that other side, and fortunately I got a pad on it.

Brown on shorthanded goals

When you have numbers going up the ice, whether it's a two-on-one or a breakaway, you don't get many opportunities like that a game so you've got to take that whenever it's given to you or whenever you have that opportunity. I think we've been able to capitalize on that and (Assistant Coach Ryan Warsofsky) has done a great job with us.

Brown on the shorthanded goals against Chicago

I don't know if we're getting in their heads. I just know we want to out-work them. We want them to know that whenever they get a power play it's not going to be easy. We're going to be on them the whole time, and if they're going to score they're going to have to make a really nice play to do it.

Vellucci on the team's mentality after taking a 2-1 lead

Just play every shift like it's your last. Everything we've done all year, we're not getting ahead of ourselves. It's one game. When we lost Game 1, it was one game. When we win tonight, it's one game. It doesn't mean anything. Tomorrow is the day that you've got to come prepared and ready to play the game the right way.

Vellucci on the team going 48-0-0 when leading after two periods this season

We have goaltending, which obviously is one big part of it, but we talk all the time about managing the puck, putting it in the right areas and doing the little things. We practice it quite

a bit. Then we have a lot of skill that can open up the game too because they're going to be pressing.

Brown on his line with Tomas Jurco and Martin Necas
Everyone calls them skill guys, but they work their tails off. They work their tails off and finish hits, and Jurcs is a great net-front guy who can make plays around the net. We're just trying to out-work the other team when we're out there. We can make skill plays when they're there, but we've scored a lot of greasy goals too.

NOTES

The Checkers' sixth shorthanded goal of the playoffs is the most since Milwaukee set the AHL's all-time record with seven in 2006 ... All six of the Checkers' shorthanded goals have come in their last six games. They went 51 consecutive games without a shorthanded goal prior to that ... Five different players have scored shorthanded during this run (Nicolas Roy twice, Haydn Fleury, Clark Bishop, Nick Schilkey and Brown) ... Nedeljkovic's 38 saves were the second-most by a Checkers goalie in these playoffs (Dustin Tokarski had 40 in Game 5 at Toronto) ... Brown has 10 points (5g, 5a) in nine AHL playoff games ... The Checkers improved to 48-0-0 when leading after two periods, including 10-0-0 in the playoffs ... Martin Necas extended his point streak to four games (2g, 3a) ... The Checkers have led 3-1 in all three games of this series ... The Checkers won Game 3 in all four playoff series ... Forward Steven Lorentz and defenseman Dan Renouf missed the game due to injury ... Forwards Scott Davidson, Jacob Pritchard and Zack Stortini, defensemen Dennis Robertson and Bobby Sanguinetti and goaltender Jeremy Helvig were healthy extras.

UP NEXT

The teams turn around quickly for a Game 4 rematch in Chicago on Thursday.

TODAY'S LINKS

<https://www.newsobserver.com/sports/nhl/article231199123.html>

<https://theathletic.com/999656/2019/06/05/projecting-the-2019-20-hurricanes-a-lot-depends-on-futures-of-justin-williams-and-petr-mrazek/>

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SportScan

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

1106705 Carolina Hurricanes

Projecting the 2019-20 Hurricanes: A lot depends on futures of Justin Williams and Petr Mrazek

By Sara Civian

Jun 5, 2019

It'd been so long since the Hurricanes made the playoffs, that during their 2018-19 playoff run you could tell fans forgot how hostile the internet becomes when a team makes the playoffs. A lot of the actual players were dealing with this for the first time, too, Warren Foegele included. I was reading yet another death threat directed at Foegele for his hit on TJ Oshie and decided to ask a more seasoned veteran who is known for his Twitter chirps, Calvin de Haan, how he handles it.

"It just is what it is, I think (social media vitriol) picks up a little bit when the stakes are a little higher," he said. "But whatever, if someone is sitting at home being an armchair GM, you know they'd never say it to your face."

Sorry de Haan, but almost a month into the offseason and it's time to sit at home and be an armchair GM. Here are some projections for next season's roster, ranging from utopia to dystopia.

Send It

First of all, we've given Kasperii Kapanen a nice little bridge deal, because in this fun little fantasy players agree to that sort of thing, and Don Waddell traded Justin Faulk for him straight up. Second, you need to assume Waddell woke up one day feeling like this guy:

This hedonistic version of the Hurricanes has a lot of changes that probably aren't necessary, definitely are not realistic, but are super fun to think about regardless. There is a zero percent chance the Canes are about to go from the cap floor to the cap ceiling, but what if they did?

And what if Justin Williams came back for a year? What if Sebastian Aho centering Teuvo Teravainen and Mitch Marner was an actual line in the National Hockey League? What if Robin Lehner didn't want to stay on the Island? (re-signing Petr Mrazek to a reasonable contract and term is also an ideal scenario, but this particular timeline is all about changes).

Nothing personal to Brock McGinn, Saku Maenalanen and/or Greg McKegg here, Carolina would just be so stacked that they couldn't afford signing them at contracts other teams would. Mo Money Mo Problems, if you will.

A Marner offer sheet is a long shot, obviously. But if we're dreaming big, he is the perfect winger to give the Canes a trickle-down effect

of depth scoring they so crave. Kapanen just makes it nasty, he plays fast and fun like a Hurricane, and there's a photo of him on rollerblades in a Raleigh driveway as a kid! What more do you need?

In a way, this ridiculous lineup actually shows how close the Hurricanes are to being Stanley Cup contenders (what a time to be alive) to me because even with trading one of their assets in Faulk for a need, Fleury would be fine on the third pairing.

Realistic fun

This version of the 2019-20 Canes is more realistic, but still served with a dose of optimism. We're assuming Justin Williams will return for a season. We're assuming Gustav Nyquist would want to join the Jerks, and that the Jerks could successfully pursue him. Petr Mrazek and Curtis McElhinney return on raises, but they aren't anything too ridiculous. The Canes don't make any trades that would mess up chemistry.

In both of these scenarios, I've kind of just slotted Martin Necas at second-line center and assumed it's going to work out. That's a big "what if," but he's been improving away from the puck and in terms of play-making down in Charlotte enough to try it. We'll go into detail about that, and why I think he'll be fine in the NHL next season, very soon.

The Canes want to stick to what has been working for them and potentially add scoring danger for next season. This lineup is that plan in action.

Worst-case scenario

Let's prepare for the worst: Justin Williams retires, the Hurricanes can't get a deal with Petr Mrazek (or Robin Lehner, etc.) done, they can't trade for a 20-ish perennial goal-scoring winger.

Even here we're being optimistic — at least they don't make any stupid trades. They'll likely need to overpay a fourth-line winger like Devante Smith-Pelly in this scenario— but he'll still get the job done. Maybe Curtis McElhinney would like to stay and keep his family here with a hefty raise and a starting role pretty much on lock. That presents issues for the Canes obviously in terms of age and workload, but it might do up-and-coming AHL goalie of the year Alex Nedeljkovic good to be forced to get legitimate NHL reps.

This is hardly the worst NHL lineup I've ever seen, so this little exercise left me optimistic for the 2019-20 Canes. Do you feel the same?

The Athletic LOADED: 06.06.2019

1106731 NHL

A two-rink, \$25 million hockey complex is coming to Snoqualmie



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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By Geoff Baker

Seattle Times staff reporter

An oft-stated hope among local amateur hockey officials has been that the arrival of a Seattle NHL team would spur an increase in construction of desperately-needed indoor ice surfaces across the region.

That's now happening with an announcement Wednesday that the Sno-King amateur hockey association has partnered with a private developer to build a 72,500-square-foot, two-ice-sheet arena in Snoqualmie by early summer of 2020. Sno-King executive director Dave Blanchard said in an interview his association expects to double its membership ahead of the Seattle NHL team's October 2021 debut and that the venue — projected to cost between \$20 million and \$25 million — will serve about 1,600 additional youth players and 1,000 more adult players on the Eastside.

"We are full, so we've always been trying to find a place to expand to," Blanchard said. "But with the NHL coming we felt that the timing really became valid."

Last July, Sno-King facilities manager and former NHL player Jamie Huscroft warned that even a new three-ice-sheet practice facility planned by the NHL Seattle group won't be enough to adequately serve what he feels will be an "explosion" of demand for amateur hockey locally within five years. Youth and adult programs, he said, were already bursting at the seams with capped memberships and long waiting lists and demand for ice has tended to grow two-or-threefold in places like Texas, Florida and Arizona after the arrival of NHL teams there.

"It's not going to take long for them to fill those three sheets of ice," Huscroft said of NHL Seattle at the time. "We're going to have to start building more."

Now, about 11 months later, those additional sheets are indeed starting to get built.

Combined with the three sheets at the \$80 million NHL training center, set to open at Northgate Mall by 2021, the latest ones from the Snoqualmie project means five additional rinks will be added near-term within a region currently served by seven such surfaces.

Blanchard agreed that "all the leagues now are pretty well close to capacity" and that Sno-King has been at capacity for three years. As such, the nonprofit association — which operates arenas in Kirkland and Renton — had been focused less on growth and more on serving its existing membership until the NHL team became official back in December.

At that point, Sno-King embarked on a search across the Puget Sound region for an expansion site and partnership. And it found a partner in the Razwick family, which owns the final parcel of undeveloped land on SE Douglas St. in the Snoqualmie Ridge business park where the new arena is to be built.

Jeff Razwick, a spokesman for the family that in 1980 founded Snoqualmie-based Technical Glass Products before selling to the Allegion conglomerate last year, said in a release that: "Supporting Sno-King by providing a building for their new home in Snoqualmie is one way we can contribute to the community. This will be a huge benefit to local youths and adults interested in hockey and figure skating, and the new arena will provide the ice space needed for everyone to get out there and skate."

The partnership will see the Razwick family build the arena's shell starting this summer, using local firms Nelson Architects, Northway Construction and Kidder Matthews. After that, a Sno-King design team consisting of HTG Architects and Gausman & Moore from Minnesota and Keller Rohrback will begin work on the interior.

Once completed, Sno-King would become the arena's only tenant through a long-term lease.

"By putting a facility in Snoqualmie, we're now within 30 minutes of peak-hour drive times to anyone on the Eastside," Blanchard said. "So, it's really a great spot for us to locate a new arena and to be able to serve all the people. So, from Bothell to Renton, on this (eastern) side of the lake, all the way out to the mountains, that's our market area."

The lack of ice sheets in the region has long been cited as a key reason why aspiring hockey players often feel compelled to move out of state. Washington Capitals star T.J. Oshie, a product of Everett youth hockey, used to have to be driven an hour each way from his Stanwood home to an arena in Mountlake Terrace before relocating to Minnesota at age 15.

NHL Seattle president and CEO Tod Leiweke said his group is thrilled about Sno-King's expansion ahead of what he expects will be an unprecedented surge in local amateur hockey memberships.

"The future arrival of the NHL into our area is already generating increased interest in ice hockey and figure skating programs on a regional level," Leiweke said.

The new Snoqualmie facility will also be in proximity to hotels and restaurants, which should help it draw out-of-towners for tournaments that will boost revenue and recoup construction costs.

Blanchard said Sno-King will also actively seek sponsorships within the venue, much like the planned NHL training center at Northgate Mall is doing.

"There will be a lot of opportunities for them to have naming rights and to name different aspects of the arena," he said. "Each rink will be named separately. They can name the locker room area, the lobby and the building itself can be named ... we're really hopeful that businesses get excited about it. It will be a great community asset."

Seattle Times LOADED: 06.06.2019

1106732 NHL

Seattle's NHL expansion team is looking for its top-level affiliate, and Boise is in the mix

BY DAVE SOUTHORN

JUNE 05, 2019 02:58 PM

The newest National Hockey League team will begin play in Seattle in the 2021-22 season, and as part of the process of starting the expansion team, it must identify its minor league affiliates.

As a Western, growing city already with its own built-in fanbase, Boise is one of the two finalists to become the Seattle franchise's



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American Hockey League city. The AHL is the top level of minor league hockey in the United States, a step above the Idaho Steelheads' current league, the ECHL.

The other finalist is Palm Springs, Calif., which currently does not have a team.

"We're still doing an analysis of the two markets, but I will acknowledge those are the two markets," Seattle NHL CEO Tod Leiweke said last week in a radio interview on KJR 950 AM.

It is unknown if the Idaho Steelheads would move up to the AHL, or if the franchise would move, and a new one put in its place. Steelheads president Eric Trapp did not comment further, but had stated previously there had been contact with the Seattle franchise. The Colorado Eagles moved up from the ECHL to the AHL last season as they became the Colorado Avalanche's affiliate.

Though Boise would already have its own arena in CenturyLink Arena and a base that often fills it up, the California option appears to be the front-runner. Though the desert city is smaller than Boise and often seen as a retirement destination, a plan was announced last summer to build a 12,000-seat stadium and sports complex just outside of the city at a cost of approximately \$300 million.

Appearing on the "31 Thoughts" podcast in Canada, AHL commissioner David Andrews said Palm Springs appears to be the likely choice, but more work needs to be done.

"There's no building there ... I think in an ideal world, Seattle would end up in a new arena in Palm Springs," Andrews said.

On this week's 208 Podcast, we discussed the AHL news, Boise State's latest twist in the baseball stadium saga, fans' first looks at the new blue turf and plenty more.

News Tribune LOADED: 06.06.2019

1106762 Websites

The Athletic / NHL Trade Board: Top 20 players who could move this summer

By Craig Custance Jun 5, 2019

It's kind of like offer sheets, explained one executive. We hype them up every year and then the hype rarely delivers. This year, like the increased offer sheet speculation, there's a lot of talk about a more active trade market than usual. The salary cap isn't expected to move much. There are contenders who are squeezed. General managers seem to be more eager to make bold moves in the summer rather than the trade deadline.

"So many teams are trying to do something. I guess it's more active than the past," said the Eastern Conference executive. "So many teams tight in there against the cap – Tampa, Vegas, Pittsburgh, Toronto – they're all right against the cap. They have to do something. And then you've got a team like Edmonton who is going to do whatever they can to change things up. (Ken Holland) is not going to sit back."

Said another executive: "Arizona is in on a lot of different guys. They're the most active. Minnesota has to figure something out."

And another: "Ottawa – I think they would be proactive. They're trying to get better and do something. Chicago – they do (have money to spend). It's very interesting."

Talk to a different person and they'll name different teams eager to deal. Florida wants to make a splash. Philadelphia has the ammunition to get better. Columbus will have some big pieces to replace. Nashville and Winnipeg have issues to address. Soon enough, you're talking about most of the league.

It makes for a potentially fun couple weeks leading into the draft in Vancouver as those conversations heat up.

"Whatever happens at the draft is starting now," said one GM. "There's a lot of talk."

And compiling a list of the top trade candidates is challenging because you KNOW it's larger than what we're hearing. But with all that in mind, and after numerous conversations to get the temperature around the league, here's Version 1.0 of our offseason NHL Trade Board.

1. Jacob Trouba, Winnipeg Jets – One way or the other, we're moving closer to some sort of finality on Trouba's future. He's one year removed from unrestricted free agency and this marriage can end with a one-year deal in arbitration and Trouba hitting the open market next year. It's not an ideal solution for the Jets, as the best asset management is a trade involving Trouba this summer. Trouba trade conversations have gone on for a long time but the difference now is that the Jets are more open to varied trade packages than they were in the past when the desire was to get a similar player in return – the kind of trade that is almost impossible to pull off.

