



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • June 7, 2019

THE NEWS & OBSERVER

Charlotte Checkers rally to beat Wolves in Game 4; on verge of first AHL Calder Cup

By Steve Lyttle

The Charlotte Checkers spotted Chicago an early lead but roared back with four straight goals Thursday night for a 5-3 victory, moving within one victory of their first Calder Cup.

The Checkers now have a 3-1 game edge in the best-of-7 playoff finals and can win the American Hockey League championship in Game 5 Saturday night in Rosemont, Illinois.

Chicago, losing for the second straight night on its home ice at Allstate Arena, had rallied twice earlier in the playoffs from a 2-1 game deficit. But the Checkers' surge over the final 21 minutes Thursday night prevented that.

Nicolas Roy scored twice in the final period, and Aleksi Saarela netted the decisive goal.

Checkers goaltender Dustin Tokarski, touched for three goals in the opening 34 minutes of play, blanked the Wolves in the final 26 minutes.

The Checkers scored early goals in the first three games of the series, but the Wolves got a quick goal Thursday. Nic Hague took a pass from Zach Whitecloud in the Chicago end and skated across center ice, past several Charlotte defenders, and tucked the puck past Tokarski.

That happened just 45 seconds into the first period – the fastest opening goal in the Calder Cup Finals in two seasons.

It took less than four minutes for the Checkers to even the score. With a defender skating toward him, Checkers defenseman Jesper Sellgren unleashed a slap shot from near the red line. The puck skidded through several players and into the Wolves' goal.

Another slap shot, this one by Chicago's Zac Leslie with 3:31 left in the period, put the Wolves back on top. As was the case with Sellgren's goal, Leslie's shot got through several players and past Tokarski.

Each team scored once in the second period. The Checkers dominated the opening 12 minutes, outshooting Chicago 7-0, but the Wolves got the first goal.

Tokarski stopped a shot by Dylan Coghlin, but the puck rebounded out to Brooks Macek, who scored with 6:13 left in the period.

Charlotte narrowed the gap to 3-2 with a minute remaining, as Martin Necas took a pass from Tomas Jurco and swatted the puck over Wolves' goalie Oscar Dansk, who had fallen onto the ice in an effort to defend Necas.

The Checkers tied the game just 32 seconds in the third period on Roy's first goal, which was set up with a pinpoint pass from Julien Gauthier.

Charlotte pulled ahead with 7:08 remaining, when Saarela scored on a blistering shot that sailed under the outstretched right arm of Dansk.

The Wolves pulled Dansk for an extra attacker with 2:36 to go, and Charlotte scored less than 10 seconds later on Roy's shot.

3 WHO MATTERED

Nicolas Roy, Charlotte: He scored the first and third goals of the final period.

Aleksi Saarela, Charlotte: Saarela's strong wrist shot sailed into the Chicago goal with 7:08 remaining in the third period and gave the Checkers their winning goal.

Dustin Tokarski, Charlotte: Touched for three early goals, Tokarski, Charlotte's backup goaltender, shut down the Wolves in the final period and improved to 12-0 this season with the Checkers.

WORTH MENTIONING

- Charlotte goaltender Alex Nedeljkovic's 38 saves in Game 3 was a career-high total for him in a regulation (non-overtime) game.

- The Wolves have a history of comebacks. They've rallied twice in the playoffs from 2-1 game deficits — against Grand Rapids in the opening round and San Diego in the Western Conference finals — to win series. And the last two times they lost back-to-back games, they followed with three-game and four-game winning streaks.

- Checkers head coach Mike Vellucci has said he has no reservations about going with Tokarski on the second night of back-to-back games. "He's a veteran leader, and everyone plays well in front of him," Vellucci said after the Game 2 win Sunday in Charlotte. "Besides, if you look at the analytics, they'll tell you that the percentages favor going with the other guy in back-to-backs."

WHAT'S NEXT?

Game 5 is set for 8 p.m. Saturday at the Allstate Arena in Rosemont. The game will be carried live by the NHL Network and by AHL TV.



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Charlotte rallies to defeat Chicago in Game 4 of AHL's Calder Cup Finals

Hurricanes affiliate comes back from down two goals to move within one win of championship

by Patrick Williams

ROSEMONT, Ill. -- Aleksii Saarela scored the go-ahead goal with 7:08 remaining in the third period, and the Charlotte Checkers rallied to move one win from the American Hockey League championship with a 5-3 victory against the Chicago Wolves in Game 4 of the Calder Cup Finals at Allstate Arena on Thursday.

The Checkers, the AHL affiliate of the Carolina Hurricanes, can win the Calder Cup in Game 5 of the best-of-7 series at Chicago on Saturday (8 p.m. ET; NHLN).

Saarela, who led Charlotte with 30 goals in the regular season, carried the puck into the left face-off circle and beat goalie Oscar Dansk with a rising snap shot at 12:52 to make it 4-3.

"It's heavy, it's quick," Checkers coach Mike Vellucci said of Saarela's shot. "That doesn't really make a lot of sense. But it does. It catches you by surprise."

Charlotte trailed 3-1 after Brooks Macek scored for Chicago at 13:47 of the second period.

Martin Necas got the Checkers to within 3-2 at 19:00 of the second. He has six points (three goals, three assists) in the series.

Nicolas Roy tied it 3-3 32 seconds into the third when he scored off a cross-slot pass from Julien Gauthier.

Roy scored his second of the night into an empty net with 2:32 remaining for the 5-3 final.

"We talked about it between the second and third [periods], about we're going to do this together, we're going to be positive together, and we're going to make a difference in there," Vellucci said. "And that was the key. Guys were all-in, stayed positive, and it carried over into the third."

Dustin Tokarski made 22 saves for Charlotte one night after Alex Nedeljkovic made 38 in a 4-1 win in Game 3 on Wednesday.

Nicolas Hague and Zac Leslie scored for Chicago, the AHL affiliate of the Vegas Golden Knights. Dansk made 18 saves.

The Wolves had forward Curtis McKenzie back in the lineup after he was suspended for Game 3 for a fight in Game 2, but forward Daniel Carr, who won the Les Cunningham Award as the AHL MVP, missed Game 4 with an undisclosed injury and is day to day.

Chicago coach Rocky Thompson kept a positive tone after its third straight loss in the series.

"We don't feel like we're being dominated or that there is no hope," Thompson said. "We should grieve. It stung. This one really hurt."

Hague scored an end-to-end goal 45 seconds into the game to give Chicago a 1-0 lead. It was the first time the Wolves held a lead in regulation in the series; they won 4-3 in overtime in Game 1 after coming back from down 1-0 and 3-1.

Jesper Sellgren tied it 1-1 at 5:21 when his shot from inside the blue line skipped past Dansk.

Leslie gave Chicago a 2-1 lead at 16:29 with a shot from the left point through a screen.



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SB NATION
CANES COUNTRY

About Last Season: Jaccob Slavin Performance Review and Grade

After a coming out party during the Hurricanes' run to the Eastern Conference Finals, Jaccob Slavin can no longer be called one of the most underrated players in the NHL.

By Andrew Schnittker

Jaccob Slavin: 2018-19 By The Numbers

- Age: 25
- NHL Seasons: 4
- Games Played: 82
- Scoring: 8 goals, 23 assists, 31 points
- Ice Time: 23:02 all situations, 18:50 ES, 1:48 PP, 2:34 PK
- 5 on 5 stats: 54.65% CF, 48.18% GF
- Contract: 6 years, \$5.3 million per year

Making the Grade

The 2018-19 season was more of the same for Jaccob Slavin being the Hurricanes' rock on the blueline and best defenseman, but it may have been the end of him being one of the best kept secrets in the league. After a stellar playoff performance for Slavin, the cat's out of the bag.

Despite playing with multiple partners throughout the season, Slavin was his usual steady, reliable self during the regular season, consistently shutting down the opponent's best players. The 2012 fourth rounder continues to use strong positioning and stick work to break up play after play in his own end, and is usually good for a spectacular "skater save" every now and then.

Despite the difficult minutes he plays against opponents' top lines, Slavin's underlying numbers were strong once again, and he managed an even plus/minus rating, which is impressive when considering the players he matches up against. He also plays on both the power play and penalty kill, continuing to prove his abilities in all situations.

It took some time for Slavin and Dougie Hamilton to be a consistent pairing (Slavin started the year with Hamilton before switching back to Brett Pesce and eventually settling in with Hamilton), but they eventually gave Carolina an elite top pairing at both ends of the ice. Playing alongside Slavin may have played a role in Hamilton's second-half surge.

Slavin put up solid offensive numbers as well, with eight goals and 31 points.

It was in the Canes' defensive leader's first postseason, however, that Slavin really shined. He continued to do yeoman's work in his own end, playing against the likes of Alex Ovechkin and Mathew Barzal.

Offensively, Slavin exploded for 11 points (all assists) in 15 games. The Canes were swept by the Boston Bruins in the Eastern Conference Finals weeks ago, but Slavin still sits sixth among defensemen in playoff scoring. He had a whopping nine assists against the Capitals in the first round, and was one of the top candidates for the Conn Smythe Trophy through the first two rounds.

As the whole team's did, Slavin's play faltered a bit against the Bruins and their vaunted top line, but his play in his first playoff run should be a very encouraging sign going forward.

The best part for the Canes and Slavin going forward is his absolute steal of a contract, the gift that keeps on giving from former GM Ron Francis. Slavin has established himself as one of the top two-way defensemen in the league, and is locked in at just \$5.3 million per year for six more seasons.

That bargain for a number one defenseman will be a big help as the Canes look to add a couple more pieces and complete the team as a Stanley Cup Contender. As the Canes look to possibly deal a defenseman for a forward, Slavin's name should obviously be off the table.

This Hurricanes team is set up for success in the long haul, with the fact that it has an elite defenseman locked in to a bargain contract no small part of that.



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About Last Season: Nino Niederreiter Performance Review and Grade

The Nino Niederreiter acquisition in January was a catalyst for a historic regular season and playoff run. Niederreiter has quickly become a key part of the Hurricanes' future.

By Andrew Ahr

Nino Niederreiter: 2018-2019 By The Numbers

- Age: 26
- NHL Seasons: 8
- Games Played: 36
- Scoring: 14 goals, 16 assists, 30 points
- Ice Time: 18:17 all situations, 15:45 ES, 2:30 PP, 0:03 PK
- 5 on 5 Stats: 57.96% CF, 58.33% GF
- Contract: 3 years, \$5.25 million per year

Making the Grade

If you told me a year ago that I'd be doing an About Last Season for Nino Niederreiter today, I would ask you which core defenseman was given up to acquire him. Instead, the Canes parted with a growing concern in Victor Rask. The fact that the Hurricanes didn't sacrifice more in the Niederreiter acquisition in January is laughable, and has contributed to a tenure-defining move for Don Waddell — one that played a big part in his General Manager of the Year nomination.

Niederreiter's impact on the team cannot be understated. He joined the locker room right around the time when things started turning around, and his extra scoring punch was pivotal during their second half success. The first thing that you notice about Nino is that his game is jam packed with skill. He's a legitimate top six winger who has 30 goal capability.

The Canes Country Rod Brind'Amour Interview: Part Two

In part two of our three-part interview, the Hurricanes head coach opens up about why being relevant was crucial to the team's success and which players stepped up to answer the bell this season.

By Brian LeBlanc

Yesterday, Carolina Hurricanes coach Rod Brind'Amour pulled back the curtain on the road that led him to the head coach's office with the team he captained to the Stanley Cup in 2006. Today, our one-on-one interview series continues with a discussion about the culture change that occurred this season in the Carolina locker room, why being relevant was so crucial to this season, and which players the coach thinks took the biggest strides forward in 2018-19.

Canes Country: You and Justin [Williams] have both talked about changing the culture around here. How much did the new attitude over the summer play into that, not just with the trades but with the guys you brought in - thinking of guys like Martinook and Ferland - that are "locker room guys." How

Something that isn't immediately apparent is the edge which with he plays. He's a big physical winger, and he will terrorize defensemen with his board work. He plays with a certain competitive edge and fire that was lacking from Rask.

There was a clear utilization issue in Minnesota over the past few seasons — he was playing only 14:37 per night under Bruce Boudreau this season, primarily on bottom six lines. In those 46 games in a Wild jersey, he tallied nine goals. Upon his arrival in Carolina, he put up six goals in his first ten games.

This really all comes down to usage. Niederreiter averaged 18:17 per game in Carolina, and played almost exclusively alongside Sebastian Aho and Teuvo Teravainen on the team's top scoring line. He also saw significantly more time at even strength than in Minnesota, and enjoyed a slight increase in his power play time as well.

Niederreiter had been a solid possession player for all of his career, and those numbers only got better in Raleigh, which is unsurprising given Carolina's track record in possession statistics. He was second in the team in Corsi For Percentage at 57.96% and came in at third on the roster in Scoring Chances For Percentage. He was fifth on the team in Goals For Percentage, indicating that he was on the ice for a lot more goals for than goals against. That's exactly what you'd expect from your top line winger.

