



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • June 10, 2019

## THE NEWS & OBSERVER

Running on fumes, Calder Cup champs: Checkers capture hockey title not a day too soon

By Steve Lyttle

Something basic drove the Charlotte Checkers to their Calder Cup-clinching 5-3 victory Saturday night over the Chicago Wolves:

The Checkers were ready for the season to be over.

"We had no intention of going back home and going to practice on Monday or Tuesday, whatever it would have been," Charlotte goaltender Alex Nedeljkovic said after his team captured the American Hockey League's top prize in Rosemont, Ill.

"We're exhausted," coach Mike Vellucci added. "We didn't want to play any more games."

The Checkers accomplished two goals – winning the franchise's first AHL championship and starting summer vacation – by playing solid defense for 57 minutes, and then outlasting the Wolves in a wild finish.

After spotting Chicago a one-game lead in the best-of-7 series, Charlotte won four straight — including three on the road — capping a 15-4 record through four rounds of playoffs.

The Checkers knew that losing Saturday would have meant a return to Charlotte and several more days of practice before Game 6 at Bojangles' Coliseum on Thursday.

Instead, the team will host a public celebration 7 p.m. Monday at the coliseum.

"Hockey-wise, it's a grind," Vellucci said. "It's June whatever it is. I don't know if it's a weekend or a weekday. I'm tired, the players are tired."

"Our guys wanted it really bad. I was a little nervous that we wanted it too much, but we came out and played the right way, and they (Wolves) played great too."

Andrew Poturalski scored just 1:31 into the game, giving Charlotte a 1-0 lead, and Morgan Geekie's goal at the 8:25 mark of the second period made it 2-0.

The Wolves battled back, cutting Charlotte's lead to 2-1 on a Brooks Macek goal with 25 seconds left in the second. Trevor Carrick's slap-shot goal about six minutes into the third period put the Checkers up 3-1, and that's how it stayed until the wild finish.

Chicago pulled goaltender Oscar Dansk for an extra skater with 3:20 left, and the Wolves scored 14 seconds later on a Gage Quinney goal.

Fending off the swarming Wolves, Poturalski stole the puck near center ice and scored an empty net goal for a 4-2 lead with 1:44 to play.

The Wolves weren't finished. They made it 4-3 on a Cody Glass goal with 38 seconds left. The Checkers responded with a Zach Nastasiuk empty-net score with 15 seconds to play.

Then the Checkers won control of the puck, and seconds later, Nedeljkovic began leaping at one end of the Allstate Arena rink, and his teammates were flinging sticks into the air and celebrating at center ice.

"To get the first championship in Checkers history and do it for (team owner) Michael Kahn and the city of Charlotte and all the guys in the room, we truly deserved it," said Poturalski, who led the AHL in postseason scoring and was named the playoffs' most valuable player.

"We worked our a--- off for that all year."

### THREE WHO MATTERED

Andrew Poturalski, Charlotte: His two goals gave him 12 for the playoffs, and he was named the postseason most valuable player.

Alex Nedeljkovic, Charlotte: The AHL's goaltender of the year turned away 26 shots and made several spectacular saves in the second and third periods.

Morgan Geekie, Charlotte: Geekie, the AHL's leading rookie scorer in the playoffs, added a goal and an assist to his postseason total.

### WORTH MENTIONING

- The Checkers became the fifth team in the AHL's 82 seasons to win the finals after losing the opening game at home. The last to do so was Hershey in 2011.

- Just for the record ... the Calder Cup is named for Frank Calder, who was the NHL's first president (1917-1940) and is credited for helping launch the AHL. The cup is 24 inches tall and weighs 25 pounds.

- While the Checkers had never won the Calder Cup, they won the Eastern Hockey League playoffs in 1957, 1971 and 1972; the Southern Hockey League in 1975 and 1976; and the ECHL in 1996. The Charlotte Knights won the Class AAA baseball's International League in 1993 and 1999, and the city also had champions at lower minor league levels in baseball and soccer.

### THEY SAID IT

"I love every one of these guys. Everybody says that, but I mean it. It was very emotional." – Checkers coach Mike Vellucci.



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## Champions: Charlotte Checkers hold off Wolves to win their first AHL Calder Cup

By Steve Lyttle

The Charlotte Checkers won the American Hockey League's Calder Cup on Saturday night, scoring two empty-net goals in the final two minutes and beating the Chicago Wolves 5-3.

The Checkers, who had the AHL's best overall record, won the best-of-7 series in five games. After losing the series opener, Charlotte won four in a row – the last three at Allstate Arena in Rosemont, Illinois.

It is Charlotte's first championship in the AHL, hockey's top minor league. The Checkers, an affiliate of the NHL's Carolina Hurricanes, are in their ninth AHL season.

The game was a tightly-played defensive struggle for the opening 54 minutes, then turned into a shootout in the closing six minutes.

Charlotte goaltender Alex Nedeljkovic was brilliant for much of the game, making several outstanding saves. But in the end, the Checkers needed their offense to survive.

Trevor Carrick scored on a slap shot with 6:15 left in the third period, giving the Checkers what seemed to be a safe 3-1 lead.

But the Wolves pulled goaltender Oscar Dansk with 3:20 remaining, and Gage Quinney scored on a rebound 14 seconds later, cutting Charlotte's lead to 3-2.

With the Wolves still holding a six-to-five skater advantage, the Checkers' Andrew Poturalski stole the puck at center ice and flicked it into the empty Chicago goal, giving Charlotte a 4-2 lead. That goal was the 12th in the playoffs for Poturalski, who won the Jack A. Butterfield Trophy as the most valuable player in the playoffs.

Once again, the Wolves came back, as Cody Glass scored on a slap shot with 38 seconds to play. Chicago desperately tried to get a tying goal in the closing seconds, but Zach Nastasiuk stole the puck and drilled it down the rink, into the empty Chicago net for the final goal.

As they had done in three of the first four games of the finals, the Checkers jumped to an early lead.

The game's opening goal came from Poturalski, who took a pass from Aleksii Saarela and beat Dansk on a low shot.

The Checkers outshot Chicago 13-6 in the period, but Nedeljkovic made several big saves in the period.

Morgan Geekie, the leading rookie goal-scorer in the playoffs, put Charlotte ahead 2-0 with 11:35 remaining in the second period. A Chicago defender tried to clear the puck away, but it bounced out to Geekie, standing 6 feet from the goal. He smacked the puck through Dansk's legs.

Nedeljkovic made a big glove save on Curtis McKenzie with 31 seconds left in the period, but Brooks Macek scored for

Chicago six seconds later, deflecting in a shot by Tomas Hyka.

### 3 WHO MATTERED

Andrew Poturalski, Charlotte: Named the Calder Cup playoffs' most valuable player, Poturalski scored two goals, including what turned out to be the game-winner. He finishes the playoffs with 12 goals and 23 points.

Alex Nedeljkovic, Charlotte: Nedeljkovic made 26 saves, including one on a Tomas Hyka breakaway in the third period. Nedeljkovic came out of the goal and smothered the puck.

Trevor Carrick, Charlotte: His slap-shot goal with 6:15 remaining in the third period gave Charlotte a 3-1 lead.

### CHECKERS PLAN CHAMPIONSHIP RECEPTION

The Checkers will host a public reception for the Calder Cup champion team at 7 p.m. Monday at Bojangles' Coliseum. Parking will be free, and there will be no admission charge.

Checkers officials said there will be photo opportunities with the Calder Cup and autograph sessions with players.

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### WORTH MENTIONING

- Saturday's game drew a crowd of 8,535 to Allstate Arena. It was the Wolves' biggest turnout in the playoffs.

- Both of the Calder Cup finalists are good at maintaining a lead in the third period. Prior to Saturday night, the Checkers were 48-0 this season when leading after two periods. Chicago was 43-2, although the Wolves lost Thursday night after holding a 3-2 lead over Charlotte entering the third period.

- The Wolves were missing two players due to injuries Saturday night – Daniel Carr, the league MVP this season; and Stefan Matteau, who scored the winning goal in Game 1.

- Chicago was trying to become the first team in 70 years to win the Calder Cup after falling behind 3-1 in the finals.

- Just for the record ... the Calder Cup is named for Frank Calder, who was the NHL's first president (1917-1940) and is credited for helping launch the AHL. The cup is 24 inches tall and weighs 25 pounds.

- While the Checkers had never won the Calder Cup, they won the Eastern Hockey League playoffs in 1957, 1971 and 1972; the Southern Hockey League in 1975 and 1976; and the ECHL in 1996. The Charlotte Knights won the Class AAA International League in 1993 and 1999, and the city also had champions at lower minor-league levels in baseball and soccer.



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## THE ATHLETIC

### LeBrun Notebook: Ducks contemplate parting ways with Corey Perry

By Pierre LeBrun

Corey Perry's days could be coming to an end with the Anaheim Ducks.

Sources have told The Athletic that the Ducks are exploring the trade market for the 34-year-old winger and barring that, a potential buyout.

Ducks GM Bob Murray has been keeping both Perry and his agent abreast of the situation and there's no question the Ducks want to treat the former Hart Trophy winner with the utmost respect throughout this process.

But the reality is that Anaheim is going with a younger roster and the timing is right for this change.

Perry has two more years left on his contract at an \$8.625-million cap hit through 2020-21, so finding a trade partner may not be easy, even with the Ducks eating some of that contract in a potential trade.

As stated above, if a trade can't be worked out, a buyout has also been contemplated, which would make Perry an unrestricted free agent.

It should be noted that Perry's full no-move clause gives him control over any trade but not a buyout. The NHL's first buyout window opens June 15 and goes until June 30. There's another buyout window in August but only for teams with salary arbitration cases.

Perhaps a change of scenery will spark a rebirth in Perry, who has been slowed by injuries over the past few seasons, subsequently affecting his production.

#### Expanded video review

The NHL-NHLPA Competition Committee meets on Tuesday in Toronto to discuss expanding video review and sources indicate the NHL will arrive with a plan already ready to examine.

Commissioner Gary Bettman, Deputy Commissioner Bill Daly plus Director of Officiating Stephen Walkom and executive vice-president Colin Campbell met between Game 1 and 2 of the Cup final at the league office in New York, to further hash out a plan for expanded video review; the latest of an ongoing discussion league officials have been having on the subject.

The next step requires input from the players via the Competition Committee and the league's 31 GMs on June 20 in Vancouver.

Of the ideas being discussed, two of interest to me are: Refs having headsets — or an earpiece — throughout the game connecting them directly to the Situation Room in Toronto. And the second is, of course, what specific items will be added for video review? I would venture to guess some of the plays that will be on the table are pucks over the glass, or pucks off the mesh, or yes, hand passes, etc. But let's be clear that expanded video review won't include judgement calls, so the

Tyler Bozak trip from Game 5 would not come under that umbrella no matter what.

Also of interest to me is whether retired NHL refs will get added to the Situation Room to be the person talking directly to on-ice officials during games. I know it's been talked about, but I'm not sure whether it's going to happen or not. I would think that's what on-ice officials would prefer.