That said, teams know how meticulous GM Kevin Cheveldayoff is when it comes to making a deal like this, and it'll be interesting to see if GMs interested in Trouba move on to another option if these conversations move too slowly.

"Chevy is the guy everyone is looking at right now," said one executive. "Who he's moving, who he's keeping. ... Everyone is looking at Chevy and waiting."

2. P.K. Subban, Nashville Predators – Changes are expected in Nashville this summer following the disappointing playoff series loss to the Dallas Stars, and Subban's name is at the center of speculation. There are a couple reasons. Don't shoot the messenger here but the topics that often come up when talking about Subban have returned, like the impact his big personality has on the dressing room. "Too much P.K. It's too much everything," said one NHL source this week. But more important than that is he hasn't performed at the same level as he has in the past. "I don't have him as a top two defenseman," said an NHL scout. "I have him as a second pairing. I think as the game continues to speed up, that's given him some trouble. I'm not sure his legs are as fresh as they used to be." If his game is declining as he hits his 30s, that \$9 million per year price tag starts to look awfully rich.

3. Phil Kessel, Pittsburgh Penguins – I certainly admire the ambition of colleague Josh Yohe, who examined the chances of every single NHL team acquiring Kessel. But this sure seems like a horse race with just a couple true contenders, with Arizona at the top of the list. The Coyotes and Penguins have engaged in Kessel talks but there is certainly a difference in opinion of what a potential deal would look like. The Penguins are looking to make a hockey trade and get a return that is worthy of a player who put up 82 points last year. The Coyotes would take Kessel off the Penguins' hands but only if there's little going back the other way. Ideally, the Coyotes would like the Penguins to retain some money, too. So yeah, that's not an easy one to get done.



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4. T.J. Brodie, Calgary Flames – The belief from teams outside of Calgary is that GM Brad Treliving would move one of his defensemen in an attempt to provide salary cap flexibility, along with providing opportunity for some of the young defensemen coming up in the system. The almost 29-year-old Brodie has one year left on his deal that averages \$4.65 million per season before hitting unrestricted free agency, so now might be the best time to move. “I think Brad is going to move one of the two (Brodie or Travis Hamonic),” said one executive. “He needs space.”

5. Justin Faulk, Carolina Hurricanes – Yes, the Hurricanes’ season was wildly successful. And yes, Carolina is looking to build off that success and not blow anything up. There’s still an internal appetite to add high-end skill into the forward group and moving one of its defensemen – Faulk, Dougie Hamilton or Brett Pesce – is still the best path to get there. The Hurricanes would love to find a match with the Maple Leafs for one of their young forwards, as has been speculated for a long time. But if there’s a deal to be made outside of Toronto, Carolina is open to it, too.

6. Jason Zucker, Minnesota Wild – Teams really like Zucker, enough so that one NHL source openly wondered why Wild GM Paul Fenton seems so eager to deal him, with The Athletic’s Michael Russo reporting twice on deals (with Calgary and Pittsburgh) involving Zucker that fell apart. “I love him,” said the executive. “He’s supposed to be a heck of a guy too. That’s twice now he’s essentially been traded.” Said another executive: “Zucker is a pretty good player at that number.”

7. Kyle Turris, Nashville Predators – Much of the Turris talk centers around the notion that the Predators are very much the front-runner for Matt Duchene and need to clear space to make it happen. Turris is coming off a 23-point season and is owed \$6 million per season through 2023-24, so Nashville would be selling low. That said, put in the right situation, it’s easy to see him rebounding back to the player you could count on for 50 or 60 points per season. “You need someone who can get him the puck and get it to him in a shooting position,” said one scout. “He has lots of skill, great shooter and is an offensively gifted player.”

8. Chris Kreider, New York Rangers – The Rangers are getting to the point where they want to get out of the rental business at the trade deadline since the rebuild is turning the corner. So there will likely be a decision point for Kreider in the near future since he’s entering the last year of his contract. The Rangers obviously like him, but if a long-term extension doesn’t make sense for their competitive timeline, then a summer trade becomes a realistic scenario.

9. J.T. Miller, Tampa Bay Lightning – Tampa GM Julien BriseBois has to do something to free up cap space, with Miller, Ryan Callahan, Alex Killorn and Tyler Johnson all trade possibilities. Miller’s offensive numbers are down since joining the Lightning, but people around the league believe he has more room for offense if given more opportunity on a team that doesn’t have as stacked a lineup as Tampa. “When he’s at his best, it’s when he’s being physical and dominating inside the blue line,” said an NHL scout. “When he played with top-two-line guys, I thought he was good in Tampa and what they needed.”

10. Connor Brown, Toronto Maple Leafs – According to one trade deadline seller, Brown was part of the conversation when Toronto was looking to buy at the deadline. Something has to give in Toronto, whether it be a trade involving Nazem Kadri, Kasperii Kapanen, Brown or another young forward, as the Maple Leafs look for cap flexibility and an upgrade on defense. “I think the Leafs are open to anything,” said an NHL executive. “But I think they’d move Kadri before Kapanen.”

11. Colin Miller, Vegas Golden Knights – The Golden Knights need to shed salary and Miller’s name, along with Cody Eakin, was mentioned by sources as a top candidate to help make it happen. Miller’s numbers dropped after his breakout season in Vegas during the 2017-18 season, making him expendable, especially with cheaper options being developed in the system. “Miller is an offensive defenseman, but at the end of the year, he has three goals,” said one NHL source. “I know they really like (defenseman prospect) Zach Whitecloud.”

12. Patrick Marleau, Toronto Maple Leafs – Colleague Pierre LeBrun has been at the forefront of the Marleau news, reporting early that the Kings and Coyotes have had conversations with the Maple Leafs about the veteran forward. It would be a big coup for Toronto GM Kyle Dubas if he can get Marleau’s \$6.25 million off the books, but it doesn’t sound like it’s completely impossible. “Marleau can still skate,” said an Eastern Conference scout. “But he’s not super hard, not super creative. He messes up (Toronto) up front because Babs likes him so much. His value is as much off the ice as it is on it. He’s such a pro. A great pro.”

13. Shayne Gostisbehere, Philadelphia Flyers – Gostisbehere had a down year last season, so the Flyers would be selling low, which might be why teams are calling. This is a smart management group that would prefer to deal from a position of strength, and one that realizes Gostisbehere is a better player than he showed and that he’s still young and capable of bouncing back. Because of that, it would be better to categorize Gostisbehere under the “teams are calling but they’re not necessarily shopping him” category.

14. Vladislav Namestnikov, New York Rangers – The Rangers have a trio of young forwards in Jimmy Vesey, Pavel Buchnevich and Namestnikov who will eventually need new deals. Vesey, famously signed as a college free agent, and Namestnikov are unrestricted free agents after this season. So they fall under the same category as Kreider. Buchnevich is a restricted free agent who is most likely headed for a bridge deal with New York after winning over coach David Quinn with a strong finish. Namestnikov drew interest at the trade deadline, most notably from the San Jose Sharks before they made the deal for Gustav Nyquist, so it wouldn’t be shocking if they circled back on this front.

15. Jared Spurgeon, Minnesota Wild – The inclusion of Spurgeon here might be more wishful thinking from other teams than reality, so we’re sneaking him in a little further down the list. Minnesota management has said that getting a Spurgeon extension is a priority, as it should be. Spurgeon likes it in Minnesota but he also wants to win. He’s represented by Eustace King, who represents the off-almost traded Zucker, so if everything goes sideways in Minnesota, and at the current pace you can’t rule that out, Spurgeon will become a hot commodity. “Spurgeon is the guy we need,” said one executive from a team looking to add defense this summer. “I’m a big fan. A huge fan,” said an NHL scout. Said another executive: “I don’t know how you’d replace him. That doesn’t make sense to me. He’s terrific for them.”

16. Brandon Saad, Chicago Blackhawks – Chicago is a team to watch this summer with GM Stan Bowman sitting in a good spot with the No. 3 pick in the draft and cap flexibility. The Blackhawks are going to get an infusion of talent one way or the other, and there’s a belief out there that a Saad deal could be part of the formula. “They’d move him,” said one executive. Said another source: “I think you can get him. His ‘A’ game is plenty good. I’m not sure he brings that ‘A’ game often enough.”

17. Mike Hoffman, Florida Panthers – Florida is expected to be very active this summer, with the Panthers emerging as the favorite for top free agents Artemi Panarin and Sergei Bobrovsky. They’d also



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like to upgrade their defense and add depth up front, which makes a Hoffman trade a possibility. Hoffman is coming off a big season (36 goals) and teams have called at times looking to get him at a discount, something the Panthers have zero interest in doing. They're happy to bring him back next season if there's not a hockey trade that makes sense here.

18. Nikolaj Ehlers, Winnipeg Jets – Ehlers is a little further down this list because the likelihood of him being traded isn't necessarily high. That said, there are teams that believe an Ehlers deal may be an option the Jets turn to if Plans A or B don't work out. The Jets would rather move forward Mathieu Perreault or find the right Trouba deal. But if they can't find a taker for Perreault and Trouba gets a big raise in arbitration, while both Patrik Laine and Kyle Connor get huge contracts ... well, you can't keep everybody.

19. Nikita Zaitsev, Toronto Maple Leafs – The fact that Zaitsev's trade request became a public affair raised some eyebrows. Typically, a player asks for a trade and it's kept under wraps – most of them never hit the public conversation. But he's very much available and removing his \$4.5 million from the books (through 2023-24) isn't going to be easy for Toronto. "He's an NHL player, that's not the question," said an Eastern Conference scout. "But the difference between 15 minutes and 22 minutes is monumental for a defenseman. Zaitsev, if he's in the five-hole – or four at the most – he's OK."

20. Olli Maatta, Pittsburgh Penguins – GM Jim Rutherford has to do something to fix the Penguins' defense with Maatta and Jack Johnson both candidates to be moved. The problem, besides Johnson's contract, is that injuries have slowed down Maatta. "I think that holds him back now," said an NHL scout. "I don't think he's a very good skater."

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The Athletic / An inside look at the interview process for an NHL Draft prospect

By Katie Strang Jun 5, 2019

It was late May 2009, with the top draft prospects gathered and ready to converge, just a few weeks in advance of the NHL Draft. Two of the consensus top-three projected picks — John Tavares and Matt Duchene — were paired together as roommates in Toronto, and though they did not know each other well at the time, that was bound to change quickly based on their temporary hotel assignments.

Especially considering that the impending weekend was fraught with nerves, anxiety and perhaps a little bit of karaoke.

Though both Tavares and Duchene were already polished and well-studied in media obligations and the scrutiny that comes with being an upper-echelon talent, both were dealing with the combine for the first time — a weekend in which the game's top players are invited to work out and interview for teams as clubs narrow down their draft boards.

While the prospect of reeling off a series of pull-ups or pedaling until near-puke on the stationary bicycle was daunting, so was the series

of interviews. What would teams ask? How would they try to probe the psyches of these young athletes?

Tavares and Duchene, both represented by CAA, sniffed out a rumor of what to expect. They heard that at least one team was planning to ask them to sing a song. As Duchene recalls it, Tavares was worried about which one to choose.

"So he was running it by me and he was soooo bad, and we were both just dying laughing," Duchene recalled in a text message to The Athletic. "We didn't know each other much before that so that really broke the ice and we've been pretty good friends ever since."

For the record, Tavares ultimately landed on "TNT" by AC/DC as his song selection and regardless of whether he nailed the notes or not — we may never know — the New York Islanders obviously heard enough of what they liked, selecting him with the first-overall pick. Duchene was taken two picks later by Colorado, and the two remain among the elite players in the league after a decade of experience and career milestones.

That this anecdote still stands out in Duchene's mind 10 years later should be no surprise, especially considering the stakes and the emotions surrounding the combine and pre-draft interview process. Each year, in fact, news nuggets dribble out from the symposium of hockey executives, scouts and development staff throughout the league.

Last week, for example, word trickled out that Philadelphia was asking prospects which fruit they would be, Arizona was having players analyze videos of their own shifts, Washington requested a serenade from Russian forward Vasilii Podkolzin, and U.S. goaltender Spencer Knight was stumped by this question: "Do you like to stop pucks or prevent goals?"

There are still the stock-standard litany of biographical questions in the 20 minutes allotted for teams to interview each prospect: How tall are your parents? Were either of them athletes? Do you have brothers or sisters? As well as the time-honored banalities: What is your greatest weakness? Which NHL player does your style most resemble? What would you bring to our organization? But as more and more players are coming to these events polished, prepared and battle-tested for the gauntlet, some teams are employing increasingly creative approaches to discern as much they can about these players. Approaches that make it nearly impossible to anticipate.

Thinking back on his experience, Penguins star Sidney Crosby felt he was given a sense of what the process would look like, and yet he was still caught off-guard by some of the questions directed his way.

Crosby, who was a surefire lock as the first overall pick in the 2005 draft, met with every NHL club (there was a lottery to determine the draft order as a result of the 2004-05 lockout), and still remembers certain topics that made him think.

He expected to talk about his previous season, the ups and downs, the key moments and his play. But he was also asked about the lack of adversity he faced in his junior career and how he would deal with that. And who he'd bring with him to a deserted island if he had just one name to choose.

Crosby laughed when asked about what he called an "interesting" process, and still feels empathy for those who are about to embark into the unknown.

"Until you go in there," he said. "you really have no idea."



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Ask those who have been around the game long enough and plenty will tell you that the combine has evolved significantly. With the proliferation of social media, explosion of interest in prospect content and teams continuing to angle for any competitive advantage possible in such a parity-driven league, the combine has become a focal point of the NHL's spring calendar.

Whereas it used to be a much more informal commitment for teams and players alike, the itineraries, testing and interviews now seem to run with military-style efficiency. Naturally, the depth and scope of the interviews have changed as well.

"I'd say 90-95 percent of all the interviews are pretty mind-numbingly basic, but over the last five or six years, there's been more of a trend toward getting into the psychological aspect of the interview, trying to get more of a read on a kid's psychology as opposed to talking about hockey," said longtime agent Allan Walsh.

Dr. Aimee Kimball, the New Jersey Devils director of player and team development, has been involved in interviewing prospects since 2009, when she was brought aboard by Ray Shero, then the GM of the Pittsburgh Penguins, as a mental training consultant. Kimball, who holds three sports psychology degrees, has seen the focus of the interviews change significantly during that span.

When she first began working in these interview rooms, teams would ask about parents' height, a player's hand size, whether he had begun shaving, all common questions generally used to project physical growth and development. The emphasis has since shifted to personality – and that's no accident.

When Kimball joined Shero in his move to New Jersey in 2016, she sat down with the scouting staff and management, and discussed what they felt were the necessary characteristics needed of individual players to have successful NHL careers. The group came up with certain intangible qualities such as resilience, grit and motivation.

From there, she crafted a plan, customizable for each individual player, to try to discern whether players possess these traits and, ultimately, to uncover each player's core personality.

"Are they easy-going or more regimented? More introverted versus extroverted? (The answers) are not necessarily good or bad," Kimball explained. "We just want to know what a player will add to the locker room."