The most memorable part of Niederreiter's short season in Carolina for me was a goal he scored in April that secured his place on the Hurricanes pantheon of playoff goals. While this particular goal didn't actually happen in the playoffs, it was the final nail in the coffin in the third period of the 81st game of the regular season against the New Jersey Devils. The goal sent the Hurricanes back to the postseason — ending the long ten year playoff drought. Fans live for moments like this, and Nino delivering one of this magnitude is a perfect storybook ending to what was an incredible first season in Raleigh.

much was done over the course of one summer, and how much more do you think needs to be done?

Rod Brind'Amour: You're always trying to add to it. The easy part of it was that we were pretty much bottom of the barrel, in my opinion. In everything - coming from not making the playoffs for such a long time, we want to make a change in the way we think, and that's basically what you're saying. We've got to be better at everything.

Justin's sitting there, he's been around. For me, it was easy. You're the guy I want it to be, and you're sitting in our locker room, so great. Now we have to give him the reins. He was there the year before, and you're like "well, it still wasn't that good." Why? Because he wasn't given the authority, and that's all he needed. Then everyone else looks and goes "he's our guy," versus when you don't give that guy the authority, it's hard for him to really take off. So that's all we had to do.

And now, you talk about the additions, sometimes you luck out. I didn't know Martinook, but we knew people that knew him, and they all said "this guy's awesome, you're gonna love



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him." OK, good. Not always do people tell you the right things, but in this case they did. On day one he shows up and you go "oh, that's the kind of guy we need around here."

Petr Mrazek, bringing him in - I don't know him, I've heard he didn't have a very good year - he comes in and he fits what we want. He's passionate. Everyone that we kept putting in the lineup, in our group, was pushing it the right way. And then you have to win, though. You have to have that success. So that started happening, and now I think we're in a good place. But to your point, do you have to keep getting better? Yeah. Everybody we keep bringing in has to be of a certain mindset: team first, willing to work hard, and then everything else happens. That's the challenge of every move that we continue to make.

CC: Along the same line, you've mentioned - even in your first press conference - that you wanted the Hurricanes to be relevant again. To the extent that this season went well, I think that probably happened. How do you define relevance for the Hurricanes?

RBA: Two parts to it. That is probably the single most [important] goal: you want to win the Stanley Cup, but you want to get to a point where people respect you and your organization. You can just tell in press conferences, the way media talk about your team, if they really respect you. It was obvious at the start of the year, I can't explain it but I know when I hear people talk about [us]. The pat on the back, "you're a hard working team, good job, but they beat you 3-1." They don't think you're really a threat.

I think that's changed. By the end of the year, for sure, teams were going "hey, these guys - they're for real." Do you have to follow it up? Yes, of course you do. We're going to have to do it again next year. We're going to have to be in the mix of teams. I think that's the first part.

The second part is in the community. We had to be relevant again. We had to give the people something to be proud about. Come watch us, be proud of your team, and the way it all worked out it couldn't have been any better. The fan engagement with the players, the things they were doing after the games which just fell in our lap and sometimes things work out. It was never intended to be what it became. You couldn't think of a better way to engage the community than what happened.

So we've done that, the bar that we wanted to raise has been raised, and now we can't take a step back. We have to figure out a way to add to it.

CC: You've said more times than I can count that you thought the first 20-25 games of the season were the best of the year, and you weren't getting the results. When those results started going your way, did it make it more difficult to go back to what you were doing when you weren't as successful, even though it was what you were trying to do, or does a malaise set in when you're winning when you say "well, we're getting the results, why do we need to go back and play this other way where we weren't getting them?"

RBA: Well, we didn't change the way we played. The style, the system, everything was the same. We dominated the majority of our first 20 games. I mean dominated - you look at shots, but forget shots. People said "oh, your shot totals are

way high" - it's chances for and against. That's why I couldn't understand people [who said] "you shoot the puck too much." Yeah, we overshoot, but guess what? Take a look, at the end of the day, at the grade-A chances, and who's getting those. We were shooting the puck, but we were shooting it in a lot of great areas.

CC: In places where you should score.

RBA: Yes! So they were getting fascinated with the fact that you'd see ten shots that were meaningless shots. Take those off the board; I don't care about those. So instead of us getting 40, we'd have 30 - but of those 30, we should have had five goals that night, and we were getting one and two. That's where it was frustrating, because there's not much you can do. You can only get so many.

Then people would be dissecting the seven or eight shots that were meaningless, and then you'd see videos of "oh, there's no traffic." They'd be clipping certain segments of the game that's irrelevant. Show the other stuff, where we're banging them off posts and we've got guys all over the place, diving in front of the net, blocking shots, whatever. That's the recipe to win. That's the way I felt.

That's why I gave the group credit, and that's where leadership comes in, they knew it too. They didn't waver, and we kept playing the same way. I didn't think we were as good, because those grade-A chances started leveling out. But we were still trying to do the same things. It's just, all of a sudden, when we were getting 15 grade-A chances a night, we were down to 12 or 11, but we were scoring three and four a night. And I'm like "we have to get back up to that 15." We never really did, but the puck went in.

CC: Eliminate for a second the guys who were new on the team this year, because there's one who's the obvious answer, I think. Of the guys who had been here previously, who do you think took the biggest step forward this season, in terms of on the ice and the atmosphere in the room?

RBA: There's probably a couple. I'll miss somebody. Here's the truth on this group: we pretty much got the most out of everybody we could get, in my opinion. That's a scary thought in a lot of ways, because what are the odds of you doing that again? But I look down the list of guys, you look at Teuvo Teravainen. I don't know how much better he could have played. There were certain games, yeah, but overall, for the year, he got better after he signed his long-term deal than he did before. That's usually not something you would think would happen. He did.

Sebastian Aho took a step. Do I think he needs to take another step? Yes. I think he came out really well, and I think his end of the year and the playoffs were kind of "eh" for me. Not what we would want. He took a big step though, because if you think back to when we started, he played center. I had questions whether that was going to work. I still do, in a lot of ways. But his year was pretty solid, and everyone loves him, and if you go into last summer and say this was his year, you'd say that would be a good year. So he took a big step.

I know I'll miss a bunch of people. Just go down anyone, you name it - I think [Jacob Slavin] took a big step. But not really - if you watch his play, it's not much different than the year



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before, except we got that relevancy, and people started watching our team.

That's what I mean - most people don't watch our team. That's what I talk about, being relevant, to go back to your other

question. The media up in Toronto, they take a stat sheet, they say "oh, look at that, Aho's got X amount of points, he's a good player, right?" Yeah, he's a good player. What about these other guys? They don't know, because they don't watch us. Now I think they'll pay more attention to us.



Comeback in Game 4 puts Checkers one win away from Calder Cup

by Nicholas Niedzielski

The Checkers flipped the script on Chicago in Game 4, erasing a 3-1 lead to beat the Wolves 5-3 and move within one win of claiming the Calder Cup.

The Wolves opened the scoring quickly, with Nic Hague going coast-to-coast for a goal on the rush, before the Checkers responded minutes later thanks to a seeing-eye point shot from Jesper Sellgren. That would be the end of Charlotte's offensive production for a long spell, however, with the Wolves striking late in the first and then again in the second to build up a 3-1 advantage.

With the Wolves riding a wave of momentum, the Checkers were able to cut into that lead in the final minute of the second period as Martin Necas collected a loose puck in front and toe-dragged his way around netminder Oscar Dansk and wired one home to send the visitors into the break on a high note.

That tally lit a fire under the Checkers, who came out flying in the third and evened the score just 32 seconds in as Julien Gauthier forced his way around a defender on the rush to feed a crashing Nicolas Roy for the slick tap in.

Charlotte continued to buzz from there, and just past the midway point of the frame it finished off the comeback as Aleksii Saarela unleashed a wicked wrister from the left circle that beat Dansk up high to give the visitors their first lead of the night.

Nicolas Roy would deliver an empty-net strike later in the frame to push Charlotte ahead by two, but Chicago continued to push hard down the stretch, including on a late power-play that produced a flurry of shots on goal. The Checkers wouldn't break, though, as Dustin Tokarski wrapped up the win with 22 stops to keep his unbeaten streak alive and put his squad ahead in the Finals 3-1.

QUOTES

Coach Mike Vellucci on the game

I thought obviously they came out flying in the first period. They out-chanced us and out-worked us quite a bit. I actually wasn't very happy with our first period. I thought in the second period we played better and I had the chances 7-2

for us. We got the big one right at the start of the third period and the momentum changed by that point. Then a big goal by (Saarela), who is dangerous all over the ice no matter where he shoots from. What I was impressed with was that we stayed with it. We talked after the second and third about how we're going to do this together and be positive together and we were going to make a difference. That was the key. Guys were all in. All in. They stayed positive and carried it over into the third.

Aleksii Saarela on continuing to shoot despite not scoring for several games Obviously it's tough when it's not going in, but it's playoffs and we have a hell of a group of guys and four lines who can score, so it helps me a little bit so I don't have to get so frustrated when it's not going in. I was relieved to finally score a goal.

Vellucci on the change in momentum

I think it started with Marty's power-play goal at the end of the second. I think that helped us quite a bit to be honest with you. It was a real big goal to go in the third only down one. Again we talked about just being positive. We've been here before, and we're a good group together and we're better together than separate. Just continue to battle through it. Then that goal on the first shift (of the third) was huge.

Vellucci on the team's comebacks this season

I really believe it's because everyone likes each other and everyone is rooting for each other. We've got great leadership in the locker room, and it starts with our captain (Patrick Brown). He competes so hard on and off the ice and takes care of himself. He's a great leader. I really believe that it's been positive thinking. We stick together, and that's the best way to put it.

Vellucci on the team's mentality

It starts early. I started it two years ago when I got here. It's the mentality of things are going to go bad and how are we going to react. There's things that weren't always going our organization's way or our team's way, and you have to be positive and you've got to work hard. I held them accountable for working hard and staying positive, because if you're not positive it's tough to win.

Vellucci on the decision to start Dustin Tokarski in goal

He's 12-0 for us. He's another one of those great guys that's



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an unbelievable leader. Did I think about going with Alex? Yeah, Alex played really well, but it doesn't matter. It's back-to-back games and the numbers speak for themselves. I can't say enough about both of those guys, but Tick did the job once again and in a back-to-back we're going to continue to do that.

Vellucci what makes Saarela such an effective goal scorer. The shot. I think you saw it. He can score from anywhere. It's heavy and it's quick. That doesn't really make much sense but it does. It catches you by surprise. I had an argument with (former Hurricanes assistant coach) Steve Smith in Carolina last year. He thought Justin Faulk's wrist shot was harder and I said no, I think his is. It's the hardest shot I've seen. When he hits the net it goes in, and that's something we've talked about quite a bit. All he has to do is put it on net. It's an unbelievable release.

NOTES

A team has given up a 3-1 lead in three of the four games in this series (Charlotte in Games 1 and 2, Chicago tonight) ... When Chicago scored the opening goal, it was their first lead of the series. Their Game 1 victory was in sudden-death

overtime ... This was the second time the Checkers erased a deficit of at least two goals in these playoffs (also a three-goal deficit in Game 3 of the Eastern Conference Finals against Toronto) ... Necas had a goal and an assist to extend his point streak to five games (3g, 4a). This was his second consecutive two-point game ... This was Roy's first multi-goal game of the playoffs ... Prior to tonight, Saarela had gone eight straight games without a goal since scoring a hat trick in the series-clinching game against Hershey in the second round ... Julien Gauthier has points in consecutive games (1g, 1a) since returning from injury ... Dustin Tokarski improved to 12-0-0 as a Checker with just 16 total goals allowed ... Forward Steven Lorentz and defenseman Dan Renouf missed the game due to injury ... Forwards Scott Davison, Jacob Pritchard and Zack Stortini, defensemen Dennis Robertson and Bobby Sanguinetti and goaltender Jeremy Helvig were healthy extras.

UP NEXT

The Calder Cup will be in the building for Game 5 on Saturday, with the puck dropping at 8 p.m. eastern.

TODAY'S LINKS

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SportScan

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

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The Athletic / 'Are you kidding me?': What it's like to practice with and against potential No. 1 pick Jack Hughes

By Corey Masisak Jun 6, 2019

Cameron Rowe is near the top of the list of goaltenders who have spent the most time trying to make sure Jack Hughes is not responsible for the puck ending up in his net.

For the past two years, Rowe has practiced with Hughes at the USA Hockey National Team Development Program in Plymouth, Michigan. Here's a story that was relayed to Rowe at the NHL scouting combine this past week in Buffalo.

The United States team had a light workout in Slovakia one day during the world championships last month. There were only five skaters on the ice, so they put together a 3-on-3 half-ice game. It was three forwards — Hughes, Johnny Gadureau and Luke Kunin — against three defensemen — Jack's brother, Quinn, and Chris Wolanin and assistant coach Dan Bylsma.

At one point, Jack Hughes had the puck along the goal line on the left side of the ice. Wolanin was marking him closely. The goaltender was hugging his right post. It looked like Hughes didn't have any options, other than maybe to circle behind the net and look for a teammate.

Instead, he got creative. Hughes, on his forehand, chipped the puck off the side of the goaltender's helmet. He tried to bank the puck off the goalie's bucket and into the sliver of an opening between his head and his right shoulder.

A couple of media members looked at each other with the same, "Wait, did he just ..." expression.