Other rumblings from around the NHL

- Outside of the Ducks, another SoCal club looking at a potential buyout is the Kings with Dion Phaneuf. Preferably L.A. would find a trade partner but if not, sources have confirmed that Kings GM Rob Blake is contemplating a buyout for the 34-year-old defenseman. He has two more years on his deal at a \$5.25-million cap hit through the 2020-21 season.
- Fresh off the Jeff Skinner signing, the Sabres certainly aren't ready to rest on their laurels. Word is they're targeting both a second-line center and a top-six winger via trade or free agency. One player I hear they kicked tires on was Jason Zucker in Minnesota. I wonder if Nashville would offer Kyle Turris at a rebate if that would also interest Buffalo?
- Justin Faulk has one year remaining on his contract and I hear the Hurricanes have already reached out to his camp, led by agent Brian Bartlett, to see if there's any interest in entering negotiations on an extension this summer. I do believe Faulk has some interest in doing that so we'll see where it goes. Speaking of the Hurricanes, word is Carolina might be willing to keep all three of their right-handed stud blueliners, depending on how the offseason market plays out. In other words, they're no longer adamant about needing to move one. But obviously if a team stepped up with an intriguing offer, they would listen. Despite the change in thinking, if Faulk does sign an extension, I would assume he would make sure to have a no-trade clause in his deal.
- The Winnipeg Jets continue to hear from teams on defenceman Jacob Trouba, who will become an RFA this summer. I don't think anything is imminent but that will probably change around the draft in Vancouver when things begin to heat up. At some point, it would make sense for the Jets to get Trouba's agent Kurt Overhardt involved in the process, given that trading Trouba with a signed extension would bring Winnipeg more value in return. At this point, however, I'm told Overhardt hasn't yet been given the green light to talk directly to teams.
- My TSN colleague Darren Dreger on Insider Trading reported on Saturday that the Arizona Coyotes intend to be aggressive on the market this summer



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and could be a player for pending UFA Matt Duchene. The Columbus Blue Jackets remain in discussions with agent Pat Brisson on the star centre as well. It's not completely out of the question Duchene re-signs in Columbus.

- Dreger also reported of the interest the Vancouver Canucks have in Milan Lucic. The most obvious trade fit is Loui Eriksson going the other way, two unwanted contracts exchanging hands. It should be noted that both players have no-trade clauses in their contracts. I think Lucic would most definitely waive to go home to Vancouver. Not sure on Eriksson and Edmonton but it's worth pointing out that the Swedish veteran played his best hockey under new Oilers coach Dave Tippett in Dallas. Eriksson has three more years left on his deal at a \$6-million cap hit

although the real cash being paid out goes down to \$5 million next season then \$4 million each of the last two years. Lucic, meanwhile, has four more years left on his deal at a \$6-million cap hit; the real cash is \$6 million next season, \$4 million in 2020-21, \$5 million in 21-22 and \$4 million in 22-23.

- There have been preliminary discussions between the Flyers and Kevin Hayes' camp led by agent Bob Murray, but nothing too serious just yet. It's really going to come down to whether Hayes, this close to July 1, is ready to forgo going to market and maximizing his options. Perhaps he decides Philadelphia represents as good an option as any and signs with the Flyers, but it's just as possible he decides to go to market.



## Charlotte Checkers Win Calder Cup

Checkers top Wolves 5-3 in Game 5 to capture first championship

by Michael Smith

The Charlotte Checkers are Calder Cup champions.

The Checkers bested the Chicago Wolves by a 5-3 score in Game 5 to capture their first ever American Hockey League championship title. After dropping Game 1 of the Finals in overtime, the Checkers went on to win four straight games, including the last three on the road, en route to the Calder Cup.

"We want to win no matter what. We want to develop, and we want to win. You develop winners. That's what's going to help you at the next level," head coach Mike Vellucci said earlier in the series. "It's great to develop, and we also want to win."

Charlotte finished atop the AHL regular season standings with a 51-17-7-1 record and 110 points. The Checkers then eliminated Providence (3-1), Hersey (4-0) and the defending champion Toronto Marlies (4-2) in their path to the Finals.

"Everyone wants to play in the playoffs. You dream about that when you're a kid. You're playing mini-sticks, and you're thinking Game 7 in overtime, you want the puck on your stick. That's what you dream about," captain Patrick Brown said ahead of Game 1. "We've got a great group here, and everyone is really excited to be playing playoff hockey."

Andrew Poturalski, the team's leading scorer in both the regular season and playoffs, got the Checkers on the board first in the decisive Game 5.

Rookie Morgan Geekie, who is just 20 years old, scored his eighth goal and 17th point of the playoffs to stretch Charlotte's lead to two in the second period.

Though the Wolves got a goal back late in the second period, Trevor Carrick reestablished the Checkers' two-goal lead in the third period.

Backed by Alex Nedeljkovic's 26 saves in net and a pair of empty-net goals, the Checkers fended off a frantic late push from Chicago - Charlotte was an unbelievable 49-0, including 11-0 in the playoffs, when leading after two periods this season - in a 4-3 Game 5 final.



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## Charlotte wins AHL's Calder Cup with Game 5 victory against Chicago

Playoff MVP Poturalski scores two goals to boost Hurricanes affiliate to championship

by Patrick Williams

ROSEMONT, Ill. -- The Charlotte Checkers won the American Hockey League championship with a 5-3 victory against the Chicago Wolves in Game 5 of the Calder Cup Finals at Allstate Arena on Saturday.

The Checkers, the AHL affiliate of the Carolina Hurricanes, won the final four games of the series after losing Game 1 4-3 in overtime. They went 15-4 on a postseason run that also included series wins against the Providence Bruins, Hershey Bears and defending Calder Cup champion Toronto Marlies.

"I know our guys wanted it really bad," coach Mike Vellucci said. "I didn't want to play any more games."

Checkers forward Andrew Poturalski won the Jack A. Butterfield Trophy as MVP of the Calder Cup Playoffs. Playing with a broken foot, Poturalski had 23 points (12 goals, 11 assists) in 18 games, including two goals in Game 5.

"We just expect to win, and we went out and did it," Poturalski said. "I couldn't be more proud of all the guys."

Charlotte became the first Hurricanes/Hartford Whalers affiliate to win the Calder Cup since 1991 (Springfield Indians). Chicago, the AHL affiliate of the Vegas Golden Knights, reached the Calder Cup Finals in the NHL team's second season.

Alex Nedeljkovic made 26 saves for the Checkers and finished 10-4 with a 2.31 goals-against average and .916 save percentage in 15 playoff games.

Morgan Geekie, Trevor Carrick and Zach Nastasiuk scored for Charlotte, which was the AHL's regular-season champion with 110 points and a league-high 51 wins. Geekie led rookies in the playoffs with 18 points (eight goals, 10 assists) in 19 games.

Brooks Macek, Gage Quinney and Cody Glass scored for the Wolves.

Oscar Dansk made 27 saves for Chicago, including on several prime scoring chances for Charlotte in the first period. The 25-year-old led the playoffs in games (19) and tied Nedeljkovic for wins (10).

Poturalski gave the Checkers a 1-0 lead with a tap-in off a pass from Aleksii Saarela on the rush 1:31 into the game. It was the fourth time in the series that Charlotte scored in the first four minutes (2:19 into Game 1, 3:50 into Game 2, and 1:51 into Game 3).

Geekie made it 2-0 with an unassisted goal at 8:25 of the second period before Macek got Chicago to within 2-1 with 25 seconds left in the period when he tipped Tomas Hyka's shot from the slot.

Carrick scored with a shot from left point at 6:15 of the third to make it 3-1.

Quinney got the Wolves to within 3-2 at 16:54.

After Poturalski gave Charlotte a 4-2 lead with an empty-net goal with 1:47 left, Glass made it 4-3 with 39 seconds left.

Nastasiuk scored into an empty net with 16 seconds left for the 5-3 final.



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## SPORTSNET™

### Charlotte Checkers beat Chicago Wolves in five games to win Calder Cup

By Josh Beneteau

For the first time in franchise history, the Charlotte Checkers are Calder Cup champions.

The Carolina Hurricanes' AHL affiliate captured the title with a 5-3 win over the Chicago Wolves — affiliated with the Vegas Golden Knights — Saturday in Chicago.

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The Checkers won the best-of-seven series in five games. After the Wolves took Game 1 in overtime, Charlotte swept the next four games, including three consecutive on the road.

Andrew Poturalski, who was named playoffs MVP, opened the scoring in the clinching game less than two minutes into the first period. Morgan Geekie's eighth of the playoffs gave the Checkers a 2-0 lead in the second period, but a late goal from Brooks Macek pulled the Wolves to within one heading into the final frame.

Trevor Carrick's point-shot bomb early in the third period restored the two goal lead for Charlotte. Then in the final four minutes of the game, the teams twice traded goals, with the Checkers scoring twice into the empty net.

Alex Nedeljkovic made 26 saves to get the win while Oscar Dansk made 27 in the loss.

## The Hockey News

### Charlotte Checkers cap off dominant campaign by capturing Calder Cup

Nothing could stand in the way of the Charlotte Checkers this season, who were the top team in the AHL at the end of the regular season and captured their first league crown when they defeated the Chicago Wolves in Game 5 of the Calder Cup final Saturday.

By Jared Clinton

Regular season champions? Check. Calder Cup champions? Check. The 2018-19 AHL campaign will go down as the Year of the Charlotte Checkers.

Heading into Game 5 of the Calder Cup final possessing a 3-1 series lead over the Chicago Wolves, the Checkers put a stamp on their remarkable season with a 5-3 victory Saturday night that saw the franchise capture its first AHL crown. Morgan Geekie had a goal and two points, Andrew Poturalski scored twice and Alex Nedeljkovic stopped 26 of the 29 shots he faced to help the Checkers secure the championship.

For Charlotte, this season signified the next step in what has been a period of continued growth for the organization. Only three seasons removed from missing the post-season for a third-consecutive campaign, the Checkers have gone from a first-round exit to a two-round run all the way to league champions in the span of three seasons, the past two of which have been led by coach Mike Vellucci.

Charlotte's season was truly remarkable in that there was little wavering from their position as the league's top team. At the culmination of the regular season, the Checkers boasted an incredible 51-17-8 record and 110 points, putting them eight points clear of the second-place Syracuse Crunch. Charlotte finished the campaign second in goals for (255) and third in goals-against (189), all the while boasting the league's best penalty kill percentage (86.6). The Checkers showcased much of the same in the post-season, winning the Calder Cup on the strength of a post-season best 4.05 goals per game that went along with 2.32 goals-against per game rate that

ranked second among all playoff teams but first among clubs that played beyond the first round.