Kimball said that there was a period where many prospects came in feeling over-coached, almost robotic, but that the pendulum swing has seemed to shift back in the other direction where kids are now being encouraged to showcase their genuine selves. That has allowed the interview process to become a more natural back-and-forth.

A few recent examples that struck her?

During one interview with a European player, she learned he was a huge fan of the animated TV show "Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles." She was surprised by this but took her cue from the player and asked which character was his favorite. His answer? Leonardo, because he was a leader.

Not scripted, but authentic and telling nonetheless.

During another interview, a player was asked about the popular online video game Fortnite, which, to the uninitiated, features a popular dance move called "flossing." Someone from the Devils contingent asked the player if he was any good at it. Then he asked the player to prove it.

The real fun began when the player challenged the interviewers to do the same (Kimball said she was not the worst of the group, but did not name names).

And while this memorable episode was purely spontaneous in nature, the majority of the work that goes into these interviews is far from off-the-cuff.

In fact, for many teams, there is a tremendous amount of preparation involved. Area scouts have likely seen these players multiple times, scouring individual shifts for certain elements of their game to analyze. Kimball said the Devils' scouting staff does a phenomenal job of identifying some of the aforementioned intangible qualities during the course of a game, in both on-the-ice and off-the-ice moments.

Scouts will watch warmups to see if a player is first on the ice or last on the ice, if the player has any particular superstitions, whether they seem engaged and focused on what they're doing or are simply going through the motions. After a bad shift, does the player bang his stick on the bench or throw something? Does he talk to his linemates? How does he respond after a poor game?

"You can learn a lot about a player when he's interviewed by a scout after a tough loss," Kimball said.

For most teams, the combine interview is not the first step in information-gathering but rather one of many during a player's draft year.

Take the San Jose Sharks, for example. The Sharks have a reputation within the league for being one of the toughest, most rigorous, exacting and, at times, unconventional interview experiences. They also have a track record of drafting pretty well.

This external reputation is not lost on general manager Doug Wilson nor his son Doug Wilson Jr., who serves as the director of scouting. The latter thinks that reputation might be a function of how much advance work they do on players and how often they simply cut to the chase.

Wilson Jr. said that the Sharks' area scouts do a "phenomenal" job gathering intel on players throughout the season, often contacting coaches, teammates, friends, family members and billet parents for extra insight. By the time they see some of the kids they interview at the combine, it's the third, fourth and fifth occasion they've spoken. Often, they'll break the ice by asking prospects to run them through the list of canned answers they've already provided to other teams.

Getting that out of the way allows them to probe deeper in other areas. The goal, Wilson Jr. said, is to leave the combine with answers to a pair of critical questions about a player: What type of learner is he? And what would be the development plan for that player if he were to be a part of their organization?

And for a scouting staff that has been together for a long time, that also means there is a certain level of frankness that exists within the team's war room.

"We have a really close group." Wilson Jr. said of the scouting and player development staff. "Whatever our reputation is, a lot has to do with our scouting group as a whole. They really feel comfortable with each other and they're honest and transparent. Guys feel free to not hold back."

But for every insight gleaned about a player, or charming anecdote shared, there are some horror stories as well — tales that range from perplexing to odd to downright inappropriate and disrespectful.



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One agent mused that the later in the week the combine goes, the more some teams' scouting staffs get bored and start screwing around for a laugh. But sometimes, teams cross a line.

Take the example of one current NHL player, who recalled his most vivid memory of the combine interview process. The wide-eyed teenager entered the room for an interview with a team, sat down and, rather than being questioned, was met with this jaw-dropping remark instead from one of the team's high-ranking executives:

"So, I heard you're a pussy."

Caught off guard, the player didn't know how to react. Whether the tactic was to see how he'd react when challenged or to test his ability to control his emotions, the player still isn't sure. He refused to take the bait and, to his relief, that team did not ultimately draft him. Still, it was a revealing glimpse inside a world that still values some of the hyper-masculine chest-pounding from middle-aged men looking to bully or intimidate a teenager.

(One could argue these types of egregious situations are still indeed useful in interviews, when viewed as a sort of Rorschach test for an organization; one can learn much more about the interviewer than interviewee by this sort of behavior.)

This, unfortunately, is not an isolated incident, with similar stories spanning generations. Some view it as a rite of passage ("This is an inappropriate business. There is no office decorum when you're slamming someone's head against the boards. We're way fucking past that," one agent said.) while others see it as a gross abuse of power ("It's the most ridiculous thing ever," one former NHL player said).

How is a player supposed to even respond in such a situation?

"I would tell a kid — if I knew something like that was going to happen — to say, 'You are the most unprofessional person I've met so far in the hockey world and if that's how you feel, then don't fucking draft me.' And then get out and walk out," Walsh said. "That would get them thinking."

Red Wings coach Jeff Blashill said he's heard about some of the off-beat, outside-the-box techniques employed by NHL teams throughout the years. In his experience, he's found it much more useful to learn about a player from the team's contacts within the hockey world, which are more likely to yield an honest, less-scripted assessment.

Blashill said that the two most important things to try to gauge about a player are inner drive and toughness, both of which are tough to discern from a 20-minute interview. Especially if a smooth answer is prioritized over honesty and candor.

"Certainly, in some cases, the goal of the person asking the question is to make the prospect uncomfortable to see how they react. I think that's something that's been used a lot in different interviews and whatnot, but I would say, in my opinion, without having sat in a lot of them but sitting in enough of them and being around is that those interviews are almost dangerous," he said.

Beyond debating the shock-and-awe approach, there are people who feel that the setting just isn't designed to evoke authentic answers and that it can sometimes mitigate the leg work the actual scouts have done on the ground.

"I always thought the combine was the greatest chance to screw stuff up on the part of teams," said former NHL executive Frank Provenzano, who was an assistant GM in both Washington and Dallas. "There's so much risk, in my opinion, in recency bias and so

many people (within an organization), for status reasons, insert themselves into the process they don't have context in."

Mike Santos, a former assistant GM who worked with the Islanders, Predators and Panthers, said that although there is still some utility in certain basics that are covered — military commitments for European players who hail from countries where there are mandatory service terms or a college player's willingness to leave school and sign with the team that drafts him — the best information comes in the months leading up to the combine, where scouts do what they do best.

Putting a ton of stock in the interview alone was largely futile, he felt.

"Most of the interviews I've been in throughout the years were so useless," said Santos, now the executive director of the Eastern Hockey League. "If you scouted and evaluated the kid and met him throughout the year, when you're tracking those teams, your scouts find (enough) info about them."

One area Santos felt was helpful, however, was when a team had certain information about a player — a reputation for partying or drug abuse or something of that nature — and confronted the player about the information.

The team wouldn't necessarily be scared off by a player owning up to substance abuse or behavioral health issues, whereas a lack of honesty was considered a red flag.

"I would 100 percent want a player to be honest with me, for two reasons. One, because it takes the mystery and the guessing out of it — This is what we're dealing with; do we still want him or not? — and two, it doesn't matter what sort of social or personal issue a person has. You're not gonna get better until you admit it, right?"

Other executives agreed that a lack of transparency and accountability was a big warning sign, as was talking poorly about a coach, a teammate or failing to own up to personal shortcomings.

This is something agents often have to confront with their clients before they enter into the process — a realistic understanding of some of the questions the players will be asked.

One agent had a player who, prior to a recent combine, left his team's program under dubious circumstances. The agent knew the player would be asked why and gave him simple advice about how to tackle the question.

"When it comes to this stuff we tell guys, 'You need to be honest, to answer what your heart tells you.' That's the only way you come through looking genuine," he said. "Just jump on it and address it directly."

Some of the bigger shops have consultants who work with clients to prepare them for the rigors and discomfort they endure as part of the process. CAA, one of the top hockey agencies, has a relationship with a communications firm that provides improvisational techniques as its primary training strategy.

Steve Shenbaum, a retired Hollywood actor who first began working in this field as a consultant for tennis star Pete Sampras, espouses the power of authenticity and human connection in his workshops that he provides to players.

Shenbaum, along with colleague Chris Friday, the director of curriculum and program manager at Game On NATION, works with top athletes at summer camps and Skype workshops to fine-tune their ability to respond in genuine ways to difficult questions and stressful scenarios.



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"It really puts the athlete outside of their comfort zone and really stretches their communication muscles so, in a way, whatever they receive in interviews is nowhere near as challenging and daunting as the exercises we put them through," Shenbaum said.

The idea behind these workshops is that Shenbaum and Friday don't want these players to be scripted; they feel that inhibits creativity and limits human connection. Rather, they try to cultivate a safe and nurturing environment for players to experiment and explore their skills without fear of rejection or ridicule.

They do exercises such as "Repeat, react and respond," which allows players to really consider the question being asked, lean into the awkward silences if necessary ("The whole rule of improv is to love pauses and silences," Shenbaum said) and tie that question back to the heart of the matter – "Every question is really, 'Why should we draft you?'" Friday likes to remind clients.

They also teach prospects how to match their signals to their answers (they call this the "8-5-3" method), where you modulate your enthusiasm and physical responses to your topic as appropriate.

Shenbaum and Friday, who also work with government and military officials, as well as corporate business types (athletes only make up 20-25 percent of their practice), try to impart the importance of non-verbal communications and comfort in surroundings. They try to learn as much as possible about the venue, the format, the location, the temperature and even the dress code of an important interview. The last thing they want is a young kid walking into a room full of strangers, wearing a suit for the first time in his life.

And the single most important ground rule for the training?

We laugh with, not at.

That's critical in an environment where you're asking teenagers to put themselves out there.

"It's crazy how powerful telling a group of 17 or 18-year-olds 'You're not going to be laughed at, shamed or taken down,'" Shenbaum said "If you just establish it, it's awesome what you get out of it. It's wild. It's lights out."

Shenbaum and Friday have learned, however, that there are certain nuances to the NHL culture that must be accounted for when preparing clients for an event like the NHL combine.

Take the "8-5-3" method as an example. When a player is asked about winning a Memorial Cup championship, the pair encourages players to respond with passion and joy. But that can be hard, even for such a young person, when up against some of the intrinsic facets of hockey culture, where stoicism still reigns supreme.

"I think sometimes they get confused by humility. (They) want to be humble in a sport where there are ramifications for upstaging (others) and not playing the game the right way," Shenbaum said. "Of all sports, hockey has the most ingrained humility. But humility is not a complete disregard for achievements."

And perhaps it is the very nuances of hockey culture that makes part of the combine interview process so fascinating. On one end, there has been extreme innovation in the ways athletes train, compete and are evaluated; and on the other end, there is still a part of hockey culture that is very much anachronistic in nature — a throwback to a different era where certain intangibles are lauded and other more practical virtues are undervalued.

The level of secrecy and subterfuge can lead to misconceptions about the process, too. Pysch testing and Vo2 max outputs often

make for good headlines, but often times, very little changes for teams despite the intel gathered at the event.

"Publicly, a lot of people think that after the combine happens a team's draft list changes dramatically, where players move up or down draft boards drastically," Wilson Jr. said. "I think the biggest thing to understand is the season is over. All the hockey is over."

And for all the hype that the event portends, it's easy to get another key element lost: ultimately, all this testing and information and scouting relies on projecting talent for players who are barely old enough to drive a car.

Not exactly an exact science. At the end of the day, these are not yet professionals.

They're kids.

"It's tricky," Santos said. "You're dealing with 17-year-olds, you know?"

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The Athletic / Pronman: What to expect by drafting center Kirby Dach

By Corey Pronman Jun 5, 2019

If you were dreaming up what an ideal hockey player should look like, it would look a lot like Kirby Dach.

Dach has been a highly touted player for years, with all the natural ability you could ask of a hockey prospect when projecting them to the NHL as a 6-foot-4 center with a ton of skill.

Here is a look at why he is No. 10 on my draft board for 2019.

Vision

Dach's best attribute is his hockey sense and particularly his vision as a playmaker. He's a guy who can make difficult plays consistently and quarterback a top power play in the NHL.

I remember watching him in the summer and being amazed by his creativity. Like this one-touch pass behind his back to set up a goal at the net.

Or this sequence where he made a skilled play to pick up the puck and fired a pass between four defenders to his teammate.

Dach can execute the traditional seam passes, too.

Though on the Saskatoon power play he was typically set up in the right circle.

This play shows how unique Dach can be. He won a battle and, using his high-end skill, long reach and fantastic instincts, with one hand took the puck out of the scrum and threw it to a teammate in front of the net.

Dach is a dangerous passer in all three zones, and while he can pick apart defenses inside the offensive blue line, he often showed the ability to stretch the ice.

Puck Skills and Skating



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Unlike in past articles, I'm combining skating and hands into one category. The reason for that is Dach was often asked by Saskatoon to be its main zone entry player. In doing this, you can see both his speed and skill on display at the same time constantly.

Dach's stride and reach make him a nightmare to stop off entries. On this rush, he showed how easily he can maneuver around a defender and how he can use his length to put the puck around him. With his skating, he then pulled away and started to roam around the offensive zone.

Dach's hands are high end, and he has the ability to pull off the flashy play to create space for himself, such as this play, even though the eventual chance was stuffed.

This play is another example of Dach's skating and skill at play. He has the edge work to evade and spin off checks, then you see both his straightaway speed and hands, which allowed him to get past the Prince Albert defense.

Dach is so good at handling the puck at full flight. He made so many high-level plays throughout the season where he attacked with speed and made defenders look foolish.

His skating isn't perfect. Both Dach and his coach Mitch Love noted that it is an area he can still improve. The first few steps are the part evaluators point to. Given how clean his stride is and how powerful a skater he is, I could see that easily coming with time and strength.

For a 6-foot-4 forward, his stride doesn't break down at all and he shows more than enough speed to push defenders back.

He absolutely has a gear to pull away from defenders. On this play, Dach created a chance with his speed.

That combination of size, speed, skill and vision makes Dach such a multi-dimensional threat and a player who can impact a game in multiple facets.

Off-Puck Play

Dach played heavy minutes all season, often 20-plus a game as he was asked to be Saskatoon's best offensive and defensive center, typically playing against the opponent's best players. He made a ton of great defensive plays on the backcheck. His effort on his two-way game is never in doubt.

Scouts have pointed out that he can be taken out of games physically. I think there's some merit to that but don't think it was a huge issue. Dach showed the ability to win battles and get to the net, but there were certainly games and stretches where his game wasn't there, whether due to inconsistent effort or lack of physicality.

Scouts noted how teams went after Dach. He was often on the punishing end of the rough stuff as teams felt they could take him out of games that way.

With that said, those same scouts noted that Dach seemed to be improving on that front toward the end of the season and in the playoff series versus Prince Albert. "They went after him all series and he took it and gave it back," said one head scout.

Production

Dach started the season on fire, one of the leading scorers in the WHL before he hit a significant midseason lull.

His numbers do not indicate a true top prospect – 25 goals and 73 points for a January 2001 birthdate in the WHL is not all that special. He was the team's best player, but he had talent around him to help him produce.

His season was a talking point among scouts as a player with all the tools who for lengthy stretches was not scoring all that much. His numbers weren't terrible, as he was still top 30 in points and shots on goal in the WHL, but for a guy with a clear top-five pick toolkit, his season was a mild disappointment.

Hockey World's Impressions

An NHL executive said: "You can talk all you want about his physical play, his production or whatever, but there's a handful of 6-foot-4 centers in the world with his skating ability, hands and IQ."