That's a move Rowe is quite familiar with.

"He's done that to me, like, six or seven times," Rowe said. "I was going to mention that earlier, but I didn't want to give away any of his hidden talents."

Hughes is the favorite to go No. 1 to the Devils in the 2019 NHL Draft later this month. It's almost certain he's either going to New Jersey or across the river to the Rangers, who hold the No. 2 pick.

Hughes was one of more than 100 top prospects in Buffalo for the league's scouting combine. While he did not go through the various drills and physical tests, he was the headliner of the event. His media availabilities on Friday afternoon and Saturday morning drew the biggest crowds, and whether Devils general manager Ray Shero will say his name or Kaapo Kakko's on June 21 in Vancouver was one of the most discussed topics at the combine.

It was an opportunity to seek out some of the prospects who have played and practiced against Hughes, and find out what it's like to try to defend him.

"In practice, Jack has this drive to just put every puck in the net," Rowe said. "Whether or not I make the initial save, he'll pick up the rebound and fire it in from the corner off my skates and 'celly.' It frustrated me in the beginning, but afterwards I learned that is the type of drive the kid has. It made me happy to see he wants to win that badly."

OK, back to the off-the-helmet move. Lots of NHL players have scored goals from weird angles by banking shots off various parts of the goaltender. But, off the helmet?

"I remember the first time he did that. It was basically a full clapper from below the goal line," Rowe said. "It hit me in the back of the head and went in. I just looked at him like, 'Are you kidding me?'" He did that, like, six or seven times. So every time Jack was on his forehand below the goal line, I wouldn't lean because I knew this thing was probably rocketing at my head."

Hughes has crafted an amateur resume unlike anything in the history of American hockey. He set several records with the NTDP, a program that has helped cultivate nearly all of the elite American players from the past two decades. He broke not only American, but overall, records at the U-18 world championship, surpassing Alex Ovechkin's career point total in the event.

Putting into context what Hughes accomplished at the NTDP isn't easy. Several future NHL superstars passed through there before him, and he dwarfed them all.

"Everybody knows Jack is a dynamic player and a generational talent," NTDP defenseman Drew Helleson said. "For me, it was great to go against him in practice every day. He's an unbelievable skater and he has great vision out there. He handles the puck extremely well. He's a tough kid, too. He's not afraid of anything. I give him a lot of credit. He's worked for everything he's gotten. To me, I think he's the best player in the draft by far."

Hughes is a world-class skater, with more than just pure speed. He has the ability to cut and turn and dart past defenders.

He also changes directions and gears in ways that can befuddle those assigned to mark him.

"Jack is an elite player. He's so dynamic, and you never know what he's going to do next with the puck," said Ronnie Attard, a 6-foot-3 defenseman from Tri-City in the USHL who weighed in at 205 pounds at the combine. "He's very hard to defend in the D-zone. Even though he's little, he is hard to eat up in the corners. Most little forwards, if you get a piece of them, you can put them into the wall. He'll slip away though. He is so hard to defend, and that's part of why he's so elite."

The passing, vision and hockey IQ are also part of Hughes' remarkable set of skills. While considered a playmaker first, Hughes



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also became one of the all-time leading goal scorers for the NTDP. Multiple teammates pointed to his goal in their first season together, when he was still 16 years old, against USHL opponent Green Bay, as their favorite Hughes moment.

"I think everybody has probably seen it by now," NTDP defenseman Domenick Fensore said. "He just danced pretty much everyone on the ice. I got a plus out of it. The guys who were on the ice, we always laugh with each other because we got a plus for it, but he's just an exceptional player. He has a lot of skill and a lot of heart and he's a good leader."

Hughes did not get measured at the draft but told reporters he is 5-foot-11. He and Quinn were both listed at 5-10 and 170 pounds during the world championships.

He'll need to add more core strength to his frame to unlock all of his incredible potential at the NHL level. If his teammates are correct in their assessments of him, the desire and willingness to do so will not be an issue.

"It's a lot of fun to be around a player with that amount of skill. It's pretty special to watch," fellow NTDP center John Beecher said. "In practice, I think he pushes everyone around him to be the best versions of themselves. It was always fun getting to battle with (Hughes). He works extremely hard, but he's also still fun to be around. I would go at him pretty good, but he doesn't back down from anyone. I was one of the bigger guys on the team, but he kept coming back at me. It's pretty neat to see a guy with that amount of skill also have that much drive.

"We were in Finland before the U-18 world championship. We were doing a drill with a net-front battle. I was going against him and wasn't expecting too much. It was just a little warmup drill. I was standing there and the next thing I knew, he was on the ice and he was dragging me down with him. Like I said, he's a competitor, but he also likes to have fun. We were laughing and joking about it."

Rowe offered a similar assessment.

"For me, I've really enjoyed it because of all the crazy stuff he did. It helped me develop, as well," he said. "That's something I feel like Jack really brought to the table. Everyone followed suit and followed his drive. He wore the 'C' for us, but he was more of a quiet leader. It was more about how he was one the ice. You didn't want to let him down. I'm not saying he was separate from the team or anything, but he was a guy who always wanted to get better and was always working hard and set an example for everyone."

So now, everyone knows about one of Hughes' tricks. Add craftiness to his assortment of skills on the ice.

Rowe had one more story to tell about practicing with Hughes, one that could top the head-hunting trick shots.

"I remember this one time, we were playing a 3-on-3, small-area game," Rowe said. "Whatever net we had, there was a hole right by my head on the outside of the post. I was hugging the post and he did the same thing. He turned around, a half-clapper and it went straight through the hole. He knew it, and he started (celebrating). I was just like, 'There is no way he put that in the net.'

"It went through the hole on the short side, and then hit the back of the net on the other side, so it looked like it went in. I was just like, 'You've got to be kidding me.' Jack was laughing. Even Coach (John Wroblewski) came over and saw the hole and was like, 'Jack, you sneaky ...' Yeah, that was crazy."

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The Athletic / Pronman's Mock Draft 1.0: Projecting the first round of the 2019 NHL Draft

By Corey Pronman Jun 6, 2019

If the calendar says it's June, that means it is officially mock draft season.

I have already compiled my ranking of the draft-eligible players with profiles of all the prospects. Now, this is a look at what I think will happen on draft day.

New Jersey: Jack Hughes, C, USNTDP-USHL

Despite a very strong late push from Kaapo Kakko at worlds, all indications are the Devils' preference is Hughes at this stage – even if the decision is a little tougher than it would have been a month ago.

New York Rangers: Kaapo Kakko, RW, TPS-Liiga

The Rangers haven't really hidden their cards on this front. It's expected they will take whomever of Hughes or Kakko is available at No. 2. I haven't heard any mentions or rumblings otherwise.

Chicago: Alex Turcotte, C, USNTDP-USHL

I've heard a myriad of names for Chicago, between Turcotte, Bowen Byram, Cole Caufield, Kirby Dach and Trevor Zegras. Enough people seem reasonably confident that Turcotte will be the pick that I'm slotting him here, but it is not close to a consensus among sources.

Colorado: Bowen Byram, D, Vancouver-WHL

I've heard Colorado's preference is to get a forward/center so they would love to get Turcotte. With that said, if Turcotte goes at No. 3, more hockey people than not think the Avalanche will take Byram as the best player available rather than go after Zegras or Dach, who are the other names rumored to be of interest to Colorado.

Los Angeles: Kirby Dach, C, Saskatoon-WHL

The names I've heard with the Kings are the two Western centers Dach and Dylan Cozens. I don't think it's a lock that Dach gets to No. 5, but there's been very strong interest in him all season from NHL folks despite his just fine numbers because of his elite toolkit. I think if Byram doesn't go in the top four, he lands here (sorry, Detroit fans).

Detroit: Trevor Zegras, C, USNTDP-USHL

I've heard Zegras, Dach and Vasilii Podkolzin rumored to Detroit. It makes sense given Steve Yzerman's preference for drafting skill, as well as how little hesitance he shows for drafting Russians. There was skepticism talking to sources at the combine about Zegras being Detroit's pick, but enough people have pegged him there that I'll go with that one.

Buffalo: Dylan Cozens, C, Lethbridge-WHL

I could see Buffalo go with Caufield or Matthew Boldy here, but Cozens is a more well-rounded player than both and would make Buffalo feel more comfortable than picking an average skater in Boldy or the 5-foot-7 player in Caufield. Cozens could play center or



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winger to fit multiple ways into the Sabres' growing stockpile of young forwards.

Edmonton: Philip Broberg, D, AIK-Allsvenskan

The sense in the industry is the Oilers want immediate help, whether with the No. 8 pick or using the pick to get something. I think that rules out Podkolzin. And while Caufield seems like a player that could help the Oilers, teams are worried that, if he doesn't truly hit, you might be waiting for him to develop for a while. Broberg will need a year or two, but he has the physical tools to move quickly to the NHL and makes sense on talent. Cozens is a possibility here, too, for that reason.

Anaheim: Peyton Krebs, C, Winnipeg-WHL

Anaheim's been a tough team to pin down. I could see Krebs, Alex Newhook or Broberg as the pick here. I haven't gotten the sense the Ducks are in on Caufield. The organization could use another top-level center prospect to accompany Sam Steel, and Krebs fits that bill.

Vancouver: Cole Caufield, RW, USNTDP-USHL

If the draft plays out this way, I could see Broberg or Caufield as the pick for the Canucks. The Canucks would likely prefer to get the top defenseman, even if they just picked Quinn Hughes a year ago, but it would be hard to pass on 72 goal scorer Caufield and the ability to line him up next to a guy like Elias Pettersson.

Philadelphia: Matthew Boldy, LW, USNTDP-USHL

I think Philly would love for Broberg to get to them to add a true top-tier defenseman to its farm system. If the draft plays out like this, though, it would be hard for them to pass on the elite skill Boldy has at No. 11. After the Kirill Kaprizov saga in Minnesota, I don't know if I can see the Chuck Fletcher regime picking a player signed by SKA in Podkolzin.

Minnesota: Arthur Kaliyev, RW, Hamilton-OHL

Minnesota's organization is in desperate need of a player who can score, and Kaliyev hit 50 this season. I could see Podkolzin as a player the Wild would like stylistically, but the aforementioned Kaprizov saga may test the fanbase if that was the case.

Florida: Moritz Seider, D, Mannheim-DEL

Seider moved very quickly in the past month or two, and I think he'll go top 15 following his World Championship showing. Florida also would want to pick a defenseman to add to a very forward-heavy farm system.

Arizona: Vasili Podkolzin, RW, SKA-VHL

This is probably toward the lowest range of where I think Podkolzin gets, I could see him anywhere from No. 6 to 14, but I don't think Arizona would pass up a chance to add a dynamic player like him.

Montreal: Cam York, D, USNTDP-USHL

It's been mildly expected all season that Montreal would be interested in adding a true top defense prospect if the player fit on talent. I've heard the Habs rumored on Ville Heinola and Victor Soderstrom for example. York had an awesome season and end to his season, and would instantly provide high-end puck-moving ability to their organization.

Colorado: Spencer Knight, G, USNTDP-USHL

Colorado, as a team with two first-round picks, seems like a prime candidate to go after Knight since it lacks a goalie of the future in the pipeline. If they get Byram at No. 4 there may be a temptation to add

a potential top-six forward, though, in a guy like Newhook, Ryan Suzuki or Philip Tomasino.

Vegas: Alex Newhook, C, Victoria-BCHL

It would have been tempting to slot Ryan Suzuki to Vegas, giving them the pleasure of drafting both brothers. But Newhook seems to have risen ahead of Suzuki, and provides some of the same dynamic playmaking and IQ Vegas values with a more well-rounded game.

Dallas: Victor Soderstrom, D, Brynas-SHL

Dallas would like to add a defenseman in this draft if the fit is there, and I've heard them rumored to be high on guys like Soderstrom and York. Dallas has done well finding defenseman outside the first round, but its system could really use a player like Soderstrom.

Ottawa: Ryan Suzuki, C, Barrie-OHL

The center depth in Ottawa is not terrible but not the best, and while the Senators have Logan Brown, Suzuki would instantly increase the amount of skill they have at the position significantly. I think this would be Newhook's floor, as well.

New York Rangers: Philip Tomasino, C, Niagara-OHL

The Rangers have had a lot of picks lately so the only true pressing "need" is a top-flight defense prospect, but none will be left at this stage. Tomasino is the best player available and would instantly provide a ton of speed and skill to their system. I think they would like Suzuki, as well.

Pittsburgh: Raphael Lavoie, RW, Halifax-QMJHL

The Penguins' system needs everything, and with a rare first-round pick, they have a chance to add legit NHL talent to their pipeline. Lavoie would add a combination of size, skill and skating they haven't had in a long time. I could see this as a spot for Thomas Harley, too.

Los Angeles: Thomas Harley, D, Mississauga-OHL

If the Kings get a center at pick No. 5, that would make all five of their first and second-round picks in the past three years centers. That creates a bit of an imbalance in the system and on the big team. Harley is a very good player to get at No. 22 based on talent, and I could see him as a fit for the Kings in terms of what they value.