Undoubtedly, much of the success in Charlotte is the result of the foundation that has been put in place by their NHL affiliate, the Carolina Hurricanes, whose drafting record in recent years has stocked the Checkers with some bright young talent. During the regular season, five of Charlotte's 10-highest scoring players were players selected in either the first, second or third round in one of the past three NHL drafts. Included in that group are 2017 first-round pick Martin Necas, who posted 16 goals and 52 points this season, as well as 2016 first-rounders Jake Bean and Julien Gauthier, who finished sixth and seventh in regular season scoring with 44 and 41 points, respectively.

As much as stocking the AHL club with high-caliber prospects — Necas, Bean and Janne Kuokkanen, who finished eighth in regular season scoring, were ranked fourth, 42nd and 86th in The Hockey News' Future Watch 2019, respectively — powered the Checkers to the win, though, no player was more influential in Charlotte's regular season or playoff run to the Calder Cup than Poturalski, who captured the Jack A. Butterfield Trophy as post-season MVP despite playing on a broken foot.

During the regular season, Poturalski built upon the rock-solid numbers he had posted over the past two seasons with career-bests across the board, recording 23 goals, 47 assists and 70 points to lead the Checkers in scoring. His playoff encore was even better than his regular season performance, however, as his 12 goals and 23 points led all players in the post-season. It was Poturalski, who wore an 'A' for the Charlotte this season, who potted the empty-netter stood as the game- and Calder Cup-winning goal, as well.

Unlike others who were part of this Checkers juggernaut, though, Poturalski didn't land in Carolina by way of the draft. Instead, his standout play at University of New Hampshire put



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him on the Hurricanes' radar, leading him to a two-year entry-level deal in 2016-17 and a one-year extension this past season. Now, however, Poturalski enters the off-season with options. His contract is up, and as a Group 6 unrestricted free agent, he can decide his next step. One would imagine the Hurricanes, given their ample cap space, are going to make a pitch, but Poturalski will have suitors, to be sure.

But even if Poturalski heads for potentially greener pastures in an effort to chase his big-league dreams, the Checkers have the opportunity to return next season with many of the same pieces in place. A few – namely Necas and Bean, and quite possibly Aleksi Saarela, who scored 30 goals and 54

points in the regular season before a 15-point post-season – have potential to land full-time spots with the Hurricanes in 2019-20, but the Geekies and Gauthiers and Kuokkanens, not to mention others such as Nicolas Roy and Stelio Mattheos, are safe bets to be back for another go-round in the AHL next season.

There will be plenty of time to think about next season in the weeks and months that come, however. For now, the Checkers will have other plans, because after winning the regular season, they've gone out and secured the real prize: the Calder Cup. And now it's time to celebrate.



## Charlotte Checkers win 2019 Calder Cup championship

The AHL's top regular season team finished off Chicago in five games to claim the franchise's first championship.

By Brian LeBlanc

The Charlotte Checkers have had plenty of plaudits come their way this season: a 50-win season, a team record 110 points, the American Hockey League's top goaltender, the league's coach of the year.

Saturday night in suburban Chicago, they added a Calder Cup championship to that list, the crowning achievement to their outstanding year.

The Checkers won their first-ever AHL title with a 5-3 victory over the Chicago Wolves, taking the lead 91 seconds into the game on a goal by leading scorer and playoff MVP Andrew Poturalski and never looking back. Alex Nedeljkovic made 26 saves as the Checkers won their fourth straight game in the series, going 3-for-3 at Allstate Arena after splitting the first two games in Charlotte.

Morgan Geekie and Trevor Carrick also contributed goals for Charlotte, who followed up their 51-17-7-1 regular season with a 15-4 romp through the postseason. Brooks Macek and Gage Quinney scored for Chicago, the latter with the Wolves' net empty, and when Wolves coach Rocky Thompson pulled goaltender Oscar Dansk again looking for a second goal to tie the game late, Poturalski hit the empty net for his second of the game.

Cody Glass scored with 38 seconds left to pull the Wolves back within one, but then Zach Nastasiuk scored into the vacated goal again with 16 seconds remaining to seal the championship. The win capped off a remarkable 49-0-0 record for the Checkers this season, including playoffs, when the team was leading after two periods.

No penalties were called on either team in the game.

It's the first title for the Checkers since they won the 1994-95 championship of what was then called the East Coast Hockey League (now simply the ECHL), and the first for an affiliate of the Carolina Hurricanes since 1991, when the Springfield

Indians won the Calder Cup. It is the seventh championship in Charlotte hockey history, as the team also won Eastern Hockey League titles in 1957, 1971 and 1972, plus the Southern Hockey League championships in 1975 and 1976. It's also the second hockey championship in North Carolina this spring, joining the Carolina Thunderbirds who won the Federal Hockey League title.

The Checkers will host a public celebration at Bojangles' Coliseum this Monday, June 10, at 7 p.m. Admission and parking are free for the event, which will feature a video presentation, remarks from team personnel, photo opportunities with the Calder Cup and an autograph session with Checkers players. Season ticket holders will have the opportunity to enter the coliseum at 6 p.m. before doors open to the general public at 6:30. Parking lots open at 5 p.m. and concession stands will be open.

Congratulations to captain Patrick Brown, coach Mike Vellucci, assistant coaches Ryan Warsofsky and Myles Fee, owner Michael Kahn, COO Tera Black, SVPs Derek Wilkinson and Shawn Lynch, media relations mavens Paul Braneky and Nick Niedzielski, and everyone associated with the Checkers on an outstanding season that few will ever forget.

Quotes (via Checkers PR)

Coach Mike Vellucci on the win

The guys wanted it really bad. They didn't want to play any more games and have that week off. I was a little nervous that we wanted it too much, but we came out and played the right way and they played great too.

Vellucci on what the team will take away from this championship

Friendship. Friends for life. That's what I told them already. You're going to have friends for life. Championship guys stick together. Hockey wise, it's a grind. We're exhausted. Nobody wanted to play any more games. It's June whatever it is. I don't know if it's a weekend or a weekday. I'm tired, the players are tired. They put everything into it. One of the things I think is the coolest and worried me a little bit is that we were the front



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dogs all year long. We were the front runners all year long That's not easy to to, and I think a big testament was that we saw Tampa Bay go down in the first round (in the NHL) and we didn't want to be having that problem.

Vellucci on the team's mentality this season

Win. We wanted to win. We accept no losing. We want to get better as players obviously but we want to win. There's the skill part of it, but developing winners is something that organizationally we needed. Mediocrity is no longer tolerated in our organization.

Vellucci on his team

To be honest with you, I love every one of these guys. It's easy to say that, it really is and everybody says it, but I mean it. It was very emotional. There's so many guys that have gotten better. It was very special.

Vellucci on Andrew Poturalski

Every period he's got both feet in a bucket with a broken foot. A special kid. An unsung hero and I don't think he gets the accolades that he deserves. I can't say enough about him. He's a special kid and we have a great relationship off the ice. I'm very happy for him – he deserves it.

Alex Nedeljkovic on winning three in a row in Chicago

We had no intention of going back home and going to practice on Monday or Tuesday, whatever it would have been. We took it game by game, and we couldn't win tonight without that first game on Wednesday. Every game was like our last.

## About Last Season: Greg McKeeg Performance Review and Grade

A solid plug in for the second half, Greg McKeeg helped to stabilize the Canes' fourth line.

By Andy House

Greg McKeeg: 2018-2019 By The Numbers

- Age: 26
- NHL Seasons: 6
- Games Played: 41
- Scoring: 6 goals, 5 assists, 11 points
- Ice Time: 10:40 all situations, 10:31 ES, 0:07 PP, 0:02 PK
- 5 on 5 Stats: 50.4% CF, 50.0% GF
- Contract: Unrestricted Free Agent

Making the Grade

Ever the journeyman, Greg McKeeg entered the 2018-19 season as organizational depth within the Carolina Hurricanes organization. Not making his NHL debut for the year until January 4th, McKeeg spent most of his time in Charlotte waiting for an opportunity that was never guaranteed to come. When he was called upon to fill a spot on the Canes fourth line however, he provided surprisingly steady play that, along with the rotating band of teammates he continued to be grouped with, provided a solid and physical presence.

Nedeljkovic on how he feels after the grind of a long season

I feel fantastic. Every day fantastic just to come to the rink and play a game that you grow up just loving and enjoying when it's just a game but now it's your career. Every day it's just fun. I don't work a day in my life right now.

Andrew Poturalski on winning a championship

It's just unbelievable. Being here for three years and building this culture and having fun, we just expect to win and we went out and did it. I couldn't be more proud of the guys in the room.

Poturalski on winning

We just kept finding a way to win. When new guys come in and they see that and see that we do whatever it takes to win, it's pretty contagious. Everyone just buys in. We love each other in that room and it's fun.

Poturalski on playing through injury for most of the playoffs

I feel unbelievable right now but it's definitely been a grind. Everyone has bumps and bruises and I'm no different. You've just got to battle through and the guys next to you and that's what playoff hockey is all about.

Poturalski on the championship

To get the first championship in Checkers history and do it for (team owner) Michael Kahn and the city of Charlotte and all the guys in the room, we truly deserved it. We worked our asses off for that all year. To get that win is definitely something we'll all remember for the rest of our lives.

One of the reasons that the Canes were able to play so well in five-on-five action was the ability to have confidence in all four lines to drive play. While McKeeg and his partners were rarely offensively potent, they were often in the offensive zone and occupying the puck. And as a center, McKeeg posted a positive faceoff percentage (51%) over 286 draws during the regular season.

While McKeeg was not counted on to fill a special teams role, as the Canes drew into the postseason, McKeeg's responsibilities were not diminished greatly. In fact, when often flanked by linemates who spend most if not all season in Charlotte, McKeeg provided many pivotal shifts in what were seen as less than advantageous matchups on paper for the Canes. He was able to chip in a pair of goals and generally was able to be part of a line that continued to hold its own in all three zones on the ice.

While McKeeg will never be confused for a skilled forward, his efforts in the second half of the season and in the postseason may well be enough to earn him an NHL job for the coming year. It is unlikely, however, with the prospects moving forward within the organization and the opportunities that await in free agency and on the trade market, that McKeeg will return to Carolina. If he were to be unable to capture a spot in a camp to compete for a roster spot, it could be possible that he returns to Charlotte in a role similar to what he was slotted this past season.



# CAROLINA HURRICANES

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## The Canes Country Rod Brind'Amour Interview: Part Three

We wrap up our discussion with thoughts about the impact of injuries, what a successful season looks like, and reflections on what Year Two could hold in store.

By Brian LeBlanc

The final part of our interview with Rod Brind'Amour touches on a few areas. How much did injuries handicap the Hurricanes in the playoffs, especially as they continued to pile up deeper into the postseason? What defines a successful season? What is the moment that best defines the 2018-19 season?

Plus, hang around for the final thought, where the coach gives what might be the most Rod Brind'Amour answer ever as it relates to the success of the Charlotte Checkers, who are one win away from fulfilling his prediction that they would claim the Calder Cup.

**Canes Country:** At the end of the season, guys obviously were banged up. Nobody wanted to talk about it after the year. How much did those little nibbling-around-the-edges injuries that aren't really a thing but definitely throw you off your timing a little bit affect you down the stretch?