Saskatoon Blades coach Mitch Love said: "He's a student of the game. He's got a very high hockey IQ. His playmaking ability is second to none. There aren't many 6-4, 200 pound, 17-year-old players who can play center the way he can."

Saskatoon Blades GM Colin Priestner said: "Kirby had an excellent sophomore season for us. He was consistently our top player on a very good veteran team. His size and his ability to see the ice and make plays will always garner the most attention, but his performance defensively against top centers every night was something I think goes a little under the radar. He has a Datsyukian ability to strip pucks and his reach is quite something on both sides of the puck. He dealt with a tremendous amount of spotlight and pressure from NHL teams all season and handled it all in a professional and business-like manner. He's one of the most special players we've ever had and he will be a franchise centreman in the NHL for years to come thanks to his blend of skill, size, hockey IQ and work ethic. He's a great person and has earned all the accolades he has been given."

Canada U18 GM Alan Millar said: "He's more of a pass-first guy. He sees the ice well, he can find holes, gets pucks through to guys, but at the same time, I think he's skilled enough, he can shoot the puck, but he's certainly more of a guy who looks to make plays first. He's got a good skating stride, too."

Kirby Dach said: "My 200-foot game is something that separates me from other players and my ability to see the plays before they happen. I think I have a very high hockey IQ. I can be a playmaker down in the offensive zone."

Projection

If Dach turned into Mark Scheifele, I wouldn't blink. When you look at Dach's frame, his high-end hands, his fantastic vision, his ability to play heavy minutes and the fact he skates quite well for a big man, all the components are there for him to become an impact NHL player.

There is no guarantee to that happening though. For stretches of the season he left scouts wanting, and there are debates in the industry if he has what it takes to raise his game to that highest level on a consistent basis. When he's on, there is no doubt he can take over a game at the NHL level.

There is too much talent with Dach, and considering he still had quite an impressive season, I feel comfortable projecting him as a potential first-line center in the NHL who will be one of his team's best playmakers and drivers.

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The Athletic / Down Goes Brown: Ranking all 50 Stanley Cup finals of the expansion era

By Sean McIndoe Jun 5, 2019

Through four games, the 2019 Stanley Cup final has been ... well, pretty great, actually. It's featured some big hits, highlight-reel goals, interesting storylines and at least a little bit of bad blood (along with some real blood). Three of the four games weren't decided until the final moments, including an overtime, the first in the final since 2016. We've also seen a lopsided blowout and a few ugly moments, so it hasn't exactly reached instant classic status yet. But we're only four games in with at least two more to go and if we get two or three more good games then the 2019 final has a chance to be remembered as one of the better ones in recent memory.

But while we wait to see how this series turns out, let's spend some time looking back on the ones that came before. There have been exactly 50 Stanley Cup finals in the NHL's post-expansion history, dating back to 1968. And today, we're going to rank them all, from worst to best.

Now clearly, this is a subjective exercise. Your view of what makes a series great may not match mine, and it goes without saying that the "best" final will be whichever one your favorite team won. But I think there are certain things that fans tend to look for in a great Cup final. You want fun teams and plenty of stars, with at least a few interesting subplots. Longer series are generally better, and ones that go seven are the best of all, especially if there are a few overtimes along the way. And there should be some sort of signature moment that still resonates, even for fans who weren't around to see the series play out at the time.

Can we come up with a list everyone will agree on? No, of course not, but that's half the fun. And at the very least, today's post will force an answer to the age-old question: Is Sean actually capable of writing an entire post that doesn't include at least a few sections about the Maple Leafs?

We've got 51 years and 50 finals to work through, so let's start from the bottom. In our case, that means going way back...

#50 – Canadiens over Blues (1969)

#49 – Canadiens over Blues (1968)

The Canadiens were the league's best team. The Blues were the only one of the six expansion teams that could tie their skates properly. If that strikes you as a recipe for an anticlimactic series, well, you have more foresight than the NHL did. The league's poorly thought-out playoff format ensured the final would be a massive mismatch, and the Canadiens rolled to a sweep both times. The 1968 series at least included a couple of overtime games, so we'll nudge it ahead of 1969 in the race for last place.

#48 – Avalanche over Panthers (1996)

This one could have been so good. It looked like we'd get the Avs and the Penguins in a final that would have been stacked with Hall of Famers and high-flying offenses. Instead, the Panthers pulled off an Eastern Conference final upset, then got swept by the Avalanche.

To make matters worse, it was a matchup between a recent expansion team that was so boring you couldn't even get behind them as a fun underdog and a Colorado team everyone hated at the moment because of Claude Lemieux. One of the games was 8-1,

and the series ended on a triple-overtime 1-0 game that set the perfect tone for the Dead Puck era to come.

#47 – Red Wings over Capitals (1998)

#46 – Devils over Red Wings (1995)

That Panthers/Avs series was one of four straight 1990s finals that ended in a sweep, and only one of them was especially interesting. I'm not sure I remember anything at all from the 1998 final apart from the emotional Cup handoff to Vladimir Konstantinov. And the most memorable moment of the 1995 series was probably furious New Jersey fans absolutely ethering Gary Bettman on live TV.

#45 – Oilers over Bruins (1988)

#44 – Islanders over Canucks (1982)

#43 – Canadiens over Rangers (1979)

#42 – Islanders over North Stars (1981)

#41 – Oilers over Flyers (1985)

Is the NHL age of parity a good thing? It's been a topic of debate in recent years. The NHL thinks it's great; others (including me) aren't so sure. Isn't there something to be said for a good-old-fashioned dynasty?

Sure there is. But as these series remind us, often the thing to be said is "don't bother watching the final, because the powerhouse team is just going to roll to an easy win." Watching a heavy favorite cruise to a four- or five-game rout isn't all that entertaining, which is why all five of these series end up in our bottom-10. The 1988 series deserves a special mention, as it featured an embarrassing power failure that caused one of the games to be wiped out and made the Oilers the only team to ever sweep a five-game final.

#40 – Kings over Devils (2012)

This is the longest series to show up on our list so far, having gone six games. But it was over well before that, with the Kings jumping out to a 3-0 series lead and then taking their sweet time in wrapping things up when everyone just wanted it to be over. Their 6-1 blowout win to mercifully end the series brought the franchise their first ever Cup, which was cool, and the main reason I've moved this final up a few spots over the years. It would have been cooler if they'd just finished it off in four.

#39 – Ducks over Senators (2007)

#38 – Red Wings over Hurricanes (2002)

#37 – Capitals over Golden Knights (2018)

Sometimes, a matchup that doesn't carry much history can end up being all sorts of fun. Other times, not so much. Last year's Caps/Knights matchup should have been great, but just didn't deliver (although the post-Cup celebrations sure did). The Wings and Hurricanes gave us one memorable OT marathon, but that's about it. And Sens/Ducks is mostly remembered for Chris Pronger getting suspended, Chris Phillips scoring into his own net, and Daniel Alfredsson shooting the puck at Scott Niedermayer.

#36 – Red Wings over Flyers (1997)

Here's the last of those 1990s sweep, and like with the 2012 Kings, I'm nudging it up a few spots because it features the dramatic end of a Cup drought. It also had plenty of star power, with Steve Yzerman and the stacked Wings facing Eric Lindros and his Legion of Doom. On paper, it had everything you'd want. In reality, we got four so-so games. Darren McCarty's goal was pretty great, though.



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#35 – Bruins over Blues (1970)

Look, I moved this one up as high as I could, partly out of pity for Blues fans who saw their other appearances take up the bottom two slots. And yes, the Bobby Orr goal still stands as perhaps the most famous in NHL history, which on its own makes this final worth remembering. But other than that, it was yet another sweep that was all but guaranteed by the NHL's weird format.

#34 – Canadiens over Bruins (1977)

#33 – Oilers over Bruins (1990)

#32 – Penguins over Blackhawks (1992)

Let's file these under matchups that should have been great but didn't quite deliver. The Habs and Bruins was a great rivalry matchup that ended in a dull sweep; the two teams would have a better rematch a year later, although their classic series actually came in the 1979 semifinal. Boston's meeting with Edmonton in 1990 featured a head-to-head matchup between the year's two MVP candidates in Mark Messier and Ray Bourque and felt like Boston's best chance to finally knock off the Gretzky-less Oilers, but they went out meekly in five. And the Hawks and Pens was packed with star power and produced Jaromir Jagr's legendary goal, but only lasted four games. At least we'll always have the NHLPA '93 intro screen.

#31 – Canadiens over Flyers (1976)

This one could also fit into the "dynasties winning easily" category from up above. But it's worth moving up a few slots, if only because a) we didn't know the Habs were a dynasty yet, and b) the Flyers were the defending two-time champs. In hindsight, it was a transition between eras. But it still ended in four straight.

#30 – Bruins over Rangers (1972)

#29 – Penguins over Predators (2017)

#28 – Canadiens over Black Hawks (1973)

#27 – Penguins over Sharks (2016)

#26 – Canadiens over Bruins (1978)

#25 – Flyers over Sabres (1975)

We hit the halfway mark on our list with a six-pack of six-game finals, each perfectly fine and featuring a handful of memorable moments. Only one on-ice animal murder, though.

#24 – Kings over Rangers (2014)

This one ranks significantly higher if you're a TV executive, as it pitted the two biggest U.S. markets against each other. The series only ended up going five games, but three of those went to overtime, including the big finale.

#23 – Stars over Sabres (1999)

Eesh. This is a tough one. It was a tight, low-scoring series pitting the Presidents' Trophy-winning Stars against Dominik Hasek and ... well, mostly just Hasek. It was almost enough to earn the Sabres their first title, and maybe it should have been, but it ended with what might still stand as the most controversial moment in NHL history. Does that make the series better? Worse? I'm not sure, but it was definitely memorable.

#22 – Canadiens over Flames (1986)

#21 – Flames over Canadiens (1989)

While the 1986 series only lasted five games, it delivered a record-setting overtime, the unusual sight of the Habs playing the role of scrappy playoff underdogs, and the arrival of Patrick Roy as a legitimate star. The 1989 rematch was even better, with six close games and the Flames finally claiming the Cup with help from one of the great OGWAC stories ever.

#20 – Blackhawks over Lightning (2015)

#19 – Blackhawks over Bruins (2013)

We'll pair up two of the three Hawks' Cups, both of which came in very good six-game series against worthy opponents. The Bruins had already won a Cup two years earlier, while we all assumed the Lightning were only another year or two away from a few of their own. We'll give the edge to the Boston series based on a better ending, with two goals in 17 seconds narrowly edging out tornado warnings and a missing Stanley Cup.

#18 – Islanders over Flyers (1980)

#17 – Flyers over Bruins (1974)

#16 – Blackhawks over Flyers (2010)

This might be cheating a little bit, but some finals end up feeling more important in hindsight. In this case, two mini-dynasties and one full-blown one all get their starts in six-game finals that feature the Flyers. The first Hawks' Cup in 49 years still stands as the best memory for a generation of Chicago fans, even though it remains funny that nobody saw Patrick Kane's winner in 2010. Then again, as Flyers fans will remind us, sometimes important plays get missed.

#15 – Canadiens over Kings (1993)

This one should have been a slam dunk for the top 10. Patrick Roy and the impossible overtime magic of the storied Habs facing Wayne Gretzky and the new-school Kings trying to take out their fourth straight Canadian team? It couldn't fail. And then it kind of did, lasting only five games. The best season in NHL history didn't produce the best finale, but it packed a hell of a lot of fun into just five games, including an illegal stick, an immortal wink, three overtimes and one of Bob Cole's greatest calls.

#14 – Devils over Stars (2000)

You can't ask for a much better matchup than two recent champs squaring off, especially when both features a Hall of Fame goalie in his prime. They treated us to a 7-3 opener before settling in to exactly what you'd expect from these teams in this era: low-scoring, heavy hitting, absolutely no room for anyone and five overtime periods in the last two games. And sudden death Cup-winners are always cool.

#13 – Penguins over North Stars (1991)

#12 – Devils over Mighty Ducks (2003)

Can a David vs. Goliath story still be great if David loses? I'd argue that it can, especially if Goliath has to sweat a little along the way. The 2003 Ducks remain the last team to have a player win the Conn Smythe in a losing cause, and the 1991 Stars might be the best near-miss Cinderella story in playoff history. The 2003 series gets nudged ahead because it went seven games, but the 1991 edition gave us the greatest moment.

#11 – Bruins over Canucks (2011)

A great Cup final always leaves you feeling like they should make a movie out of it. Normally, that film would be a feel-good pick-me-up. This one would be more of an apocalyptic doomsday tale, one featuring two of the most easy-to-hate finalists in memory.



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The two teams served up a nonstop parade of cheap shots and sucker punches, along with multiple biting incidents and the longest suspension in Cup final history. They also gave us four shutouts, including a pair of 1-0 finals, to go along with an 8-1 laugh. The last of those shutouts came in Game 7 in front of a Vancouver crowd that went from joyous to stunned to nauseous to outright furious, culminating in a downtown riot.

Was any of it pretty? Nope. But it was memorable, and fascinating in its own way.

#10 – Islanders over Oilers (1983)

#9 – Oilers over Islanders (1984)

On paper, you couldn't ask for two better matchups, as the last two true NHL dynasties went head-to-head in what turned out to be a passing of the torch. Both sides were stacked with Hall of Famers, both believed that the Cup was their destiny, and both would come to symbolize everything fans loved (and sometimes hated) about the high-flying 1980s.

Unfortunately, neither series was all that good. The Islanders swept the 1983 meeting, and the Oilers won in five in 1984. So in that sense, both finals were disappointing, and maybe even overrated. But in the bigger picture, they were two of the most important series in NHL history, and seeing two dynasties overlap so perfectly was almost too good to be true.

#8 – Lightning over Flames (2004)

This seven-game classic was low-scoring and occasionally ugly, but it was a fitting end to the pre-cap era. The first three games were so-so, but from there we got four straight one-goal games, including two overtimes. And of course, there was the most controversial no-goal in NHL history, courtesy of Martin Gelinis in Game 6. Flames fans still swear it was in, and that they were robbed of a Cup. They might be right.

#7 – Oilers over Flyers (1987)

The Gretzky-era Oilers went to four finals and only lost five games. Three of them came in this series, as the underdog Flyers nearly rode rookie goalie Ron Hextall to the upset. At the time, it was thrilling to see the Oilers up against the ropes and in danger of being KO'd on the league's biggest stage. The fact that they managed to hold on in a dramatic seventh game just reminded us of how good they were.

#6 – Canadiens over Black Hawks (1971)

Remember that dumb playoff format that forced an established franchise to play an expansion team in the final? The NHL finally got rid of it in time for the 1971 playoffs, and the hockey gods rewarded fans with the only seven-game final between 1966 and 1986.

The end result was fun ... and also weird. The series featured legends like Jean Beliveau, Bobby Hull, Stan Mikita, Frank Mahovlich, Henri Richard, Ken Dryden and Tony Esposito. The two teams went back and forth in a tight series, with the home team winning every game until the deciding seventh, in which the visiting Habs came back from down 2-0 to earn a 3-2 win; it was only the second Game 7 road win in Cup final history.

When it was all over, the victorious Canadiens celebrated by firing their coach.

