



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • June 12, 2019

THE NEWS & OBSERVER

With clock ticking, Canes' Waddell has decisions to make, deals to negotiate

By Chip Alexander

With the NHL Draft and free agency fast approaching, Carolina Hurricanes general manager Don Waddell has been a busy man and will soon be busier.

Waddell said Tuesday that he planned to meet with Sebastian Aho's agent at the draft next week in Vancouver. Both the team and the center would like to agree on a long-term contract, but at what price? Seven million dollars a year? Eight? Nine? More?

"There's still some real negotiating to be done," Waddell said.

Aho, a restricted free agent, is coming off a 30-goal, 53-assist season, helping lift the Canes into the Stanley Cup playoffs for the first time since 2009. He was named an NHL All-Star for the first time. He's highly marketable and a fan favorite. That's some nice negotiating leverage for the 21-year-old forward from Finland.

But Waddell and the Canes have players due to become unrestricted free agents on July 1 if not re-signed, among them team captain Justin Williams, forward Micheal Ferland and goalies Petr Mrazek and Curtis McElhinney.

Williams said after the Canes' playoff run ended in the Eastern Conference finals that he would take time to unwind and reflect -- on the season and his career -- before deciding whether to retire or continue to play. At 37, he has three Stanley Cup rings and financial security, signing a two-year, \$9 million deal in July 2017 when he returned to the Canes as a free agent.

Waddell said no decision had been made by Williams, noting Canes coach Rod Brind'Amour had been talking with his good friend and teammate on the Canes' 2006 Stanley Cup champs. Waddell said there would be other conversations with Williams at the NHL Awards next week in Las Vegas -- Williams is a finalist for the Mark Messier Leadership Award -- and that Williams, if he does play, would stay with the Canes, not move to another team.

Waddell, in his end-of-season press conference on May 21, said that the team's preference would be to agree to new deals with both Mrazek and McElhinney, who combined to give the Canes enough consistent and quality goal-tending to reach the playoffs.

"With both guys, that's still our goal," Waddell said Tuesday. "If a deal makes sense, we will get that done but there's still work to be done."

The goalies' asking prices are not known. Mrazek came to Carolina last year as a free agent, his one-year deal paying him \$1.5 million. McElhinney, claimed on waivers from the Toronto Maple Leafs in early October, earned \$850,000.

Both should be asking for substantial increases. Mrazek, 27, finished with a 2.39 GAA and .914 percentage in the regular season while McElhinney, who turned 36 on May 23, had a 2.58 GAA and .912 save percentage.

The Edmonton Oilers signed goalie Mikko Koskinen, due to become a UFA on July 1, to a three-year extension with an annual cap hit of \$4.5 million. Koskinen finished the season with a 2.93 goals-against average and .906 save percentage.

Waddell stressed that every situation, like every NHL market, is different. Former Canes forward Jeff Skinner, after scoring a career-high 40 goals last season with the Buffalo Sabres, recently signed an eight-year deal worth \$9 million a season with the Sabres. But again, Skinner was to be a UFA on July 1 if the Sabres could not get him under contract.

"We have made it clear that everyone's revenue is different around the league," Waddell said. "Our contracts can't be based on another team's economics but on our own economics."

Waddell said the team had held no conversations with Ferland, a part of the Canes' megatrade with the Calgary Flames last June, indicating Ferland would become a UFA on July 1. Ferland's first season with the Canes had a strong start and he added some needed toughness to the lineup, but his production later dipped because of injuries.

The Canes also have a number of non-player contracts expiring at the end of June. That includes Waddell, who serves as president and general manager.

John Forslund, the Canes' long-time television play-by-play man, and TV analyst Tripp Tracy could soon be signed to new contracts, Waddell said.

Tony MacDonald, long the Canes' director of amateur scouting, will retire after the draft next week, Waddell said.

As for Waddell, he said owner Tom Dundon has asked him to stay on as president and GM, saying of a new contract, "We'll figure it out."



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THE ATHLETIC

Bag of Jerks, Part 1: Contract negotiations, free-agency priorities, who is the best celebrity Hurricanes fan?

By Sara Civian

There is not much I enjoy more than sitting down to write a mailbag and seeing 50-plus questions. Y'all always bring the heat, and you didn't disappoint in this first Q&A of the offseason.

Between the Checkers winning their first Calder Cup, free agency looming and the draft less than two weeks away, there's too much to stuff into one post. This will be the first of two Hurricanes mailbags this week.

Let's discuss free-agency priorities, contract negotiations and Jon Hamm first. We'll get to prospects and things of that nature in the next one.

What is the team's No. 1 priority this offseason? Bringing back Justin Williams might seem to be it, but that is in the Captain's hands. — Norm C.

Like you said, Williams is the only one in control of his future, and he's taking his time with the decision, as he said he would. So let's focus on the No. 1 priority this offseason that the Hurricanes can actually somewhat control: signing a goaltender (or two ...). Obviously, Petr Mrazek (\$1.5 million) and Curtis McElhinney (\$850,000) have contracts that are up, and both will be rightfully looking for more. Hurricanes GM Don Waddell initially said in late May he hopes to sign both of them, and as of this week, that's still the hope. I think re-signing both while giving Alex Nedeljkovic his fair share of NHL opportunities is ideal when you consider what else is out there on the goalie market, what those asking prices and terms would look like, and the likelihood of them signing elsewhere. There are a few situations that could get ~interesting~ this offseason, but this is one the Canes should really hope doesn't.

Who's on the way out? — Alex K.

Funny you should ask, Alex K. — you can get the long-winded answer here. The SparkNotes version would say Micheal Ferland. It's just flat-out significantly more likely that a different team will pay him closer to the raise he is seeking than the Canes will after his disappointing, injury-ridden second half. Consider, too, that Nino Niederreiter was able to fulfill Ferland's role as a scoring threat and power-play weapon the second he arrived in Raleigh. Sure, the Hurricanes are drowning in cap space right now, but they probably won't ever be a team that can afford to spend on multiple luxuries.

This is always a crazy time of year because anything could change in a five-minute window. For example, I just have a feeling that a team in desperate need of a fourth-line center is going to offer Greg McKeeg a well-deserved contract, and as much as the Canes like him, they'd probably let him walk considering the amount of fourth-line depth they have in their system. That could also happen for Saku Maenalanan.

The only player I'm confident has played his last game as a Hurricane, though, is Ferland.

Do you think the recent playoff run will improve the Hurricanes' stock as a potential UFA destination this Summer? — Kirk O.

It takes a lot for people to change their minds about a city and/or organization, but I actually do. Even more than that — well, I guess it goes hand in hand — is the culture change. Players around the league see how well the locker room gets along in Raleigh, they hear Dougie Hamilton say how much the game experience has changed since he used to play at PNC Arena in an away jersey, they want to play for Rod Brind'Amour. There will always be players who just want to play in major cities or close to home, or who think Raleigh is the (yeehaw!) NASCAR mecca of the world or whatever. But everyone around the league paid attention to things like Niederreiter flourishing when he joined the Canes, and nothing flips a narrative that this is somewhere careers go to die like that.

Do you foresee any major free agent signing and/or trade happening? — Harrison H.

Again, anything could happen, but not really.

The Canes need to sign their goalies, finish Sebastian Aho's contract, figure out Williams' future and decide what to do about several other pending UFAs.

After that, they need to think about what they have in Charlotte and players already under contract who could take the next steps in their development.

Then they need to consider what they actually need, which free agents they could successfully target and which players they could trade to yield a "major" result.

If you ask me, all they really need is to lock down goaltending and another 20-ish goal scorer, assuming Williams doesn't retire. I wouldn't consider the acquisition of one of those major compared to all the other big moves that are promised to happen on other teams this offseason and the Hurricanes' previous offseason.

Hi Sara, keep kicking ass...do you get the sense (Hurricanes owner) Tom Dundon would spend to the cap ceiling? — Josh M.

Hi, Josh. I will keep kicking ass if you keep keeping ass. There's no denying the playoff run, relevancy and revenue generated from all of the above will have an impact on willingness to spend. But every team operates on a different budget, and small markets just generally won't spend to the cap ceiling. I get the sense Dundon will spend, as he's said, "to make the team better," but it's never going to be a free-for-all. We will learn a lot more about his ownership-style this summer.

Any reaction inside Canes-land about Jeff Skinner's new contract? Collective sigh of relief that someone else is paying him? Upset that they didn't get a chance to put that offer in front of him? Just shrug and move on? — Brant G.



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Well, one of the reasons they traded him was because they weren't going to put that offer in front of him. We can argue all day about the obviously weak return the Canes got for an elite even-strength goal scorer, but they didn't trade him to get a good return. So I'm sure Canes-land is generally happy for him — and relieved it didn't have to deal with the drama of not signing him that might've wasted months.

Skinnerfraude aside, it's a booming offseason for pending UFAs, so you have to wonder how much it means for the market price of a player like Aho even if folks act like it means nothing.

If you had the power to force one pending UFA to sign with the Canes, who would it be and why? — Peter W.

Matt Duchene so he could eat waffles with Jaccob Slavin and provide a scoring threat at second-line center that would round out the Hurricanes. But mostly the waffles.

What are you hearing about Don Waddell's role going into next season? Will he continue to take on responsibilities as President and GM? Are the Canes approaching the draft with the mentality that he is their GM? — Matt B.

I asked him about it last month.

"I think this (the front-office structure) is working, so I don't see any reason why we should change it."

Say what you want about Waddell's history (even though his present involves a GM of the Year nomination), but he's always been excellent at the scouting and drafting aspects of the job. You have to give Ron Francis a tip of the hat for drafting such a strong team of Calder Cup champions, but I'd have faith in Waddell heading into the draft.

The old scoreboard has come down to make room for the fancy-pants version we'll get before next season. Do you think this really matters, or is good old fashioned winning games going to keep driving the revolution at the ticket sales window? — Jeff H.

Everything matters just a little bit, and altogether it adds up to a whole lot. Hurricanes VP of marketing Mike Forman always does a great job explaining this. On one hand, you think, "Yeah, it's just a scoreboard. So what?" On the other hand, all these tiny details just reiterate how important it is to have attractive facilities/gear/etc. in creating a culture of competency.

I remember reading colleague Mark Lazerus' book about the Blackhawks. He spoke of their dark ages, none of their stuff was state of the art, and it all compounded to create this culture of negativity and complacency. It mattered. Players felt like it was a joke and treated it as such.

Plus, this scoreboard is so much better. It's not like the old one was holding the Hurricanes back from winning or something, but upgrades remind them they're a damn good professional team, and they remind you why you buy tickets to see the team. Why not?

The Blues have Jon Hamm. The Bruins have John Krasinski. Who is your favorite celebrity Caniac? — Cody S.

Brian Pesce.

What position do the Canes need to be better at next year to not be swept in the conference final? — Kenneth M.

I think it's mostly a matter of maintaining good goaltending and young stars taking those next steps. Definitely needed more out of Aho and Niederreiter, and they knew it. Think about Andrei Svechnikov with another year under his belt, too.

I keep thinking about the ECF series and how the Bruins third and fourth lines just destroyed the Hurricanes. When looking at the forward groups, what do you think the Canes can do to fortify their lines? I'd love to hear about possible internal fix and free agency targets. — Shlomo R.

Adding just one more 20-goal scorer via free agency or trade could make enough of a difference without killing the team vibe. Kasperii Kapanen and Gustav Nyquist are two I'd consider a good fit. This is under the assumption that Svechnikov, Aho and other young, promising prospects take the next big steps in their development, and goaltending either stays the same or improves. So much of the reason the Bruins have such a strong bottom six is because they have such a strong top six. Most of the players in their bottom six could play or have played more minutes/bigger roles on other teams but are able to trickle down the Bruins roster.

Have you heard anything regarding the ECHL situation? Are the Canes looking to grab a South Carolina affiliate? (Greenville, South Carolina) — William M.

I reported last week they are "working on something closer" to make traveling easier, according to sources. I'm not aware of any changes or updates to that plan yet.

You see the Canes (or anyone else) extending an offer sheet this offseason? It's been over 5 years since anyone has even tried this in the NHL. Not worth burning the bridges? There are certainly some tempting RFA this year if so. And those 4-6M & 6-8M tiers aren't thaaaat bad if you have stacked prospect pool and plenty of picks... — Kyle S.

As glorious as the summer of the offer sheet and all the ensuing drama would be, I just can't bring myself to entertain it as an actual possibility. Not many in this sport are in the business of burning bridges.