New York Islanders: Bobby Brink, RW, Sioux City-USHL

The Islanders are never ones to shy away from swinging at skill, and Brink is full of it. He's a longer-term bet due to needing to clean up his skating, but he, Nils Hoglander or Nicholas Robertson would add a dynamic scoring element that they covet. I think they'd prefer to beef up their center depth, but the draft gets very thin at center at this point of the first round.

Nashville: Nils Hoglander, LW, Rogle-SHL

The Predators' system is light at the moment and could really use high-end skill, which Hoglander provides in bunches. Ideally, they'd like a top center prospect, but as mentioned before, there's not many left at this point unless you start discussing low upside types like John Beecher.

Washington: Nicholas Robertson, LW, Peterborough-OHL

The Caps have gone heavy on defensemen and goalies at the draft of late and could really use some scoring in their system. Robertson, Hoglander or Brink around this slot would make a ton of sense.

Calgary: Jakob Pelletier, LW, Moncton-QMJHL



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While the Flames used their 2018 draft to pick all forwards, their system could still use a bit more scoring depth, and Pelletier nearly scored 40 this season. I could see Egor Afanasyev as a pick here too.

Tampa Bay: Lassi Thomson, D, Kelowna-WHL

The Bolts haven't used a high pick on a true puck-moving defenseman in quite a few years. I could see Thomson, Ryan Johnson or Heinola fitting the bill. Thomson would provide a lot of what they value in terms of skating, skill and hockey sense.

Carolina: Patrik Puistola, LW, Taapara-Liiga

Tom Dundon announced to the world the Canes are going forward and I don't expect he's a man who is saying that to play three-dimensional chess. If the Canes want skill, Puistola is the most skilled player left at this point.

Anaheim: Ryan Johnson, D, Sioux Falls-USHL

Johnson really came on in the last month or so of the season, and some NHL folks think this is a low slotting for him in the first round. The Ducks love mobile puck-moving defensemen, and Johnson or Thomson would be a fit at this slot for an organization that's lost a few of this type of player in recent years.

Buffalo: Ville Heinola, D, Luukko-Liiga

This is likely way too low a slotting for Heinola based on industry buzz, as he is seen as more of a consensus top 20 than top 30, but sometimes the draft plays out that way. The Sabres don't have many defensemen in the system who play the way Heinola does with his high-end vision and ability to transition the offense.

Boston: Alex Vlasic, D, USNTDP-USHL

Boston typically likes players with high-end athletic tools, and Vlasic is that in bunches as a 6-foot-6 defenseman who is an off the charts good skater for a man his size and whose stock trended up in the second half of the season.

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The Athletic / What to expect by drafting center Alex Newhook

By Corey Pronman Jun 6, 2019

Alex Newhook has been on the prospect radar for a long time. He's lived all across Canada and this season had one of the best campaigns in recent memory by a Jr. A player.

He is a dynamic, albeit small player who is committed to play college hockey at Boston College next season.

Here is a look at why I have him No. 11 on my draft board.

Skating

Newhook is an explosive skater who is able to drive play because of the speed he has and the pace he plays with.

This clip shows how powerful and quick a skater he is.

His legs have such a quick twitch and he gets so many strides out in a second. His ability to burn up the wing in this way is unique.

This is another example of those quick feet at work. He winds up past center ice and, even with the defense set up and seeing him coming, he still turns around a (rather slow) defender.

Newhook's legs allow him to create offense out of nothing. On this play, for example, it's technically a broken play as the pass to him is deflected, but he catches the puck in full stride and is able to turn the corner.

You will see throughout the rest of the clips, he doesn't just have great speed, his edge work is also very good and he can be very elusive once he breaks into the offensive zone.

Vision

Newhook is one of the smartest players and most creative passers eligible for this year's draft.

One thing that makes him stand out as a playmaker is how he makes plays at full speed. This play shows how he sets up a goal while moving very fast and yet squeezes his pass between several defenders to hit a teammate in the slot.

While that was clearly BCHL level defending, that kind of play translates to the pro level.

This play in motion was one of my favorite from Newhook all season. While moving up the zone, he finds a streaking teammate, and times it right to avoid his checker's stick and the defender near his target.

This next play illustrates his patience. Newhook shows the ability to pull up, wait for a lane to develop and then find his defenseman coming late into an open lane.

Newhook can make plays in motion, as shown above, but he can also pick apart defenses from a standstill. Scoring on a 5-on-3 is nothing amazing, but on this play we don't see him make a play down low or across, which is a standard pass, but rather feather a pass past all three defenders.

Another example of how Newhook threads a beauty of a pass between an entire team to generate a goal. His head is always up looking to make a play.

I'm sure some will see these clips and think "well, that is the BCHL, show me him doing it at a higher level."

Here are two plays at the U18s that stood out to me. This first was an amazing play between all of the Canadian players, but Newhook was very involved.

He makes several great reads. The initial spinoff and pass, but more importantly he sees the passing play develop, steps into the lane at the right time to receive the puck and then delivers the bullet feed across the zone.

And finally, this play shows Newhook's timing, vision and skill to feather a difficult pass over a long distance. It's not on target, but I like how it shows his mind at work to pick apart defenses.

Puck Skills

Newhook has great vision but also has some noticeable "pop" to his game in terms of the flashy 1-on-1 moves and a high level of creativity with the puck. He had numerous wow-caliber moments throughout the season.

You have this play where he hops over an opponent's out stretched leg while putting a puck through the defender.



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Or this play where, after deking out one defender, he gets a little overly fancy with a between the legs move to try and go against the grain to beat the goalie.

He can deke at full speed. Such as this play where he makes a man miss easily with one deke and generates a goal from it.

This play where shows his ability to maneuver in traffic, which is another skill that will translate to tight-areas at the pro level even if it won't be as easy.

Finally, another fun play to end his highlight reel: Newhook is going at full speed and his hands are so quick he actually knocks the defender's stick out of his hands!

Production and International Performance

At the BCHL level there wasn't more Newhook could do. He led the BCHL in scoring and was named the league MVP. In his two seasons in the league, he was absolutely dominant.

NHL scouts look at the league with some skepticism. While top prospects dominate junior all the time, I'm sure careful observers will watch the clips above and see some of the plays he made were a product of playing against a lower quality of competition than the CHL. Scouts see potential cause for concern when they look at Tyson Jost and Beau Bennett, who recently tore up the BCHL but didn't (or haven't yet) make a real impact in the NHL.

Early in the season there were concerns as to whether Newhook's play translated to higher levels. He was cut from Canada's U18 team in the summer and, at the World Jr. A Challenge, he played well but wasn't dominant like recent Jr. A first-round picks Cale Makar or Jost.

Newhook ended the season on a high note, though, as for my money he was one of the top 3-5 best forwards at the IIHF U18s, and Canada's coaches selected him as one of their best players, over consensus top 10-pick Dylan Cozens.

"I had full confidence in [Newhook]. I think he's the man and he was determined to prove himself. He took that cut from the Hlinka as motivation," said Canada's U18 coach in the spring Brett Gibson.

Hockey World's Impressions

An NHL executive said: "He's a high energy, two-way center with a powerful blend of speed and skill. He's excellent in the faceoff circle and strong on the puck. He's an explosive and highly competitive player."

An NHL scout said: "He grew on me over the course of the season. Early on I saw the vision. I wasn't sure if he could play at an elite pace, but he proved me wrong."

Boston College coach Jerry York said: "I love his hockey sense and his explosiveness. He's a lot stronger than when you look at him at first glance. He's got a thick, sturdy frame. He's a dynamic young player who is going to put up a lot of numbers wherever he plays."

Canada West director of operations Kevin Saurette, "I love his compete level. Everyone can see his skill level, his skating and the way he sees the ice. He's hard on the forecheck, he finishes checks, his feet never stop moving. He's a real leader on and off the ice."

Victoria Grizzlies GM/coach Craig Didmon said: "He has great endurance, he doesn't tire and wears his opponents down. He can attack in a variety of ways. He has great speed, a great shot on the fly and sees the ice very well. He can play 200 feet."

Newhook said: "I take a lot of pride in my compete level. On the ice I think my best attributes are my speed and hockey IQ."

Projection

Newhook's season was for the most part very successful. He dominated Jr. A and was awesome at the IIHF U18s. He has a ton of high-end components in his game between his skating, skill and vision to potentially be a top scorer at the pro level.

Concerns about how he played for two weeks at Canada's U18 camp and the World Jr. A Challenge are valid, but he's played too well for too long over the past few years for that to override his track record.

I don't know if Newhook's role in the pros is an all-situations forward or a typical top-six scorer, but I think he has all the offensive tools to be a top line scorer in the NHL, whether at center or on the wing.

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

By Jonathan Willis Jun 6, 2019

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.



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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.

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.



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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 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



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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.

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



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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 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 short of 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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Sportsnet.ca / Tyler Bozak non-call latest 'black eye' for NHL officiating

Luke Fox | @lukefoxjukebox June 7, 2019, 2:01 AM

BOSTON – So this is how we find out Cam Neely is a lefty.

The uncalled penalty was so blatant and so instrumental to the outcome of the game and, possibly, the championship that the president of the Boston Bruins stood up enraged in the press box, snatched a water bottle with his left hand and, in one fluid motion, whipped it against the wall like Pedro Martinez.

We imagine the Dasani container like commissioner Gary Bettman's head after seeing the St. Louis Blues get jerked by a hand pass in the previous round: trying not to explode.

Happy 54th birthday, Mr. Neely.

Your team is the latest to get screwed by an egregious officiating gaffe in a pivotal moment of the 2019 Stanley Cup playoffs.

With the series knotted at two, and the Blues leading 1-0 midway through the third period of Game 5 on Thursday, Tyler Bozak took out a puck-playing Noel Acciari's left leg from behind, flinging his opponent on his back. A clear slewfoot in plain sight of officials Kelly Sutherland and Steve Kozari.



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Seconds later, David Perron squeaked the puck through Tuukka Rask, giving Bozak an assist and the Blues a 2-0 lead.

Because Jake DeBrusk later scored for the home side, the Perron strike became the winner. The goal that gives St. Louis two cracks to win its first-ever Cup, starting with a home-ice opportunity Sunday? It's charged with controversy.

"The National Hockey League's getting a black eye with their officiating in these playoffs, and there's another one that's going to be talked about," Bruins coach Bruce Cassidy said.

"It's right in front of the official. It's a slewfoot. Our guy's gone. The spotter took him out of the game for a possible concussion. I mean, it's blatant. It had a big effect on the game.

"It really made it difficult for us to get the win tonight. So, I'm disappointed."

Cassidy was hardly the only one.

A shower of rally towels, sticky cups and water bottles, like the one Neely had chucked, littered the ice surface as fans chanted, "Bulls—!" More garbage rained as the shovel crew needed another lap to tidy up the mess.

"It happens when people expect things to go a certain way, and it doesn't," Bozak said, following the 2-1 squeaker. "It happened in Toronto quite a bit. It happened in St. Louis before. Emotions run high, especially at this time of year."

Bozak dismissed the trip as a simple "puck battle," yet he raised his right arm, opened his palm and appeared to be appealing a whistle that never sounded.

Was he surprised there was no call?

"It's a fast game out there, I couldn't tell ya," Bozak said. "I saw the puck there, went for it, we got it back, and he was down. I don't really know what happened to be honest with you, but we'll take it."

This is amazing. Not only is the official looking right at the trip but Tyler Bozak immediately looks over because he knows he messed up pic.twitter.com/ixuL2EIR1w

— Dimitri Filipovic (@DimFilipovic) June 7, 2019

"It's not like something crazy was missed," Perron added. "I don't agree with it, obviously. Anything I say won't sound good. Sorry, I'm French. I could say it better in French."

Acciari, still pleading on his knees as the Blues celebrated behind him, saw it differently.

"It's just kind of embarrassing," he said.

Earlier in the game, Torey Krug disputed a hard check from Zach Sanford and Marcus Johansson could make a case that his head was targeted by Ivan Barbashev.

"Those are the hits they want to get out of the game, correct? That's what I hear a lot about," Cassidy said.

But it's the lack of a whistle after the Bozak trip that's most enraging the whistleblowers.

"That's a penalty every time. There's no ifs, ands, or buts about it. I'm all for letting us play, but when it leads to scoring chances and the opposing team ends up with the puck, it should be going our way," Krug said.

"It's different game to game. You get two officials each game that come in and they try to establish a different standard. Sometimes it's

tough, but we'll have to figure out what that standard is next game and try to live on the edge."

Throw Bozak's jutting leg on the pile with Timo Meier's hand and Cody Eakin's phantom high stick: no matter how the series ends, it won't be forgotten.

"We don't make comments on judgment calls within games. There are hundreds of judgment calls in every game," officiating chief Stephen Walkom told a pool reporter. "The official on the play, he viewed it and he didn't view it as a penalty at the time."

Prior to this two-game winning streak that has given the Blues their first series lead, Blues coach Craig Berube's tone was decidedly different.

"I don't agree with all the calls," Berube said Sunday. "We were the least penalized team in the playoffs coming into this round. Now all these penalties."

Adding a rich little wrinkle to the controversy, Berube's tone changed in the wake of Game 5.