#5 – Hurricanes over Oilers (2006)

You know when you get a matchup that just feels like it was destined to happen, because the two teams just have so much history and

interlocking storylines that it can't be any other way? This matchup was the exact opposite of that.

But that was part of the appeal. In 2006, the NHL was back after a year-long lockout, and everything felt fresh and new, and maybe even a little bit random. The small-market Oilers and Hurricanes in the Stanley Cup final? Why not? TV executives hated it, but the two teams delivered a highly entertaining series filled with highlights and plot twists and one very big injury. Oh, and it ended with the most awkward Cup handoff ever. It was a lot of things, but never boring.

It all added up to a hell of a series. Is it overrated because we were all so starved for big league hockey to come back? Maybe, but after a year of watching poker and spelling bees, we'll allow it.

#4 – Red Wings over Penguins (2008)

#3 – Penguins over Red Wings (2009)

It's not the only Stanley Cup final rematch in NHL history, but it is the best. And it was a near-perfect storyline, with a Red Wings' dynasty that had spanned two eras facing the next generation in Sidney Crosby and the Penguins. The veteran Wings held off the kids in a six-game win in 2008, but the future was served in 2009. And it all culminated with just about the most ridiculous finish to a final we've ever seen, featuring a literal last-second showdown between two future Hall of Famers.

#2 – Avalanche over Devils (2001)

We all remember this one for how it ended – with Joe Sakic taking the Stanley Cup from Gary Bettman and handing it directly to Ray Bourque, giving the legendary defenseman his first skate with the Cup in the very last game of a 22-year career.

And yes, that was a great moment, one that would make this final worthy of a top-10 spot all on its own. But that makes it easy to forget how great the rest of the series was. It featured Patrick Roy and Martin Brodeur, two of the three greatest goaltenders of their era (and maybe ever) going head-to-head for the only time. In addition to Bourque and the goalies, the series included five other Hall of Famers, all in their prime. It was two teams that would combine to win five of nine Cups between 1995 and 2003. And it saw the Avs rally back from a 3-2 deficit to win in seven.

And then, that perfect ending. As a fan, you can't ask for much more.

#1 – Rangers over Canucks (1994)

Here's the dirty secret of the 1994 final: It was supposed to be a coronation. Mark Messier and the Rangers had just won their second Presidents' Trophy in three years. They'd loaded up with one of the most aggressive trade deadlines in history. They'd rolled through the first two rounds without breaking a sweat, then survived the obligatory near-miss by overcoming the Devils thanks to The Guarantee and Matteau Matteau Matteau.

In an NHL that was clearly shifting its attention to the United States, here was the biggest market ready to win the biggest prize on the biggest stage, snapping a 54-year drought in the process. It was perfect. And the hockey gods even served up a cupcake matchup in the form of the Western Conference's seventh-best team. A mere formality, really.

And then the series started. The Canucks stole Game 1 in overtime, signaling that they may not be following the script. New York roared back with three straight wins, punctuated by Mike Richter stopping the unstoppable Pavel Bure on a penalty shot. That set up the Rangers to break the drought and claim the Cup on home ice. Instead, the Canucks won the game on the strength of the wildest third period you'll ever see, then took Game 6 on home ice. Even a



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quarter-century later, the shot of an exhausted Trevor Linden and Kirk McLean after that win remains iconic.

It all set up a dramatic seventh game that lived up to the hype, with the Rangers taking an early lead before the Canucks battled back to get within one. Nathan LaFayette came an inch from tying it late in the third, and the Rangers would hold on for the win, if only barely.

The waiting was over. But the Rangers had had to wait just a little longer than anyone expected, thanks to one of the most compelling underdog stories in recent memory. It was a series that had everything. Including the No. 1 spot on our list.

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The Athletic / A 2016 NHL Draft re-draft and retrospective look back at my ranking

By Scott Wheeler Jun 5, 2019

Each year, in the aftermath of the release of my NHL Draft package at The Athletic, readers are increasingly curious not only about the rankings of the current draft's top 100 prospects, but also the inner-workings of how that list comes together.

The latter impulse is completely understandable. If you're going to trust my evaluations — and ultimately my ranking — then you're right to question how my prior work has stood the test of time.

In the interest of respecting that transparency, my annual draft packages include my guide to scouting, which details everything from my viewing process and the skills I value most to the context I consider and my limitations.

Last year, for the first time, I also began an annual tradition of re-drafting the draft class of three years earlier. The goal was twofold:

Provide you with my updated evaluation of the 2015 draft class' top prospects (while sometimes simultaneously reminding you, for better or for worse, who your team may have been able to land).

Self-evaluate my own ranking at the time side-by-side the way the 30 NHL teams actually selected in order to see where I was successful, where I made mistakes and how I fared against the decisions made by 30 NHL teams.

This year, as promised, that process begins anew, three years after the 2016 draft. While the below 30 players are not definitively done their growth curves and this ranking could still change moving forward (my 2015 re-draft would have players like Mitch Marner and Sebastian Aho higher if I did it today, for example, while a ranking like Dylan Strome's, which took some heat this time last year, looks strong), they are all now 20 or 21 and there are real conclusions to be drawn about where they're at — as well as where they're headed.

This new ranking — like my draft ranking — is based solely on my evaluations. This time around, by request, I have also included some baseline statistics for the players last season in their respective leagues (for those in the NHL I have also included Game Score Per 60 at 5-on-5 with a minimum cutoff of 500 minutes, for a pool of 574 players and 209 defencemen).

1. Toronto Maple Leafs: Auston Matthews

Actual draft pick: No. 1 (change: none) to Toronto

My final ranking: No. 1 (change: none)

This is both the first and last slot on this list that won't generate debate — or induce the rage of Fanbase X about the ranking of Player Y. Forget his place within the draft class, Matthews is one of the best 5-on-5 goal scorers in the NHL at this point and a surefire year-to-year 40-goal centre if he can stay healthy. There are legitimate questions to ask about his health but very few to ask about his game (though he's not the dominant defensive player many expected him to be). Matthews is the transformational player you'd hope for out of a first overall pick and the Leafs wouldn't think twice about it three years later. Any narrative about Matthews and Laine (it was a tired, forced narrative at the time) has been squashed.

2018-2019 season (NHL): 73 points (37G, 36A), 68 games. Game Score Per 60: 3.23 (11th).

2. Winnipeg Jets: Patrik Laine

Actual draft pick: No. 2 (change: none) to Winnipeg

My final ranking: No. 2 (change: none)

Let's get this out of the way: Laine was bad last year. Not just bad in the relative-to-his-two-prior-seasons kind of way. Bad in the borderline-ineffective-outside-of-the-powerplay kind of way. I expect, though, that Laine's junior year will be his worst for a long, long time. He's too good not to figure it out. And though there are now legitimately five other players worth at least considering side-by-side Laine, as well as legitimate questions to ask about his ability to make plays when his shot isn't finding the back of the net, Laine still has game-breaking talent that is unmatched by the five players below him on this ranking. For that, he stayed at No. 2. When Laine is on, he can score from anywhere in the offensive zone like few — if any — players in the world. His 110 goals is one shy of Matthews and 39 better than the next-closest player from the 2016 draft. If he can stay healthy, he's going to become one of the 40-something (50-something by then, likely) players to reach the 500-goal mark.

2018-2019 season (NHL): 50 points (30G, 20A), 82 games. Game Score Per 60: 0.95 (tied for 417th).

3. Columbus Blue Jackets: Matthew Tkachuk

Actual draft pick: No. 6 (change: +3) to Calgary

My final ranking: No. 4 (change: +1)

This was the toughest slot to rank on this list — and one that will probably generate considerable debate from Blue Jackets fans who would be happy to just take Pierre-Luc Dubois again. In that way, it's not dissimilar to the debate about my Tkachuk ranking in 2016, either. I took a lot of heat for ranking Tkachuk at No. 4 in 2016. Many believed he was a complementary player and that his huge production was largely due to his linemates, Mitch Marner and Christian Dvorak. But Tkachuk was a line-driving player then and he has become one in the NHL. It's close, and I'd listen to arguments for the four players that follow as the No. 3 in a re-draft today, but Tkachuk brings so, so much to the table. He's physical, he's an irritant and his rush game has caught up to what has always been a dominant game in front of the net, on the cycle and below the goal line. Though annual expectations for Tkachuk should probably sit somewhere between last year's breakout production and his 55-point pace of the two seasons prior, Tkachuk has become a force at the NHL level. And he did it while playing most of his season with Michael Frolik and Mikael Backlund, rather than Elias Lindholm, Sean Monahan, and Johnny Gaudreau.



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2018-2019 season (NHL): 77 points (34G, 43A), 80 games. Game Score Per 60: 3.08 (tied for 19th).

4. Edmonton Oilers: Clayton Keller

Actual draft pick: No. 7 (change: +3) to Arizona

My final ranking: No. 5 (change: +1)

Keller is one of those players whose skillset and ceiling are best understood within the context of his team. He is — without question — the craftiest player to emerge out of the draft, its best puck handler and a rare line-driving winger (and though he hasn't reached Patrick Kane or Mitch Marner levels in terms of his ability to carry a line, he also hasn't played alongside John Tavares or even Jonathan Toews). Even if you concede that Keller took a step back in his sophomore season, he is still one of the younger players on this list (he doesn't turn 21 until the end of July, which bodes well for continued growth), his team's leader in points and assists in both of his seasons and a freshman superstar at Boston University the season before. I have concerns about his ability to bring that shooting percentage up (a career 9 percent rate) and add a consistent goal-scoring element to his game but if the Coyotes can surround him with some more talent than there's consistent 70-point upside there. I believed then that he was a contender for fourth overall and I think that assessment holds up now. He was a steal at seventh overall.

2018-2019 season (NHL): 47 points (14G, 33A), 82 games. Game Score Per 60: 1.36 (tied for 311th).

5. Vancouver Canucks: Pierre-Luc Dubois

Actual draft pick: No. 3 (change: -2) to Columbus

My final ranking: No. 6 (change: +1)

I was a little surprised when the Blue Jackets took Dubois third overall in 2016. That isn't to say I wasn't high on the kid. I was. But I felt at the time that he belonged in the four to seven pick range. In hindsight, the Blue Jackets were right to take Dubois over Puljujarvi (more on Puljujarvi later) and that pick was one of the areas of the draft where my ranking has since finished at a competitive disadvantage. And though Dubois has proven to be a better player than Puljujarvi, I still stand by having Tkachuk and Keller slightly ahead of him at the time. My concern today with Dubois is the third-best prospect in the draft is the same one I held then. He's an excellent two-way player, has proven he can centre a top line with some darn good players while also pulling his weight offensively. Is there more upside in his game than we saw last season though? Is there room for Dubois to be more than a 61-point player? With some puck luck and the right linemates, probably. But that's about where his ceiling lies. And I just see more upside today (as I did in 2016) in Tkachuk and Keller so I'll take that risk, even if Dubois' the safer, more consistent player. I wouldn't bank on him shooting close 16 percent again next season and his raw production will take a hit if the Blue Jackets lose Artemi Panarin, who he played 73 games and more than 700 minutes with at 5-on-5 last season. The Canucks would take this outcome in a do-over, though.

2018-2019 season (NHL): 61 points (27G, 34A), 82 games. Game Score Per 60: 2.38 (tied for 92nd).

6. Calgary Flames: Alex DeBrincat

Actual draft pick: No. 39 (change: +33) to Chicago

My final ranking: No. 20 (change: +14)

While I think my record on the above players stands up, this is my first real quote-unquote win on this list given how much higher I had

DeBrincat on my ranking than where he went (a 19-spot difference). And yet, in hindsight, despite being a lot higher on DeBrincat than most (DeBrincat was ranked 21st among North American skaters on NHL Central Scouting's final list), I was still far too low on him. I believed in him and declared the pick a steal at the time. I trusted his goal-scoring ability would translate despite his size, which was a major concern. And yet, it wasn't enough. I should have been even higher on him. DeBrincat has become (very quickly and without any real obstacles) one of hockey's best goal scoring wingers. He is very much a lesson in size bias. A lot like Tkachuk, his linemates on stacked Erie Otters teams were given too much credit for his success. He's not ever going to put up huge assist totals with the shot-heavy way that he plays but DeBrincat is a star and his 79 goals in two seasons feel like only the beginning.

2018-2019 season (NHL): 76 points (41G, 35A), 82 games. Game Score Per 60: 2.38 (tied for 92nd).

7. Arizona Coyotes: Charlie McAvoy

Actual draft pick: No. 14 (change: +7) to Boston

My final ranking: No. 15 (change: +8)

The final player in the tier of five who I think have a legitimate shot at finishing at No. 3 on this list someday when their careers are all said and done, McAvoy has emerged as the draft's best defenceman. In that way, both myself and a number of teams were too low on him. At the time, my rankings were really close for the top six defencemen on my board (Jakob Chychrun, Olli Juolevi, Dante Fabbro, Mikhail Sergachev, Jake Bean and McAvoy). And while I still believe all six of those defencemen are going to be top-four D-men in the NHL while few if any are going to be true No. 1 options, I now see McAvoy as having the best odds at eclipsing those expectations. He's already an excellent No. 2 at the very least and a combination of his Game Score and his possession metrics last season suggested he might be even more than that. His biggest challenge has been one of health. I'd like to see McAvoy lead his team in ice-time and stay in the lineup for a full 70-plus games because once that happens we're really going to get a sense for just how good he can be.

2018-2019 season (NHL): 28 points (7G, 21A), 54 games. Game Score Per 60: 2.03 (11th among defencemen).

8. Buffalo Sabres: Mikhail Sergachev

Actual draft pick: No. 9 (change: +1) to Montreal

My final ranking: No. 12 (change: +4)

Sergachev represents the first clearcut win for the NHL versus my list. And though I was only three spots lower on my ranking than where the Canadiens took the player, in hindsight I wasn't high enough on the Windsor defender (I saw a kid with a huge shot who could wow you with a big goal in the OHL but didn't have the skating of a Jakob Chychrun or the patience of a Dante Fabbro). Though he hasn't been challenged with the defensive minutes of a McAvoy at this point in his career, Sergachev has been a contributing regular on the best team in the league for the better part of two years now. Though I'm still not sure I see true No. 1 potential in his game (none of his skills make him a true game-breaker), there's no denying Sergachev has what it takes to get there (size, length, a big shot, good enough man-on-man defending and the ability to control tempo and either carry or pass the puck in all three zones). The Sabres would take a do-over here without thinking twice (more on Alex Nylander later).

2018-2019 season (NHL): 32 points (6G, 26A), 75 games. Game Score Per 60: 2.00 (12th among defencemen).



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9. Montreal Canadiens: Adam Fox

Actual draft pick: No. 66 (change: +57) to Calgary

My final ranking: No. 29 (change: +20)

Remember when I said that this ranking was going to be based on my evaluations? Well here we are at the point where a kid who has yet to play an NHL game gets ranked ahead of several who are a season or two deep into their NHL careers. I'm confident Fox is going to be that good. He's one of those players who is going to spend so much time with the puck on his stick on offence that concerns over the ability of a smaller defender to be a No. 1 are quickly going to be muted. Fox is a stud who just had the most productive season by an NCAA defenceman (1.45 points per game!) since I began doing this whole scouting things six years ago (breaking the record of 1.08 points per game that he tied two seasons before). This is a kid, who, as a defenceman, posted 17 more points than his nearest teammate while playing to a plus-23 rating on a Harvard team that spent more time outside of USA Today's national NCAA ranking than it did inside it. He's going to immediately become an impact player for the Rangers and will probably go down as the second-biggest steal of the 2016 draft (if that's possible for a kid who never played for the team that drafted him) to Alex DeBrincat. Like DeBrincat, I was considerably higher on Fox than the NHL consensus, so that's good, but I was still too low on him. The kid led the NCAA in points per game (not just defencemen, everyone)!