**Rod Brind'Amour:** I thought they would affect us a lot more, because they were lingering for a long time. If you look at Calvin de Haan, he was banged up. Aho was banged up too. That affected his last 20 games and playoffs, in my opinion.

**CC:** Was that a result of when he and Nino [Niederreiter] collided, or was there something else?

**RBA:** No, he had something else. But that did affect him for a week or two there. There were a bunch of guys. Martinook is the obvious one. The guy is basically on one leg, skating around and still fairly effective just because of what he brings. But I think most teams have that. It's not like we had anything [unusual]. But it did affect us. Losing Calvin affected us, but then [Trevor van Riemsdyk] at the end, I think that really took a toll. Then we relied on five guys way too much, more than if we had had Riemer in there.

**CC:** There was a time this season where Brett Pesce wasn't all that happy with how his season was going. He moved to the other side in January or so, and things kind of took off for him. It was a side that we hadn't really seen him on in the time he had been here. What difference did that make, both for him and the downstream effects of loosening up that logjam on the right side a little bit?

**RBA:** He did not start the way he wanted because he was injured [over the summer]. So we had put him down just to get him going, and what happened was the de Haan and Faulk pair was actually pretty good to start the year, so it kind of left Pesce a little frustrated. Eventually, and it always does, players don't understand that; we've got to get you in shape, then the minutes came, and we flipped him back into a top-four role - that's not how I look at it, but that's how players look at it.

The whole right-left thing, I don't know where that got — well, I know where it started, a few years ago it was a big deal — in

the NHL you should be able to play either side, and the good players can. He can, so will he play there again? Probably.

**CC:** You said at the end of the Boston series, and Don [Waddell] said it too, that the Hurricanes overachieved this year. Question one on that, how unusual is that for a team like this to overachieve in the way the Hurricanes did, and the second question, how do you follow that up? If you get to the conference final again next year, is that a success?

**RBA:** I think it depends on the year. If you look at our year, like I said, this is why I said it was successful: making the playoffs is not what your goal is, but it was a success the way we did it. The way we had to go, second-best record in hockey for 40 games - that's a hell of a good run. So that makes it a success. If we don't score in overtime of Game 7 [against Washington] and we lose, is that a successful year? Everything changes.

Our goal is to win the Stanley Cup. That's what the goal is. Anything less is not necessarily the goal, but can it be a success? Yes. It just depends on, to me, how the whole year works out. We might have ten injuries next year. Well, then making the playoffs might be a hell of a year. You know what I mean? You don't know how it's all going to shake out.

**CC:** The reason that came to mind, after they lost to the Blue Jackets Steven Stamkos basically said "well, we didn't win the Stanley Cup, so the season was a failure." Do you subscribe to that mindset? Or does it matter who you're talking about?

**RBA:** I do, but it matters who you're talking about, for sure. That team, everyone predicted to win the Stanley Cup, and they didn't. Every team's different. Is it a failure if you don't win the Stanley Cup? It can be, but it also doesn't have to be.

**CC:** If you can think back to one moment that defines this season, either the regular season or the playoffs, what would that moment be for you?

**RBA:** There's a lot of them. That's the problem. In the regular season there were a couple games where we could have [gone] the other way after we lost. We had a couple tough losses where we dominated games and we would lose.

There was a game in LA early in the year, I think it was a [2-0] loss. 0-0 game with a minute and a half to go, and we gave up a faceoff goal that we had talked about ten times before the game, during the game, that they were going to run. One of our players fell asleep, and it's a guy that we count on, and we lose the game. That's two points we lost, and you never know how it's going to affect you, but we came out of that and the guys rallied around that guy. He was fine. That was a defining moment to me. How is this going to go for the group?

Look at the game in Florida where we were up 3-1, they come back and go ahead, then we come out and score two power play goals in the third, and win the game. The game where [Mrizek], in overtime, won it - that's a pretty impressive little turn.

There's the Pittsburgh game here, where we get two points out of it, score on a 6-on-5 faceoff play, get a tie and win in overtime. The Montreal game. To me, there's a bunch of



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games that could have gone the opposite and we would have had a different year.

In the playoffs, to me, it was when that Ovechkin thing happened with Svechnikov. That could have [gone] one way or the other. When we came out of that game, after that happened - and we had injuries, Ferland goes out, we were down to ten forwards - we blow them out of the arena. To me, that was a defining moment. It was, we weren't going to take a back seat to this. It's okay, and we end up winning the series. There were a bunch of moments.

CC: How gratifying was it for you personally for this team to have this kind of success this year - just as Rod Brind'Amour the person, not even as the coach?

RBA: I don't view it as a success for me. Everything was a success for the organization because of the scrutiny we were under. Let's be honest, the moves that were made in the offseason were questioned. There [weren't] too many people who were 100% sure that these were good [moves]. I said it, maybe it wasn't you guys, but I remember [saying] the season's either going to be a success or a train wreck. But I want either one, because I'm tired of us being in the murky middle.

I feel like we're always...not bad, but not good. And that's the worst. If you're going to be bad, let's be bad so we could get another Svech, get a [Jack] Hughes in this draft. That's how you end up winning, people. It's not great scouting, great [whatever] - guess what? Those teams that have won, and have gone on to be pretty good, for the most part are teams that were terrible and got lottery picks.

So let's do one or the other. Let's either be good or get that lottery pick. So it worked out.

CC: What is one thing as a coach that you want to either change, or refine, or do differently next year?

RBA: There's a lot of things we're going to do differently. I say a lot - little things. It's all about the little things. More than anything, what would I do different? I don't know that there are a lot of things I would do differently. It's still kind of a work in progress for me. It's a tough question.

We're always changing. We're always looking at how we can get better. You can't just stay the same. The challenge is always finding that next thing. This year was kind of easy because it's fresh, and you're putting your stuff out there. Now,

how do you add to it? How do you continually get better? That's going to be the challenge.

CC: I might ask you this again in September - I will, or somebody will. What are you most excited about going into Year 2 of this whole experiment?

RBA: I'm nervous still about the team, who we're going to have. We have some question marks, you're always worried about having to get better. I love these guys, so I want everybody back - I know it doesn't work that way, but selfishly I'd like to see it. I'd like to know what the team is now, and you can't. That's never going to happen. That's a better question for September, to be honest, but I am excited about a couple young players we haven't seen yet.

I want to get [Martin] Necas in here. I want to see him. I really enjoyed this year working with Svech. One of the reasons why Necas wasn't here, I don't think you can have two young kids like that out there all the time. It's too much. Too much inexperience. Svech learned along the way, we could kind of piece him in, and I think he's ready to take a real big step next year. And I think Marty will be kind of on his heels, I'm hoping. So I'm excited to see that. And there are a couple of other young guys that I still think can make their mark on this league.

CC: How much of a difference does it make that Charlotte is going through the run they're on right now, in terms of setting the organizational expectation that this is the bar to clear, no matter what level you're at?

RBA: Well, you always want to win. As far as development for them, I don't even know if it helps them or not. I started thinking about that this morning, because they'd be training right now, but right now they're not training. They're on the deficient mode and they're going to have to take time off. I'm thinking, as a young guy, is this good? I'd rather see them in the gym right now getting bigger, faster, stronger, but of course you want them to have success.

So we want to be successful in everything we do, from an organizational standpoint, and raise the bar in everything. I think the fact that we played as long as we did, and now Charlotte's going to win — I feel like they'll win this, they're the better team — we've got the better players, so that's a good sign.

Everything has for sure been positive now. The trick is going to be to turn the page and keep building.



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## 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 shone. 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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## Checkers win Calder Cup Championship

by Nicholas Niedzielski

The Checkers capped off their record-breaking season Saturday night, beating the Wolves in Game 5 to capture the franchise's first-ever Calder Cup and deliver the city of Charlotte a championship.

The league's leading playoff scorer Andrew Poturalski wasted no time getting the Checkers on the board, collecting a slick cross-ice feed from Aleksii Sarela and lighting the lamp just 91 seconds after the opening puck drop.

Charlotte's top line continued to heat up in the middle frame as Morgan Geekie added another for his squad, catching a Chicago turnover in the slot and wiring a quick shot under Oscar Dansk. The Wolves got a spark of life in the waning seconds of the period as they finally broke through offensively, but the Checkers reestablished their two-goal advantage early on in the third.

Geekie came up big with a faceoff win in the offensive zone and Trevor Carrick ripped the ensuing loose puck into the back of the net to make it 3-1.

The Wolves would cut back into the lead twice late in the third period – using an extra attacker both times – to increase the drama, but the Checkers would punch back each time as Poturalski and Zach Nastasiuk each buried a puck into the empty net to seal the team's fourth straight win and end the series in five games.

As he has all season, the AHL's Most Outstanding Goalie Alex Nedeljkovic stepped up to the challenge in the Cup-clinching game, pulling off several stellar denials en route to a 26-save performance. Poturalski, who ended the postseason with league-best 23 points (12g, 11a) in 18 games, was named the AHL's Playoff MVP.

### QUOTES

Coach Mike Vellucci on the win

The guys wanted it really bad. They didn't want to play any more games and have that week off. I was a little nervous that we wanted it too much, but we came out and played the right way and they played great too.

Vellucci on what the team will take away from this championship

Friendship. Friends for life. That's what I told them already. You're going to have friends for life. Championship guys stick together. Hockey wise, it's a grind. We're exhausted. Nobody wanted to play any more games. It's June whatever it is. I don't know if it's a weekend or a weekday. I'm tired, the players are tired. They put everything into it. One of the

things I think is the coolest and worried me a little bit is that we were the front dogs all year long. We were the front runners all year long That's not easy to do, and I think a big testament was that we saw Tampa Bay go down in the first round (in the NHL) and we didn't want to be having that problem.

Vellucci on the team's mentality this season  
Win. We wanted to win. We accept no losing. We want to get better as players obviously but we want to win. There's the skill part of it, but developing winners is something that organizationally we needed. Mediocrity is no longer tolerated in our organization.

Vellucci on his team

To be honest with you, I love every one of these guys. It's easy to say that, it really is and everybody says it, but I mean it. It was very emotional. There's so many guys that have gotten better. It was very special.

Vellucci on Andrew Poturalski

Every period he's got both feet in a bucket with a broken foot. A special kid. An unsung hero and I don't think he gets the accolades that he deserves. I can't say enough about him. He's a special kid and we have a great relationship off the ice. I'm very happy for him – he deserves it.

Alex Nedeljkovic on winning three in a row in Chicago

We had no intention of going back home and going to practice on Monday or Tuesday, whatever it would have been. We took it game by game, and we couldn't win tonight without that first game on Wednesday. Every game was like our last.

Nedeljkovic on how he feels after the grind of a long season

I feel fantastic. Every day fantastic just to come to the rink and play a game that you grow up just loving and enjoying when it's just a game but now it's your career. Every day it's just fun. I don't work a day in my life right now.

Andrew Poturalski on winning a championship

It's just unbelievable. Being here for three years and building this culture and having fun, we just expect to win and we went out and did it. I couldn't be more proud of the guys in the room.