"I'm not here to judge the officials and calls that could have been or couldn't have. They go both ways," he said. "We play a hard game. We're a physical team. We forecheck hard. I'll say it again: we are the least penalized team in the playoffs. End of story. I don't need to talk any more about it."

Cassidy believes the "narrative" has veered since Berube complained, and Patrice Bergeron was asked if Berube had subtly planted a seed in the stripes' mind.

"I hope not," Bergeron said. "I hope not, because that shouldn't change anything."

Unfortunately, the hoopla over the officiating obscures the facts: that the determined Blues earned this win; that Ryan O'Reilly has been the best skater on the ice in the past 120 minutes; that St. Louis has now shut down Boston's power play five times straight; and that rookie Jordan Binnington pitched his best performance of the series, of his life, a 38-save gem.

After a silent Neely rode a crowded service elevator down six floors with the folks that will be writing about his water bottle, one reporter asked if he'd like to comment on the call that wasn't.

Neely didn't want to talk.

But the Stanley Cup Final now has two off-days so everyone else will.

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Sportsnet.ca / Chara's return not enough to spur Bruins to Game 5 win vs. Blues

Chris Johnston | June 6, 2019, 11:29 PM

BOSTON — His broken jaw protected by a newly affixed chin guard, Zdeno Chara stood tall on the blue line while TD Garden stopped for a thundering ovation as he was announced in the starting lineup.



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Chara played because of course he did. Three days after taking a puck to the face, and with a cut on the right side of his mouth and who-knows-what going on inside, the Boston Bruins captain made a dramatic return to the Stanley Cup Final because he couldn't bear to miss a game this big.

"Amazingly brave," Bruins coach Bruce Cassidy told Scott Oake on the "Hockey Night in Canada" broadcast.

"I wouldn't expect anything less from him," said Brandon Carlo.

"It shows his character," added goalie Tuukka Rask. "It takes a lot for him to not play. He's got some big balls."

It was an iconic playoff moment, even if Boston didn't follow it up with a victory. This was a 42-year-old man fighting through pain and a doctor's warning — giving every ounce he had to try and help push his team towards another championship.

We don't yet have the full picture of what Chara had to do in order to play, but his presence in Game 5 wasn't a foregone conclusion. Eating has likely been difficult, if not impossible, since he left a pool of blood on the ice in St. Louis and missed the final 37 minutes of Monday's game.

He had 71 hours to receive treatment and get the clearance needed to pull on a helmet rigged-up with extra protection and jump back into the fray.

"His injury is a little more serious than some," Cassidy said after Thursday's 2-1 loss to the Blues. "He was medically cleared with some warnings. He made the decision to play. Inspirational for us, good player for us.

"We knew he wouldn't be 100 per cent. So we're happy to have him out there but it just speaks a lot to his character and his role to play."

Cassidy dressed Steven Kampfer as the seventh defenceman and an insurance policy, but still gave Chara 25 shifts for 16:42. The big man delivered a hit on Brayden Schenn during the opening minute — one of four he was credited with on the night — and made good on a promise to play with no restrictions.

He wasn't up to speaking with reporters due to his facial injuries, but took a couple questions through the Bruins public relations staff and said he wasn't concerned about risking further damage to his jaw: "You don't think about that. You think about playing. You don't go into a game thinking you might get hurt."

Still, there were some adjustments.

Chara scolded the Bruins bench during a television timeout earlier in this series, but couldn't make himself heard to the same degree through a tightly contested Game 5.

"Not a whole lot," said Rask.

"He was fine," added Carlo. "Maybe not yelling as much on the ice, but on the bench he was fine."

When the game turned on a missed penalty call right before David Perron's 2-0 goal, it was still Chara who pled the Bruins case with referee Kelly Sutherland while angry fans pelted the ice with debris.

He and defence partner Charlie McAvoy also got crossed up on coverage before Ryan O'Reilly opened the scoring, but Chara was far from a liability overall. Under the circumstances, it was a notable performance.

"What he's going through, that's something I'll tell my kids about when they wake up with a fever and don't want to go to school," said

Bruins defenceman John Moore. "Those are life lessons that I'll carry long beyond hockey, that I'm very grateful to have with Zee."

The Bruins rolled out Bobby Orr and Derek Sanderson as their pre-game flag captains and left Chara at the end of the line for in-arena introductions that aren't typically done in the middle of a series. They were trying to squeeze as much juice as possible out of his return and built a 13-3 shot advantage within 13 minutes.

Were it not for Jordan Binnington's best game of this Stanley Cup Final, the script might have been written differently.

"I think it gave their team momentum in the first period, for sure, having him out there," said Blues coach Craig Berube. "But our team hung in there and we pulled out a gutsy win. That's the way I look at it. Our team was gutsy tonight. Our goalie was good and our team was gutsy."

Talk about adding insult to injury.

The list of things that become more difficult with a broken jaw includes breathing, speaking, eating and drinking. We can safely assume it includes skating, bodychecking, passing and a bunch of other things that happened on the ice, too.

As if the mere act of playing in the NHL beyond your 42nd birthday weren't already enough, Chara rewrote the potential recovery time for a broken jaw in the playoffs. Derek Stepan needed five days when he did it for the New York Rangers in 2014 and Chara took three.

That's the same length of time he now has to get ready for Game 6 and, he hopes, a Game 7 after that.

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Sportsnet.ca / Coach's Corner: Chara could've protected himself from injury

Sportsnet Staff | June 6, 2019, 10:21 PM

Zdeno Chara, broken jaw and all, started Game 5 of the Stanley Cup Final for the Boston Bruins on Thursday night, despite suffering the gruesome injury in Monday's tilt in St. Louis.

It's remarkable that Chara is even playing considering he had his jaw wired shut, but Don Cherry believes that he could've done one thing to prevent the injury.

"Young coaches, [sticks] at the side, never out in front," Cherry exclaimed during Coach's Corner on Hockey Night in Canada. "I watch the TV down here, I watch the papers, the whole deal. Not once did they say 'a stupid play.'"

"Here's a guy, 42 years old, wasn't taught when he was a kid," Cherry continued. "I played 16 years, never had that happen to me. You never put your stick out like that. Here's a guy — 42 years old — never learned when he was young."

Chara suffered the injury in Game 4 after Blues forward Brayden Schenn's shot ricocheted off the Bruins defenceman's stick and onto his jaw.



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The veteran blue-liner remained rooted to the bench for the rest of Game 4, but was medically cleared to play in Game 5.

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Sportsnet.ca / Analyzing what Zdeno Chara still brings the Boston Bruins at 42 years old

Andrew Berkshire June 6, 2019, 11:42 AM

Heading into a pivotal Game 5 in Boston, the Bruins could possibly be without their 42-year-old captain, Zdeno Chara, after he was struck in the face by a Brayden Schenn shot that deflected off his stick. He has been listed as a game-time decision so at such an important time in this series we have to ask: just what is Chara's impact these days?

At the peak of his career, Chara was one of the biggest game-changing defencemen in the world, boasting a monstrous impact on defence that created a nearly impenetrable unit for the Bruins when he shared the ice with Patrice Bergeron. However, his prime is in the past so that's not the Chara the Bruins are potentially losing in the Stanley Cup Final.

There are intangible losses to when such a long-tenured captain goes down, and Chara's leadership qualities are unquestionable at this point. But on the ice would his absence be something that spells the end for the Bruins?

In a league that keeps getting younger and faster, that Chara is still an impact player at all is a testament to his intelligence, talent, and conditioning. But how impactful is he exactly? Let's try to put it into a little bit of context by looking at Chara's past decade of work in general using Corsica.

Goals are a bit more random, but Chara has been one of the biggest impact players on shot attempts since the statistic became publicly available on all players in the 2007-08 season. Going back through 10 seasons, we can see Chara has been an incredibly resilient possession driver throughout his career, lasting until age 39 when he had a year where the Bruins were worse in shot share while he was on the ice than when he was off.

That dip below breaking even lasted three seasons, but he had a bit of a career renaissance in 2018-19. The temptation when analyzing an older player who had a big uptick in play is to look at who they're playing with. Seeing Chara spent more than half his 5-on-5 minutes with an up-and-comer like Charlie McAvoy, it would be easy to give the young kid the credit here. But surprisingly there's not a huge drop for Chara when he was away from McAvoy according to Natural Stat Trick's line tool.

With McAvoy and Chara together the Bruins controlled 54.7 per cent of shot attempts at 5-on-5. Chara dropped to 53.2 per cent without McAvoy, while McAvoy stayed steady at 54.7 per cent without Chara.

I think it's safe to assume that McAvoy helps Chara out, but the captain clearly didn't struggle without the youngster this season either.

Even if Chara only has a fraction of the on-ice impact he had during his prime, it appears he's someone the Bruins would miss. But let's cut things down a bit finer and look at how Chara has impacted the Bruins' performance in the playoffs.

On the surface of things, Chara's impact on the Bruins' run to the Stanley Cup Final has been enormous. Boston has scored twice as often as they've allowed goals while he's been on the ice, but small sample sizes and goals are known to be unreliable indicators of performance. When we take a look at other metrics, Chara's impact is less pronounced.

The Bruins are slightly better in high danger chances while Chara is on the ice, but surprisingly that probably isn't coming from him. His offensive impact at 5-on-5 is sort of negligible at this point, and that's where they've been better in the playoffs.

On the other side, the Bruins are allowing more high danger chances per minute played while Chara is on the ice than when he's off. In fact, only Torey Krug and Brandon Carlo are allowing more on the Bruins' blue line.

In shots and shot attempts Chara is a little bit behind the play, and the result is that the Bruins haven't controlled the puck nearly as often.

Even in an area where you expect the big man to have an enormous impact, the Bruins are controlling the passing game slightly better when he's on the bench and his defensive impact there is dead on team average.

Obviously we have to account for Chara facing top matchups night in and night out. It's the playoffs after all, where matchups matter far more than in the regular season.

Looking at Corsica's quality of competition metrics, you can measure a player's level of difficulty in several ways. You can look at average ice time of the opponents a player faces, the average Corsi for percentage, and the average expected goals for percentage.

In time on ice quality of competition, Chara ranks first among the Bruins' defencemen, but in Corsi he ranks fifth, and in expected goals he ranks third. What stands out about the Bruins' defence at 5-on-5 is that there's hardly any spread in quality of competition by any metric.

If Chara is out of the lineup the Bruins will lose some leadership, some intimidation factor, and some physicality, but if the supremely underrated Matt Grzelcyk is healthy enough to draw in (he's a game-time decision like Chara), don't make the mistake of thinking Boston can't still win this series.

Chara is a unique specimen that is impossible to replace, but while the intangibles have value, his overall impact simply isn't what it once was.

If he sits, the Bruins can weather this.

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Sportsnet.ca / Stanley Cup Game 5 Notebook: Chara's skate inspires Bruins

Luke Fox | June 6, 2019, 1:54 PM



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BOSTON – No one who knows the man was surprised by the scene, and yet it was hard not to gasp just a little as Zdeno Chara strode out from the Boston Bruins dressing room for Thursday's morning skate, two-and-a-half days after suffering a broken jaw.

The term warrior gets thrown around loosely in sport, but seeing the oldest NHLer trying to prepare himself for Game 5, it was the first that pops to mind.

"It's just ingrained in him. When you hear the stories of how he was brought up. He was brought up as a tough, hardworking person," Brad Marchand said.

"He wants to win more than anything, and he shows that every single night. You never know what he's playing through — he keeps everything quiet and to himself, and he's not worried about complaining about injuries or anything like that. He's willing to play with one leg, one arm. It doesn't matter. He's out there working as hard as he can and sacrificing his body because he knows, at the end of the day, you win — it's worth everything you go through.

"Not everyone has that. You can't teach that; you can't push that on people. It's either in you or it's not. He's able to play through pain, a lot more pain than most people. Probably anyone in this league. It's incredible to see. I know I couldn't do what he does."

Chara skated around and fired pucks while wearing a shield and clear jaw protector.

The first worry was that he might have suffered a concussion as well. He didn't.

If the doctors clear him to play Thursday night, he will.

Chara only communicated to reporters through a couple written responses, downplaying his extraordinary durability and concerns that he might reinjure his face by throwing it in the way of the Blues' relentless forecheck.

"At this time of the playoffs, everyone has injuries and there are challenges that you have to overcome to play," Chara said, via the club. "I'm no different than any player on either team."

Tell that to teammate John Moore, who thoughtfully considered his captain.

"Much is made of his professionalism, his toughness, his approach, but until you see that in the flesh, you have a whole other appreciation for it," Moore said.

"The guy's 42. When I'm 42, I'm certainly not going to be the first guy in the gym, weighing all my food, squatting the most on the team. Those are all things you respect.

"What he's going through, that's something I'll tell my kids about when they wake up with a fever and don't want to go to school. Those are life lessons that I'll carry long beyond hockey, that I'm very grateful to have with Zee."

Dunn empathizes with Chara

In a cruel twist of symmetry, St. Louis defenceman Vince Dunn returned from his own face injury the night Chara suffered his.

"I really feel for him," said a sincere Dunn, who can relate. "It's not easy to see. It's not easy to feel that. I've felt the same thing, so I feel bad for him and hope he's doing OK."