What is one thing your experience this year has changed about how you watch and/or think about hockey? — David Z.

Good question. I always believed it's important for the locker room to be full of players who get along, respect one another, work hard and have fun. I just never really thought the human element could take a team as far as it took the Canes. I take chemistry and friendships between teammates much more seriously now.

Are you still writing/going to write the Dougie piece you mentioned a while ago? — Emily M.

Yes! A good thing about such a crazy playoff run is that I still have so many stories I had to put on the back burner left to write.



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AHL Notebook: Charlotte combines development with winning

Calder Cup champions provide strong future for Hurricanes

by Patrick Williams

Each season NHL organizations attempt to walk the fine line between player development and winning in the American Hockey League.

Charlotte (Carolina Hurricanes) found a perfect balance between the two this season by winning the Calder Cup after a 51-win, 110-point regular season.

Here are four takeaways of what it all means for Charlotte, which defeated Chicago (Vegas Golden Knights) in five games for the Calder Cup, and the Hurricanes:

Winning matters

Mike Vellucci, in his second season, won the Louis A.R. Pieri Award as the AHL's outstanding coach. He considers this Calder Cup championship to be a major turning point for the Carolina organization. He also serves as assistant general manager and director of hockey operations for the Hurricanes, who this season made it to the Eastern Conference Final, where they were swept by the Boston Bruins.

The Hurricanes and Vellucci wanted to see more than player development from Charlotte.

"We accept no losing," Vellucci said. "We want to get better as players, obviously, but we want to win. Developing, there's the skill part of it, but developing winners is something that as an organization we needed.

"Mediocrity is no longer tolerated in our organization, and it started with [Hurricanes coach] Rod Brind'Amour."

Prospects aplenty

The Hurricanes have quietly built one of the best prospect pools in the NHL, one that has now experienced a four-round playoff grind.

Forward Martin Necas, selected by Carolina in the first round (No. 12) of the 2017 NHL Draft, had 13 points (five goals, eight assists) in 18 playoff games in his first AHL season. Center Morgan Geekie, a third-round (No. 67) pick in 2017, led all AHL rookies in playoff scoring with 18 points (eight goals, 10 assists) in 19 games. That total also tied him for second in the AHL with teammate Tomas Jurco. Forward Aleksi Saarela, who was traded to Carolina by the New York Rangers in the Eric Staal trade in 2016, had 15 points (seven goals, eight assists) in 17 playoff games after scoring a team-leading 30 regular-season goals.

Forward Nicolas Roy, a fourth-round pick (No. 96) in the 2015 NHL Draft, had 15 points (six goals, nine assists) in 19 playoff games. Forward Julien Gauthier, the No. 21 pick in the 2016

NHL Draft, had eight points (five goals, three assists) in 17 playoff games.

Among defensemen, rookie Jake Bean, the No. 13 pick in 2016, was plus-10 with 26 shots on goal in 15 postseason games while Haydn Fleury, the No. 7 pick in the 2014 NHL Draft, had six points (two goals, four assists) and was a plus-seven.

Goalie Alex Nedeljkovic, selected in the second round (No. 37) in 2014, is a prime candidate for more work in Carolina next season after three busy AHL seasons. He has led AHL goalie in regular-season games in back-to-back seasons, including 51 in 2018-19.

Nedeljkovic was 10-4 with a 2.31 goals-against average and .916 save percentage in 15 playoff games. He was named to the AHL First All-Star Team and won the Aldege "Baz" Bastien Memorial Award as the AHL's outstanding goalie in the regular season when he was 34-9-5 with a 2.26 GAA and .916 save percentage.

Experienced leadership

Forward Andrew Poturalski was named the Jack A. Butterfield Trophy winner as the most valuable player in the Calder Cup Playoffs. Playing with a broken foot, Poturalski had 23 points (12 goals, 11 assists) in 18 games.

The 25-year-old, in his third season with Charlotte, formed part of a deep veteran core that helped guide Carolina's young prospects. Captain Patrick Brown excelled in a variety of roles and also proved to be a useful NHL recall option. Jurco and Necas flourished together quickly.

"[Hurricanes general manager Don Waddell] believed in this group, believed in giving us good young players and surrounding them with awesome vets," Charlotte senior vice president of hockey operations Derek Wilkinson said. "That's the formula that works in the American League. It's tried and true, but it's hard to get to, and hard to do."

Defensemen Trevor Carrick, Josiah Didier, Dan Renouf and Bobby Sanguinetti added experience for younger defenders like Bean and Jesper Sellgren.

Forward Zack Stortini offered guidance and was the first player to receive the Calder Cup from Brown. Veteran goalie Dustin Tokarski formed a top tandem with Nedeljkovic.

"It was all positive, and I couldn't ask for a better guy to be there with you and to win it with," Nedeljkovic said of Tokarski.

Behind the bench

Vellucci is 97-43-8-4 in two seasons with Charlotte, and this season had 11 players play for the Hurricanes.



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Vellucci molded the talent into a cohesive, detail-oriented unit. The Charlotte penalty kill finished first in the regular season (86.6 percent), and the team finished second in goals-against per game (2.49). Charlotte limited opponents to 27.03 shots per game in the regular season, third-best in the AHL.

That brand of tenacious defense fueled an already potent offense that finished fifth in the regular season at 3.36 goals per game and first in the postseason (4.05).

Vellucci finished his fifth season in the Carolina organization after a strong career as coach and general manager with Plymouth, where he twice won Ontario Hockey League Coach of the Year honors.

His work with Charlotte had already attracted considerable attention, and a Calder Cup will only further solidify his credentials as a candidate for NHL coaching vacancies at some point.

The Hockey News

Does a Calder Cup victory correlate to Stanley Cup success for NHL clubs?

Winning the AHL crown should seemingly set up an NHL franchise for future success. But does it really work that way? We look back at a dozen winners to determine if a Calder Cup win portends a Stanley Cup celebration.

By Jared Clinton

There are several reasons why the future looks bright for the Carolina Hurricanes. Sebastian Aho and Teuvo Teravainen appear to be every bit the cornerstones of the offense that Carolina had hoped they would be. The defense is rock solid, built upon a foundation of an almost infallible top four. Rookie coach Rod Brind'Amour didn't miss a beat when it came to carrying over the possession-style game instituted by his predecessor, Bill Peters. And Carolina is also coming off of a trip to the Eastern Conference final that has reenergized the entire fanbase.

But another reason for Hurricanes faithful to be hopeful about what's to come is that it appears the group of bright, young talent that's on the way has what it takes to play and win in big situations. Case in point? The Charlotte Checkers, Carolina's AHL affiliate, hoisted the Calder Cup over the weekend mere months after capturing the circuit's regular season crown. Impressive stuff, and enough to get Hurricanes fans dreaming up their own championship celebrations. After all, the AHL-to-NHL connection is an easy one to draw. The Checkers feature a number of Carolina's top prospects, including Martin Necas, Jake Bean, Janne Kuokkanen, Julien Gauthier, AHL post-season standout Morgan Geekie and goaltender Alex Nedeljkovic. So, it's only a matter of time before the Hurricanes are perennial Stanley Cup contenders, right?

Well, not so far. For all a run to the Calder Cup can teach a group of young players and for all the success those players experience in one minor-league campaign, does an AHL affiliate hoisting the league's top trophy really correlate to prosperity for the big club down the line?

The answer isn't black and white. Below, we've taken a team-by-team look at a dozen of the past 15 Calder Cup winners – every champion from 2004-05 through 2015-16 – and offered a glimpse into how the AHL success influenced the NHL product. For each NHL team, we've outlined their regular season record, playoff record and best end-of-season finish in the five campaigns that followed the AHL affiliate's Calder Cup victory.

Our findings? Over the past 15 seasons, not a single team has followed up their AHL success with a Stanley Cup victory, though there are two franchises who have come awfully close in the five-year timeframe. Take a look:

PHILADELPHIA PHANTOMS – 2004-05
NHL Affiliate: Philadelphia Flyers

The foundation for the Flyers' success around the end of the millennium's first decade was built during the Phantoms' Calder Cup run, and the two major pieces – Jeff Carter and Mike Richards – didn't arrive until the regular season ended. Combined, the two played three regular season games, but the future Flyers duo, both of whom were 19 at the time, contributed a 19 goals and 38 points total during the run. Ironically, a couple of the same players who helped the Phantoms win the Calder Cup are those who got in the way of the Flyers capturing the Stanley Cup in 2009-10. By that time, 2004-05 Calder Cup champions Patrick Sharp and Ben Eager were both members of the Chicago Blackhawks and played a part in Philadelphia's six-game defeat in the Stanley Cup final. (Of course, Carter and Richards would later win the Cup together with the Los Angeles Kings.)

NHL Record: 194-165-51 – 439 pts. (20th)
Playoff Record: 27-25
Best Finish: Eastern Conference champions

HERSHEY BEARS – 2005-06
NHL Affiliate: Washington Capitals

It wasn't long after the Bears' post-lockout Calder Cup victory that a few notable graduates made their way to the Capitals. Top-scorer Tomas Fleischmann was among those who were part of the Washington outfits that became perennial contenders in the early Alex Ovechkin days, as were Brooks Laich, Eric Fehr and David Steckel. But the greatest product of the Calder Cup run was Mike Green, who was a top offensive defenseman with the Capitals for several seasons. By the time Washington started shedding some of the up-and-comers who led the Bears to AHL success, though, the Capitals were undergoing a retooling after failing to advance beyond the second round at any point.

NHL Record: 223-133-54 – 500 pts. (5th)
Playoff Record: 17-20
Best Finish: Second Round



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HAMILTON BULLDOGS – 2006-07
NHL Affiliate: Montreal Canadiens

It doesn't matter that this run to the AHL crown produced not a single skater who became an impact player for the Canadiens. Why? Because it signalled the arrival of Carey Price, who is inarguably the most important player Montreal has had throughout his tenure. Only 19 at the time, Price used his one Calder Cup run to vault himself into a part-time gig with the Canadiens the following season and he's been the incumbent starter ever since. He played an important part in guiding Montreal to the 2013-14 Eastern Conference final, and were it not for an injury in Game 1 of that series against the New York Rangers, maybe Price has a Stanley Cup final appearance under his belt.

NHL Record: 202-153-55 – 459 pts. (20th)
Playoff Record: 27-25
Best Finish: Eastern Conference finalists

CHICAGO WOLVES – 2007-08
NHL Affiliate: Atlanta Thrashers

The Wolves' win had no bearing on the Thrashers' success. Absolutely none. So, how is it that Chicago, given their affiliation with Atlanta, was able to piece together a winner? Well, they had some hired guns. For the duration of their careers, Jason Krog and Darren Haydar were two of the best pure scorers the AHL has even seen and the duo dominated in the post-season, scoring a combined 24 goals and 65 points in 24 playoff games. Bryan Little is the lone prospect on those Wolves who is a current NHLer of note. Ondrej Pavelec was the starting goaltender and remained a No. 1 for some time, but he has since retired.

NHL Record: 165-167-44 – 374 pts. (24th)
Playoff Record: N/A
Best Finish: Second in Southeast Division

HERSHEY BEARS – 2008-09
NHL Affiliate: Washington Capitals

The Bears' second post-NHL lockout Calder Cup victory was similar in that it produced a few recognizable role players and saw one standout defenseman start his career. Among those who fit the former category are Jay Beagle, who would eventually play a part in the Capitals' 2017-18 Stanley Cup victory, while John Carlson fits the bill for the latter. Both were fresh-faced – Beagle in his second professional season, Carlson just getting his first taste – but played a part in Hershey climbing the mountain. Also on the roster? Karl Alzner, as well as Michal Neuvirth, who was the star and backbone of the playoff run.

NHL Record: 209-118-49 – 467 pts. (6th)
Playoff Record: 17-20
Best Finish: Second Round

HERSHEY BEARS – 2009-10
NHL Affiliate: Washington Capitals

With a core that included Chris Bourque, Alexandre Giroux and Keith Aucoin, the Bears captured back-to-back Calder Cups. And this run saw the next wave of future Capitals get more playing time. Alzner was more involved, as were Carlson and Beagle. Neuvirth again commanded the crease, but his backup? A baby-faced Braden Holtby, who saw action in the

playoffs three times. He'd later backstop Washington to the Stanley Cup, but that came nearly a decade after his bit part in the Calder Cup victory.