Poturalski on winning

We just kept finding a way to win. When new guys come in and they see that and see that we do whatever it takes to win, it's pretty contagious. Everyone just buys in. We love each other in that room and it's fun.

Poturalski on playing through injury for most of the playoffs



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I feel unbelievable right now but it's definitely been a grind. Everyone has bumps and bruises and I'm no different. You've just got to battle through and the guys next to you and that's what playoff hockey is all about.

Poturalski on the championship

To get the first championship in Checkers history and do it for (team owner) Michael Kahn and the city of Charlotte and all the guys in the room, we truly deserved it. We worked our asses off for that all year. To get that win is definitely something we'll all remember for the rest of our lives.

## NOTES

This is the first championship in the Checkers' nine AHL seasons. The team won six previous championships in various other leagues, including Eastern Hockey League titles in 1957, 1971 and 1972, Southern Hockey League championships in 1975 and 1976 and an ECHL title in 1996 ... The Checkers finished the season 49-0-0 when leading

after two periods ... Poturalski finished with 23 points (12g, 11a) in 18 games. He was held off the score sheet just three times ... Josiah Didier had three points, all assists, in five Calder Cup Finals games. He had just one total point in the rest of the playoffs (14 games) ... The Checkers finished the playoffs with four consecutive wins. Their only longer streak was a six-game run from April 24-May 8 that included the second-round sweep of Hershey ... Defenseman Dan Renouf missed the game due to injury ... Forwards Scott Davison, Steven Lorentz, Jacob Pritchard and Zack Stortini, defensemen Dennis Robertson and Bobby Sanguinetti and goaltender Jeremy Helvig were healthy extras.

## UP NEXT

The team will hold a public championship celebration Monday, June 10, at Bojangles' Coliseum. The event starts at 7 with doors opening to the general public at 6:30 p.m. More info here.

## Checkers to host public championship celebration on Monday

The Calder Cup champion Charlotte Checkers will host a public celebration at Bojangles' Coliseum this Monday, June 10, at 7 p.m.

Admission and parking are free for the event, which will feature a video presentation, remarks from team personnel, photo opportunities with the Calder Cup and an autograph session with Checkers players. Season ticket holders will have the opportunity to enter the coliseum at 6 p.m. before doors open to the general public at 6:30. Parking lots open at

5 p.m. and concession stands will be open.

The Checkers defeated the Chicago Wolves in Game 5 of the Calder Cup Finals earlier tonight to capture the first AHL championship in the team's nine-year history in the league. This is the seventh championship in the Charlotte hockey history, as the team also won Eastern Hockey League titles in 1957, 1971 and 1972, Southern Hockey League championships in 1975 and 1976 and an ECHL championship in 1996.

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# CAROLINA HURRICANES

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## SportScan

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

1146477 Carolina Hurricanes

Running on fumes, Calder Cup champs: Checkers capture hockey title not a day too soon

BY STEVE LYTTLE CORRESPONDENT

JUNE 09, 2019 05:32 PM

Something basic drove the Charlotte Checkers to their Calder Cup-clinching 5-3 victory Saturday night over the Chicago Wolves:

The Checkers were ready for the season to be over.

"We had no intention of going back home and going to practice on Monday or Tuesday, whatever it would have been," Charlotte goaltender Alex Nedeljkovic said after his team captured the American Hockey League's top prize in Rosemont, Ill.

"We're exhausted," coach Mike Vellucci added. "We didn't want to play any more games."

The Checkers accomplished two goals – winning the franchise's first AHL championship and starting summer vacation – by playing solid defense for 57 minutes, and then outlasting the Wolves in a wild finish.

After spotting Chicago a one-game lead in the best-of-7 series, Charlotte won four straight — including three on the road — capping a 15-4 record through four rounds of playoffs.

The Checkers knew that losing Saturday would have meant a return to Charlotte and several more days of practice before Game 6 at Bojangles' Coliseum on Thursday.

Instead, the team will host a public celebration 7 p.m. Monday at the coliseum.

"Hockey-wise, it's a grind," Vellucci said. "It's June whatever it is. I don't know if it's a weekend or a weekday. I'm tired, the players are tired."

"Our guys wanted it really bad. I was a little nervous that we wanted it too much, but we came out and played the right way, and they (Wolves) played great too."

Andrew Poturalski scored just 1:31 into the game, giving Charlotte a 1-0 lead, and Morgan Geekie's goal at the 8:25 mark of the second period made it 2-0.

The Wolves battled back, cutting Charlotte's lead to 2-1 on a Brooks Macek goal with 25 seconds left in the second. Trevor Carrick's slap-shot goal about six minutes into the third period put the Checkers up 3-1, and that's how it stayed until the wild finish.

Chicago pulled goaltender Oscar Dansk for an extra skater with 3:20 left, and the Wolves scored 14 seconds later on a Gage Quinney goal.

Fending off the swarming Wolves, Poturalski stole the puck near center ice and scored an empty net goal for a 4-2 lead with 1:44 to play.

The Wolves weren't finished. They made it 4-3 on a Cody Glass goal with 38 seconds left. The Checkers responded with a Zach Nastasiuk empty-net score with 15 seconds to play.

Then the Checkers won control of the puck, and seconds later, Nedeljkovic began leaping at one end of the Allstate Arena rink, and his teammates were flinging sticks into the air and celebrating at center ice.

"To get the first championship in Checkers history and do it for (team owner) Michael Kahn and the city of Charlotte and all the guys in the room, we truly deserved it," said Poturalski, who led the AHL in postseason scoring and was named the playoffs' most valuable player.

"We worked our a--- off for that all year."

### THREE WHO MATTERED

Andrew Poturalski, Charlotte: His two goals gave him 12 for the playoffs, and he was named the postseason most valuable player.

Alex Nedeljkovic, Charlotte: The AHL's goaltender of the year turned away 26 shots and made several spectacular saves in the second and third periods.

Morgan Geekie, Charlotte: Geekie, the AHL's leading rookie scorer in the playoffs, added a goal and an assist to his postseason total.

### WORTH MENTIONING

- The Checkers became the fifth team in the AHL's 82 seasons to win the finals after losing the opening game at home. The last to do so was Hershey in 2011.

- Just for the record ... the Calder Cup is named for Frank Calder, who was the NHL's first president (1917-1940) and is credited for helping launch the AHL. The cup is 24 inches tall and weighs 25 pounds.

- While the Checkers had never won the Calder Cup, they won the Eastern Hockey League playoffs in 1957, 1971 and 1972; the Southern Hockey League in 1975 and 1976; and the ECHL in 1996. The Charlotte Knights won the Class AAA baseball's International League in 1993 and 1999, and the city also had champions at lower minor league levels in baseball and soccer.

### THEY SAID IT

"I love every one of these guys. Everybody says that, but I mean it. It was very emotional." – Checkers coach Mike Vellucci.



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News Observer LOADED: 06.10.2019

1146485 NHL

Suiting Up Hockey's Stars, One Stitch At a Time

By Salim Valji

June 10, 2019

MONTREAL — It's a ritual broadcast widely every year during the N.H.L. playoffs: powerful hockey players in their power suits entering the arena.

And for decades, one bantam-sized tailor has outfitted more than his share of hulking hockey stars. Giovanni Vacca, 86, stands about 5-foot-5 and sports a black suit, V-neck sweater and dress shirt. He plies his trade in the heart of Montreal's Little Italy, where he has stitched suits for hundreds of professional hockey players and executives — including members of this year's Stanley Cup finalists, like Boston Bruins General Manager Don Sweeney and St. Louis Blues captain Alex Pietrangolo.

Vacca's client list reads like a page out of the N.H.L. record books. From the 1990s and early 2000s: Wayne Gretzky, Rob Blake, Kevin Stevens, Theo Fleury, Brian Leetch and Mark Recchi. His roster includes the likes of Sidney Crosby, Shea Weber, Joe Thornton and Brent Burns.

Vacca came to Montreal from San Pietro Infine, a small town about 90 miles from Rome, in 1948 at the age of 15. He always had a sartorial instinct and apprenticed shops around Montreal before creating Giovanni Clothes in 1965.

"I wanted to advance, so I decided to go on my own," he said. "I had a lot of cooperation with suppliers and a good name. People started to come. One tells the other."

Despite being known for his hockey clientele, it was a baseball team, the Expos, that first made the trek up Boulevard St. Laurent to see Vacca.

"One of the first guys that came in was Rusty Staub," he said, referring to one of the team's first stars.

"Word got out that players needed to look good at a low cost," said Warren Cromartie, an outfielder for nine seasons for the Expos. "They spent time with you to make you happy about the suit you are buying."

The Vacca name spread within the Major League Baseball community and soon visiting teams would stop by the three-story shop. According to Cromartie, Vacca outfitted former home run king Sammy Sosa with his first suit.

"Andre Dawson told him to go to Giovanni," Cromartie said. "Sammy got two suits, even though Andre told him to just get one!"

Count a New York Yankee great as another satisfied client.

"Joe Torre would come in," Vacca said. "He was a nice man. We'd go have dinner afterward."

Vacca also outfitted several members of the 1994 Stanley Cup champion Rangers, including Neil Smith, who assembled the team.

"He cares very much about his customers and his suits are of magnificent quality," said Smith, the former Rangers general manager.

As professional sports morphed from the mom-and-pop types of operations in the 1960s to the billion-dollar businesses that exist today, Vacca altered his approach. No longer do players trek from their downtown hotels to Little Italy. Now his son, Domenico, goes on the road and outfits teams at their home rinks.

"The guys were always in our office, for years and years," said Domenico during an interview in Nashville, where he had measured the Predators earlier in the day. "After the mid-80s, then curfews started and they weren't allowed out late. It was Kevin Stevens who said, 'Dom, why don't you come see us on the road.' Before I knew it, I was going everywhere."

That player-centric approach is how Canadiens winger Jonathan Drouin, who grew up 62 miles from Giovanni Clothes, became a client. The two met a couple of years ago while Domenico was outfitting Drouin's former team, the Tampa Bay Lightning.

"Some of the guys told me to see him," Drouin said. "I like the suits he makes, the fits, the brands. I always like going back to Domenico."

Over the course of 50 years, father and son have seen fashion styles and body types evolve. The league has gone from valuing broad-shouldered, bigger players to emphasizing smaller, speedier types. The Vaccas have noticed the evolution.

"Players today want more slim fit, tight fit," Giovanni said. "From the big suits, now we have the short suits."

"Today, guys really know what they want," Domenico said. "Go back 20 years, they were asking my opinion. Nobody had a clear view. Today they still ask for my opinion, but they have a clear view of what they want."

Like the art of suit making, the art of relationship building is a delicate one that is taken seriously.

So after five decades outfitting home run kings and goal scoring champions, not to mention RCMP officers and corporate executives, what's been the secret to keeping those relationships?

"A guy who comes in and buys one suit, he gets treated the same as the guy comes in and buys 10 suits," Giovanni said. "Everybody's equal."