The 22-year-old tried describing the pain of a puck smashing your mouth, speaking for a man who can barely talk.

"At first you don't really know what's happened. It's just a shock to your face. You look down and you see blood in your hands, so I think overall it's just a pretty big shock to yourself," Dunn said. "It's scary. You feel a little helpless at the start, but there are lots of support and guys pick you up."

Sidelined since halfway through the Western Conference final, Dunn made an immediate impact in Game 4, setting up Ryan O'Reilly's opening-minute goal and delivering a sorely needed offensive push from the back. Captain Alex Pietrangolo says the perfect word to describe Dunn is dynamic.

"I had so much energy inside of myself that going out for that first shift, my legs were just shaking. It was just a lot of excitement. There's no real way to prepare yourself for a game like that. You can practice and do all the things off the ice to try to get yourself prepared, but until you're out there and until you get into the flow of the game, that's when you start to get the hang of it," Dunn said.

"I just bring a little more dynamic to the back end. I like to create. I like to quick-up pucks. I like to be that next wave of offence. It's a series where they're pressuring very hard, so as quickly as we can we need to get it into the forward's hands, get through that neutral zone and onto the forecheck. If I can be a part of that, that's great."

Bruins weighing options on defence

Starting with Charlie McAvoy, head coach Bruce Cassidy publicly challenged his healthy defencemen to elevate their play in light of all the injuries.

At Wednesday's practice, the D pairing looked like this:

Moore-McAvoy

Krug-Carlo

Kampfner-Clifton

With both Chara and Matt Grzelcyk (concussion) game-time decisions, 30-year-old journeyman Steven Kampfner is a good bet to make his Cup Final debut. Kampfner scored once in the two playoff games he's been used this year.

Prospect Urho Vaakanainen hasn't played a game in 41 days, and that was in the AHL. He's a long shot.

Cassidy is still considering going with seven defencemen for insurance, in which case David Backes, who played a team-low 9:09 in Game 4, would be the best bet to get scratched.

Per Bruce Cassidy, Zdeno Chara and Matt Grzelcyk are game-time decisions.

"They're on the ice now, so that's a good sign. We'll see how they feel around 7-7:30 tonight." pic.twitter.com/czYC3hpx0o

— Boston Bruins (@NHLBruins) June 6, 2019

Edmundson out, Bortuzzo in

Blues coach Craig Berube is also juggling his blueline, swapping out Joel Edmundson in favour of Robert Bortuzzo.

Edmundson was hardly used in Game 4's victory (7:24) and is a minus-3 in the series.

"It's been very good, the competition. We've used everybody — that's what you need to do in the playoffs," Berube said. "All the guys realize it. They care about each other."



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"You don't have to be happy about it, but you still have to be a good teammate, and they have been very good that way. It's great to have the depth."

Goalie Jordan Binnington believes the 6-foot-4 Bortuzzo can play a key role in front of him.

"He's a great role guy, a great shot blocker for us," Binnington said. "It's good to have him back."

Bruins' second line gets called out—and rightly so

The highest-paid Bruin, centre David Krejci, has zero points in the Cup Final and zero goals in the past two series.

Left winger Jake DeBrusk has scored just once in 11 games.

Right winger David Backes has one point in the past two series.

The Bruins' supposed second unit has been taking on water, and it's a problem that has been addressed in meetings and video sessions over the two off-days.

"It's been frustrating personally for me all playoffs. But in saying that, it's not about personal achievements right now," says DeBrusk, who has three post-season goals. He had six last year and only played two rounds.

"We feel it. We play the game. We understand that we need to do more out there. It's a matter of timing plays and execution as well. It could be as simple as a chipped puck that doesn't get in the right area—next thing you know, you're playing in the D zone. Credit St. Louis. They've done a good job."

Cassidy said Backes does his thing, but DeBrusk needs to use his speed to get on the inside more.

"Typically Krejci is very receptive, but he still likes to play his way. We're going to have to be halfway on that, then go from there," Cassidy said. "We have to find a way to get them back feeling good about their game."

Blues are the ultimate road warriors

Despite their rabid fan support at Enterprise Center, the Blues have enjoyed much more success in enemy territory in these playoffs. The Blues are 8-3 record as visitors. Only five teams in NHL history have earned more road wins in a single playoff year.

"When you're on the road, you have no one to impress," Brayden Schenn explained. "You come out, you play for one another, you keep it simple. And I think we've done a good job of that during the playoffs."

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TSN.CA / Binnington has Blues on brink of first Stanley Cup

Frank Seravalli

BOSTON — You could practically hear the bronze being chiseled, all 6-foot-9 of Zdeno Chara cast for immortality — maybe even wearing the full facial shield.

There was room next to Bobby Orr outside the Garden, too.

Chara's mere appearance in the Boston Bruins' lineup was the stuff of legend, the literal definition of "hockey player" in the dictionary. Maybe no one in the history of the game has played 72 hours after suffering a broken jaw. Certainly no one at the age of 42.

If you had hair, it was standing straight up when Chara was feted with a roaring, 25-second ovation from the Bruins' faithful when announced as a starter.

The Bruins milked every second of the scene. They actually engineered the moment, since the starting lineups for both teams are typically only announced in Games 1 and 3 of the Stanley Cup Final, or the first game in each city. That is what the Blues were told.

"I think it gave their team momentum in the first period for sure having him out there," Blues coach Craig Berube said of Chara.

Chara was followed by Bobby Orr and Derek Sanderson, who served as the Bruins' banner captains and waved the B's flag.

Hey, when it's potentially the last home game of the season, you attempt to create an advantage anywhere you can.

But on a night when the Bruins tried to pull out all the stops, Jordan Binnington actually did.

St. Louis' rookie netminder staved off a furious first period onslaught from the Bruins, turning aside all 17 shots he saw, and his teammates returned the favour to squeak out a 2-1 win in Game 5 on Thursday night.

Binnington has the Blues on the brink of their first Stanley Cup in franchise history.

Believe it.

"Unbelievable," Colton Parayko said. "I mean, he won one for us here. It was a huge game by him. Very impressive. I don't really know, I could talk about that performance all day. It was unreal. Good for him. That was awesome."

They can lift Lord Stanley on home ice with one more "Gloria" on Sunday night in St. Louis. The winner of Game 5 in a tied Final has gone on to hoist the Cup 18 times in 25 instances.

"Well it wasn't our best game of the series, but sometimes your goalie is going to make some big saves, especially early on to change the momentum and he did that," captain Alex Pietrangolo said. "He was unbelievable."

Binnington's teammates said it was his best performance of the playoffs.

"I don't know," Binnington shrugged. "I don't keep tabs."

Sadly, Game 5 won't be remembered for Binnington's stone-cold killer play, as his night was overshadowed by yet another blown call from the official. Like each of the three rounds before it, the Stanley Cup Final has also been marred by controversy.

Bottles and towels rained down from the rafters after a trip from Blues forward Tyler Bozak on Noel Acciari went unpenalized and David Perron netted what ended up being the game-winning goal on the same sequence.

(It's been a rough four months since Boston celebrated its last pro sports championship.)

Bruins coach Bruce Cassidy called it an "egregious" missed call.

"The National Hockey League's getting a black-eye with their officiating in these playoffs, and there's another one that's going to be talked about," Cassidy said. "I thought it was a great hockey



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game. That call, probably ... really made it difficult for us to get the win tonight."

So did Binnington. There was just something about him in Game 5, his confidence apparent in his aggression cutting down angles, that made it feel different than any of his other starts in this series. He was on another level.

"He was excellent all game and did a great job in the first period for sure," Berube said. "They came hard, Boston. We were tested in the first for sure and 'Binner' stood tall. Big reason we won the game."

Binnington was five minutes away from being the first netminder to shut out the Bruins this postseason. He was the first to deal them two consecutive losses at home.

Now, the Bruins are facing elimination for the second time this spring. They erased a 3-2 series deficit to the Toronto Maple Leafs in Round 1. This time, it feels like the Bruins took their Stanley Cup shot in Game 5.

"The stakes are a little different right now and it's against a different team as well," Jake DeBrusk said. "They're one win away. That's what they're thinking over there."

The Blues are now a combined 7-1 in Games 5, 6 and 7 in these four rounds and Binnington has not allowed more than two goals in any of those games. There is no better recipe for success.

"Our team hung in there and we pulled out a gutsy win," Berube said. "That's the way I look at it. Our team was gutsy tonight. Our goalie was good and our team was gutsy."

They stood tall, took the Bruins' best punch, broken jaw and all. That statue will have to wait.

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TSN.CA / Five Marlies who could push for NHL roster spots next season

Kristen Shilton

Maple Leafs general manager Kyle Dubas confirmed last week what this rapidly unfolding NHL off-season has already made evident: With the Leafs facing a cap crunch and the potential of significant personnel turnover, the team will be relying on prospects to fill gaps on the roster this September.

"There's also going to be huge opportunity for a whole litany of players that have been with the [American Hockey League's Toronto Marlies] for two, three years," Dubas said at the NHL's scouting combine in Buffalo on May 30. "It'll be one of the more exciting training camps that we have in terms of battles for actual roster spots on the team. And that'll be great."

There are short-term roles with the club that will need addressing, as off-season surgeries for Zach Hyman (torn ACL) and Travis Dermott (shoulder) project to keep them out of action until late October and November, respectively.

Then there are the other, longer-term holes Dubas will likely need to plug.

Defenceman Nikita Zaitsev's public trade request could well be fulfilled by the Leafs before fall, while pending unrestricted free agent Jake Gardiner will almost certainly have signed elsewhere by July 1. Add in Ron Hainsey's murky future as he mulls coming back for a 17th season and a large swath of the Leafs' top-five defensive spots from last season could require reworking over the summer.

Veteran forward Patrick Marleau, with a \$6.25 million cap hit in the final year of his contract, is rumoured to have been shopped to Los Angeles and Arizona.

And then there's the Leafs' restricted free agent class, led by burgeoning superstar winger Mitch Marner. While his RFA counterparts Kasper Kapanen and Andreas Johnsson are more frequently mentioned as potential trade pieces, Marner should be a cornerstone of the franchise if Dubas can find the right number to get him signed.

Any would-be NHLers on the Marlies couldn't ask for a better scenario from which to break through. One year removed from winning the franchise's first Calder Cup championship, the Marlies overcame a terrible first half to clinch a playoff berth in the final week of the regular season.

From there, the team rattled off seven straight wins en route to an Eastern Conference Final appearance that ended with a Game 6 loss to the Charlotte Checkers.

There were bright spots all along the way for the Marlies though. Below are five standout players who could push for NHL roster spots this fall:

Jeremy Bracco, 22, RW

2018-19 season: The disappointment of being a healthy scratch in all but four playoff games in 2017-18 wasn't easy for Bracco to shoulder, but Marlies' head coach Sheldon Keefe told Bracco during the team's Calder celebration that his time to lead the group was coming. Bracco took that encouragement to heart, delivering on his coach's expectations with a sensational 2018-19 season. Not only did Bracco pace all Marlies with 79 points (22 goals, 57 assists) in 75 regular-season games, those numbers were good for second overall in American Hockey League scoring. The Freeport, N.Y. native added another 16 points in 13 playoff games, the most of any player in the Eastern Conference. Listed at 5-foot-11 and 171 pounds, Bracco bears a physical resemblance to Marlies' NHL graduates Trevor Moore and Johnsson, both of whom carved out niches in Toronto as valuable pieces of the team's offence.

Bracco: "It's been a crazy 12 months. If anyone tells you everything is going right all the time, they're lying right to your face. So I just stayed on the course. A big thing here is the process. The way things evolve is something the front office and management have talked about, and I like to think I've had a plan since being drafted in 2015 [second round, 61st overall], and I like to think things have been going well."

Bracco scored 16 points in 13 playoff games, the most of any player in the AHL's Eastern Conference

Coach Sheldon Keefe: "He was never short on confidence, but there was some insecurity there because he hadn't proven himself at this level. Clearly he's gotten over that. I think he's more than proven himself throughout this season and throughout this playoff. It's a sign of his character that he's taken on some responsibility here given to how important he is to our team."

Timothy Liljegren, 20, RD



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2018-19 season: If it weren't for the high ankle sprain Liljegren suffered on Dec. 1, his sophomore AHL season might have looked quite different. Liljegren began the year on the Marlies' top pairing with Calle Rosen, while also contributing to both special teams. There were rumblings the Leafs were planning to recall him to the NHL around mid-winter. The ankle sprain prevented that from happening, and forced Liljegren out of representing Sweden at the World Junior Championships. He returned to the Marlies on Feb. 15 looking even better defensively than before getting hurt, but Liljegren's offensive output slowed with only one goal in the final 24 regular-season games. In all, Liljegren notched three goals and 15 assists in 43 appearances, plus five assists in 13 playoff games. While it wasn't quite the season he expected, Liljegren is a prized right-shot defenceman who is only months removed from his 19th birthday. He's also already experienced the pressure of seven playoff rounds in two seasons.

Liljegren: "After my high ankle sprain, I think I took big steps in my development and I got a lot of ice time from Sheldon. My defensive game has stepped up; that's the area I've improved the most. I stood still in my offensive side, so I need to improve on that. I want to bring the second half of my season into training camp next year."