NHL Record: 200-129-47 – 447 pts. (10th)
Playoff Record: 21-23
Best Finish: Second Round

BINGHAMTON SENATORS – 2010-11
NHL Affiliate: Ottawa Senators

Several players from the Baby Sens ended up cracking the Senators roster in the not-too-distant future, but Mike Hoffman was the only real difference-maker at any point. Others on the roster included Zack Smith, Erik Condra, Mark Borowiecki, Eric Gryba and Robin Lehner, who was excellent during the Calder Cup run. The real leaders offensively, however, were Ryan Potulny and Ryan Keller, neither of whom really caught on in Ottawa.

NHL Record: 184-140-52 – 420 pts. (18th)
Playoff Record: 10-13
Best Finish: Second Round

NORFOLK ADMIRALS – 2011-12
NHL Affiliate: Tampa Bay Lightning

This was the birth of the dominant and deep Lightning teams we see today. Simply run down the list. The offense featured Tyler Johnson, Ondrej Palat and Alex Killorn. The coach? Jon Cooper. Also on the roster were Radko Gudas, Mark Barberio and Michael Kostka. Dustin Tokarski led the way in goal. No wonder the Admirals won the Calder Cup. Tampa Bay hasn't won the Stanley Cup, but of all the teams on this list, no outfit had its minor-league championship translate to sustained big-league success quite like the Lightning.

NHL Record: 202-138-36 – 440 pts. (12th)
Playoff Record: 25-22
Best Finish: Eastern Conference champions

GRAND RAPIDS GRIFFINS – 2012-13
NHL Affiliate: Detroit Red Wings

Based on the sheer volume of players who made the jump – not to mention coach Jeff Blashill – there's a fairly clear connection that can be drawn between the Griffins' Calder Cup-winning team and this era's Red Wings' teams. That said, success in the AHL didn't result in great NHL fortunes. Grand Rapids was led by Petr Mrazek in goal, and Tomas Tatar, Luke Glendening, Danny DeKeyser, Riley Sheahan, Gustav Nyquist, Brendan Smith and Tomas Jurco all saw time with the Griffins during the post-season run. Only two – Glendening and DeKeyser – are still Red Wings.

NHL Record: 185-158-66 – 438 pts. (19th)
Playoff Record: 5-12
Best Finish: First Round

TEXAS STARS – 2013-14
NHL Affiliate: Dallas Stars

There are only two notable players from the Baby Stars' championship outfit that became regulars with the big club: Brett Ritchie and Radek Faksa. At the time, Faksa was 19 and a bottom-sixer in Texas, while Ritchie was more impactful in the middle of the lineup. Oddly, the Stars weren't lacking for prospects who could get the job done in the AHL. Justin



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Dowling, Curtis McKenzie, Scott Glennie and defensemen Jyrki Jokkipakka, Jamie Oleksiak and Patrik Nemeth all showed promise. Overall, though, the AHL crown didn't portend great success in the NHL.

NHL Record: 210-155-45 – 465 pts. (15th)
Playoff Record: 14-12
Best Finish: Second Round

MANCHESTER MONARCHS – 2014-15
NHL Affiliate: Los Angeles Kings

What the Monarchs' win meant for the Kings is difficult to gauge when most of the group is gone. Consider this: only two players – Derek Forbort and Adrian Kempe – who played more than five games with the Monarchs during that run are still with the Kings organization in any capacity. That's it. Top young contributors such as Michael Mersch, Jordan Weal, Nick Shore, Colin Miller and Kevin Gravel all either failed to catch on in Los Angeles or were moved along at some point.

NHL Record: 163-134-31 – 357 pts. (20th)
Playoff Record: 1-8
Best Finish: First Round

LAKE ERIE MONSTERS – 2015-16
NHL Affiliate: Columbus Blue Jackets

The Blue Jackets completed a monumental upset of the Presidents' Trophy-winning Lightning in Round One of the post-season, and there are a few players who contributed to that victory who cut their teeth with the Calder Cup champion Monsters. For instance, their leading playoff scorer? Oliver Bjorkstrand. Also helping along the offense? Josh Anderson. And the breakout performance came courtesy of Zach Werenski, who made a seamless transition to the pro game while skating on a blueline that also featured Dean Kukan, who looks like an up-and-comer for Columbus. The pieces developed in the AHL, some of whom helped during the Calder Cup run, are starting to make a difference in the NHL.

NHL Record: 142-85-19 – 303 pts. (6th)
Playoff Record: 9-12
Best Finish: Second Round

(Note: Only four seasons and three seasons, respectively, were used to assess the NHL success of the Kings and Blue Jackets.)



SB NATION
CANES COUNTRY

Carolina Hurricanes 2019 free agency preview part one: Identifying the holes

The Canes have a few spots to fill ahead of the opening of the NHL's free agency period on July 1, but where are they? And which of the team's unrestricted and restricted free agents should be brought back?

By Andrew Schnittker

There's still one game left in the 2018-19 NHL season, with the Bruins and Blues set to square off in a winner-take-all game seven Wednesday night, but that doesn't mean it's too early to take a look at what the 2019-20 edition of the Carolina Hurricanes may look like.

Over the next two days, I'm going to run a two-part series looking at what holes the Canes will be looking to fill when NHL free agency opens on July 1, and what options they'll have for filling them in terms of both external free agents and internal promotions from the Calder Cup Champion Charlotte Checkers.

Given its abundance of draft picks and prospects, Carolina will likely make at least one trade, but for the sake of this exercise, we're only looking at free agent signing and promotion candidates.

For the first part of this, we need to figure out what holes the team is looking to fill. A quick glance at CapFriendly shows the Hurricanes have seven forwards (Jordan Staal, Jordan Martinook, Teuvo Teravainen, Andrei Svechnikov, Nino Niederreiter, Warren Foegele and Lucas Wallmark), six defensemen (Justin Faulk, Jacob Slavin, Dougie Hamilton, Trevor van Riemsdyk, Calvin de Haan and Brett Pesce) and a goalie under contract at the NHL level for next season.

The goalie part is misleading, however; as it's Scott Darling, who seems likely to be bought out. So, the team appears to need five or six forwards, a defenseman and two goalies. However, those numbers shrink when considering who is likely to be brought back.

Sebastian Aho is a restricted free agent, but is a virtual lock to be back in as the team's top center on opening night, coming off a massive pay day. Brock McGinn is also an RFA, and the team should have no reason not to bring him back after another solid regular season and one of the biggest goals in Hurricanes history.

The big question up front is whether captain Justin Williams comes back on another one-year deal or retires. For our purpose here, we're going to say he comes back after a regular and postseason in which he showed he had plenty left in the tank.

The two unrestricted free agents the Canes appear likely to say goodbye to are Micheal Ferland and Greg McKegg. Unless Ferland is willing to lower his asking price (he'll probably have to at least some) significantly after following up a hot start with an injury-plagued second half, he's probably gone.

McKegg is a more interesting case. If he's willing to come back for cheap as the 13th forward, the Canes would likely re-sign him. He may want a shot at being a regular at center, however; and the Canes should be looking to upgrade at that position from the group of Aho, Staal, Wallmark and McKegg, so we'll say he goes too.



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Defense is the position that, barring a trade, the Canes don't need to make a move. Last year's top six is all under contract for at least another year, and if the Canes bring back Haydn Fleury (RFA), there's your seven.

Beyond Williams' future, goaltending is the other big question mark. Assuming Darling is bought out, the Canes don't have a goalie under contract at the NHL level. The (very successful) tandem of Petr Mrazek and Curtis McElhinney are unrestricted free agents, and even Alex Nedeljkovic, coming off an extremely successful season for Charlotte, is an RFA.

Don Waddell is on record as wanting to bring back both Mrazek and McElhinney, but will he be able to, and is it time to give Ned a shot? We're going to re-up with Mrazek and let Mac walk here.

If all those players are re-upped, the Canes' needs go down to two or three forwards and a goalie. Of course, they don't need just any players, as there are specific roles to be filled. Looking at who's already here, these are the holes that need to be plugged before the puck drops for the 2018-19 season:

Second-line center- If you want to look at this as 2A/2B with Jordan Staal, that's fine, but the Canes need more firepower/playmaking down the middle, to help at both even strength and on the team's much-maligned power play. Adding another center behind Aho would have a domino effect. It would push Staal and his two-way, power game down to the third spot and Wallmark, who performed very well both

in the third spot during the playoffs and even in the second with Staal injured, to the fourth.

A center group of Aho, another top-six caliber player, Staal and Wallmark is one to be feared.

2B/Backup Goalie- Mrazek definitely earned the right to be a full-time starter with his play this season, but the team also ran the platoon option very effectively during the regular season, and may opt to do so again. With Mrazek's track record still somewhat limited, the Canes would be better served to add a high-upside netminder here as opposed to a pure backup.

Top-nine winger- If the Canes do bring in or promote another top-six center, than the top nine locks include Aho (if re-signed), Williams (if re-signed), new center, Staal, Teravainen, Niederreiter, Foegele and Svechnikov. Jordan Martinook has certainly proved capable of joining that group, but if Carolina adds another forward to replace Ferland, it could roll out a fourth line of McGinn, Wallmark and Martinook, giving the team incredible depth.

Depth forward- This is largely dependent on McKegg. If he's willing to fill this role, the Canes should keep him. If not, then the team needs a 13th forward who can sub in when Rod Brind'Amour wants a different look or in case of injuries. This would ideally be a veteran, not a player from Charlotte who's better-served playing every night.

Tomorrow, we'll take a look at who might fill these holes, with candidates both from this year's unrestricted free agent pool and promotions from Charlotte.

2019 NHL Mock Draft: Carolina Hurricanes select Samuel Poulin with 28th Pick

Our mock draft selection this year is a bit later than we've been accustomed to. Still, we had our pick of some highly-skilled forwards, and went with a player who already has a Carolina connection.

By kleblanchockey

The annual SBN NHL Mock Draft has been ongoing for a couple of weeks, and today the 28th pick, the lowest the Carolina Hurricanes have picked in a decade, came up for selection. Our selection this year comes from a league the Hurricanes haven't picked much from over the years, a talented winger who has a connection to the franchise through his father, the Whalers' first round pick in 1991.

For the better part of a decade, Hurricanes fans have spent the months of April, May and June looking over draft lists, trying to decide which prospect the team would select in the highlight of their playoff-less summer, the NHL Draft. There is certainly a different feeling among Caniacs this year, as the feeling entering the draft isn't "who will get us back to the postseason?", but rather, "who will we add to keep us there?"

Picking at the end of the first round has been a rarity for the organization, especially recently; the Hurricanes have drafted inside the top 13 for eight of the last nine seasons. However, in Vancouver on June 21st, Carolina will have an opportunity to either add to their deep prospect core, or improve their NHL roster via a trade of the pick.

With that being said, we selected Sherbrooke (QMJHL) winger Samuel Poulin with Carolina's 28th pick in the 2019 SB Nation NHL mock draft.

Samuel Poulin: Data File

- DOB: 2/25/2001
- Team: Sherbrooke Phoenix (QMJHL)
- Left Wing | Shoots: L | 6'2", 207 pounds
- 2018-19 Stats: 67 GP - 29G, 47A, 76 points, 46 PIM

Pick Breakdown

Unlike a year ago, where Carolina could take their pick of which forward they coveted, this draft will be dictated by what other teams do in front of them. Owner Tom Dundon has been on record with his feelings of (not) drafting first round defensemen, so if he has any say in the decision making process it's pretty obvious where the focus will be positionally.

Poulin checks many boxes both stylistically and culturally for Carolina. He is an offensively-minded forward with possession ability in the attacking zone. He's shown leadership and work ethic qualities as he was named an alternate captain for his QMJHL team at age 17. He was selected second overall by Sherbrooke in the 2017 QMJHL Entry Draft behind only 2020 uber-prospect Alexis Lafreniere.

Lastly, a notable wrinkle is his pedigree, as his father Patrick was selected 9th overall in 1991 by none other than the Hartford Whalers, and was a veteran of over 600 NHL games.



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Scouting Analysis

When watching Poulin, the first thing you notice is his play within the offensive zone. His shot is NHL ready, and is a tool that will be deployed to improve an NHL power play. He is noticeable in possession, and is effective in both creating space below the circles for his linemates, and distributing when defenders play him too closely.

Size-wise, Poulin has a projectable frame which he has already started to fill. His combination of size and strength lends many to peg him as a power winger down the road, but it would be near-sided to think of him only as a hard-nosed net front presence. He certainly has the tools to be a playmaker as well.