2018-2019 season (Junior, NCAA): 48 points (9G, 39A), 33 games. Hobey Baker Award Finalist.

10. Colorado Avalanche: Carter Hart

Actual draft pick: No. 48 (change: +38) to Philadelphia

My final ranking: No. 45 (change: +35)

If you've followed my draft work, you already know where I stand on goalies in their draft years: I'm extremely apprehensive to rank them highly. There's considerably more predictability in forwards and defencemen. We know that goalie draft position and goalie success are only loosely correlated to NHL success. So why waste a high-value asset on a goalie? Though I ranked Hart slightly ahead of where he was picked in 2016, my view of him was largely in line with the draft's (though I had him as my top-ranked goalie and the central scouting bureau had Evan Fitzpatrick ahead of him among North American goalies). The only goalie in recent memory who ranked in my first round was Andrei Vasilevskiy, because I was close to certain he was going to be a starter. Today, after three WHL Goaltender of the Year awards, two CHL Goaltender of the Year awards, and an excellent first professional season with the Flyers, there's enough of a track record in Hart's game to truly believe he, too, is going to be a legitimate starting goalie. And that means this new ranking is deserved. He hasn't faltered in five seasons.

2018-2019 season: .917 save percentage, 31 games. Delta all-situations save percentage: +.0014 (28th among 60 goalies with 1000 minutes played).

11. Ottawa Senators: Samuel Girard

Actual draft pick: No. 47 (change: +36) to Nashville

My final ranking: No. 19 (change: +8)

Girard was one of the players I fought hard for within the scouting community in 2016. Some scouts were really low on how skinny and slight he was — and the likelihood of his talent to overcome that. And then he returned to junior after the draft and put together one of the best seasons in recent CHL memory by a defenceman, racking

up a combined 84 points in 64 games before immediately stepping into the NHL the following season. There haven't really been any hiccups. He hasn't established himself in the same way a McAvoy has but neither have any other defencemen from the 2016 class. Furthermore, his progression has been mostly steady. I still like Girard's ability to take even bigger steps moving forward too, even in the shadow of Cale Makar. The Avalanche have a good thing going and Girard proved to be a huge hit for them and my ranking. He remains a testament to skill, skating, handling and patience. You don't have to be 6-foot-3 to be an impact defenceman in the NHL anymore. The Avalanche's core on the backend, led by Tyson Barrie, Makar and Girard, will teach us that much.

2018-2019 season (NHL): 27 points (4G, 23A), 82 games. Game Score Per 60: 1.07 (tied for 92nd among defencemen).

12. New Jersey Devils: Jakob Chychrun

Actual draft pick: No. 16 (change: +4) to Arizona

My final ranking: No. 7 (change: -5)

I felt for most of his draft year that over-exposure bias crept into Chychrun's resultant fall to the Coyotes and the first pick in the second half of the first round. Unsurprisingly, though, the common ground was somewhere in between where I had him ranked (which was too high) and that fall. Still, it was predictable that the Coyotes were going to be happy with that pick — and they should be. Though Chychrun has struggled with his health early in his career, his progression has been pronounced. Chychrun paced for 31 points over 82 games last season on a team that struggled so much to score that Keller's 47 points led the way. If Chychrun can stay healthy for a full season, I still think there's room for his game to take off behind Oliver Ekman Larsson. The tools are there (the skating, the shot, the improved decision-making) and though his defensive game still has some kinks that need to be corrected, I believe he has it within him to make those adjustments and be a big part of whatever comes next in Arizona. Between Keller and Chychrun, the Coyotes have to be considered among the winners from 2016.

2018-2019 season (NHL): 20 points (5G, 15A), 53 games. Game Score Per 60: 0.99 (103rd among defencemen).

13. Carolina Hurricanes: Dante Fabbro

Actual draft pick: No. 17 (change: +4) to Nashville

My final ranking: No. 11 (change: -2)

Like Chychrun, I was surprised when Fabbro fell into the late teens in 2016. Since, his progression has been as strong as I expected it would be. He handled the jump from the BCHL to the NCAA smoothly as a freshman before becoming one of the better defencemen in college hockey as a sophomore and a junior. This season was particularly busy for him because he also worked in an appearance at the Spengler Cup (where he was named to the tournament's All-Star team), a playoff stint with the Predators and a world championship run with Team Canada. I don't think Fabbro is ever going to put up monstrous offensive numbers but he's going to step right into an excellent Predators defence next season and have an impact while also alleviating some of their pending cap troubles. Fabbro plays a mature, calculated game at both ends and that's going to allow him to develop into a minute-crunching, all-situations defenceman. The Predators should be thrilled with the pick and I stand by my ranking at the time.

2018-2019 season (Junior, NCAA): 33 points (7G, 26A), 38 games. Two-time Hockey East Second All-Star.



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14. Boston Bruins: Henrik Borgstrom

Actual draft pick: No. 23 (change: +9) to Florida

My final ranking: No. 41 (change: +27)

Borgstrom's just going to be really, really good. I don't want to overcomplicate his analysis because that's what it comes down to. Some players put it all together and that's what he has done (and will continue to do). Borgstrom is one of two players on this list that my ranking lost out to in a clear way to the team that drafted him (Filip Hronek is the second but more on him later). The Panthers hit a home run and my middle-six upside projection for him in 2016 could get exposed as one of the bigger mistakes of my ranking (there's legit impact forward upside to his game). He was brilliant in college and excellent immediately in the AHL last year. If I were a betting man, I'd bet on Borgstrom taking a huge step next season in the NHL. Draft him in your keeper league too. Still, this is also one of the first slots on the ranking where the team picking would be really disappointed in a re-draft because there's no way McAvoy is available at No. 14 today.

2018-2019 season (NHL): 18 points (8G, 10A), 51 games. Game Score Per 60: 0.86 (tied for 441st).

15. Minnesota Wild: Jordan Kyrou

Actual draft pick: No. 35 (change: +20) to St. Louis

My final ranking: No. 33 (change: +18)

I grew to love Kyrou's game so much in his post-draft season that I wrote an entire piece about all of the little things that make him so darn good (and so darn fast). He hasn't slowed down (literally or figuratively) ever since. Kyrou's going to be a second-line winger who can break open a game with his speed at 5-on-5 and facilitate on the powerplay. I would have had the next three players on this list higher than him if I didn't trust that evaluation of his upside.

2018-2019 season (AHL): 43 points (16 goals, 27 assists), 47 games. Fourth in under-21 points per game (0.91) in the AHL.

16. Arizona Coyotes: Filip Hronek

Actual draft pick: No. 53 (change: +37) to Detroit

My final ranking: No. 76 (change: +60)

Hronek has age on his side (a November 1997 in a predominantly-1998 draft class) in terms of his development curve but what I saw as a player who projected as a No. 4-6 D now looks like a player who may become a No. 2-3 D. Though I was too low on Hronek, it's not as though his late second-round draft spot didn't indicate shared feelings by a lot of teams. Still, this represents one of the bigger misses for my ranking. Hronek followed an excellent age-adjusted AHL career with a promising start to his NHL career this season, and an exceptional showing at the world championships as the Czech Republic's best defenceman. His game is still a little too reliant on the powerplay for its production, and he was gifted an opportunity with the Red Wings immediately that most other players on this list could only dream of, but that ongoing opportunity should allow him to reach his ceiling. I have come to really appreciate Hronek's aggressiveness with and without the puck — even if he takes too many penalties for my liking — because of the way the latter breeds the former.

2018-2019 season (NHL): 23 points (5G, 18A), 46 games. Game Score Per 60: 0.88 (tied for 117th among defencemen).

17. Nashville Predators: Jesper Bratt

Actual draft pick: No. 162 (change: +145) to New Jersey

My final ranking: No. 78 (change: +61)

If age has worked in Hronek's favour to this point, the reverse is true of Bratt who is one of the youngest players to appear on this list. That's a good thing, especially given the fact that he's coming off a season that paced for 53 points over 82 games. And though I don't think Bratt is much more than that (a 45-55 point player at his ceiling), that's a phenomenal outcome for a kid who was taken in the sixth round. Bratt represents both a major win for the Devils and a major win for my ranking versus where they picked him because he should have gone considerably sooner. Bratt's size worked against him in his draft year but he has shown every step of the way since that it shouldn't have. He can try to play passer a little too much (sometimes he just needs to shoot it) but his two-way game has earned the trust of his coaches so it's not as though they believe he's a perimeter player. Every team needs effective middle-six forwards and landing one as deep in the draft as the Devils did is a home run. Bratt's the biggest riser in this re-draft versus my list and the NHL draft, so hat's off to him.

2018-2019 season (NHL): 33 points (8G, 25A), 51 games. Game Score Per 60: 2.1 (tied for 113th).

18. Winnipeg Jets: Tyson Jost

Actual draft pick: No. 10 (change: -8) to Colorado

My final ranking: No. 10 (change: -8)

I don't know why the Jets picked Logan Stanley where they did in 2016 (he wasn't even in my first round) but alas. Jost is the first of three players outside of the top two picks to appear on this list who I ranked in the spot where they were drafted. The net result since is a wash. I like Jost's game a lot. I liked it then and I like it now. The only reason he has dropped is because I have mounting questions about his upside. At the time, I believed he could become an excellent 2C on a contending team and a 1C on a weaker one. Since, I have begun to soften those expectations. I still think there's 2C upside that could be untapped but I was surprised that he went the one-and-done route in college (a sophomore year could have benefitted him, in my opinion). At this point, if he continues being what he is (a fine 3C) then that's probably slightly lower than what the Avalanche were hoping for out of a 10th overall pick and it's definitely lower than what I expected out of a 10th-ranked player on my board. Still, Jost is a contributing NHL player who is effective off the puck. I also suspect he'll still become a regular 20 goal scorer as he begins to play more because there's a scoring touch below the surface there that we haven't fully seen to date.

2018-2019 season (NHL): 26 points (11G, 15A), 70 games. Game Score Per 60: 1.5 (tied for 272nd).

19. New York Islanders: Jesse Puljujarvi

Actual draft pick: No. 4 (change: -15) to Edmonton

My final ranking: No. 3 (change: -16)

Puljujarvi is one of the all-time draft enigmas in that his draft year truly was sensational. As a reminder: That season, he'd put together two ultra-impressive international showings — including one of the best draft-eligible world junior performances we've ever seen — and capped it off with nine points in 10 playoff games in Liiga. In the years before that, he was so far ahead of his peers in Finland (Laine included) that there was serious talk of him as the No. 2 prospect in the draft. And then things got pushed off the rails in Edmonton. Some of that is a byproduct of some flaws in his game that got exposed when he made the jump (mainly his skating and the tentativeness that emerged when things didn't immediately go well). But some of it, I'm still certain, is a byproduct of his environment and



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the way the Oilers handled his development. I no longer see Puljujarvi as the All-Star level talent I did in his draft year but I still think he can be a contributing second-line forward at the NHL level if he's used correctly. As with my ranking of Dylan Strome at No. 11 last year (ahead of some players who'd already proven they could stick in the NHL), I suspect that may not go over well with the fanbases of some of the NHL regulars who sit slightly lower on this list. I just don't think Puljujarvi's story is done being written quite yet.

2018-2019 season (NHL): 9 points (4G, 5A), 46 games. Game Score Per 60: 0.46 (tied for 519th).

20. Detroit Red Wings: Sam Steel

Actual draft pick: No. 30 (change: +10) to Anaheim

My final ranking: No. 21 (change: +1)

Steel's 2018 Memorial Cup performance was one of the best showings at the tournament I've ever seen. He was unstoppable for the host Pats, carrying them with 13 points in five games. In the aftermath of concluding an excellent junior career, I expected big things from Steel this year and he delivered with surprisingly strong NHL outcomes (playing on a bad line) as well as a great rookie season in the AHL, which preceded an excellent showing in these Calder Cup playoffs. Steel doesn't have 1C upside to his but I still project him as a playmaking 2C who can act as the passer with shooting wingers or the shooter with passing wingers. His versatility will serve him well at the next level and he's the kind of piece the Ducks will want to hang onto as their aging core turns over the team to players like Steel and Ondrej Kase. He's not the biggest kid in the world but he's deceptively strong on the puck, careful with a flair for the dramatic and some slick hands in tight spaces. Use Steel with a right-shot winger like Jakob Silfverberg and they'll be a lot of fun to watch.

2018-2019 season (AHL): 41 points (20G, 21A), 53 games (plus 11 points in 22 NHL games).

21. Carolina Hurricanes: Jake Bean

Actual draft pick: No. 13 (change: -8) to Carolina

My final ranking: No. 13 (change: -8)

It's funny how things work out. The Hurricanes, who took Bean at No. 13, get him at No. 21 this time around (in the slot they took Julien Gauthier). You'll notice that, like with Jost, Bean's draft slot matched up with my ranking, so I wouldn't blame them for taking him where they did. Bean's fall has less to do with his play than it does with the rising potential of a handful of other players who've leapfrogged him. In fact, Bean has done just about everything you could hope for since draft day other than stick in the NHL (which is fine for a 20-year-old with a late birthday!). In his first full season of professional hockey, the kid was named to the AHL's all-rookie team as one of its two best first-year defencemen. He played a pivotal role on arguably the best team in the league and has everything he needs to be a second-pair defenceman who can run a powerplay. He handles the puck calmly, he makes the outlet pass when the carry isn't available, he defends well off the rush, he closes gaps quickly and he takes scoring opportunities when they're there. His biggest challenge will be finding his role within an organization with enviable depth on defence.

2018-2019 season (AHL): 44 points (13G, 31A), 70 games.

22. Philadelphia Flyers: Victor Mete

Actual draft pick: No. 100 (change: +78) to Montreal

My final ranking: No. 35 (change: +13)

Mete fits into the Girard mould as a defenceman who I was a lot higher on in his draft year who fell due to size concerns and has since performed well above where he was selected. Mete never took over junior hockey games like many of the players on this list who capped off their careers with considerably more impactful offensive numbers than Mete's seven points in 14 games during his final playoff run with London but Mete's game was never about raw production (increasingly, hockey is becoming less about it too, particularly for defencemen). Mete's biggest strength has always been his skating. He was one of the best skaters in the draft in 2016 and that's true today (he trails only Kyrou in any pronounced way). He's not going to be a 40-point defenceman and that's fine because he has proven he can handle himself off the puck while helping to control play back the other way and that's exactly what you're looking for in a modern NHL defenceman. He's one of my bigger hits from 2016.

2018-2019 season (NHL): 13 points (0G, 13A), 71 games. Game Score Per 60: 1.14 (tied for 79th among defencemen).