"It's a story. What can I tell you?"

New York Times LOADED: 06.10.2019

1146486 NHL

Stanley Cup Finals Headed to Game 7 After Bruins Wallop Blues

By Ben Shpigel

June 9, 2019

ST. LOUIS — The final thing the Boston Bruins saw before leaving their locker room at Enterprise Center was a keepsake from eight years ago. A framed photograph hanging above the exit showed Patrice Bergeron clutching a bottle of Champagne, his mouth open



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in delight, as Brad Marchand, standing to his right, held the Stanley Cup aloft.

The memento, subtle as a cannon blast, reminded the Bruins not only of the predicament they faced on Sunday, but also that they had conquered it before. The last time the Bruins secured the Cup, they erased a three-games-to-two deficit in the finals against a team that had never won a title.

They earned an opportunity to do it again after forcing a Game 7 Wednesday in Boston by way of a 5-1 victory against the Blues, silencing a frothing St. Louis crowd anticipating the team's first championship in its 52-year history. The Bruins are seeking their seventh, and first since 2011, when Marchand and Bergeron, same as now, were part of a fearsome core that overwhelmed Vancouver.

Marchand scored the Bruins' first goal on Sunday, on a five-on-three power play. Another member of that nucleus, David Krejci, assisted on the laser by Karson Kuhlman — in the lineup for the first time since April 30 — that soared past Jordan Binnington to extend the Bruins' lead to 3-0. Zdeno Chara, the Bruins' captain since 2006, added an empty-netter.

The best player on the ice — as proffered by defenseman Charlie McAvoy, with the conviction of a prosecuting attorney — was Rask, who didn't play a minute of the 2011 playoffs but, after losing in the 2013 finals, has spent the intervening years demonstrating why he is one of the league's best goalies. Coming within eight minutes of his third shutout of these playoffs, Rask stopped 28 of 29 shots — including 12 across four Blues power plays — to deflate St. Louis, the team and the city. Facing elimination this postseason, he is 3-0 with a .953 save percentage.

"He's allowed us an opportunity to play in a Game 7," Coach Bruce Cassidy said of Rask. "I think the whole hockey world loves a Game 7, so it should be a great night in Boston and may be the best team win."

Back on the morning of Jan. 3, when the Blues ranked last in the 31-team N.H.L., there seemed a better chance of 20 wombats reaching the Stanley Cup finals than of that best team potentially being the Blues — let alone Enterprise Center hosting the home team's potential clincher.

The day dawned bright and warm, and blue-clad fans tottered around downtown until those final few hours before face-off, when they clogged nearby streets. Clutching beers in glasses shaped like the Cup, they wore snappy T-shirts — "Stanley, we'd like you to meet Gloria," a reference to the Blues' peppy victory anthem — and toasted their good, and foreign, fortune of watching hockey in June.

The Blues observed the mayhem from the safety of their bus, escorted by police, en route to the arena from their hotel. They heard the honking and the "Let's Go Blues!" chants. As they prepared for the biggest game in franchise history, the Bruins, loaded with players who have played many of those, gathered in their locker room. Bergeron, a Bruin since 2003, had something he wanted to say.

"It was exactly what we needed — it was," McAvoy said. "It was an element of what the dream is. Growing up, every one of us shares the same dream and kind of just bringing us all to a point where we can all be on the same field. We were all a little kid once and we all wanted this bad. And I think it was just an element of savoring this moment and not letting it end tonight. It was exactly what we needed. He stepped up. When he talks, you listen."

By the time they skated onto the ice, the arena — already buzzing from the final rendition by the longtime national anthem singer Charles Glenn, who is ceding duties to focus more on his multiple

sclerosis — pulsed with every hit. All series the Blues have tried imposing as much aggressiveness as the rules allow, but Brayden Schenn's boarding call on Joakim Nordstrom — followed by Ryan O'Reilly's delay-of-game penalty — awarded the Bruins' lethal power play 58 seconds of five-on-three time.

It took just 21 seconds for the Bruins to convert, with Marchand one-timing David Pastrnak's cross-ice pass into the open side of the net at 8:40 for his first goal since the empty-netter that clinched Game 1.

The Bruins confronted elimination once before in these playoffs, in the first round, when they defeated the Maple Leafs in Toronto before capturing Game 7 at home.

"I just remember the mentality, the kind of 'screw it, let's just go out and play hockey,'" defenseman Torey Krug said.

Krug's thrust — that they play with purpose, unencumbered by the stage or the moment — was more difficult early for Boston to adopt live. The Blues' larger forwards still overpowered Boston in its defensive zone, and the Bruins struggled at the face-off circle, losing 37 of 63 over all.

Still, they maintained their 1-0 lead and had an excellent opportunity to double their advantage early in the second, when Danton Heinen, sprung by a stretch pass from McAvoy, skated in alone on Binnington but fanned on the shot.

As St. Louis surged, the Bruins' composure lapsed, giving the Blues two power plays — and nearly the tying goal. If not for McAvoy, who swatted the puck out of midair after Alex Pietrangolo's backhander crackled the post and sneaked behind Rask, Jaden Schwartz would have been positioned to jam it in.

Both of the Bruins' second-period penalties were for tripping, which they fervently believed should have been whistled on Tyler Bozak in the third period of Game 5, a noncall that produced the Blues' decisive goal. Coach Bruce Cassidy said he thought it would be easier for the Bruins to regroup because they, at least, had a chance to tie the score — unlike in Game 3 of the Western Conference finals, which the Blues lost after a hand pass led to San Jose's overtime winner.

The Blues' resilience, cultivated all season, guided them to three straight wins against the Sharks — and three more in this series. The fourth remains tantalizingly close.

"Listen," said Blues Coach Craig Berube, "if you told me four months ago we were going to be in the Finals in Game 7, I think I'd take it."

They have won twice at TD Garden this series, but now they must go there and solve Rask and a team loaded with experience in these situations. After all, the last Game 7 in the Cup finals came eight years ago, and as the photograph shows, the Bruins knew how to win then, and they surely know how to win now.

New York Times LOADED: 06.10.2019

1146504 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Bergeron's pre-game speech motivates Bruins to push Final to Game 7

Chris Johnston | June 10, 2019, 2:14 AM



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ST. LOUIS — If the Boston Bruins go on to lift the Stanley Cup later this week, Patrice's speech will live in lore alongside Tuukka's dominance and Zdeno Chara's return from a broken jaw.

This playoff run was in danger of ending right here. There were more than 100,000 people gathered outside Enterprise Center in anticipation of the St. Louis Blues closing out their first ever championship on Sunday, and with the heat turned up to 100 before Game 6 it was Patrice Bergeron that adjusted the emotional thermostat in the visiting room.

Bergeron is a conqueror of two Olympic finals and a Stanley Cup Final, and is not the type to waste his words. The ones he spoke with Boston's season on the line struck a chord that helped set the stage for Game 7 back in the friendly confines of TD Garden.

"It was exactly what we needed," said 21-year-old defenceman Charlie McAvoy, Boston's ice time leader in these playoffs and a self-proclaimed emotional wreck before the game.

"It was an element of what the dream is: Growing up, every one of us shares the same dream and kind of just bringing us all to a point where we can all be on the same field. We were all a little kid once and we all wanted this bad. And I think it was just an element of savouring this moment and not letting it end tonight."

Bergeron backed it up, too.

He was one of the few Boston skaters who kept the puck moving in the right direction during a tense first period. It is basically an open secret at this point that he's playing at well less than 100 per cent, but that didn't keep him from firing three shots on goal during the key opening 20.

"He's a legend," said 22-year-old Bruins winger Jake DeBrusk. "To see him kind of set the tone that way made us want to run through a wall."

Now, the game wasn't won with a speech.

It took another 28 saves from Tuukka Rask — the Conn Smythe favourite who has allowed four goals in five elimination games this spring — and a well-executed 5-on-3 power play in the first period that was finished off by a Brad Marchand snipe.

That calmed some nerves on the Bruins bench after a furious early surge by the Blues. It was 1-0 at the first intermission, but St. Louis was winning board battles and bringing a heavy forecheck.

"Even though we came out with the lead, I thought we got stuck there a lot," said Boston coach Bruce Cassidy. "If that trend continued, I thought it was going to be tough for us tonight — we're really relying on our goaltender."

The Bruins started to take back some territory in the second period and caught a break when Brandon Carlo's point shot took a wicked hop and slipped through Jordan Binnington less than three minutes into the third.

An avalanche of goals followed in what became a 5-1 Boston victory.

"I thought it was an even game, really," said Blues coach Craig Berube. "Two periods, it's tight hockey. There's not a lot of room out there. I'll credit Boston. They played well. They checked well. They didn't give us a ton of room out there."

They played like a team that had been there before, in part, because a few of them had. Bergeron, Marchand, Chara, Rask and David Krejci were each part of the last Game 7 played in a Stanley Cup Final — and celebratory pictures from their 2011 victory in

Vancouver once again were brought to St. Louis and hung up in the dressing room.

It didn't go unnoticed among the Boston players that a couple celebratory ads were accidentally released by the St. Louis Post-Dispatch on Sunday morning either. Call it a little more fuel for the fire.

While the St. Louis players had to deal with family and friends travelling in for a potential celebration, Bergeron and the other Bruins veterans started setting a tone that will continue to be important until puck drop on Wednesday night.

"We're going to have to live a bit what St. Louis did today," said Cassidy. "Now you're going home, the Stanley Cup's in the building, someone's winning it and you've got a lot of new friends all of a sudden. Or old ones are coming out of the woodwork."

"I think the message, they've been good at that: 'Stay in your bubble, take care of your immediate family, but catch up with your friends on Thursday type of thing.'"

This Bruins' core is constructed of serial winners.

They have helped bring along the young players who now have the team in position to win another title. Credit Bergeron with a primary assist for helping them put the celebration on hold in St. Louis and force a Game 7.

"I've been dreaming of this moment for my whole life — to win this trophy," said McAvoy. "That's really all it is, is just a dream, and then all of a sudden you're here. It's gone by fast. We're already here in Game 7."

"I'll be damned if I blink. There's no time to be worried or to be nervous about this situation. There's guys who never get a chance to play here and I'll be damned if I spend a second just not being grateful and just playing the best that I can."

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 06.10.2019

1146505 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Coach's Corner: Small plays what makes Blues' Pietrangelo a 'winner'

Sportsnet Staff June 9, 2019, 9:59 PM

A lot of players have starred on the St. Louis Blues' run to the Stanley Cup Final, but during Coach's Corner on Sunday Don Cherry called special attention to Alex Pietrangelo.

"Little things add up," Cherry said while showing a highlight of Pietrangelo clearing the defensive zone in Game 5. "He knows he's going to get creamed, (but) he makes the play. That's the little things that (make) a winner with a guy like Pietrangelo."

Pietrangelo, the Blues' captain, has been a steady presence on the blue line throughout the playoffs. His 25:43 of ice time per game leads all players in the Final, and his 16 points are tied for third most on the Blues.