A player of Poulin's ability wouldn't fall to the end of the first round if there wasn't some room for improvement. His skating is above average, but not elite, and his transitions within the play could (and should) improve with time. However, at this point in the first round, you bet on talent, especially if a player has the work ethic to improve.

Final Thoughts

As Carolina's roster continues to grow and evolve, it is nice to be able to draft from a best player available perspective, rather than looking to fill a specific hole with a certain prospect. If Poulin is selected, he would join a talented forward group in the Hurricanes organizational pipeline with the added luxury of being able to develop at a comfortable pace.

It's certainly a different, and welcome, mindset for Canes fans.

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1146645 Carolina Hurricanes

With clock ticking, Canes' Waddell has decisions to make, deals to negotiate

BY CHIP ALEXANDER

JUNE 11, 2019 04:44 PM

RALEIGH

With the NHL Draft and free agency fast approaching, Carolina Hurricanes general manager Don Waddell has been a busy man and will soon be busier.

Waddell said Tuesday that he planned to meet with Sebastian Aho's agent at the draft next week in Vancouver. Both the team and the center would like to agree on a long-term contract, but at what price? Seven million dollars a year? Eight? Nine? More?

"There's still some real negotiating to be done," Waddell said.

Aho, a restricted free agent, is coming off a 30-goal, 53-assist season, helping lift the Canes into the Stanley Cup playoffs for the

first time since 2009. He was named an NHL All-Star for the first time. He's highly marketable and a fan favorite. That's some nice negotiating leverage for the 21-year-old forward from Finland.

But Waddell and the Canes have players due to become unrestricted free agents on July 1 if not re-signed, among them team captain Justin Williams, forward Micheal Ferland and goalies Petr Mrazek and Curtis McElhinney.

Williams said after the Canes' playoff run ended in the Eastern Conference finals that he would take time to unwind and reflect -- on the season and his career -- before deciding whether to retire or continue to play. At 37, he has three Stanley Cup rings and financial security, signing a two-year, \$9 million deal in July 2017 when he returned to the Canes as a free agent.

Waddell said no decision had been made by Williams, noting Canes coach Rod Brind'Amour had been talking with his good friend and teammate on the Canes' 2006 Stanley Cup champs. Waddell said there would be other conversations with Williams at the NHL Awards next week in Las Vegas -- Williams is a finalist for the Mark Messier Leadership Award -- and that Williams, if he does play, would stay with the Canes, not move to another team.

Waddell, in his end-of-season press conference on May 21, said that the team's preference would be to agree to new deals with both



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Mrazek and McElhinney, who combined to give the Canes enough consistent and quality goal-tending to reach the playoffs.

"With both guys, that's still our goal," Waddell said Tuesday. "If a deal makes sense, we will get that done but there's still work to be done."

The goalies' asking prices are not known. Mrazek came to Carolina last year as a free agent, his one-year deal paying him \$1.5 million. McElhinney, claimed on waivers from the Toronto Maple Leafs in early October, earned \$850,000.

Both should be asking for substantial increases. Mrazek, 27, finished with a 2.39 GAA and .914 percentage in the regular season while McElhinney, who turned 36 on May 23, had a 2.58 GAA and .912 save percentage.

The Edmonton Oilers signed goalie Mikko Koskinen, due to become a UFA on July 1, to a three-year extension with an annual cap hit of \$4.5 million. Koskinen finished the season with a 2.93 goals-against average and .906 save percentage.

Waddell stressed that every situation, like every NHL market, is different. Former Canes forward Jeff Skinner, after scoring a career-high 40 goals last season with the Buffalo Sabres, recently signed an eight-year deal worth \$9 million a season with the Sabres. But again, Skinner was to be a UFA on July 1 if the Sabres could not get him under contract.

"We have made it clear that everyone's revenue is different around the league," Waddell said. "Our contracts can't be based on another team's economics but on our own economics."

Waddell said the team had held no conversations with Ferland, a part of the Canes' megatrade with the Calgary Flames last June, indicating Ferland would become a UFA on July 1. Ferland's first season with the Canes had a strong start and he added some needed toughness to the lineup, but his production later dipped because of injuries.

The Canes also have a number of non-player contracts expiring at the end of June. That includes Waddell, who serves as president and general manager.

John Forslund, the Canes' long-time television play-by-play man, and TV analyst Tripp Tracy could soon be signed to new contracts, Waddell said.

Tony MacDonald, long the Canes' director of amateur scouting, will retire after the draft next week, Waddell said.

As for Waddell, he said owner Tom Dundon has asked him to stay on as president and GM, saying of a new contract, "We'll figure it out."

News Observer LOADED: 06.12.2019

1146697 Websites

The Athletic / Top 31 prospects of the past five years, 2019 edition

By Corey Pronman Jun 11, 2019

There is so much written about the top prospects each year, but you can still be left wondering: "Just how good is Jack Hughes? Is he Connor McDavid good?"

To put the top of the 2019 class into perspective, I ranked the very best NHL Draft prospects of the past five years, using the perspective of evaluations from when these players were draft-eligible, ignoring what has transpired since then.

What's important to emphasize is these are my evaluations at the time of the draft, not now. So jumping to a conclusion like "how in the world do you think Jesse Puljujarvi is better than Mitch Marner" is incorrect, unless discussing them in past tenses.

Obviously there will be egg on my face in several instances, particularly the 2017 draft where I wasn't super high on Cale Makar or Elias Pettersson heading in, and my rankings of nearly every one of these draft classes would be substantially different as we've gotten new information on these players.

While I try my absolute best to view these prospects through the perspective of where they were as draft prospects, it is obviously hard to battle hindsight, but I do my best to be consistent.

In terms of tiers, I view McDavid on his own tier, while Patrik Laine through Rasmus Dahlin is a tier, and Kaapo Kakko through Andrei Svechnikov is a minor tier difference before the next group.

Breakdown by draft:

2015: six players

2016: six players

2017: five players

2018: seven players

2019: seven players

Check out Corey Pronman's complete preview of the 2019 NHL Draft.

Connor McDavid, 2015 draft (first overall, Edmonton): McDavid was one of the best prospects in the history of the game. In 2015, he wasn't in a different galaxy from Jack Eichel, or some of the top names in recent years, but there was some noticeable separation. McDavid distinguished himself at every level and tournament he ever took part in, and he has continued to do so since joining the Oilers, becoming the best player in the NHL over the past three seasons.

Patrik Laine, 2016 draft (second overall, Winnipeg): I'm going to eat crow on this one. Laine was one of the most dominant non-McDavid/Sidney Crosby 17-year-olds I've ever seen. He was a big, strong winger with an elite combination of offensive tools between his hands, sense and shot, but his speed wasn't amazing. I thought he'd turn into a rock star. As an NHLer, he has scored a lot, with a 44 goal season in 2017-18, but his 2018-19 was bumpy. This one may be a bit of a learning experience.

Auston Matthews, 2016 draft (first overall, Toronto): I've followed Matthews closely for many years and continue to be amazed by the skill level and goal-scoring ability he brings to the table. He has one of the most exciting toolkits I've had the pleasure of scouting. He has been one of the best centers in the NHL and, as long as he stays healthy, he should put up huge numbers.

Jack Hughes. 2019 draft: Hughes had a dominant season, looking like he was toying with opponents at times at the junior level and setting many records at the USNTDP. I think he's going to be an



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elite NHL player and a player the team that drafts him (New Jersey) can build around.

Jack Eichel, 2015 draft (second overall, Buffalo): Eichel had massive draft hype in 2015 because of his time with the USNTDP and particularly his dominant play in college. The hype was warranted as he's turned into one of the best centers in the league and a true elite driver of offense.

Rasmus Dahlin, 2018 draft (first overall, Buffalo): Dahlin was one of the best defense prospects to come along in the past few decades, right up there with Drew Doughty, Aaron Ekblad and Victor Hedman – if not above all three. In his first NHL season, Dahlin was remarkably good for a U19 defenseman. He's tracking to become a star defenseman in the league as projected.

Kaapo Kakko, 2019 draft: Kakko had a fantastic season in Finland between Liiga and the World Championship. Some scouts think his season was more impressive than Aleksander Barkov's at the same age. Kakko's right on track to step into the league next season and be a cornerstone player for an NHL club's (New York Rangers) rebuild.

Jesse Puljujarvi, 2016 draft (fourth overall, Edmonton): Puljujarvi was the MVP of the 2016 World Junior Championship and one of the most impressive prospects to ever come out of Finland. He has a lot going for him in terms of his skating, skill, shot and frame. His hockey sense has proved to be a bigger issue than I thought it would be at the time of the draft, leading to his draft and overall evaluation becoming a huge point of debate in the scouting community as he's struggled to get it going in the NHL.

Andrei Svechnikov, 2018 draft (second overall, Carolina): Svechnikov was highly touted for years going into his draft and as a rookie delivered on that promise for Carolina. He scored 20 goals, drove play when he was on the ice and showed a hard power game around the net. He's a very well-rounded player who could develop into a star for the Hurricanes.

Mitch Marner, 2015 draft (fourth overall, Toronto): In his draft season, Marner was a two points per game player for London in the OHL. Since then, he's continued to show offensive dominance wherever he's gone, including the NHL. He is one of the most imaginative offensive players I've ever scouted as an amateur, and with his hands, IQ and skating, he is one of the best offensive players in the NHL.

Filip Zadina, 2018 draft (sixth overall, Detroit): Zadina looked very impressive last season, showing elite skills and finishing ability to be a top scorer in the NHL. His first season following his draft had a few more bumps than I anticipated, but I still think very highly of his talent.

Dylan Strome, 2015 draft (third overall, Arizona): After being a much-hyped third-overall pick by the Coyotes in 2015, Strome's star faded a bit, but he had a heck of a rebound following his trade to Chicago. He may never be the fastest or a legit No. 1 center like once projected, but with his size, IQ, hands and shot, he's going to be a very good player for a while.

Alex Turcotte, 2019 draft: Turcotte wasn't fully healthy this season but when he was healthy, he was fantastic. He's a very well-rounded center who projects as an impact No. 1 who can make a difference with his speed, skill and physicality.

Jesper Kotkaniemi, 2018 draft (third overall, Montreal): Kotkaniemi was very good in Liiga and internationally in his draft year. In the NHL he was impressive for an 18-year-old, showing his high-end skill and vision with regularity. He's still 18 so still quite young

despite having a full year of NHL experience, and with continued improvements to his quickness he'll become a true No. 1 center.

Noah Hanifin, 2015 draft (fifth overall, Carolina): Hanifin was incredibly good in a tough conference for a draft-eligible player in 2015. He joined the college ranks extremely early after blowing away the competition at the USNTDP the season before. As a prospect, Hanifin was a dynamic skating defender with good but not dynamic skill and solid two-way play. He has not evolved into a star, but he's a quality top-four defenseman for Calgary.

Clayton Keller, 2016 draft (seventh overall, Arizona): Keller was one of the most accomplished players in the history of the USNTDP statistically as a draft prospect. He's an elite playmaker with very good speed and, despite a small frame, he'll engage physically. After a Calder-finalist season, he didn't take a big step forward, but I still believe in the player a lot and think he'll be a top player in the league in due time.

Bowen Byram, 2019 draft: Byram had a fantastic season as one of the best defensemen in the WHL and a critical component to a long playoff run for his team. He's a very well-rounded defender who projects to step into the league next season and down the line become a No. 1 defenseman. He is one of the very best defensive prospects of the past few years.

Mathew Barzal, 2015 draft (16th overall, N.Y. Islanders): Barzal missed a big chunk of his draft season with an injury, but when he was healthy, he impressed a lot with his dynamic elements. Watching him as an amateur, you were entertained and stopped scouting just to watch him for fun. Barzal continued to be a dynamic playmaker in the NHL even if his production took a mild slide this season.

Nico Hischier, 2017 draft (first overall, New Jersey): Hischier as a draft prospect was very good between league and international play. I saw a highly talented skater and playmaker who would be a very good NHL player. It's probably odd to some to see a first-overall pick this low in the rankings, but I really did not like the 2017 draft class at all. In hindsight with higher evaluations of Makar, Miro Heiskanen and Petterson, things would change a bit, but I still think it was a soft class. Hischier is still a pretty good player, but this year the Devils got a real winning lottery ticket.

Cole Caufield, 2019 draft: Caufield only scored 72 goals last season and projects to be a star goal-scoring winger in the NHL. He's right up there with some of the very best names of the past few years because of his special scoring ability, his elite hands and his high-end hockey IQ.