Coach Sheldon Keefe: "Liljegren coming back from his injury the way he did and blossoming and being such a responsible and reliable defensive player to go with the offensive attributes he has, that helped us tremendously."

Rasmus Sandin, 19, RD

2018-19 season: Sandin endured a less than ideal start to his first professional season when his AHL debut was delayed due to a thumb injury. Once he got going though, Sandin was terrific, hardly looking his age (18) as he battled players with twice his experience. Just as he was really rolling, another injury befell Sandin, this time a hyperextended elbow while he was representing Sweden at the World Juniors. Sandin didn't appear to miss a beat when he returned to the Marlies on Feb. 9, earning more ice time from Keefe as the season went on and becoming an integral part of their push deep into the playoffs. Sandin finished the regular season second among Marlies' defencemen with six goals and 22 assists in 44 games, and he paced blueliners in playoff points with 10 assists in 13 outings.

Sandin: "I think on the ice, you really have to be prepared for everything, for taking a hit, giving a hit. They play quicker. Off the ice, just taking care of my body – taking care of myself a little better. [I'm] better overall, a little bit more [aware] of what I'm doing, being one step ahead."

Coach Sheldon Keefe: "Coming in as an 18-year-old first-year player, playing with a great level of poise and dealing with his own injury issues and responding well to that, that just really helped us. All [he and Liljegren] need is an opportunity to show what they can do."

Sandin finished the regular season second among Marlies' defencemen with six goals and 22 assists

Pierre Engvall, 23, LW/C

2018-19 season: Engvall started his first full AHL season on the wing, but Keefe always planned a shift to centre eventually. Engvall excelled when the time came, capitalizing on his strength and reach while showing off a strong transition game. Through his rookie campaign, Engvall produced a respectable 19 goals and 13 assists in 70 games and added another goal and six assists in 13 postseason tilts. Engvall's greatest value is in his size (6-foot-5, 214 pounds), offensive versatility and penalty-killing ability, making him an intriguing candidate for the Leafs' fourth-line centre slot.

Engvall: "I think I developed a lot in my defensive play because I got to play centre. It helped me a lot to grow in certain areas on the ice. I liked it a lot. I get to use my speed even more. I get the puck down low and get to skate it up and I like that. I think it's better for me in many areas."

Coach Sheldon Keefe: "He had an open mind [about playing centre]. He has the skill set. He's such a great skater; he's a big strong guy. The extra physical confrontations in the faceoff dot or down low in his own zone were not an issue for him and in fact I think it really helped his game. He felt more engaged in the play because he was constantly having to battle for position."

Egor Korshkov, 22, RW

2018-19 season: It took nearly three years from the time Toronto drafted Korshkov 31st overall in the 2016 NHL Entry Draft to get him playing in North America, but the Russian quickly immersed himself in a new league and a new culture. Korshkov recorded his first AHL goal in his North American debut with the Marlies on May 3, the only point he would register in nine playoff games.

Coach Sheldon Keefe: "He's certainly got size [6-foot-4, 180 pounds]. He's a presence out there, but I also like how he skates and shoots the puck...he seems to have a real good sense around the rink, on the ice and where to go and what's required."

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TSN.CA / Life outside of hockey keeps Zach Hyman balanced

Ryan Sura

There is more to Toronto Maple Leafs winger Zach Hyman than meets the eye.

Apart from writing his own award-winning, best-selling children's books and launching his own esports company, Hyman has partnered up with Schick Hydro's "Man I Am" campaign to talk about life away from hockey. The campaign is about embracing the man that you are, so having Hyman and NHL legend Gary Roberts represent the campaign seemed fitting.

"I like to do things other than just be a hockey player, so I feel like this idea really fit me," Hyman said. "... And then I got to partner with Gary Roberts, who was one of my childhood heroes growing up."

Hyman might have his off-ice ventures, but he does focus on being a hockey player first. Since his NHL debut in 2015-16, the 26-year-old has increased his points total every season. In 2018-19, Hyman tallied a career-high 21 goals and 20 assists in just 71 games for the Maple Leafs.

"Being more comfortable in your role and working on your skills," Hyman said of the strategy he uses to help him improve as an NHLer. "I think every year you learn more about yourself and what you need to do to take your game to the next level. I think it also comes with experience, but you need to put in the hard work."

Hyman's 41 points helped the Leafs to their third straight 40-win season and a fifth-place finish in the Eastern Conference. However, they could not handle the Boston Bruins in the first round of the 2019



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Stanley Cup playoffs, losing in seven games at TD Garden. The Leafs have not beaten the Bruins in a playoff series since 1959.

Despite losing at the hands of the Bruins yet again, there is a lot of hope for this young, offensive-driven team. Hyman believes every new season is a new opportunity to grow.

"We're getting closer every year. I think we've been building and getting better. We have a great group of guys and we're excited for next year," said Hyman, who suffered a torn ACL during Game 4 of the series with Boston. He underwent surgery in late April and is expected to be out at least six months, including training camp and the first few weeks of the 2019-20 season.

There is also a good chance that Hyman will not be playing with the exact same "group of guys" when he returns from his injury next season. Defenceman Nikita Zaitsev has requested a trade, and veteran forward Patrick Marleau looks to be on the move along with other pieces in the Leafs organization.

Hyman believes it's hard not to be aware of what's going on with the team – it's all part of the business.

"Every year things change, people move on and people come in," Hyman said. "It's natural during the off-season, and obviously when you play with someone for a long time you build good relationships with them. You have to try and tune out the white noise and when something happens you just have to go from there."

Tuning out the white noise is something Hyman and the Leafs have done since exiting the playoffs early and watching the Bruins go the distance. Boston is currently in a dog fight with the St. Louis Blues in the Stanley Cup Final.

"We can't focus on what would have happened," Hyman said of the Bruins making it to the Cup Final and whether Boston's successful playoff run validates Toronto's loss in any way. "I'm just focusing on the Raptors' [NBA Finals] playoff run, and cheering on my good friend Tyler Bozak."

Bozak, a member of the Blues, played with Hyman in Toronto from 2016 to 2018 in his nine-year career with the Leafs. Bozak had 40-plus points in five of his nine seasons with Toronto.

Hyman believes having a life outside of hockey has been a key to his early success. Some young players coming into the NHL have struggled with this, but the Toronto native has been able to find a balance that works for him on and off the ice.

"I think you need to have things outside of hockey – you can't have hockey fully consume your life. You need to have family, friends, and other interests. Whether I'm in the corners grinding or writing a children's book, I'm still Zach Hyman."

"I think it's important to show something outside of just being a tough hockey player."

Hyman is an open book with most of his interests outside of hockey, but when asked if he has any personal goals for next hockey season, he's keeping it to himself.

"Sure I do, but they're personal."

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TSN.CA / Searching for the NHL's potential No-Stats Hall of Famers

Travis Yost

This week, NBC Sports' NBA Insider Tom Haberstroh wrote a fascinating piece on Golden State Warriors swingman Andre Iguodala and why he is worthy of enshrinement in the Basketball Hall of Fame.

On the surface, Iguodala is a hard sell for the Hall of Fame. He has one All-Star Game appearance and has never been named to an All-NBA team. But Haberstroh points out that more modern metrics suggest Iguodala has been an emphatic difference maker over the course of his career.

As one example, Haberstroh points out that Iguodala's plus-minus – which is a much more valuable measure in the NBA than it is in the NHL due to scoring frequency – is the second highest number recorded in the NBA Finals since 1997 (he is surrounded on the list by names like Manu Ginobili, Tim Duncan, Draymond Green and Stephen Curry.)

This led me to wonder about similarly situated players in the NHL. Unfortunately, a direct comparison to the league's year-end two All-Star teams doesn't work all that well. (The NBA sends 3.1 per cent of their players to an All-NBA team, nearly double that of the NHL. Positional requirements for voting are also more rigid in the NHL.) We do have the Hart Trophy though, awarded annually to the player judged most valuable to his team. About 25 players receive one or more votes for the award each year, so we have considerably more sampling data on the players the Professional Hockey Writers' Association has valued over time.

We can measure the historical votes against some player performance measure. I am going to leverage a goals above replacement model because of its ability to encompass a player's offensive and defensive impact better than any other singular metric, but similar exercises could be conducted with a variety of other measures. (I think the conclusions would generally be similar.)

First, some rules. The data we are sampling on is over a 10-year period – from 2008-09 to 2017-18. We know that usage is an important data point when determining Hall of Fame candidacy, so we will only look at players with at least 10,000 minutes of total ice time.

From there, we can look at each player's goals above replacement value on a raw basis and per 60 minute basis against all of his peers. Lastly, we will only consider players who have received 10 or fewer Hart Trophy votes. (Note: this means names like Ryan Suter, Shea Weber, Patrick Marleau, and P.K. Subban types are omitted from consideration.)

Applying all of those rules, we are left with the following 'No-Stats Hall of Famer' candidates. Select at your own discretion, but I think this is an interesting mix of players who probably have some argument to make it to the Hall of Fame, and players who have just been underrated for a very long time:

The encouraging part about this list is it is broadly inclusive of players who have (a) had lengthy and productive careers; and (b) are regularly excluded from the significant individual award consideration, either because of their position, their team's performance over the years or the performance of potentially superior teammates over the years.

The big three names here – Washington's T.J. Oshie, Pittsburgh's Patric Hornqvist, and Calgary's Mark Giordano – are interesting for



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different reasons. Oshie has a Stanley Cup and some lofty counting numbers that generally correlate with 'star' reputation, but hasn't accumulated anything of note in terms of individual hardware. Beyond that, superstar players on his teams have generally overshadowed Oshie – the most obvious examples include Alexander Ovechkin and Nicklas Backstrom in Washington, but Paul Stastny and an in-his-prime David Backes in St. Louis also cloaked Oshie's performance in the early years of his career.

It might be Patric Hornqvist, though, who looks like the best Iguodala comparison. Despite being a consistent 20-plus goal scorer and two-time Stanley Cup winner over his 11-year career, Hornqvist has rarely earned proper praise. From 2008 to 2018 at even strength, Hornqvist has been 94 goals better than the opponent while on the ice. That puts him right in between names like Corey Perry and Steven Stamkos near the top of the on-ice goal differential leaderboard. The goal differentials have been largely driven from his defensive touch, which is always tougher to properly value: Hornqvist's teams have only conceded about two goals per 60 minutes at even strength while on the ice, which puts him 10th best amongst qualified forwards – decimal points behind Patrice Bergeron and ahead of Anze Kopitar.

Mark Giordano has earned more praise and fanfare of late – he finished as a Norris Trophy finalist in 2018-19, though it's worth noting that this was Giordano's first nod for consideration as the league's best defender. On top of that, Giordano has never won a Stanley Cup and was left off of both of Team Canada's gold-medal teams at the 2010 and 2014 Winter Olympics. But Giordano has always been an advanced stats darling, in large part because of his massively favourable impact to team shot differentials, scoring chance differentials and goal differentials over the course of his career. Giordano excels in all areas of the ice and does the little things as well as anyone in the league. Those quiet impacts have made him arguably Calgary's most valuable player since entering the league as a regular in 2006-07.

Those three names (along with Justin Williams further down the board) jump off the page to me. How about you?

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TSN.CA / How Doug Armstrong almost blew up the Blues

Frank Seravalli

BOSTON — Imagine, for one second, Brayden Schenn skating in the Stanley Cup Final –wearing the spoked-B for the Boston Bruins instead of the Blue Note.

It almost happened, or so he thinks. Schenn said he got a call on U.S. Thanksgiving in November and believed he was being traded from the Blues to the Bruins.

"How close? I'm not too sure. But there were definitely rumours that I was coming here," Schenn said. "It's funny how it works out. Blues versus Boston in the Final. It's crazy."

The permutations are indeed crazy. If Schenn became a Bruin, maybe Charlie Coyle is watching this Final from his hometown of Weymouth, Mass., instead of scoring in it.

Schenn was far from alone. Make no mistake: the St. Louis Blues were open for business after a dismal start to the season. GM Doug Armstrong had his finger on the trigger to blow up the Blues.

"You talk to your agent. They know about it, too. You get put up on Frank Seravalli's Trade Bait board all the time," Schenn told a pack of reporters at the Cup Final's Media Day. "There were some dark days at the beginning of the year."

In mid-December, six Blues were on the TSN Trade Bait board. Captain Alex Pietrangelo was linked to the Toronto Maple Leafs. Schenn to the Bruins. Alex Steen's name was out there. Veterans Jay Bouwmeester and Pat Maroon were likely ready to be flipped as trade deadline rentals.

"You try to stay away from reading things or listening to things," Pietrangelo said Wednesday. "Maybe that part is a little bit easier for me because if anything was going to happen it would have to go through me anyway"

Only top prospects were considered off-limits. Rival managers said even when it came to sniper Vladimir Tarasenko, Armstrong's response was: "Make me an offer."

Amazingly, the same roster that Armstrong assembled last summer is the one that will take the ice in Game 5 on Thursday night at TD Garden with a chance to inch one win closer to the franchise's first Stanley Cup. Tarasenko is now perhaps the front-runner to win the Conn Smythe Trophy among the Blues.

Go figure. Sometimes the best trades are the ones you don't make.