If St. Louis wins the first Stanley Cup in franchise history, the 29-year-old would certainly be a candidate for the Conn Smythe Trophy.

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# CAROLINA HURRICANES

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1146506 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Three UFA risks to be wary of overpaying this summer

Andrew Berkshire June 8, 2019, 10:36 AM

After breaking down some players who should be available come July 1 and fly under the radar as likely bargains, it's time to look at the other side of the coin.

Every summer there are huge contracts handed out to players who probably shouldn't get them. That can be tough to avoid in a scenario where teams are desperately trying to fill holes and competing with other general managers to achieve that can drive up costs.

It's important to note that when we're looking at these players, no one is saying they're bad. When we talk about buyers having to beware of signing players it has more to do with a player's reputation overstripping their actual performance, or short-term success leading to poor evaluations.

Essentially the lessons all teams should take from past mistakes are beware of age curves and never pay for last year's playoff performance.

## WAYNE SIMMONDS

Everyone is a big fan of the way Wayne Simmonds plays the game. He's tough as nails, he scores from the net front, and you know when it's crunch time he's going to be a warrior out there. The problem is, he's been dealing with some injuries that have really slowed him down in recent seasons.

That's really cut into his production at 5-on-5 and at 30 years old he's at an age where injury and natural decline can coincide to rapidly push a player down the lineup, especially one that plays a physical game. Simmonds is also coming off a contract where he was severely underpaid considering the 161 goals he scored during his six-year deal.

Simmonds remains a particularly excellent power play net-front guy and he works hard every game he can get in. But teams should be extremely wary of giving out too much term, and a big raise on his current cap hit (\$3.75 million) also seems like a bit of risk.

## TYLER MYERS

This past season was a huge opportunity for Tyler Myers to really set himself up. Jacob Trouba and Josh Morrissey emerged as the top pair for the Jets, while Dustin Byfuglien manned the second pair. That left Myers with very cherry-picked, relatively easy minutes. It should have been a season for Myers to dominate, but instead the Jets were consistently worse with him on the ice than off.

Myers is a boom or bust player with a ton of raw talent, but outside of his rookie season he's never seemed to be able to put it all together on a consistent basis. His sheer size combined with that talent is going to tempt teams to roll out huge contract offers this summer despite the fact that he struggled as a 4/5 defenceman in 2018-19.

Myers can help most teams when he's at his best, but it's a roll of the dice when he's going to give you a good game, and when he's

struggling he can really hurt you. It's not as if there aren't any teams that would benefit from his presence, but expecting him to consistently play within the top-four is a stretch.

## MIKE SMITH

This one is quick and easy. For a long time Mike Smith was a little overrated by teams and a little underrated by data-driven analysts. He's struggled with injuries in recent years and last season his performance fell off a cliff and he was only an average goaltender throughout the season.

But in the playoffs he was spectacular on a Flames team that was thoroughly outplayed and outcoached. He was essentially the lone bright spot and a lot of hockey people are going to look at that and say he was great when it mattered most.

This is really dangerous thinking and it's the kind of thing that leads to the infamously bad Ville Leino contract. Leino was a decent depth player who got big money and big term and couldn't ever replicate the playoff performance for which he was rewarded. At 35 years old, Smith is unlikely to suddenly get better and a five-game stretch of absolute dominance in the high danger area is more of a blip than a signal of what's to come.

On a short-term deal worth a middling amount of money, Smith can probably still work well as a platoon option in 30-45 games for a team. But assuming he can be a 55-plus game starter or even a massive difference maker in fewer games because of his playoff performance is not smart thinking.

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1146507 Websites

TSN.CA / Bruins veterans slam Stanley's case shut, force Game 7

Frank Seravalli

ST. LOUIS — There are five photos the Boston Bruins brought with them to the Gateway City, the same five pictures that hang in their dressing room at TD Garden.

In one placed adjacent to his stall, Tuukka Rask is taking a Stanley Cup shower, drenched in champagne.

In another nearby, Patrice Bergeron is gripping a bottle of Veuve Clicquot with the grin of a lifetime, while Brad Marchand sips from the font of Lord Stanley next to him.

For the five veterans remaining from 2011, there is no better reminder. For the newcomers and kids along for the ride, a chance to be in indelible photos like those are the ultimate motivator to climb the mountain.

"I think every day it's a reminder of what we're playing for," Bergeron said. "It's just to remember how much it means to make it happen."

In case they needed another one, Bergeron provided a reminder with a moving pre-game message to the Bruins on Sunday night.

Then Marchand and Rask went out and slammed Stanley's case shut, sending the Bruins back to Boston with a chance to take more memories.



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It will be Seventh Heaven in Beantown on Wednesday for the 17th time in NHL history. One game, winner take all for hockey's ultimate prize.

"The whole hockey world loves a Game 7," Bruins coach Bruce Cassidy said. "May the best team win."

Marchand quieted a revved up Blues crowd - one ready to blow off 52 years worth of steam - with an early power play goal and Rask was nearly flawless in a 28-save performance as the Bruins forced Game 7 with a 5-1 victory at Enterprise Center.

Wednesday will mark the first Game 7 in the Final since 2011, when the Bruins also turned around a 3-2 series deficit against the Vancouver Canucks.

These Bruins appear unflappable because they've done it before. They have five players left from a decade ago; 13 teams in the Eastern Conference have a combined six players remaining on their original team over that time span.

The next time anyone tells you experience is overrated, remind them that the last team to win the Stanley Cup without a previous winner on the roster is the 1989 Calgary Flames.

Case in point: Charlie McAvoy admitted his nerves were all over the place before Bergeron addressed the team before the game. He said "just the thought of it being over" was "terrifying."

"Man, I'm going through this and this is my first Stanley Cup and it's just a lot," McAvoy said. "I'll just be honest with you. The emotions, like, crap, it's a lot. This is your dream to win this thing and when your backs are against the wall and you know they're one away, it hurts a little bit. But I got a different perspective when our guys stepped up and just talked."

He said Bergeron calmed everyone down. When he speaks, you listen, Jake DeBrusk said.

"We are in a situation that is everyone's childhood's dream here and we must realize it," Bergeron said of his speech.

"It was exactly what we needed," McAvoy explained. "We were all a little kid once and we all wanted this bad. And I think it was just an element of savouring this moment and not letting it end tonight."

Rask wouldn't let it. After a rather average Final round, he saved his best for when the Bruins' backs were against the wall. He staved off an early St. Louis onslaught, while the Blues mauled the Bruins on the forecheck early. He was a perfect 12-for-12 on shorthanded shots faced as the Bruins killed off four opportunities - despite the Blues' lethargic power play looking as threatening as it has at any point in the series.

Rask improved his save percentage to a staggering .973 in five elimination games this spring. The Bruins are a perfect 5-0, winning three times to save their own season (twice against Toronto) and twice to knock out Columbus and Carolina.

He may win the Conn Smythe Trophy no matter what happens on Wednesday.

"He was the best player on the ice tonight," McAvoy said. "He's our best player, he has been all playoffs and all regular season. We know that when he plays like that, to the best of his ability, and when we do our jobs in front of him ... he's going to be there. He's going to be in that zone."

In my case I shall stay.

— The Stanley Cup (@StanleyCup) June 10, 2019

The Blues didn't seem rattled with the Game 6 loss, or shaken that they squandered the opportunity to see St. Louis explode. After 52 years, what's three more days?

Maybe, just maybe, the Blues have the Bruins exactly where they want them. St. Louis is 9-3 on the road this spring and Jordan Binnington's bounce back numbers are verging on the stuff of legend (12-2 this season with a .937 save percentage).

"Listen, if you told me four months ago we were going to be in the Finals in Game 7, I think I'd take it," coach Craig Berube said. "We've been a good road team. We've won twice up there in this series, so we're a confident group."

Now comes the test for the Bruins. Marchand's magic, Rask's stone-cold killer instinct, Zdeno Chara's toughness and Bergeron's words won't mean a thing without finishing the job.

"We're going to have to live a bit what St. Louis did today and have to deal with now you're going home, the Stanley Cup's in the building, someone's winning it," Cassidy said. "There is a danger there and I think that's what [the veterans bring]. These guys have been there and are able to get that message out."

The message is simple. As Fred Shero said, win one and walk together forever - in photographs and on the Stanley Cup.

TSN.CA LOADED: 06.10.2019

1146508 Websites

TSN.CA / Winning the Stanley Cup would be a family affair for Blues

Frank Seravalli

ST. LOUIS — Forty nine years ago, Neil Armstrong was on the ice as a linesman the last time the St. Louis Blues skated in the Stanley Cup Final in 1970 - against these same Boston Bruins.

Forty nine years later, Neil's son Doug is on the precipice of going where no man has gone before - in bringing the Stanley Cup to St. Louis as general manager.

Somewhere in Sarnia, Ont., 86-year-old Neil will be watching on Sunday night.

"Hopefully," Doug Armstrong said, as this series started. "I think he is."

It has been a difficult few years for the elder Armstrong, one of 16 on-ice officials inducted into the Hockey Hall of Fame. The man nicknamed "Ironman" for not missing a single assignment from 1957 through 1978 - a span of 1,744 straight regular season games - is suffering from Parkinson's disease and dementia.

Doug calls his father frequently at his Sarnia assisted living facility, but the conversations aren't always easy.

"It's one of those things, some days it's really good," Doug said. "Other days it's 'Well, we'll try again tomorrow.'"

Their next conversation could be one to remember, as the Armstrongs may soon be mentioned in the same breath as the Sheros, the Fletchers, and the Bowmans - legendary father-son duos who have won the Stanley Cup as front office members.



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Neil was recognized for his work as a linesman, but he spent two decades as a full-time amateur scout for the Montréal Canadiens - where he helped the Habs to Stanley Cups in 1986 and 1993.

Doug won his first Stanley Cup as an assistant to Bob Gainey in Dallas in 1999. Nearly 20 years to the day later, he can do it again after steering St. Louis' ship through turbulent waters.

"Really, what going through a run like this has shown is how many people around the game talk about him," Doug said of his father. "It makes you feel fortunate to have someone like that who was held in such high regard around the league."

That is what makes the Stanley Cup so special. The party on the ice is really just a bigger celebration for all of the people who helped make that moment possible.

The tears of joy shared between T.J. Oshie and his father, Tim, last year in Las Vegas was an indelible Stanley Cup moment.

It was the perfect reminder that yes, the Blues are playing for each other, and playing for a Cup-starved city - but they are also playing for family in Game 6 on Sunday night.

It's about Patrick Maroon, and his incredible journey, signing a one-year deal with the hometown Blues last summer so he could be around his 10-year-old son Anthony for a full season for the first time in his NHL career. Anthony cried tears of joy after Pat's series-winning OT goal in Game 7 against Dallas.

It's about Ryan O'Reilly and Brayden Schenn playing for their brothers - Cal O'Reilly and Luke Schenn - who were teammates in the NHL on the Sabres and Flyers, but never got the chance to win together.