Quinn Hughes, 2018 draft (seventh overall, Vancouver): Hughes was No. 5 on my draft board last summer and my No. 1 NHL prospect at the midseason point. We will see what he ends up doing in the NHL but all the tools are there to be an impact guy – other than his size. He has elite feet, skill and hockey sense. I think he will find a ton of NHL success in short order next season.

Pierre-Luc Dubois, 2016 draft (third overall, Columbus): Dubois was a controversial (at the time) No. 3 overall pick, but I still liked him a lot, even if not at that slot. I saw a very well-rounded player who would become a good first-line forward but not a star. That might end up being what actually happens, but what he's been so far is still a very good NHL player.

Nolan Patrick, 2017 draft (second overall, Philadelphia): Patrick was when I did my draft rank and remains still a tough projection. He has ability, but it's debatable whether it's elite ability. There's no denying he is skilled and makes plays, but I had concerns at the time about



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whether he was truly a game breaker. Those concerns have proven somewhat valid to date even though he's still a good NHL player.

Gabriel Vilardi, 2017 draft (11th overall, Los Angeles): During his draft season, I was interested because of Vilardi's high-end size/skill/IQ combination. He could make some unique plays. He had some skating concerns and was hurt a bit during his draft season, but I thought a lot of the package was very appealing. Since then the injury issues have only gotten worse, and he missed the entire past season.

Oliver Wahlstrom, 2018 draft (11th overall, N.Y. Islanders): Wahlstrom was one of the most productive players in the USNTDP's history and one of the top goal-scoring talents on this list. He has an elite shot to couple with very good hands. He had a tough season after being drafted and looks a little bad at this slot, but I still like the player.

Matthew Tkachuk, 2016 draft (sixth overall, Calgary): Tkachuk has done nothing but produce big numbers for years at every level and tournament. He's a highly skilled and intelligent forward who has made as many fans in Calgary as enemies with other fanbases. Since hitting the NHL ranks, he's continued his success from his amateur days and will be one of Calgary's more important players for years to come. I had concerns over his skating as an amateur to get him to the highest echelons as a prospect, but he's proven it is not an issue.

Cody Glass, 2017 draft (sixth overall, Vegas): Glass wasn't on my top 30 in 2017 to start the season, but he erupted at the start of the season and maintained his play throughout the campaign to become a top prospect. He's a dynamic playmaker who has the skill, size and IQ to be a significant scorer in the NHL, and has dominated junior hockey. It remains to be seen what he does in the NHL, but he did quite well in the AHL playoffs.

Trevor Zegras, 2019 draft: Zegras is one of the most skilled players on this very talented list of players. He's an absurdly good playmaker. He's not the biggest or fastest, but he has all the ability to become a top NHL player because of how special his brain is.

Nick Suzuki, 2017 draft (13th overall, Vegas): Suzuki was one of the top players in the OHL in his draft season and through his career, including leading Guelph to a title this past spring. He's a dynamic playmaker who can also score. He's not the biggest, but he's gotten a little quicker. I've bounced around on him a lot as a prospect but lately the direction of his game is pointing up and he may fulfill on the promise I saw on him at 17.

Dylan Cozens, 2019 draft: Around this point of the list you could really suggest 10-15 names and they'd be reasonable. I think Cozens deserves to be in the mix, though. He's not a flashy player, but he's very well-rounded and has had a very successful junior career. He brings a ton of speed, physicality and scoring to games. I think he'll be a top player for whichever team picks him.

Adam Boqvist, 2018 draft (eighth overall, Chicago): I was very high on Boqvist in his draft year because of his fantastic skill level and vision, despite not being the biggest or quickest. This season he had his bumps adjusting to the pace of the OHL. I still like the player I just probably would have him a few spots lower.

The Athletic LOADED: 06.12.2019

1146698 Websites

The Athletic / Comparable NHL players for 24 of the top prospects in the 2019 NHL Draft

By Craig Custance Jun 11, 2019

I like shortcuts.

I especially like shortcuts when it comes time to cram for a big event, like, say, the NHL Draft. Not all of us can be like The Athletic's prospect writer Corey Pronman who "goes to junior hockey games" and "travels for prospect tournaments" and "knew who Philip Tomasino was before last week."

Recently, when Team USA U18 coach John Wroblewski was describing talented forward Matthew Boldy, he casually mentioned that he reminded him of Marian Hossa. That was the shortcut. Now you knew that Boldy was a skilled winger who plays a 200-foot game. It was an easy way to speed up the process of learning all these guys. I like consuming prospect analysis that way and suspected others might too.

So I reached back out to Wroblewski to have him give NHL player comparables for the other USNTDP players expected to go at the top of the draft. And to get a complete analysis of the rest of the top prospects, an NHL amateur scout agreed to do the non-Americans. The results are below.

But first, a quick caveat: Not all these players are going to be All-Stars. Or Hall of Famers. Using recognizable players is just a way to make easily identifiable comparables and highlight similar skill sets. OK, with that out of the way, let's dive in:

The Americans

(Breakdown by John Wroblewski)

Jack Hughes

NHL player comparable: Connor McDavid

The breakdown: "Both great skaters. Connor is more of a north-south guy, and Jack will beat you east-west. His edges are so good. The similarity for me is how brave both are to bring pucks into the hard areas of the ice. For being burners they're also both manipulative on the power play. ... They can slow things down too."

Alex Turcotte

NHL player comparable: Sidney Crosby with a hint of Brad Marchand

The breakdown: "A lot of people are trying to compare him to (Jonathan)Toews. Toews is much sturdier and simpler. (Turcotte) has that pestering ability like Marchand does. Not to that end but I'm not sure that won't be Turcotte in 10 years when guys have been playing against him for a long time. We get a small sample size of three or four games against Youngstown and those guys hate him. ... Sid's goals come in tight. Turcotte and he also have that similar skill set, like 'How did that go in the net from two feet away?' They both have that capability. And that mentality to win. That's something that burns."

Trevor Zegras

NHL player comparable: A mix of Clayton Keller and Patrick Kane

The breakdown: "(Zegras') defining elements are that creativity that bubble up out of nowhere. Kane would be the closest to that. They make the almost impossible plays, they make it look routine. Their



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improvisation, the saucer passes and spin-o-ramas that happen on a whim. It looks like something that's been orchestrated or set up. It happens all the time."

Cole Caufield

NHL player comparable: Alex Ovechkin

The breakdown: "He's a miniature version of Ovi. He'll score every single way but they both have that campout spot on the back side. If you leave them alone any other spot, they're equally as dangerous. They'll both score back door. The difference is 120 pounds or something. But you've got a mini-Ovechkin. The similarity is how the puck explodes off their stick. Once you get Cole into the dots and hash marks, they're similar."

Matthew Boldy

NHL player comparable: Marian Hossa

The breakdown: "It's perfect. It's a great throwback reference to a guy who plays a modern game but is supremely dedicated to 200 feet and works that transition game to his overall attack. His seek and destroy mentality is very unique – the way that he lifts sticks and goes the other way and catches teams off guard. There must be a dozen clips of us scoring off his backcheck in two years."

Cam York

NHL player comparable: Morgan Rielly

The breakdown: "There's hardly anything that catches Rielly off guard. He seems to turn in flux situations into offensive opportunities. On the power play, he's so natural to delegate – when the shot is there, he takes it. He's efficient at using his flanks on the power play and keeping pucks alive. Yorkie has the same abilities."

Alex Vlasic

NHL player comparable: Colton Parayko

The breakdown: "He's a mix between Victor Hedman and a guy like Colton Parayko. Big. Sturdy. Athletic up and down the sheet. Can log huge minutes. ... (Vlasic) has got a cannon. He changed his stick lie after last season. It was night and day with how he could operate with it. He'll continue to get better He's used that same stick for seven or eight years and now he changes. His hands and shot will continue to get better."

Henry Thrun

NHL player comparable: Ryan Suter

The breakdown: "There is such a unique subtlety to Thrunner's game and every now and then something pops. It's simple, simple, simple and then all of a sudden there's a remarkable stretch pass in the middle of the ice. He's like a QB in the West Coast offense – a bunch of seven-yard passes, clipping along at 70 percent and then there's the play action and it's down the field. He's a simple, calculated player."

Drew Helleson

NHL player comparable: Matt Niskanen

The breakdown: "There's an undervalued competitor there. Hardly ever gets beat out of the line rush or in the corner. There's a steadiness to his activity in the offensive end. He knows how to activate, when to join the rush. He's an above average shot. Very sneaky skill set. If there ever was a sleeper in the draft, I'd say it's him."

John Beecher

NHL player comparable: Chris Kreider

The breakdown: "Kreider or a young Patrick Marleau. He has speed to burn. He can absolutely fly. Guys would always talk about Marleau, how good his first two or three strides were and then it was top speed. Beecher is the same way. He can fly. His speed is undeniable. Flying around, crossing the net. It's a real simple game but fun to watch."

Spencer Knight

NHL player comparable: Tom Barrasso

The breakdown: "Everyone wants to go with Carey Price but with the way (Knight) plays the puck, you almost have to go back to Tom Barrasso, with his steadiness. He was another guy labeled as a prodigy, in the NHL at 18 (years old), tons of expectations. They have prowess playing the puck and their confidence is very similar."

The Rest of the Field

(Breakdown by an NHL amateur scout)

Kaapo Kakko

NHL player comparable: Peter Forsberg

The breakdown: "When you watch him play at whatever level, he uses his body and his power. The way he comes out of corners, the way he attacks the net – there's a lot of similarities with the way he plays and the way Peter Forsberg plays."

Bowen Byram

NHL player comparable: Drew Doughty

The breakdown: "He's got swagger like Doughty does. He'll stick you behind the play. He has that fierce look in his eyes. He's an elite defenseman. That edge is what you want to have. If you look at all the top players around the league, they all have that edge and killer instinct. It doesn't have to be dirty, but when the game is on the line, they're stepping up and making the play."

Dylan Cozens

NHL player comparable: Patrice Bergeron

The breakdown: "He's a hard one. I would say he's got quiet skills. Great skater. He does everything well. Bergeron is so smart, he has skill but you don't sit there and go 'he has top-five skill in the league.' Cozens has a lot of underwhelming qualities that equal a really, really good player."

Philip Broberg

NHL player comparable: Brady Skjei

The breakdown: "I don't see him as a one or two, I see him more as a four or five. I know people love him, though. You'd love for him to be Victor Hedman, but I think Brady Skjei is more of what you're going to get. Broberg is such a polarizing player. People either love him or question some of his things. I think his hockey sense can get him in trouble at times, but if you're big and can skate, you can play."

Kirby Dach

NHL player comparable: Ryan Getzlaf

The breakdown: "It's going to take time to grow into his big frame, but with the way he shoots the puck, I see a lot of Getzlaf. His consistency was in and out but he's also a kid. Comes from a great hockey background. He's got No. 1 center, power forward skill set – that whole package."



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Alex Newhook

NHL player comparable: Cam Atkinson

The breakdown: "He's an interesting one because he's in the middle of the ice and can shoot and score. He's a good player. He's his own player. I think he can score like Atkinson. He has that quick release. He can get himself in and out of traffic to score goals and can shoot the puck."

Vasili Podkolzin

NHL player comparable: Vladimir Tarasenko

The breakdown: "It's his willingness to go to the net to score goals. Everywhere he's played this year, he's produced. He's powerful, he's strong. He's fearless when it comes to going to the net and he has a great shot."

Arthur Kaliyev

NHL player comparable: Phil Kessel

The breakdown: "He just scores. Kaliyev has some holes in his game. He doesn't love to play D. Doesn't always look like he's working. If he has a split second to score a goal, he's going to score a goal. He knows how to score."

Ryan Suzuki

NHL player comparable: Ryan Nugent-Hopkins

The breakdown: "He's a second-line center. Doesn't love to go to the hard areas. He does a lot of stuff on the perimeter. Unreal hockey IQ and can make plays. I would like him to be a little more competitive. Skill and sense, there's a lot of good here and he's a No. 2 center if everything goes well."

Philip Tomasino

NHL player comparable: Claude Giroux

The breakdown: "He's so good at stripping pucks. He's skilled, smart, elusive, sneaky skill. I think he could be a No. 1 center. He's a good player. A really good player."

Thomas Harley

NHL player comparable: Thomas Chabot

The breakdown: "I like him a lot. Chabot fell in his draft year because he wasn't always hard to play against and wasn't always engaged in battles. But now, it doesn't really matter. The offense, the way (Harley) surveys the blue line, the way he walks the line – there's a lot of similarities."