23. Florida Panthers: Olli Juolevi

Actual draft pick: No. 5 (change: -18) to Vancouver

My final ranking: No. 9 (change: -14)

There are still varying opinions on Juolevi and though I believed the Canucks taking him as high as they did was a major shock in 2016, I'm actually probably a little higher on him in this re-draft than most. The fact that he has yet to play an NHL game has drawn so much attention in large part because he was a fifth-overall pick, not because he's a complete bust. He was excellent for TPS in last year's Liiga playoffs and he was off to a decent (though up-and-down) start to his AHL career in Utica before going down to season-ending knee surgery. I truly believe had Juolevi stayed healthy this season that we would have seen him up with the post-deadline Canucks and he would have begun the upcoming season in the NHL. Now, that future looks murkier and he's likely to go back to Utica to get some games in before a decision is made about his future with the team. I still think there's a medium chance that he becomes a reliable, possession-driving second-pairing guy at the NHL level. He doesn't wow you with one skill (the shot of a Sergachev, the physicality of a Hronek or the skating of a McAvoy/Chychnon) but Juolevi does a lot of little things effectively and the end result is a pretty decent player. He was a big reach at No. 5 but here's hoping he can get his career back on track.

2018-2019 season (AHL): 13 points (1G, 12A), 18 games.

24. Anaheim Ducks: Dillon Dube

Actual draft pick: No. 56 (change: +32) to Calgary

My final ranking: No. 31 (change: +7)

Dube is fantastic. He does everything a coach is looking for out of a player; the back checking, the support above the puck, the won races, the versatility to play up and down the lineup and across multiple positions. He's going to be an excellent middle-six forward who can play with more talented players on Line 1 if need be. I'm proud of where I had him on my list at the time because it represented a departure from perceptions about his upside (NHL central scouting had him 41st among North American skaters) and he has blossomed since. Dube's upside isn't super high-end but that won't prevent him from becoming a very good NHL player. He's going to step into the Flames lineup next year and give them yet another cost-controlled, talented young forward. Between Tkachuk, Fox and Dube, the Flames' scouting team are the winners of the 2016 draft (I like the Matthew Phillips pick in the sixth round too).



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2018-2019 season (AHL): 39 points (15G, 24A), 37 games. Led under-21 AHL players in points per game (1.05) alongside Drake Batherson.

25. Dallas Stars: Brett Howden

Actual draft pick: No. 27 (change: +2) to Tampa Bay

My final ranking: No. 32 (change: +7)

I've always been a little lukewarm on Howden because he looks and plays like a third-line forward (thus why I struggled to put him in my top 30 in 2016, even though I believed in him as a legit NHL prospect). He skates well, he's physical, he's at his best playing a heavy game on the cycle and using his puck protection skills to get to the front of the net, but his talent level doesn't scream upside. Still, he's going to have an NHL career and the Rangers obviously like him a lot or they wouldn't have 1. Traded for him and 2. Bypassed an AHL audition to insert him directly into the NHL as a rookie. He's a lot like Jost in that I don't think he's going to necessarily drive a line but I do like what he offers a team. This is also a point in the re-ranking where my expectations for the remaining players begin to tail off so he's at the top of the "he's going to be a good NHLer but he doesn't wow me" tier that rounds out the rest of the top 30. He would definitely represent a considerable upgrade on Dallas pick Riley Tufte, who wasn't anywhere near my top 30 in 2016 when the Stars took him 25th.

2018-2019 season (NHL): 23 points (6G, 17A), 66 games. Game Score Per 60: 0.56 (tied for 507th).

26. St. Louis Blues: Logan Brown

Actual draft pick: No. 11 (change: -15) to Ottawa

My final ranking: No. 16 (change: -10)

Brown didn't put up the big numbers of a Dube or a Kyrou in the AHL this season but his rookie year was still a huge success and enough to keep him on this list. There were a number nights when I watched the Belleville Senators play and he was the best player on the ice (which says a lot, given that he played with Drake Batherson, one of the league's best young players, in stretches). As the game gets smaller and smaller, there is still room for players like Brown (who stands 6-foot-6) if they have enough skill. I have no doubts that he does. He's going to be a middle-six centre who makes his linemates better and distributes on the powerplay (while also potentially being the net-front guy). Brown was taken too high in 2016 but there's still time (and room within an organization that will give it to him) for him to blossom into a strong NHL player. And wouldn't it have been something if his hometown Blues had picked him?

2018-2019 season (AHL): 42 points (14G, 28A), 56 games.

27. Tampa Bay Lightning: Alex Nylander

Actual draft pick: No. 8 (change: -19) to Buffalo

My final ranking: No. 8 (change: -19)

It's been a slow build for Nylander but he starting to come into his own. A year ago, I had some viewings of Nylander where he looked like a lost, disengaged, perimeter player. That changed this season on a good Rochester team. Even though his results didn't catapult to where Sabres fans would probably hope by this point in their eighth overall pick's career, Nylander is still a legitimate prospect. I like to joke that he's his brother William, minus the skating ability. I don't know what that makes you but it should be enough to be a decent middle-six forward who can be a difference-maker on a second powerplay unit. Nylander has an excellent, accurate shot that he needs to find ways to use more and puck skills that allow him to

hang onto the puck and delay. Sometimes that latter can work against him because he lacks the aforementioned speed of his brother and better defenders will close that gap but I still think he's going to figure it out. Nonetheless, I was too high on Nylander (as was the hockey world) during his draft year. Part of that was probably tied to the namesake and his standout draft year showing at the world juniors. Live and learn.

2018-2019 season (AHL): 31 points (12G, 19A), 49 games.

28. Washington Capitals: Maxime Lajoie

Actual draft pick: No. 133 (change: +105) to Ottawa

My final ranking: No. 38 (change: +10)

Lajoie is another player, a lot like Girard, who I fought hard for in his draft year (though for very different reasons). Even though my lists tend to skew toward pure upside and raw skill, there are rare examples of players who I fancy because they play so efficiently that they're able to overcome that skill deficit they may have. Lajoie is one of those kids. His rookie season in the NHL was a roller coaster (he shouldn't have been in the NHL to begin with and that showed in his results) but he is where he is today because he plays a cerebral, poised, no-fuss game that includes a lot of the right decisions and limited mistakes. He's never going to be a top-pairing guy but it's not hard to imagine Lajoie playing a calming role for a looser D partner for a long time.

2018-2019 season (NHL): 15 points (7G, 8A), 56 games. Game Score Per 60: -0.43 (208th among defencemen, though four of the bottom nine defencemen in GS/60 were Senators).

29. Boston Bruins: Dennis Cholowski

Actual draft pick: No. 20 (change: -9) to Detroit

My final ranking: No. 51 (change: +22)

I'll be honest: I thought that the Red Wings taking Cholowski where they did was one of the bigger mistakes of the first round. And though I still think he was the wrong guy in retrospect, his progression has surprised me. Part of that, as with Lajoie, is driven by the rushed nature of his path to the NHL when he probably needed more time. But even before Cholowski surprised and made the jump, he'd begun to show there may be more than a third-pairing guy beneath the surface after immediately becoming an impact player as a WHL rookie (if you can call a kid who'd played college a year earlier a junior hockey rookie, but you get the point). The Red Wings need all of the youth they can get these days and Cholowski has the talent to be a part of the solution on a second pairing.

2018-2019 season (NHL): 16 points (7G, 9A), 56 games. Game Score Per 60: 0.43 (tied for 168th among defencemen).

30. Anaheim Ducks: Tyler Benson

Actual draft pick: No. 32 (change: +2) to Edmonton

My final ranking: No. 22 (change: -8)

Benson's trajectory has been fascinating to track. He was a superstar-level prospect in minor hockey whose progression was stunted by injuries and lukewarm play in the WHL. And though he ended up putting together an impressive WHL career, many scouts were sour on him in his draft year. I was not one of them and that faith paid off this season with an outstanding rookie campaign. Benson wasn't just named to the all-rookie team after leading all first-year players in assists, he was also named to the AHL's second All-Star team. Benson, above all else, is a passer. And though I'd like to see him be a little more assertive with the puck in some



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situations, he has become an excellent two-way play who just flat out makes his linemates better. The Oilers need more of that these days and he and Kailer Yamamoto should eventually give them some much-needed flair on the wing.

2018-2019 season (AHL): 66 points (15 goals, 51 assists), 68 games.

Non-exhaustive honourable mentions: Tage Thompson, Luke Kunin, Carl Grundstrom, Dylan Gambrell, Janne Kuokkanen, Adam Mascherin, German Rubtsov, Rasmus Asplund, Rem Pittlick, Max Jones, Michael McLeod, Chad Krysl, Kale Clague, Taylor Raddysh, Yegor Rykov.

Takeaways

Before I jump into a self-evaluation of sorts, here's a little more context on the results, with my ranking then and now side-by-side the actual draft order.

Note: The green illustrates a ranking where my final list in 2016 was closer to where they are today than where they were selected. The yellow indicates a slot where the NHL draft won out over my ranking. If those qualify as quote-unquote wins or losses for my list (with ties being where we were exactly aligned), my final record would have been 16-9-5 across the 30 picks. You'll notice I have also highlighted in red the players who appeared in each of the respective top 30s in 2016 who fell out of it in my new ranking. There, things were a little closer, with 10 of my players falling out versus 11 of the actual draft's.

All-in-all, I'm pretty happy with the outcomes (at least to date).

There are also some clear trends. My draft ranking won out in a pronounced way on smaller, high-skill players like DeBrincat, Girard, Fox, Bratt and Mete while losing out on Hronek, Borgstrom and Sergachev (and missing on common ground on Nylander and Puljujarvi).

Not captured in the evaluation are all of those players highlighted in red, though. There, the trends are the same. For everything my list gained in its belief in smaller, talented players, it also lost. I was too high on the uber-talented Vitalii Abramov, who went on to become the QMJHL's most dangerous player before faltering early in his pro career in the AHL. I was also too high on the diminutive Will Bitten, Adam Mascherin and Cam Dineen. Given the impact of taking a DeBrincat or a Fox would have had, though, I'm willing to live with that slight bias (though it's absolutely a lesson learned and something I need to be cognizant of in my rankings moving forward).

The highest player on my board to fall out was Kieffer Bellows, who I had at No. 14 in 2016. I have written about that Bellows mistake over the course of the last couple of years and have adjusted the things I value most accordingly. There's a tendency to fall in love with pure goal scorers like Bellows (or Owen Tippett or Arthur Kaliyev) and in recent years I have done a much better job of steering clear of that than I did with Bellows. That has meant making sure there's a package that complements the nifty release or the powerful one-timer, whether that's the skating needed to find space or the playmaking needed to survive in other areas of the ice. Drafting Bellows that high would have been a huge mistake and I've got to own that.

On the flip side, though, you'll notice that players like Logan Stanley (taken 18th) didn't appear in my top-30 then or now, and that I was considerably lower on Michael McLeod and his otherworldly skating ability than the Devils were when they took him 12th overall (there's more to success at the next level than skating and McLeod is a good case study in that).

More than anything, this exercise highlighted yet again how difficult this job really is. While I continue to be proud of my track record, there's always more to learn and correct. I hope I've done an honest job of that here.

The Athletic LOADED: 06.06.2019

1106767 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / 'You need to do more': Tarasenko takes page from Ovechkin's Cup run

Luke Fox | June 5, 2019, 7:41 PM

BOSTON – There is a Russian superstar in this Stanley Cup Final striving to do exactly what the last one did.

Work harder. Discover new elements within his own game. Round out his reputation. Lift a trophy.

Sniper Vladimir Tarasenko paid close attention as his countryman, the old-and-improved Alex Ovechkin, blocked shots like a third-pair defenceman and backchecked like a fourth-line call-up last June in order to finally, drunkenly and magnificently realize his dream.

"The biggest thing you learn is that you can't always stand waiting for a puck to come to you to score goals," Tarasenko said following Wednesday's practice.

"You need to do more to help a team win a Cup. That's the biggest lesson, and it was a great example by Ovie last year, so that was pretty impressive."

Tarasenko, 27, doesn't speak often to Ovechkin, but keeps in touch regularly with Washington Capitals defenceman Dmitry Orlov. The two 27-year-olds dominated the KHL at the same time, earning trips stateside.

But even Orlov's calls have been put on ignore of late. Until the season wraps, Tarasenko is only picking up for family.

"I try to put the phone talk away a little bit," he said

Yes, Tarasenko is so focused on the task at hand — win Game 5 on Thursday — that he's limiting distractions outside of the St Louis Blues' room.

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Viacheslav Fetisov, the back-to-back Cup winner who was integral to breaking the barrier for Russians like Tarasenko to even play on this continent, did get in his ear during the Blues' Round 2 victory over the Dallas Stars.

"He wished me good luck and everything. That was pretty good," Tarasenko said. Fetisov also offered a bit of advice, but Tarasenko politely prefers to keep the details of those conversations private.

Same with the numerous chats he has with Blues consultant and nine-time Cup winner Larry Robinson, a quiet championship presence casting his shadow over this mostly ring-free roster.

"We talk about everything: what bothers you, what not bothers you. He helps the team a lot," Tarasenko explained. "He's a huge legend



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in the league. It's an honour for us to be in the same locker-room and have a chance to speak with him every day and share this moment with him."

It's not unreasonable to envision this moment culminating with another Russian known for possessing one of the world's most dangerous shots hoisting the Conn Smythe Trophy.

Jordan Binnington has been fine in the final, but he was pulled in Game 3 and was hardly the first star in the Blues' wins. A case could surely be made for Ryan O'Reilly or Alex Pietrangelo, but team points leader Jaden Schwartz is still looking for his first goal of the series.

Tarasenko slammed home his 11th goal of the post-season in Game 4 when he hopped on a juicy rebound from a long-range Pietrangelo shot. (Yes, the captain is purposely shooting for rebounds. "Maybe Colton [Parayko] can score from that far out. I can't," Pietrangelo smiled.)

Uncharacteristically quiet through the first two rounds since Fetisov wished him luck, Tarasenko now has points in nine of 10 games. His three goals in the Final is one shy of tying the NHL record for most in the championship series by a Russian-born player (Alex Kovalev scored four in 1994).

"One of the best wrist shots in the NHL," said centreman Brayden Schenn. "He's able to find the open areas to score goals, and whether it's my job or Schwarty's job, we've got to do a better job of helping him and finding him, getting him the puck to put it in the back of the net."

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O'Reilly has deserved all the glowing headlines he's received this week, seeing as how the Selke Trophy finalist nearly willed the Stanley Cup Final to six games (minimum) with his herculean effort Monday.

But Tarasenko's two-way game, much like Ovechkin's in 2018, has been a post-season revelation.

"He's become a more well-rounded player. His work ethic without the puck, skating, checking, being physical — and guys feed off that. They look at how hard he's working out there and how physical he plays without the puck and the little things and that inspires our team," said coach Craig Berube.

"He's just working. It's all hard work and compete."

While the B's have had their way on the man advantage, the Blues' top line of has outscored Boston's Big 3 by a 3-0 margin head to head during 5-on-5 play, dominating possession as well.

In Game 4, Berube dealt Patrice Bergeron, Brad Marchand and David Pastrnak a steady diet of his Oskar Sundqvist-led fourth unit to free up his own top six. On Thursday, Tarasenko & Co. will punch the clock again and look to pummel Boston's depleted D corps with the league's most effective forecheck.

Hit bodies. Create turnovers. Generate rebounds. And let the shooter shoot.