In this case, Armstrong admitted that he may have been saved from himself.

"You've got to be honest. There's not many trades that time of year, so even if you want to do things, it's hard to find a dance partner," Armstrong told TSN on the night the Blues clinched the West. "That probably made it easier to stand pat."

Around the time rumours were swirling in mid-December, days after Colton Parayko topped the TSN Trade Bait board, Blues players said Armstrong held a meeting with the leadership core to inform them he was "doubling down" on the roster.

Alternate captain Jaden Schwartz recalls that meeting occurring on Dec. 17 in Edmonton. The Blues were in 28th place.

"Things weren't going well. We weren't happy with where we were, he wasn't either," Schwartz said of his GM. "He told us he still believed in us and he wanted to stick with our group."

Schwartz believed that had a calming effect, at least for those who didn't have the benefit of a no-trade clause.

"We responded really well after that," Schwartz said. "It was good for everyone to hear. At that time of the year, there was obviously a lot of rumours going around. I think he did it just to connect with us a little bit and let us know how he feels."

Armstrong told his players he wasn't going to sell then, but by the time he went on a scouting trip to Russia in early February, he still wasn't sure. The Blues traded a Top 10-protected first-round pick to Buffalo in the Ryan O'Reilly trade on July 1, 2018 and he wasn't sure whether that clause would need to kick in.

He watched the Blues' turning point on television in Russia.

"To me the turning point was that Florida game [on Feb. 5], coming back in the third period, winning, and then going into Tampa and winning 1-0," Armstrong said. "I think we beat Nashville back-to-back and we were no longer sellers after that."



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The season before, Armstrong irked the Blues' core when he dealt Paul Stastny to Winnipeg on deadline day in 2018 while his team was just one point out of the playoff chase.

"You never know when you're going to have a chance to have an extended run, but I knew last year we didn't have a chance," Armstrong said. "Thankfully, we never got to that part in February."

Instead, Armstrong added Michael Del Zotto from Anaheim for a sixth-round pick as insurance on defence. It was his only trade of the season.

"I'm lucky that we didn't do anything," Armstrong said. "I'm very proud of the guys that this team came through the way they did."

So is Schenn, even though it apparently would have worked out well either way.

"He didn't panic. He held us together, believed in the group that he put together in the summer time," Schenn said. "I'm glad I'm here."

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USA TODAY / St. Louis Blues score after uncalled tripping penalty, win Game 5 of Stanley Cup Final

Mike Brehm and Kevin Allen, USA TODAY Published 11:50 p.m. ET June 6, 2019 | Updated 2:10 a.m. ET June 7, 2019

Boston Bruins coach Bruce Cassidy said the NHL is "getting a black eye with their officiating" after an "egregious" missed call led to the St. Louis Blues' winning goal Thursday.

St. Louis' Tyler Bozak took out the legs of Boston's Noel Acciari, sending him hard to the ice during the third period.

The referees didn't call tripping, and the Blues maintained control of the puck while Acciari stayed on the ice. Ryan O'Reilly passed to David Perron, who scored past goalie Tuukka Rask for a 2-0 lead in Game 5 of the Stanley Cup Final on Thursday night.

"It's right in front of the official," Cassidy said. "It's a slew foot. Our guy's gone. The spotter took him out of the game for a possible concussion. I mean, it's blatant. It had a big effect on the game."

Just before the goal, there was no penalty on Bozak here.. Play continued, even though Acciari appeared injured, because the Blues possessed the puck. pic.twitter.com/BTPff2NCZj

— Shayna (@hayyyshayyy) June 7, 2019

That ended up being the game-winner when Boston's Jake DeBrusk scored to bring the Bruins within a goal.

"It was just a puck battle, I don't know," Bozak said of his hit. "I saw the puck there and went for it. He was down. I don't know really know what happened, to be honest with you. Yeah, we'll take it."

Bruins executive Cam Neely reacted in anger and angry fans threw debris on the ice.

Cam Neely was not a fan of that call. pic.twitter.com/mHzE7lyxB

— Conor Ryan (@ConorRyan_93) June 7, 2019

"I don't blame him," analyst Mike Milbury said on NBC. "You work all year long to eliminate 29 teams to get yourself in a position to be two out of three in the Stanley Cup Final and an official blows a call as badly as that was blown. That's just unforgivable."

Cassidy said the narrative in the series seemed to have changed after Blues coach Craig Berube complained about the officiating after the Bruins went 4-for-4 on the power play in a 7-2 win in Game 3.

The NHL said it wouldn't address Thursday's controversy.

"We don't make comments on judgment calls within games," NHL director of officiating Stephen Walkom said. "There are hundreds of judgment calls in every game. The official on the play, he viewed it and he didn't view it as a penalty at the time."

St. Louis' Tyler Bozak, who tripped Noel Acciari, celebrates a goal by David Perron.

Even though Acciari appeared to be hurt, the Blues still had possession of the puck, and under NHL rules, referees had to allow play to continue until the Bruins gained control.

A similar play happened in the second round when Blues defenseman Colton Parayko ripped a big shot at Dallas Stars goalie Ben Bishop, hitting him in the collarbone and causing the goalie to drop to the ice. Alex Steen got control of the rebound and skated into position for a shot that was deflected by Jaden Schwartz past a motionless Bishop for a 3-1 lead.

The Blues, who lead the Final 3-2, are one win away from their first Stanley Cup title and can wrap up the series at home on Sunday night.

"It was egregious," Cassidy said of the non-call. "But we're moving on. We're getting ready for Game 6."

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USA TODAY / Stanley Cup Finals: Jordan Binnington helps Blues move one win from first championship

Kevin Allen, USA TODAY Published 11:04 p.m. ET June 6, 2019 | Updated 2:11 a.m. ET June 7, 2019

BOSTON – Veteran Zdeno Chara's inspirational performance in Game 5 of the Stanley Cup Final was trumped by rookie Jordan Binnington's "unreal" effort.

That's what St. Louis Blues defenseman Colton Parayko called Binnington's 38-save night as the Blues beat the Boston Bruins 2-1 and moved within one win of winning their first Stanley Cup in the franchise's 52-year history.

"Unbelievable," Parayko said of Binnington. "Obviously, he won one for us here. It was a huge game by him. Very impressive. I could talk about that performance all day. It was unreal. That was awesome."

The Blues, leading 3-2 in the best-of-seven championship series, can lift the Cup if they can beat Boston in Game 6 Sunday in St. Louis.



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The Bruins were expecting a big lift when Chara was cleared to play, even though the captain was hit in the face with a shot in Game 4. Reports said Chara suffered a broken jaw, but the Bruins have not confirmed that. He started the game on defense.

St. Louis Blues goaltender Jordan Binnington dominated Game 5 with 38 saves in a 2-1 victory.

Inspired by his presence, the Bruins poured 17 shots on Binnington in the first 20 minutes and he stopped them all.

"It wasn't our best game of the series, but sometimes your goalie needs to make some big saves to change the momentum and he did that," said Blues defenseman Alex Pietrangelo.

Binnington already has earned a reputation for being able to stay calm in hectic moments.

"On this stage. Rookie goalie. That's pretty impressive," Pietrangelo said.

Pietrangelo said the Bruins "everything at the net" and he did "everything he needed to do."

"They threw a lot of the stuff from tough angles, but he was good at clearing the rebounds," Pietrangelo said.

David Perron said Binnington refuses to allow his emotions to get too high, even when the game is over.

"Even at the end, the buzzer ends and everyone's excited," Perron said. "He's moved on already."

The Bruins were trying to move on after Game 5, but they were still upset about an uncalled tripping penalty by St. Louis center Tyler Bozak that led to Perron giving the Blues a 2-0 lead.

"What was being said on the bench was you missed an (expletive) call," Bruins coach Bruce Cassidy said.

"I think we all have the same opinion about it," Bruins center Patrice Bergeron said. "I don't need to expand more except it is what it is."

The Boston fan base is upset because calls seem to be going against the Bruins since Blues coach Craig Berube complained about the officiating after Game 3.

Do the Bruins believe that had an impact?

"I hope not," Bergeron said. "I hope not, because that shouldn't change anything."

Even after that non-call, the Bruins had time to come back. They did cut the lead to 2-1 on a goal by Jake DeBrusk.

Now, the Blues' mission is to stay focused on the prize. The Bruins have already beaten them once in St. Louis in this series.

"The way that we'll have success," Perron said, "is by playing our game and not listening to the noise the next couple days and really be dialed in and focused to provide a better than tonight."

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USA TODAY / Bruins' Zdeno Chara joins tradition of playing through pain, starts Game 5 with jaw injury

Kevin Allen, USA TODAY Published 12:07 p.m. ET June 6, 2019 | Updated 8:40 p.m. ET June 6, 2019

BOSTON — Embracing the NHL's long tradition of playing through pain in the postseason, Boston Bruins captain Zdeno Chara started Game 5 of the Stanley Cup Final after reports say he suffered a broken jaw in Game 4.

Chara, 42, the team's shutdown defenseman, was hit in the face by St. Louis Blues forward Brayden Schenn's shot in Game 4. The only information coach Bruce Cassidy has provided is that Chara has stitches to close a cut and that he needs dental work.

Chara, wearing a full face shield, was wildly cheered by Bruins fans, who shouted "Chara, Chara, Chara" before the national anthem.

In case Chara struggles, the Bruins have inserted Steven Kampfer as a seventh defenseman. Forward David Backes is out of the lineup.

TRADE HINTS: Here are some players who could be moved soon

Bruins defenseman Zdeno Chara, wearing a full face shield, checks Blues left wing Jaden Schwartz in the first period.

Through the years, several players have overcome broken bones to play in the Final. In 1964, Toronto Maple Leafs defenseman Bobby Baun had to be carried off the ice in Game 6 of the Stanley Cup Final after blocking a shot with his leg. He refused to be taken for an X-ray. Instead, he rejoined his team and scored an overtime goal to beat the Detroit Red Wings. He also played Game 7, even though it was determined his leg was fractured.

"He's an incredibly tough man and he's willing to play through anything," Boston forward Brad Marchand said of Chara. "It shows so much character in him. ... There is a reason why he is still playing and he's a Hall of Fame player. He's willing to put his body through anything to win."

Because of Chara's facial injury, he could not talk to the media Thursday morning. Bruins personnel took two questions to him from the media and he provided these responses:

► What's your biggest challenge in skating with this type of injury?

"At this time of the playoffs, everyone has injuries and there are challenges that you have to overcome to play," Chara said. "I'm no different than any player on either team."

► How do you weigh the risk of further injury when deciding whether to play?

"You don't think about that," Chara said. "You think about playing. You don't go into a game thinking you might get hurt."

Cassidy said Thursday morning that a doctor would have to clear Chara and then it was the defenseman's decision on whether to play.

"He was brought up as a tough, hard-working person," Marchand said. "...you never know what he's playing through because he keeps everything quiet to himself. He's not worrying about complaining about injuries. He's willing to play with one leg, one arm, it doesn't matter."

Marchand said Chara's reputation for playing through pain pre-dates his arrival with the Bruins in 2006.

"Not everyone has that," Marchand said. "You can't teach that. You can't push that on people. It's either in it or it's not. He is able to play



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through a lot more pain than most people – probably anyone in this league. I know I couldn't do what he does.”

Defenseman Matt Grzelcyk, who has been in concussion protocol since being injured in Game 2 of the Final, sat out again.

“I'm just taking it day-by-day and listening to what doctors tell me,” Grzelcyk said.

St. Louis and the Bruins are tied 2-2 in the series.

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USA TODAY / Stanley Cup Final: TV, fast facts for Boston Bruins-St. Louis Blues in Game 5

Lila Bromberg, USA TODAY Published 6:00 a.m. ET June 6, 2019

After going down 2-1 to the Boston Bruins in the Stanley Cup Final, the St. Louis Blues evened the series in Game 4 to keep their hopes of a first title within reach.

The Blues could have easily been deflated after a 7-2 blowout loss in Game 3, but instead came out firing to score within 43 seconds of the puck drop on Monday. Ryan O'Reilly scored that goal, as well as the game-winner in the third period to seal a 4-2 victory, and he has two assists in the series as well. Vladimir Tarasenko has also been crucial for St. Louis, with three goals in the finals.

Charlie Coyle has been a force for Boston throughout the series, scoring goals in each of the last three games, with an assist in the mix as well. Though he's been solid in goal in the Bruins' playoff run, goalie Tuukka Rask allowed more goals in Game 4 than any contest in the series, so he'll look to rebound on home ice.

Game 5 has proven to be pivotal in the Final, as historically the winner has proceeded to take home the Stanley Cup 18 of 25 times (72%).

And though they have a home crowd to support them, the Bruins enter with uncertainty surrounding captain Zdeno Chara, who was hit in the face by a puck in the second period of Game 4.

Boston Bruins center Charlie Coyle (13) and right wing David Backes (42) defend St. Louis Blues left wing Zach Sanford (12) during the first period in Game Four of the 2019 Stanley Cup Final at Enterprise Center.

The basics

When: Thursday, 8 p.m. ET

Where: TD Garden in Boston

TV channel: NBC

Streaming: NBC Sports app and NBCSports.com

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