Moritz Seider

NHL player comparable: Anton Stralman

The breakdown: "He's top four. Right-handed shot. Mobile. Is he offensive? I'm not sure. Can he make a good first pass? Yes."

Victor Soderstrom

NHL player comparable: Roman Josi

The breakdown: "He's another offensive player. He's not Erik Karlsson. How offensive is he going to be? Who knows? He's reliable. He's dependable. He could be top 10 in the draft. He could be the second D off the board. Josi is a pretty good all-around defenseman who has some offense, too."

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The Athletic / Down Goes Brown: How I'd fix the NHL's replay review system

By Sean McIndoe Jun 11, 2019

I've spent a big chunk of the last few months writing about replay review. It's been unavoidable, because the officiating has become the dominant story of the 2019 postseason, and there's a growing cry for the league to do something. For many, that something is more replay review, for everything from hand passes to majors and match penalties to (most recently) even tripping minors.

I don't necessarily agree, at least with some of the more extreme proposals. I've laid out my case for why I think replay review for penalties would be a disaster. I've outlined the five hard questions the league needs to ask before they go any further down the replay path. I've tweeted about it. Lord, so many tweets.

So I've made my point. Some would say I've beaten it into the ground. But here's the thing: One of my pet peeves in life is people who complain about everyone else's ideas without ever saying what they'd do instead, and I'm getting dangerously close to that territory. Anyone can stand on the sidelines and say "this is broken." At some point, you should be willing to offer up some ideas for how to fix it.

This feels like the right time to do that, since we're told Gary Bettman will present his plan to the competition committee today. Maybe my ideas are better. Maybe they're worse. Maybe they're exactly the same, and Bettman will tweet the Spiderman pointing meme at me and I'll transform into a corn cob.

The point is, I've done enough complaining. It's time to be part of the solution. So here's my 10-point plan for expanding and also shrinking but mostly fixing replay review. Read it over. Pick it apart. Agree with it, or don't. Tell me why it is in fact me who has been the idiot all along. Fair's fair. Here we go.

Step 1: Expanded review for black-and-white calls

We'll start with the change we can probably get almost everyone to agree on. We'll expand replay review to include hand passes, like that Timo Meier overtime miss. Today, those can only be reviewed if the puck is batted directly into the net. Now, we'll be reviewing them anywhere along a play that leads to a goal.

We'll also add pucks that are directed with a high-stick, which is the same category of play. And while we're at it, we can include the review of pucks that hit the netting, which we learned this postseason is already on the books but in an extremely limited way. That gets expanded here.

The review would come from the league war room, which is already responsible for automatically reviewing just about everything goal-related, like kicking motions and pucks crossing the line. It's a little bit of extra work that will occasionally add a few seconds of extra time before we can face off and get back to playing, but it will be worth it.

That all feels like common sense. Those additional reviews would be rare, but they'd be important, and we should be able to do them in a way that avoids any controversy.



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Of course, careful readers will notice that there's one detail we have to nail down first ...

Step 2: Define what "leading to a goal" means

This was one of my tough questions from this post. What does it mean for a play to lead to a goal, and where do you draw the line? Is it based on a certain number of seconds? Distance from the net? The puck staying in the zone? Some touchy-feely "we'll know it when we see it" sense of intuition?

Not in our new system. For us, a play leads to a goal if the defending team never regains possession. If they touch and control the puck at any point after the missed infraction, then we don't worry about it. You had your chance to make a play, you can't blame the miss anymore.

In other words, our message here to the players is straightforward: Keep playing hockey. If there's a glove pass or the puck hits the netting or whatever else, don't stop and wave your arms around like a tattling first-grader. Keep playing. If the miss causes a goal, we'll take care of it with replay. Otherwise, keep doing your job. A missed call earlier in the shift doesn't give you a magical do-over on everything else that happens afterward.

Admittedly, we're introducing a sliver of subjectivity here, because possession can be dicey. But we already have a relatively common play where officials need to make this kind of judgment: Delayed penalties. We'll use the same definition here.

Note that simply making contact with the puck isn't possession, so Meier's hand pass still falls under this expanded review even though the puck deflected off Jay Bouwmeester's leg. Our expanded rule would also have waved off the Blue Jackets' goal in Boston, because the Bruins never got the puck back after it hit the netting. But this play from a few years ago where over a minute of game time and multiple possessions go by while Jack Edwards has a meltdown? Get out of here. Keep playing hockey.

(Isaiah J. Downing / USA Today)

Step 3: Review for a few penalties, but only a few

Yes, we're allowing replay review for penalties. But only certain types, and only for calls that are purely objective.

First things first: Let's just let the officials use replay for puck-over-glass calls. I hate this stupid rule, but if we're going to be stuck with it then let's at least make sure they're calling it right. There are somehow still people out there who claim this rule is great because it's so black-and-white, even as we can't ever seem to get it called without needing all four officials to huddle up and triangulate exit angles. Enough. If you're going to stand around arguing about whether the puck was deflected or where the shot came from or whether it went over the glass here or (moves finger a fraction of an inch) there, then just grab an iPad and watch a replay. This might be the only known case where more review would actually save us some time.

We'll also allow officials to check high-sticking penalties if there's a question as to whether the opponent's stick made contact. Sometimes it looks that way, but it turns out to be a teammate's stick or the puck. If the refs want to double-check, they can.

Finally, we're not including head hits as a reviewable play right now, because the current rule is complicated and subjective. But if and when the NHL just goes with a blanket "all hits to the head are illegal" rule, those will be reviewable too.

That's it. When it comes to penalties, that's the whole list.

Step 4: Absolutely no new reviews for anything subjective

But what about everything else? What about all those missed hooks or holds, or the majors that should have been minors, or the minors that should have been majors, or the stuff that might have been a dive, or whatever subjective call happened to your favorite team last night that you're mad about?

Not reviewable. None of them.

Almost every penalty call is subjective. The rules are written that way. Hockey is a fast game, and the best people to decide on penalty calls are the ones who are down there on the ice as it's happening. It's not a perfect system, but it's the best one we've got.

So what do we do if the referee misses a Tyler Bozak trip, or gives a major for a Cody Eakin shove that may not deserve it? How do we handle those situations?

The same way we did for the first 100 years of the NHL: We lived with it.

Oh, we complained. Fans booed. Players screamed. Coaches occasionally threw benches. We waved our glasses at the ref and told him he was missing a great game while the organist played "Three Blind Mice."

And then life went on. Because it's sports, and bad calls happen, and not everything bad that happens in life can be instantly fixed for us. Missed calls suck. Believe me, I know. If I thought that adding replay review for subjective penalties would fix all those controversies without creating 10 times as many new ones, I'd be all over it. But it won't.

Subjective calls you disagree with will happen. We can live with them. It's really our only option.

(Should we give the refs some extra help in the form of an "eye-in-the-sky" official who could also make calls? I have no idea. I'm not touching that proposal here, because it's not really a replay question. If the referees think an extra voice in their head at all times would be helpful, then sure, let's give it a try. I'm skeptical, but I'm not a ref, so we'll leave it to them.)

Step 5: The only viable solution for offside review

OK, so we've covered penalties and various puck-related violations. What about offside review? How do we fix that?

Easy. We get rid of it. Completely.

It hasn't worked. We tried it for four years, because we overreacted to Matt Duchene being offside by five feet on one play that most fans still don't even understand. (The linesman didn't miss Duchene being offside; he mistakenly thought the other team had controlled the puck back into its own zone.) We thought replay would be an easy way to fix those obvious misses. We were wrong.

Instead, we've had four years of squinting at fuzzy freeze frames to see if a skate was in the wrong place by a fraction of an inch or, worse, ever so slightly in the air. We haven't caught a single Duchene play in all that time, because they turn out to be extraordinarily rare. But we have taken hundreds of perfectly good goals off the board because of plays we never even noticed before.

Enough. There are probably ways to improve offside review, but we don't need to put a fresh coat of paint on this junker. It hasn't worked. Get rid of it.

Does that mean there will inevitably come a day when another Duchene play happens and we have no way to go back and fix it? Sure. With our luck, probably soon than later. Oh well. If the



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alternative is sitting through hundreds of pointless reviews, let's take our chances that we can handle a bad miss once a decade or so without the world ending.

Bettman says the ship has sailed on getting rid of offside review. Nonsense. We've had it for less than four percent of the NHL's history. We had the skate-in-crease rule longer than this, and we happily launched that one into the sun and then had a party afterward. Real leadership means admitting your mistakes and then fixing them. Offside review was a mistake. Dump it.

Step 6: The goalie interference conundrum

Hoo boy. This one gets tough.

On the one hand, we've said we don't want review of anything subjective, and goalie interference is a completely subjective call. Actually, it's worse than that – it's a whole series of subjective calls that overlap on each other to add up to a final decision. It's a mess. And it's completely ill-suited to freeze frame reviews, as we've learned over the last four years. It's awfully tempting to give this one the same treatment we just gave offside review.

But on the other hand, goals matter, and interference by definition happens immediately before or even concurrent with a goal being scored. Unlike just about everything else we're talking about here, there's no question over whether these calls affect a goal. It seems like we should have something in place here.

I don't know. So I'm going to punt just a little bit by saying that we keep interference reviews, but we take them out of the hands of coaches and leave them purely at the discretion of the league. That might mean the Toronto war room, or that off-ice official, or someone else – it doesn't really matter. But somebody has the authority to buzz down to the ref and say "Hey, you're going want to look at this."

We're going to be very clear that when these reviews happen, we're only overturning plays where we're close to 100 percent sure the original call was wrong. When in doubt, the call on the ice stands. It's not a starting point or a suggestion. It's the default setting, and we don't change it unless the replay makes it clear that we have no choice.

Does that work? I'm not completely convinced that it does. But it's better than any other option I can come up with.

Step 7: About those coach's challenges

If you've been reading carefully, you may have noticed something: Our new plan hasn't included any coach's challenges. That's because they're gone.

Sorry guys. In theory, it was a good idea. In reality, we handed you some power over the game and you used it to bring us nitpicky challenges on plays nobody had ever had a problem with in the nearly 100-year history of the league. And not just the ones that you or your players could see in real time. You went and assigned people on your staff to stare at slow-motion screens and find those fractions of an inch as they happened.

We understand why you did that – in hindsight, it was the only reasonable thing for you to do. And you'd keep doing it if we let you, because of course you would.

So we won't let you. We've re-calibrated our reviews to focus on plays that lead directly to goals, which means they can fall under the league's automatic review protocol. We've turned interference over to the league too. And we've eliminated offside review entirely. And that means we don't need challenges anymore. One less thing for you guys to worry about. No need to thanks us.

And as an added bonus, this means you get your timeouts back. Remember timeouts? Those things you used to use for mid-game strategic adjustments or to rest players at critical moments, or just to stem the momentum when a game was slipping away from you? Today, you can't do any of that, because you have to save that timeout in case you need it for a review. Now you'll get them back, to use as you see fit.

Step 8: Ask our friends for a favor (that we won't get)

As part of all this, we're going to do a little behind-the-scenes lobbying. Specifically, we're going to go to our multibillion-dollar TV partners with a simple request: Maybe don't spend the first year of these new rules constantly trying to find any missed offside or other questionable call that we didn't review and plaster it all over your broadcast.

I know it will be tempting. There's going to be an adjustment period, and while that's going on, fans will have an appetite for anything that would have been different under the old system. That's especially true if it gives them a reason to complain about their team being robbed. There will be lots of room for complaining here, at least early on.

We're going to hope our partners won't do that to us. We'll ask them not to. That's all we'll do is ask – we're not forcing anything here, because mandatory rah-rah coverage doesn't help anyone. If the broadcasts really want to spend their intermission segments with a panel of angry old guys yelling about a freeze-frame of a play that was maybe offside but can no longer be reviewed, let them. Some viewers will probably eat it up, at least at first.

The point is we know this stuff will be coming, and we'll live with it. Meanwhile, fans will adjust. It was weird in 1999-2000 when you noticed guys with their skates in the crease on plays where goals still counted. We got used to it. It didn't take as long as you might think it would.

Step 9: Be clear on the purpose of all of this

This one's simple and we've already touched on it, but it's important enough to warrant its own section.

Under my plan, the idea behind replay review is to catch obvious errors. We're not trying to nitpick or find reasons to take goals off the board. We want to get the big misses right. That's it. That's the whole purpose.

That means we're going to rewrite all the various replay rules to make it crystal clear that calls will only be overturned if the video evidence is indisputable.