"I think about it a lot," Ryan O'Reilly said. "I wouldn't be here in this league if it wasn't for my family, my parents, my brother, the stuff they did throughout the years to get me to this place. I can never repay them. They've done so much above and beyond."

Ryan said it was a special to play with Cal on the Sabres because "growing up we were only trying to kill each other."

"He's about four and a half years older than me, and that's how I think I really learned how to play the game," Ryan said. "I always tagged along with him and he let me play with his buddies. I think I learned to play that defensive game and hold my own because of him."

Both Cal and Luke will be in Enterprise Center. Luke had travel trouble on Saturday and was ready to drive 13 hours from a Washington airport to St. Louis to make Game 6. He wouldn't miss it.

"He's my biggest fan," Brayden said. "I think as a player, you realize how hard it is to win, so to have a family member, and your best buddy here, that's amazing."

It's about Michael Del Zotto, the Blues' extra defenceman, whose parents Steve and Lee haven't missed a game in the Stanley Cup Final - even though their son hasn't skated in a single playoff game this spring.

It's about Del Zotto's childhood teammate from the Toronto Blues, captain Alex Pietrangelo, and how he's played for the memory of his son, Gabriel, whom they lost in 2017 due to complications of the pregnancy. Pietrangelo can share this win with the triplets him and his wife, Jayne, welcomed in 2018.

"There hasn't been a single day that I have not thought about Gabriel or shed a tear for him," Pietrangelo wrote last year. "For me,

hockey has always been much more than a game. It's a place you can go to forget about everything in the world for a while, where there's no pain and no problems. Everything is just pure fun."

It's about Jaden Schwartz honouring the memory of his sister, Mandi, whom he lost to cancer at the age of 22 back in 2011. Schwartz has carried Mandi with him every step of the way in the Stanley Cup Final.

"What a scene that would be if Jaden gets to hold up the Cup," his father Rick Schwartz said. "I would love to see his reaction, knowing that Mandi is there with him. That would be priceless."

It is within reach now - for the Blues, for St. Louis, for all of them.

TSN.CA LOADED: 06.10.2019

1146509 Websites

USA TODAY / Bruins rout Blues 5-1 to force Game 7 of Stanley Cup Finals

Kevin Allen, USA TODAY Published 11:00 p.m. ET June 9, 2019 | Updated 1:42 a.m. ET June 10, 2019

ST. LOUIS — With the St. Louis Blues and Boston Bruins headed to the NHL's first Stanley Cup Final Game 7 since 2011, it feels as if it were meant to be.

In Game 1, it seemed as if the series could go either way. Now with the series headed to Boston for a decisive game Wednesday in TD Garden (8 p.m., ET, NBC), it still seems like it could go either way.

"Listen, if you told me four months ago we were going to be in the Finals in Game 7, I think I'd take it," Blues coach Craig Berube said.

The Bruins downed the Blues 5-1 in Game 6 on Sunday on the strength of goalie Tuukka Rask's 28 saves. They denied the Blues a chance to celebrate their first Stanley Cup championship in 52 years on home ice.

One point was reinforced in the Bruins' Game 6 victory: Rask is the team's clear-cut MVP.

"He just steps up when it matters and we have all the faith in the world in him," Bruins defenseman Charlie McAvoy said.

Rask has a 1.98 goals-against average and a .937 save percentage this postseason. When the Bruins have needed a big save, that save percentage is probably even higher.

"He's been at his best for a while now," Bruins center Patrice Bergeron said.

Puck goes off post, off Rask's back and Charlie McAvoy saves it [pic.twitter.com/ZT7KQBzyZo](https://pic.twitter.com/ZT7KQBzyZo)

— Pete Blackburn (@PeteBlackburn) June 10, 2019

The Blues gave Rask some credit, but they also believe they didn't pressure him the way they can and should. The Blues are already laying out their strategy for Game 7.

"Take a look at it," Blues defenseman Alex Pietrangelo said. "I think we can make life a little harder on him."



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Ryan O'Reilly, who had the Blues' lone goal, said the Blues didn't do a quality job shooting the puck in Game 6.

"I had a couple of chances and didn't put them where I wanted to," O'Reilly said. "I have to put the puck into an area and make it tough on him. We have to do a better job of screening."

The Blues will have two days before Game 7 to refine that strategy against Rask.

At one point, the Bruins led this series 2-1 and then the Blues led 3-2. The Final has been so close that everything matters, including pregame speeches. The Bruins said Bergeron made a good one before Game 6.

"He's a legend," Bruins winger Jake DeBrusk said. "We're here for a reason and everyone who plays hockey grows up and dreams of playing in this moment, and it was pretty much something around those lines. To see him set the tone that way made us want to run through a wall."

Neither team is afraid of a Game 7. The Bruins had to win one in the opening round to get past the Toronto Maple Leafs. The Blues defeated the Dallas Stars in a double overtime Game 7 to reach the Western Conference final.

"We've been a good road team," Berube said. "We've won twice up there in this series, so we're a confident group."

Wednesday will be the first time that a Boston team has hosted a Game 7 of a championship series since the Celtics beat the Los Angeles Lakers in 1984.

"Game 7 is special," DeBrusk said. "It's what every fan wants to see."

And it has seemed like we were headed to a Game 7 from the moment the series started.

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USA TODAY / Newspaper accidentally posts ads congratulating Blues for winning Stanley Cup ... before actually winning it

Tess Demeyer, USA TODAY Published 4:14 p.m. ET June 9, 2019 | Updated 4:36 p.m. ET June 9, 2019

The publishers of the St. Louis Post-Dispatch either have a crystal ball or a little too much adrenaline going into Game 6 of the Stanley Cup Final.

With the Blues leading the series against the Bruins 3-2, St. Louis has a shot at clinching its first Cup in franchise history tonight at 8 p.m. ET.

But the local paper just couldn't wait for the series to conclude. It accidentally sent out an electronic edition of the paper that included a signed congratulatory letter from Blues chairman and governor Tom Stillman as well as a celebratory advertisement from rental car company Enterprise, which was founded in St. Louis.

"Winning the Stanley Cup was a dream come true for so many of you. All of us will remember where we were, what we did and how we felt when the Blues brought the Cup home. Each of us will have a

library of memories to pass down for generations," wrote Stillman, who also looked "forward to celebrating with you as we parade the Cup down Market Street."

The pages, which have since been removed, were only visible to subscribers before readers took to social media to poke fun at the newspaper's mistake.

The newspaper posted an apology on Twitter for the "sneak peek at what our advertisers are hoping to say to the Blues, the fans and St. Louis."

In preparation for the outcome of the Stanley Cup Final, some of our readers got a sneak peek at what our advertisers are hoping to say to the Blues, the fans and St. Louis. We apologize for the sneak peek and hope to share their messages with everyone very soon!

— St. Louis Post-Dispatch (@stltoday) June 9, 2019

With a chance at winning the Stanley Cup for the first time, who can really blame the staff of the Post-Dispatch for letting their excitement get the best of them?

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USA TODAY / Stanley Cup Final: Blues can end 52-year championship drought in Game 6

Kevin Allen, USA TODAY Published 8:48 a.m. ET June 9, 2019 | Updated 1:17 p.m. ET June 9, 2019

ST. LOUIS — The St. Louis Blues are trying not to think about how they have a chance tonight to win the first Stanley Cup in the franchise's 52-year history.

But it is hard not to.

"It's incredible how many amazing teams that have been here and haven't won," Blues center Ryan O'Reilly said. "Looking at it now having that opportunity, seeing this group in here, seeing the city behind it. It's amazing."

The Blues lead 3-2 in the best-of-seven NHL championship series going into tonight's Game 6 at Enterprise Center (8 p.m., ET, NBC). Injured Blues forward Robert Thomas might be ready to play. It will be a game-time decision. Blues forward Ivan Barbashev will miss Game 6 with an NHL-imposed one-game suspension for a high hit against Boston's Marcus Johansson in Game 5.

Before this playoff run, the Blues had not even been to the Stanley Cup Final since 1970. What makes the Blues' playoff run more improbable is that they were in last place out of 31 NHL teams on Jan. 2.

"It's tough to put into words," O'Reilly said. "Just running into random people around the city and how excited they are. Season ticket-holders for thirty-plus years. Their excitement. It's so much more beyond the (players)."

The city of St. Louis has become enthralled with the Blues' chase of the Cup. Many former Blues players have come in for playoff games. Actors Jon Hamm, from St. Louis, has attended games, along with



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St. Louis native actor Scott Bakula and actress Jenna Fischer, who grew up in St. Louis.

One St. Louis fan, Scott Berry, can win \$100,000 if the Blues win the Stanley Cup because he placed a \$400 bet in Las Vegas when the Blues were a 250-1 shot to win the Cup last January.

If the Blues win, they will become the third first-time Stanley Cup champion since 2012. The Los Angeles Kings, who entered the NHL the same year as the Blues, won their first Cup in 2012 and the Washington Capitals, who entered the NHL in 1974, won their first Cup last June.

The NHL's longest Stanley Cup drought is owned by the Toronto Maple Leafs, who haven't won the Cup since 1966-67, the season before the Blues joined the NHL.

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USA TODAY / Stanley Cup Finals: Time, TV, streaming info and everything you need about Game 6 of Bruins-Blues

Lila Bromberg, USA TODAY Published 7:35 a.m. ET June 9, 2019 | Updated 7:36 a.m. ET June 9, 2019

After defeating the Boston Bruins in Game 5, the St. Louis Blues can capture their first Stanley Cup at home in Game 6 on Sunday.

The Blues won 2-1 Thursday for their second consecutive victory against the Bruins. Rookie goalie Jordan Binnington stopped 38 shots, including 17 in the first period, for a 3-2 series lead.

St. Louis' Ryan O'Reilly scored the first goal and assisted on the second. He has three goals and three assists in the series.

The second goal was controversial because referees missed a tripping penalty by St. Louis' Tyler Bozak on Noel Acciari before David Perron scored. It ended up being the game-winner when Jake DeBrusk scored for Boston.

If the Blues win Sunday, they would become the second consecutive first-time winner, following the Washington Capitals, who made franchise history last season. That hasn't happened since the Carolina Hurricanes (2006) and Anaheim Ducks (2007) hoisted the Cup in back-to-back years.

If the Bruins win, Game 7 will be in Boston Wednesday.

The basics

When: Sunday, June 9 at 8 p.m. ET

Where: Enterprise Center in St. Louis

TV channel: NBC

Streaming: NBC app and NBC.com

Fast facts

The Blues will be without forward Ivan Barbashev, who was suspended one game for an illegal check to the head of Boston's Marcus Johansson.

Despite reportedly having a broken jaw and being unable to talk after being hit in the face by a puck in Game 4, Bruins captain Zdeno Chara played in Game 5.

The Bruins had three power-play chances in Game 5 but couldn't capitalize on any of them. Neither team has a power-play goal the last two games. Bruins coach Bruce Cassidy is making an adjustment by moving Marcus Johansson to the top power-play unit.

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