"There's sometimes no room for fancy plays," said Tarasenko, buying in all the way. "We just need to always stay connected, like stay closer to each other and keep working hard. If you look on our chances, it's all come off of hard work or forecheck, or something like this.

"We know where we are on the ice, which makes the game really easy for us.

"So, it's pretty exciting time right now."

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 06.06.2019

1106768 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Vaakanainen ready, but it's a 'long shot' Bruins use him for gaps on D

Chris Johnston | June 5, 2019, 5:07 PM

BOSTON — The hockey world is only just getting to know Urho Vaakanainen. Most of us are still trying to keep the vowels and consonants arranged in the correct order when typing out his name.

But an intriguing scenario exists where the engraver at Boffey Silversmith in Montreal might have to double check that spelling when the Stanley Cup arrives there later this summer.

First Vaakanainen has to suit up for the Bruins — something coach Bruce Cassidy is calling a "long shot," but not an impossibility. Then Boston must win two of its final three games against the St. Louis Blues to claim the trophy.

Vaakanainen is creeping into the conversation for Boston's battered blue-line despite having just two games and 18 total minutes of NHL experience to his name. The 20-year-old Finn joined the main group for Wednesday's practice at TD Garden after being part of the Black Aces for the last five weeks, essentially putting him on notice for Game 5 as Boston waits to see if either Zdeno Chara (jaw) or Matt Grzelcyk (concussion) will be cleared to play.

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Cassidy and his staff have debated the merits of inserting Vaakanainen, a left shot, if both of the other left-shot options can't go. Understandably, they have some concerns about how he might handle that kind of assignment.

"That would be a big ask. A real big ask," said Cassidy. "But if that's the way we've got to go then that's the ask we're going to make. Right now, like I said, that's a long shot, that we would go that way. Especially seeing Grizz out there today, so that gives us all a little bit of confidence that he's closer. It's always a step in the [concussion] protocol to be out on the ice.

"If that's what we've got to do, that's what we do."

Vaakanainen would be one of the least likely players to suit up in a Stanley Cup Final in recent memory, especially since he's a mere six months removed from winning gold at the world junior tournament in Vancouver. He could become the first player to win both in the same year, according to Sportsnet Stats.

The Bruins selected him 18th overall in 2017 — the seventh defencemen taken in that draft, behind Miro Heiskanen (No. 3, Dallas), Cale Makar (No. 4, Colorado), Cal Foote (No. 14, Tampa), Erik Brannstrom (No. 15, Vegas), Juuso Valimaki (No. 16, Calgary) and Timothy Liljegren (No. 17, Toronto).



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There isn't a whole lot of flash to Vaakanainen's game. He's a tough competitor and strong skater, according to Tero Lehtera, his former coach with SaiPa in the Finnish League. He's known for surprising opponents who beat him by coming back to get the puck.

He got a small taste of NHL action when Boston ran into injuries early in the season, making his debut in Vancouver on Oct. 20 and then playing in Ottawa three nights later — where he suffered a concussion that sidelined him for two months.

"I was in a blur. I didn't really sleep before the game so I can't really remember anything about the game," Vaakanainen said of his NHL debut. "The second game I didn't play that much, I just played the first period, so I don't know if that helps at all."

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He last suited up for the AHL's Providence Bruins on April 26 in a playoff game against Charlotte and has been skating and working out ever since just in case he was called on by the big club.

Anyone who dresses for a game in the Stanley Cup Final is guaranteed to get his name engraved on the trophy if his team wins. It doesn't matter if you're a recent draft pick who spent the majority of the season playing elsewhere.

Vaakanainen isn't Cassidy's preferred option right now — "You throw him at the end, is that fair? Can he succeed?" asked the coach — but he has to prepare like he might be playing.

There's a high degree of unpredictability with the type of injuries Chara and Grzelcyk are nursing, and in this physical series with the forecheck-heavy Blues it's always possible someone else goes down before Game 6 or a potential Game 7.

"If I play, I'm going to do my best," said Vaakanainen. "But I don't know about tomorrow."

At this time of year, you never know.

Stranger things have happened.

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 06.06.2019

1106769 Websites

TSN.CA / Free Agent Frenzy: Jets re-engaging with Tyler Myers

Frank Seravalli

BOSTON - The calendar says Free Agent Frenzy begins on Canada Day.

But for the Winnipeg Jets, the deadline might as well be June 23 — the opening of the unrestricted free agent interview period — when it comes to keeping Tyler Myers.

Now that GM Kevin Cheveldayoff has a clearer picture of what RFA defenceman Jacob Trouba can fetch in a trade, the Jets have re-engaged with Myers' camp on bringing back the 6-foot-8 blueliner.

The two sides met at the NHL Draft Combine in Buffalo last week.

The question is: Can the Jets entice Myers enough in the next two and a half weeks to not go to market? He's made it this far and the pull to at least listen in the courting process is strong.

Myers would draw no shortage of interest on the open market. The Vancouver Canucks, Colorado Avalanche and Dallas Stars are among the teams potentially interested in signing Myers, though you could probably pencil in more than half the league as keen on the idea of adding a right-shooting defenceman of his calibre.

Myers, 29, collected nine goals and 31 points for the Jets last season. He would likely earn a \$6-plus million AAV from market on a long-term deal.

Could the Jets, amid their cap crunch, possibly convince him to stay with a cap hit in the high \$5 million neighbourhood? It would probably be a slight discount, but the Jets can offer what others can't: familiarity, a chance to win and an increased role with Trouba vacating a spot on the right side of the Jets' depth chart.

They're working on it. But the clock is ticking.

Myers is up to No. 7 on TSN Hockey's latest Free Agent Frenzy Top 30 list, second only to Erik Karlsson among UFA defencemen.

Six new names joined the board, including Vezina Trophy finalist Robin Lehner of the Islanders (No. 12), Lightning defenceman Anton Stralman (19), Jets blueliner Ben Chiarot (25), Blues' Game 7 hero Pat Maroon (28), Oilers winger Alex Chiasson (29) and Predators pick-up Brian Boyle (30).

The Jets traded the negotiating rights of Kevin Hayes (No. 17) to Philadelphia on Monday, but Hayes re-signing with the Flyers does not appear to be imminent.

No player has put more money in his pocket this spring than Boston Bruins forward Marcus Johansson. Finally healthy, it has been an impressive playoff run for 'JoJo', the former 58-point scorer. He's got four goals and seven critical assists, forming a dynamic duo with fellow deadline acquisition Charlie Coyle. For Johansson, a return to Washington may be in the cards if the money makes sense.

Here is TSN Hockey's latest Free Agent Frenzy Top 30 list:

RK	Player	Team	Pos	Age	GP	G
	PTS	17-18				
1	Artemi Panarin	CBJ	LW	27	79	
	28	87	\$6M			
2	Erik Karlsson	SJS	RD	29	53	
	3	45	\$6.5M			
3	Sergei Bobrovsky	CBJ	G	30	62	
	2.53	.913	\$7.43M			
4	Matt Duchene	CBJ	C	28	73	
	31	70	\$6M			
5	Jeff Skinner	Buf	LW	27	82	
	40	63	\$5.75M			
6	Anders Lee	NYI	LW	28	82	
	28	51	\$3.75M			
7	Tyler Myers	Wpg	RD	29	80	
	9	30	\$5.5M			
8	Joe Pavelski	SJS	C	34	75	
	28	64	\$6M			
9	Mats Zuccarello	Dal	RW	31	48	
	12	40	\$4.5M			



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10	Marcus Johansson 13 30	Bos \$4.58M	LW	28	58	Kevin Allen, USA TODAY Published 2:20 p.m. ET June 5, 2019
11	Robin Lehner 2.13 .930	NYI \$1.5M	G	27	46	BOSTON — The Bruins are treating the Zdeno Chara injury as if it's a mystery without any clues.
12	Jake Gardiner 3 30	Tor \$4.05M	LD	28	62	Bruins coach Bruce Cassidy didn't speculate whether injured captain Zdeno Chara is out for Thursday's Game 5 of the Stanley Cup Final.
13	Jordan Eberle 19 37	NYI \$6M	RW	29	77	"Facial injury – no update on him," Cassidy said. "I will give you an update on him tomorrow."
14	Alex Edler 10 32	Van \$5M	LD	33	55	The only hint Cassidy offered was that Chara didn't skate, "so that makes it a little bit more difficult for him."
15	Gustav Nyquist 22 60	SJS \$4.75M	LW	29	81	"I've always said the guys who skating are little closer," Cassidy said.
16	Micheal Ferland 17 40	Car \$1.75M	LW	27	71	Chara, 42, suffered what appeared to be a significant injury early in the second period of Game 4 when he was struck in the face by a shot by Blues forward Brayden Schenn. The shot, from close range, struck Chara's stick and deflected upward.
17	Kevin Hayes 19 55	Phi \$5.18M	C	27	71	Some media reports say Chara suffered a broken jaw, but all Cassidy confirmed after Game 4 was that Chara received stitches to close the cut and that he would need dental work.
18	Ryan Dzingel 26 56	CBJ \$1.8M	LW	27	78	Bruins defenseman Zdeno Chara is attended to after being hit in the face by a puck.
19	Anton Stralman 2 17	Tam \$4.5M	RD	32	47	On Wednesday, Cassidy was asked whether he had seen Chara? "No," he said.
20	Wayne Simmonds 17 30	Nsh \$3.98M	RW	30	79	Has he talked to Chara? "No," he said.
21	Braydon Coburn 4 23	Tam \$3.7M	LD	34	74	"Text," Cassidy added. "Does that count?"
22	Brett Connolly 22 46	Wsh \$1.8M	RW	27	81	What did Chara say in the text?
23	Brandon Tanev 14 29	Wpg \$1.15M	LW	27	80	"Not much," Cassidy said.
24	Joonas Donskoi 14 37	SJS \$1.8M	RW	27	80	Patrice Bergeron, another Bruins leader, was asked about Chara's condition and he said: "We haven't seen him."
25	Ben Chiarot 5 20	Wpg \$1.4M	LD	28	74	The Chara injury has the potential to have devastating consequences. He has averaged 21:56 of ice time per game. He's the leading hitter among Boston defenseman and second in blocked shots. More importantly, he has an aura about him. He's 6-9, and he can disrupt a rush with his size and reach. Players still try to avoid him.
26	Colin Wilson 12 27	Col \$3.94M	LW	29	65	Chara's particularly valuable against the Blues because they play a physical game.
27	Ron Hainsey 5 23	Tor \$3M	RD	38	81	"Against a heavier team is when you really miss what he brings to the table," Cassidy said.
28	Patrick Maroon 10 28	StL \$1.75M	LW	31	74	But the Bruins aren't as alarmed as most teams would be losing an important player. They've been down this road before.
29	Alex Chiasson 22 38	Edm \$650K	RW	28	73	"Our mentality will be fine in terms of being able to win without certain players," Cassidy said. "It's because we've done it, not in the Final of Stanley Cup ... we did it without (Patrice Bergeron) this year. So I think guys will be good that way in knowing the team will pull together."
30	Brian Boyle 18 24	Nsh \$2.55M	C	34	73	It's worth noting that the Bruins are not talking as if that it is given that Chara is out. "We don't know right now," Cassidy said. "There's a little bit of that hope factor for us as well."

TSN.CA LOADED: 06.06.2019

1106770 Websites

USA TODAY / Zdeno Chara's status remains a mystery, but Bruins don't seem worried

Said Bergeron: "He's a warrior, and it's pretty impressive the pain threshold that he has."



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Even if Chara's jaw is broken, former NHL star Jeremy Roenick said it's possible he could play, depending upon the severity of the injury. He broke his jaw twice in his career – once in four places – and he played 14 days later. The other time it was shattered, broken in 23 places, and he was out in eight weeks.

Roenick said he doesn't know the extent of Chara's injury, but he said today's technology allows injuries to be stabilized better than in the past.

"The hardest thing is breathing," Roenick said. "If he can breathe, he can play. I think he will play because he has a whole lifetime to heal his face."

A chance to win a Stanley Cup could be a big motivation for Chara, even though he has won it before.

Roenick paused: "I know I would break my face to win a Stanley Cup."

USA TODAY LOADED: 06.06.2019

1106771 Websites

USA TODAY / Charles Barkley doubles down on Marchand-Draymond Green comparison: You want to punch them in face

Andy Kostka, USA TODAY Sports Published 7:18 a.m. ET June 5, 2019 | Updated 3:44 p.m. ET June 5, 2019

Brad Marchand has been called many things in response to his nagging, often-aggressive style of play on the ice — pest, annoyance, agitator.

Now, the Boston Bruins left winger, who's scored eight goals during the Stanley Cup Playoffs along with delivering a fair amount of hits — some fair, some not — can add one more descriptor to a growing list: Draymond Green.

Charles Barkley, NBA Hall of Famer, TNT analyst and NHL fan, first made the comparison in an interview with Sportsnet in Canada and elaborated Tuesday during a teleconference for the American Century Championship celebrity golf tournament, played at Nevada's Edgewood Tahoe Golf Course on July 12-14.

"He's a hell of a player, and he's an annoying guy. Draymond is a hell of a player, and he's an annoying guy," Barkley said. "There's a bunch of really good players who are really annoying to play against, and you would want to play with them. So, I look at Draymond and Marchand as the same type of players. Just terrific players who would be really annoying to play against, and you really want to punch them in the face."

Marchand is putting together the most prolific year of his 10-season career. The 5-foot-9 winger notched 36 goals and 100 points during the regular season, helping Boston reach the Stanley Cup Final for the first time since 2013. Their series with the St. Louis Blues is tied 2-2.

But Marchand also carries a certain reputation. This season, he compiled 96 penalty minutes in 79 regular-season games.

In the playoffs last year, Marchand licked two players and was warned by the NHL that he'd be disciplined if he licked a third.

Marchand also punched defenseman Scott Harrington in the back of the helmet while Harrington was on his knees April 30 during their playoff series with the Columbus Blue Jackets. Marchand also stepped on an opponent's stick, breaking it, before a faceoff.

Green, like Marchand, has a knack of playing physically. Plus, Barkley decreed in 2018 he'd like to punch Green in the face, too.

During the interview with Sportsnet, Barkley said, "That little Marchand dude, man, he makes me want to punch him in the face sometimes."

Later in the video, Marchand said he felt Barkley just "wants to be my friend," and said he might reach out to the former 11-time NBA All-Star.

Brad Marchand on Charles Barkley: "I think he just wants to be my friend" pic.twitter.com/8dldxyJ88u

— Heart of NHL (@HeartofNHL) June 2, 2019

"He knows my name. That's pretty cool, right?" Marchand said in the video. "He's Charles Barkley. Guy's a legend."

He might get his wish. On Tuesday, Barkley said "it would be an honor" to meet Marchand after the series ends.

Barkley will be glued to the action.

"People know how much hockey I watch," Barkley said. "I had a couple nice parties up in Toronto — well, Game 3 really sucked, it was over after the first period — and I had a nice get-together with my friends last night, and that was a heck of a game. People know what I feel about hockey."

Barkley is scheduled to play in the American Century Championship along with Tony Romo, Aaron Rodgers, Larry Fitzgerald and many other athletes and celebs from the entertainment world.

USA TODAY LOADED: 06.06.2019