And we'll make sure our referees know that. When in doubt, keep the call on the ice. If it's hard to know for sure, based on a couple of the angles or that one screengrab somebody posted on Twitter, stick with your call and we'll have your back. But if you change the right call to the wrong one based on replay, it's a fireable offense. Do not overturn unless you're sure.

Will that take some getting used to by fans? Sure. It's not the way the NHL does it today, even though it's how the current rules suggest they're supposed to. But fans will learn. Especially because of our last step ...

Step 10: Communication is key

We'll end with what might be the most important step of all. Luckily for us, it's also among the easiest.

Tell your fans what you're doing, and why.



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Not once. Not the first time. Not occasionally. Every time.

It doesn't matter how smart your system is. It doesn't matter if you're getting it right. It doesn't matter if all the GMs and coaches and players love it. If the fans don't understand what you're doing, you've failed. And right now, the NHL is failing. And they're failing because they barely even seem to be trying.

Our new system will fail too, unless fans understand it. We'll make sure they will.

That means that every review starts with a referee getting on his mic and explaining what's being reviewed, and what the call on the ice was. And when the review is done, they explain what the ruling is and why.

Yes, I know these guys hate this part. I know every NHL referee other than Wes McCauley looks like they want to swallow their own tongue every time they have to talk to the crowd. Too bad. This is important. Take a public speaking course if you need to. This is part of your job description now.

No more telling us "After review we have a good goal" and then skating away to murmurs of confusion. Why is it a good goal? What were you even looking for? What did you see?

The NFL isn't a bad model to follow here. They're not perfect, but at least the referees make an effort to explain what they're looking at. The NHL can do at least as well.

And it won't stop with the referees. Have you ever seen those little dispatches the league posts to its website after every review? If not, don't worry, because they're completely useless. They all basically say the same thing: There was a review, we did the review, and the result was goal/no-goal. No reasoning. No explanation. No point.

Again, there's a model to follow here, and for once it's actually the NHL itself. You don't have to like the Department of Player Safety decisions, but those videos they make to explain them are really good. They'll even occasionally get you to change your mind about something. And even if they don't, they at least let you know what they were thinking. You don't need a full five-minute video for every replay review, but the same sort of philosophy needs to apply.

And what if there's an especially controversial call? There shouldn't be, remember, because we're only overturning obvious stuff, but maybe we screw up and it happens anyway. If so, we need a league official to be front and center with an explanation. Stephen Walkom giving quotes to a pool reporter is a decent start, but we need more than that. Bryan Lewis used to go on Hockey Night in Canada to explain controversial calls – here he is in the moments after the Brett Hull debacle. Whether you accept his explanation or not, at least he's offering one on behalf of the league. Let's get back to that.

So there you have it. We've expanded replay review to more areas than it covers today, including some penalties. But we've also made sure there will be fewer reviews overall, because we've eliminated the most common one. We've redefined expectations, dumped the coach's challenge, and promised to do a better job of telling our fans what's going on. And we'll never have to watch a pixelated skate hover over a fuzzy blueline ever again.

Is that better than what we have now? I think it definitely is. Is it better than whatever Bettman offers today? We'll see. Is it the best we could possibly do? You tell me. I'm open to other ideas here, because like I keep saying, this is a hard question that goes way beyond "just get it right."

But now you know how I'll do it when I'm named commissioner. (Just try to act surprised when it happens.)

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Sportsnet.ca / What does the future hold for Jesse Puljujarvi and the Edmonton Oilers?

Mark Spector | June 11, 2019, 12:32 PM

EDMONTON — Jesse Puljujarvi skated with two coaches on Monday in Edmonton, the Oilers trainer watching like a hawk from the seats above.

His drills weren't about skating the length of the ice and blasting a shot, but instead a series of circles, and tighter turns, as he rehabs from surgery to correct a problem on both hips. He used pucks not in the traditional sense, but as pylons to be skated around.

Swirling, turning, looping. Returning to the place he started, and doing it over again.

This is the metaphor for the career of a No. 4 overall pick who is in limbo, circling somewhere between the 'B' word (bust), a young player who may be ready for that boost a second organization can give him. Or is he simply a 21-year-old who just needs some consistency in his handling to find a niche that he can use to find some traction in the National Hockey League?

That's Jesse Puljujarvi stretching out the recently operated on hips in a workout with Oilers coaches on Monday. Trainer T.D. Forss watching from the stands. pic.twitter.com/hmEE94jdL

— Mark Spector (@SportsnetSpec) June 10, 2019

Some young players survive the vortex and stay on the team that drafted them, like Sam Bennett has done in Calgary, or Jake Virtanen in Vancouver. Others, like a Dylan Strome, need the inspiration a trade provides to begin to find their potential.

We spoke with people around the hockey world — including Oilers new GM Ken Holland and Puljujarvi's agent Markus Lehto — to get a read on what lies ahead for the six-foot-four Finn, who landed in the Oilers' lap at No. 4 when Columbus selected Pierre-Luc Dubois third overall in 2016.

Vancouver drafted Olli Juolevi next. He hasn't played an NHL game yet. Both the Canucks and Oilers wished they'd taken Matthew Tkachuk, chosen sixth by Calgary, a far better prospect than either Finn. Charlie McAvoy went at No. 14 to the Boston Bruins. Ouch!

First, it must be said that Puljujarvi was absolutely failed by the previous Oilers administration, led by fired GM Peter Chiarelli. They were too late on getting him help with his English; they likely brought him over from Europe a year too soon; they should have given him more time in AHL Bakersfield; they left him far too often to his own devices, a teenager far from home in a foreign land with a foreign tongue.

But the player bears some responsibility as well. It hasn't come easily for him in the NHL and he hasn't worked hard enough at his game. By all accounts, he has been waiting for good things to happen, rather than working on his craft so it can reach a place where it will meet success.



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Finnish journalists and hockey people who have spoken to Puljujarvi in his native have told me that he lacks drive. That he doesn't seem ready to put in the concerted effort he'll need to become an NHL regular.

Holland has yet even to speak with the young man, though he has talked twice with his agent.

"The toughest thing to gauge about a young player is how they will handle adversity," Holland said. "They're all the best players on their team in Bantams, Midgets, at the World Junior (where Puljujarvi was named tournament MVP). Most haven't had any adversity when we draft them. They've never had to handle it."

Ryan Dixon and Rory Boylen go deep on pucks with a mix of facts and fun, leaning on a varied group of hockey voices to give their take on the country's most beloved game.

Puljujarvi is in that exact spot today.

Lehto, his agent, told us back in February, "when the player isn't trusting anymore... 'Do these guys really want me here? Do they really trust me to become a Top 6 guy? A Top 9 guy? An offensive player?' The player is uncertain.

"Are we reaching the point that for the team and for the player, it might be actually be beneficial for going different paths, different routes?"

Today, with his player needing to sign his second NHL contract this summer, Lehto is still wishy-washy on Edmonton. A new GM and coach can't hurt, he says, but maybe it is still too late for Jesse Puljujarvi and the Oilers.

Holland, on the other hand, will take his "stability" mantra that he has said over and over again when asked what the Oilers need from him, and apply it to the player. The minors are out of the question, in our opinion, for a player who has received interest from the KHL.

If the player asks for a trade, Holland might oblige. Puljujarvi's market value could inhibit that however, as no GM would flip a No. 4 overall for a fourth round pick. Maybe he becomes an add-in that solidifies a bigger deal, but there are no favours to be doled out here, only an opportunity under new coach Dave Tippett to slowly morph into a depth player, the way Bennett has in Calgary. Then see where that role takes Puljujarvi.

Assuming he is still Oilers property, there will be no Top 6 job awaiting Puljujarvi in Edmonton in the fall. More likely is a steady role on third-line right wing — a place to learn how to be an NHL player, without the pressure to produce points or support an elite centreman.

Holland needs to acquire a veteran centreman who can spend a season with Puljujarvi, both dragging him into the difficult areas of the game, and providing him with some consistent offensive opportunity. No more spending two games with Connor McDavid, three games with Kyle Brodziak, and then a couple as a healthy scratch. What Puljujarvi needs is 82 games as a third-line winger and a chance to learn how to play the NHL game.

If an injury means a call-up, then fine. If he masters the third line and moves up?

Fine.

But the best thing would be for Puljujarvi to play 82 games with the right centreman, and learn how to play and practice like a pro. Be a positive player every night. A player the coach can trust.

From there...

Well, let's get there first. Then we'll talk.

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Sportsnet.ca / How Bruins' Torey Krug got his swagger and will get his money

Luke Fox | @lukefoxjukebox June 11, 2019, 9:18 AM

BOSTON — Torey Krug carries himself like the tallest five-foot-nine man on the planet.

Head high. Chest puffed. Speech assured. Beats cranked.

When he gives interviews, the shortest member of the Boston Bruins makes himself perfectly perpendicular, like a kid doing his damndest to be high enough to get on this roller coaster.

And, oh boy, what a ride it's been.

A small defenceman making big-time plays in XXXL moments, then scrambling right in his larger opponents' grills to tell them all about it.

"It comes from growing up in a house with four boys where it was survival of the fittest," says Krug, never drafted, always doubted.

"Ultimately being a smaller player on every single team I've grown up playing on, you have to do something to make yourself special and unique, otherwise teams are just going to pass up on you and go with the safer route, which is a bigger player.

"Specifically being a defenceman, I've had to make myself unique — and that's what I bring to the table, that swagger, and hopefully it bleeds through our locker room and the rest of our lineup."

Oh, it does. Pulses through the dressing-room sound system, too.

Patrice Bergeron takes care of the inspirational speeches, Zdeno Chara controls the dial on the work-ethic thermostat, and Krug mans the iTunes.

The locker room DJ is open to requests, occasionally adding to the soundtrack of Boston's Stanley Cup push, but all submissions must be Krug-approved if they are to be added to the same playlist he's been bumping for months.

"It's been working for us," Krug says.

Explicit versions of big, boastful, live-your-best-life rap anthems like 50 Cent's P.I.M.P., Eminem's Not Afraid, and Linkin Park and Jay-Z's Numb/Encore greet reporters and trainers like a noisy dorm party at morning skates.

"Classic college kid, right? Jokes around and stuff," smiles David Pastrnak, beneficiary of many a Krug pass. "But he's awesome. A great kid with heart.

"When he's on his game, he's unbelievable."

On Wednesday in Boston, Krug, 28, will have a chance to cap the most productive regular season of his career (53 points in 64 games) with the greatest moment of his life. That is, until his Michigan State University sweetheart, Melanie, gives birth to his first child next week.



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"My wife will be not moving around too much, and extended family has gotten the message to steer clear, and I think that's the approach a lot of us will have," says Krug ahead of Game 7. "It's about staying in the moment and playing this next game. Just doing whatever it takes. Be selfish."

"I mean, to be honest, family's the most important thing in this world, for sure. It's kind of allowed me to relax and just play hockey. Obviously worried and excited and nervous with all that comes with your first kid."

The Bobby Orr comparisons are, of course, a quantum leap, but Orr — or any other Bruins blueliner, for that matter — never did score four points (all primary) in a Cup Final match, the way Krug did in Game 3. He now has six in the series, 18 in the post-season and, were it not for Tuukka Rask's excellence, would have some Conn Smythe buzz.

"Bobby Orr is probably the greatest influencer in the game of hockey itself. You really can't compare yourself in any way shape or form to him," Krug says. "Ask me again in a couple weeks."

The rabid locals want their hockey served like their chowder — as many lumps as possible, please — and they gobbled up Krug's Game 1 helmet-free demolishing of Blues phenom Robert Thomas. ("No penalty," Thomas said. "I'm fine with the hit.") Side-by-side images of Krug's flying hit and Orr's flying Cup-clinching goal in 1970 were shared online. And after Krug steamrolled Thomas, he glided directly to the Blues' crease to deliver a death stare, pupils in full bloom.

"I don't know if he's on something, but he was pretty fired up," Jordan Binnington said.

"It's a bit of an iconic moment because the hair is flying and the way he fell," coach Bruce Cassidy said. "It's good for hockey."

So is Krug.

While the Blues' D corps is big and burly and safe, Krug exemplifies the compact but quick modern D-man.

"They have probably a few more bigger guys, bigger bodies to where they're finishing checks, where we check with our feet. We're a team that skates really well so we force you into bad areas," Krug says. "We might not always put you through the glass, but we skate so well that you have no options with the puck and we kind of funnel you into an area where you're going to make a turnover."

Krug is fearless on puck retrievals, slick with a good first pass, and comfortable quarterbacking the deadliest post-season power play (32.9 per cent) in history. Since Cassidy, too, was an undersized D-man in his playing days, he and Krug speak frequently about the intricacies of his role.

"I take a lot of pride in being a very knowledgeable hockey player, so once I do get on the half wall, I know what's available. Butch gives us a lot of cues, when the opposing team does a certain thing to look for this or that," Krug explains.

"That's when you can be more creative, and that's the fun part of hockey for a guy like myself, being able to move and not having to worry about the X's and O's part of it. It's just the creativity and guys stepping into certain roles, certain spots and we fill for each other. When we're on and we're in sync, we're a really dangerous unit."

Torey Krug on his mentality facing elimination: "Screw it. Let's go play hockey." #NHLBruins

— luke fox (@lukefoxjokebox) June 9, 2019

Regardless how Game 7 unfolds, keeping that unit intact should be of high priority for GM Don Sweeney come July 1.

That's the date Krug is eligible to re-sign an extension. He's worth much more than his current \$5.25-million cap hit and would have a parade of suitors were he to reach free agency in 2020.

Boston has a pattern of identifying and locking up its stars before they get that far.

The Michigan-born Krug loves being a Bruin. The former finance major also knows his worth.

"You've got guys like Bergy and Krej and Zee and Pasta taking discounts — that's expected around here. If you want to try and make every dollar you can, then unfortunately it's not going to be with this group. We want guys who want to be here, want to win, and you've got to sacrifice some things," says Marchand, speaking generally.

"At the end of the day, if you lift a Stanley Cup and take a little less money, it's worth it every single time. That's the culture around here in this group, and it's why we've been able to be a successful team."

What's made Krug successful, individually, is that permanent chip on his shoulder, the one that propels him to get up in the face of Alex Steen and Zach Sanford and David Perron and whoever else wants it, while still generating offence.

"That's a line that I flirt with on a nightly basis," Krug says. "If I'm not playing with that swagger, then I'm not making those high-end plays."

"If I don't have that and I'm not being a special player, I wouldn't blame a GM for going a different route and taking a bigger guy. That's what I bring to the table."

"I'll always need it, and I'll always have it."

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1146702 Websites

Sportsnet.ca / Blues bringing superfan Laila Anderson to Boston for Game 7

Shannon Coulter | June 11, 2019, 11:29 PM

The St. Louis Blues will have a special guest at TD Gardens on Wednesday for Game 7 of the Stanley Cup Final against the Boston Bruins.

The Blues posted a video to Twitter on Tuesday where 11-year-old superfan Laila Anderson learned the team is sending her to Boston for the big game.

Anderson was diagnosed with a rare disease that affects her immune system last fall and had a bone marrow transplant in January.

She has been a fan of the Blues for several years and got a standing ovation when she attended Game 3 of the Western Conference Final against the San Jose Sharks.

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1146703 Websites

TSN.CA / Cassidy, Berube ride second chances to brink of a Stanley Cup

Frank Seravalli

BOSTON — Bruce Cassidy went nearly 14 years between NHL head coaching gigs. Some believed Craig Berube might never get another shot after being fired in Philadelphia in 2015.

One man will walk out of TD Garden on Wednesday night forever known as the coach of a Stanley Cup champion.

Who would have thought?

This wasn't even how Cassidy played it out hundreds of times growing up on Coldrey Avenue in Ottawa's west end.

"Like a lot of kids, I was Bobby Orr," Cassidy said Tuesday. "If I didn't score and we lost Game 7, we played it again. Middle of winter or middle of summer, it didn't matter. I never imagined myself coaching; I'm not going to lie. Here I am. It's the next best thing."

This is a Stanley Cup final story of second chances — and what a coaching matchup it has been. Berube and Cassidy both have their fingerprints all over these playoff runs.

Cassidy seems to have the Midas touch, while Berube has pushed all the right buttons.

The beauty of this final is it's a chess match without any of the pretense.

These are two coaches from the old school. There are no mind games, no I'm-not-telling-you-my-lineup changes and very little running around to shield lines from matching. It's just my best against your best, let's go.

"May the best team win," Cassidy said of Game 7.

More refreshing than their shared frank and honest nature has been their journey to this moment.

Berube could follow his assistant — nine-time Cup winner Larry Robinson — as only the second interim coach to guide his team to the Stanley Cup (Robinson took the New Jersey Devils to a championship in 2000). The man known as "Chief" from Calahoo, Alta., took over for Mike Yeo on Nov. 19.

Blues GM Doug Armstrong continued to interview coaching candidates for a month with Berube on the bench. The interim tag was never removed as the Blues climbed from 31st place on Jan. 3 to third place in the Central Division. Armstrong finally admitted in May that the Blues are now "down to one" candidate for the job.

"We were looking outside at potential candidates, whether it be major junior, Europe, the NHL, the American Hockey League," Armstrong said on May 10. "And as I started to work with Craig, whatever name was on the candidate list started to get crossed off and crossed off. Now we're at a list of one."

Berube, 53, was named a finalist for the Jack Adams Award alongside Jon Cooper and Barry Trotz. He was out of hockey four seasons ago and fuelled this turnaround with a team built on mental toughness.

Cassidy, 54, was a finalist for the Jack Adams last season in his first full year behind the Bruins' bench. The argument could be made that the credit for the Bruins' turnaround from rebuild candidate to contender belongs to Cassidy and not GM Don Sweeney. This is largely the same core — minus Charlie McAvoy and a few young pieces — that missed the playoffs in 2015 and 2016.

The Bruins are an incredible 117-52-22 (.670) since Cassidy took over for Claude Julien in Feb. 2017.

Cassidy's resume looked like alphabet soup from the time he was fired by the Capitals as a 38-year-old after two years at the helm on Dec. 3, 2003. He assisted Trent Yawney for one season in Chicago, was head coach for the OHL's Kingston Frontenacs, then went back to AHL Providence as an assistant coach for three seasons before being promoted to head guy of the Baby Bruins in 2011-12.

Cassidy said he always hoped he would get another chance, but wasn't sure. He was ready for it.

"If you want to get back, you got to do things differently," Cassidy said. "For me, part of that was how I communicated my message, I believe. I've learned to be better with it. You're a little bit older, better balance, you know, in my life overall. It makes you a little more patient with players as well."

Sweeney got a first-hand glimpse of that growth, working closely with Cassidy in Providence while he was the Bruins' assistant GM.

"Him having the opportunity to do it at the NHL level is really just a testament to what he has done as a person and as a coach," Sweeney said. "I believed in it, I knew that his ability to adapt and make decisions in-game would be really beneficial to us as an organization, especially when you're implementing younger players."

Both coaches' ability to adapt has been on full display.

Cassidy, known as a power play savant, was the one who picked apart the Blues' penalty kill ahead of the Game 3 romp. He then added centre Karson Kuhlman to the lineup in Game 6 when it would've been easy to just go back to David Backes after dressing seven defencemen in Game 5.

Kuhlman hadn't played since April 30, but he scored Boston's third goal to help save their season and force Game 7. He was Boston's 21st scorer this postseason, tied for the most all-time with the Flyers team Berube skated for in 1987.

"It happened to work out tonight," Cassidy said of Kuhlman. "He was a good add."

Cassidy would probably say Berube's biggest impact came via the public complaints he made about the officiating earlier in the series. But his big change of the playoffs was moving Brayden Schenn back to play with Jaden Schwartz against the Winnipeg Jets in Round 1. That third-period swap produced a game-winning charge, then two more hat tricks from Schwartz.

The Blues are the first team to have two players suspended in one Stanley Cup final, but Berube has adjusted accordingly. Zach Sanford was subbed in for the suspended Oskar Sundqvist and has changed the look of Ryan O'Reilly's line.

Berube will have to decide whether Ivan Barbashev should play in place of Robert Thomas or Sammy Blais in Game 7. Cassidy will have to weigh whether Chris Wagner or Matt Grzelcyk is ready to return.

No pressure.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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All that's riding on the line is a chance to listen to Gloria or Dirty Water and a championship that no one can take away.

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USA TODAY / City of Champions: Boston will get third trophy since October if Bruins beat Blues

Kevin Allen, USA TODAY Published 4:10 p.m. ET June 11, 2019 | Updated 8:35 p.m. ET June 11, 2019

USA Hockey executive director Pat Kelleher, a Boston guy living in Colorado, has proudly passed along his rooting interest in Boston sports teams to his children.

"My children were born and raised in Colorado, but they have been properly parented," he says, laughing. "Brainwashed might be another term for it."

When the Bruins play the St. Louis Blues Wednesday in Game 7 of the Stanley Cup Final (8 p.m. ET, NBC), he said his children will be going "crazy as if they grew up in Boston."

Some fans share the misery of their fandom with their children. Not Boston fans. Kelleher's daughter, Abbey, is 17 and Boston teams have won 12 championships in her lifetime. That's six by the Patriots, four by the Red Sox, one each by the Celtics and Bruins.

If the Bruins win Wednesday, Boston-area teams will be the reigning champions in the NHL, NFL (New England Patriots) and Major League Baseball (Boston Red Sox).

Boston Bruins center Charlie Coyle experienced plenty of championships as a Massachusetts native.

"If you told me when I was a kid this was possible, I would have said, 'That's preposterous,'" said Tony Massarotti, 51, who partners with Michael Felger on the highly popular Felger and Mazz Show on 98.5 The Sports Hub in Boston.

"We all keep waiting for this to end," Massarotti said. "And it just keeps going ... in all honesty, they had a chance at a fourth. It's kind of crazy, but the Celtics underachieved. They should have probably been in the Final Four."

Massarotti said Boston's run of success is a regular topic on his broadcasts. Boston fans want this third title.

"Just driving around here, you see people with the flags on their window, and bumper stickers, people wearing hats, jerseys and jackets," said Ben Smith, a longtime college coach in the area. "We really didn't have a spring in New England. People have been kind of housebound. The Bruins have (been a distraction) from the bad weather and maybe they've helped the Red Sox because people haven't noticed how bad they can be. They have been the entertainment factor."

Different sports landscape

Boston's sports landscape is much different than it used to be.

Massarotti said there was a time in the 1990s when Boston was jokingly referred to as "Loserville."

"For example, the Patriots were not just bad, they were a laughingstock," Massarotti said. "They were the Cleveland Browns or Detroit Lions."

Today, every sports town would love to have the success Boston is having.

"It's hard to argue against Boston being the best sports city in America," said USA Hockey's National Team Development Program winger Matthew Boldy, a Massachusetts native projected to be a first-round pick in this month's NHL draft.

Boldy, who committed to play at Boston College, says the success of Boston teams is inspirational to younger athletes.

"This is huge for the city and kids growing up in the area," Boldy said. "Growing up, I've seen a lot of parades and championships. It makes it easier for you to dream about that happening for you one day."

Bruins center Charlie Coyle, from East Weymouth, Mass., says that happened to him.

"I always think back to being in middle school when the Patriots started winning and the Red Sox and you go to school the next day and wear the gear," Coyle said. "Going to parades. I went to a few growing up. So I was really fortunate to have those great teams here, cheer them on and experience that."

Boston Bruins defenseman Matt Grzelcyk grew up near TD Garden.

The Bruins have more Americans (13) on their roster than any other team, and several have a Boston connection. Defenseman Matt Grzelcyk grew up within walking distance of TD Garden and his father John is a Bruins employee who helps convert the arena from hockey to basketball.

"Matt can walk out of the arena and take a five-minute walk and be where he grew up," Smith said. "There is a community feeling about this team."

Allan Steele has been a Bruins' season ticketholder in the last row of the balcony for 25 seasons. He remembers paying \$15 or \$20 per ticket per game in the 1990s. Today, his tickets are \$70.

"And I still think it's a bargain," he said. "This week, it's \$170 per ticket and we could probably sell them for \$2,000 right now."

But he won't sell them. He said young sports fans in Boston are spoiled by their teams' success.

Younger generation used to titles

"Kids who are 20 and under don't understand what real life is," Steele said. "They just think every team should win. It's going to be amazing when we hit hard times and go back to normal."

Given the team's history of poor performances before this golden era of Boston sports, Massarotti compares it "to a homeless person winning the lottery."

He said every Boston parent has to have the "talk" with their children about the fact that life as a sports fan isn't this rosy.

"They don't have a clue," Massarotti said. "They think this is all normal. This is a generation where everyone gets a trophy. And in this case, it's somewhat true. There's a parade every year. Every year, there is a final to take your kids to. It's ridiculous."

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