



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • June 13, 2018

THE NEWS & OBSERVER

Hurricanes announce exhibition schedule

By Jonas Pope IV

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The Carolina Hurricanes released their 2018 exhibition schedule on Tuesday. Carolina will play six exhibition games, including three home games at PNC Arena.

The Hurricanes will open their 2018 preseason schedule on the road against the Tampa Bay Lightning on Sept. 18. The

next night, Carolina will host the Lightning in their preseason home opener, beginning at 7 p.m. The Stanley Cup Champion Washington Capitals come to Raleigh on Sept. 21, and the Hurricanes will hit the road for games in Nashville (Sept. 25) and Washington (Sept. 28).

Carolina concludes the exhibition schedule with a 1:30 p.m. game against Nashville at PNC on Sept. 30. That exhibition will be free to attend as part of the team's annual Caniac Carnival.



Stanley Cup champs come to PNC Arena for preseason game against Canes

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Raleigh, N.C. — The Carolina Hurricanes will hit the ice for a home-and-home exhibition matchup against the Tampa Bay Lightning to start the 2018-19 season.

The team published a six-game exhibition schedule on Tuesday that includes three home games at PNC Arena.

The Hurricanes will open their 2018 preseason schedule Sept. 18 against the Tampa Bay Lightning at Amalie Arena. The following night, Carolina will host the Lightning at PNC Arena in their exhibition home opener at 7 p.m.

The Hurricanes host the Stanley Cup Champion Washington Capitals on Friday, Sept. 21, at 7:30 p.m., before hitting the road for games in Nashville on Sept. 25 and Washington on Sept. 28. Carolina wraps up its exhibition schedule with a 1:30 p.m. game against the Nashville Predators at PNC Arena on Sunday, Sept. 30, which will be free to attend as part of the team's annual Caniac Carnival.

CAROLINA HURRICANES 2018 EXHIBITION SCHEDULE

Day	Date	Opponent	Time	Venue
Tue.	Sept. 18	@Tampa Bay	7:30 p.m.	Amalie Arena
Wed.	Sept. 19	Tampa Bay	7:00 p.m.	PNC Arena
Fri.	Sept. 21	Washington	7:30 p.m.	PNC Arena
Tue.	Sept. 25	@Nashville	8	Bridgestone Arena
Fri.	Sept. 28	@Washington	7 p.m.	Capital One Arena
Sun.	Sept. 30	Nashville	1:30 p.m.	PNC Arena

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CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • June 13, 2018



How the Canes Won the No. 2 Pick

Inside look at outside shot Canes had to win draft lottery

by Michael Smith [@MSmithCanes](#) / CarolinaHurricanes.com

June 12th, 2018

Visit www.Hurricanes.com/Draft for the latest news, videos and pick-by-pick information in the 2018 NHL Draft.

Of the 1,001 possible lottery draw combinations in the 2018 NHL Draft Lottery, the Carolina Hurricanes owned just 30 winning four-digit combos - a slim 3 percent chance at leapfrogging their way to a top three pick in this year's draft.

From there, we know *what* happened: the Hurricanes defied the odds to win the second overall pick, the first time they have moved up in the draft order in 18 tries since the lottery was instituted in 1995.

But *how* did it happen?

That process played out in about 15 minutes time behind closed doors on Saturday, April 28, prior to the televised reveal of picks, segments of which stretched out over a few hours that night during the Stanley Cup Playoffs.

Hurricanes President and General Manager Don Waddell was just as gripped by the drama of the reveal as the rest of us watching it unfold on television.

"That two hours seemed like eight hours," he recalled.

Meanwhile, the results of the lotteries were known by a handful of folks selected to be present inside a small room at Sportsnet's Hockey Central studios at the Canadian Broadcasting Center in Toronto.

Inside that room, with a practical but simplistic set-up featuring the lottery machine itself, a handful of TV screens and some light snacks, NHL Commissioner Gary Bettman initiated the lottery draw process a little bit before 7 p.m. Eastern.

One-by-one, lottery balls numbered one through 14 were loaded into the machine. With the press of a green button, the balls dropped into the cylindrical container, and with the press of a blue button, the balls began to bounce and fly around in the machine.

"Begin," Bettman instructed with a brief wave of his right hand.

Lottery balls were drawn in 15-second intervals. The Buffalo Sabres, the favorite to win the first overall pick with 18.5 percent odds, landed the first winning four-digit combination.

"Release the remaining balls back into the machine, please," Bettman said after ensuring the representatives from the Ernst & Young accounting firm were set for the second lottery draw.

Green button. Balls in.

Blue button. Balls flying.

Fifteen seconds.

Red button. The first ball: 14.

Fifteen seconds.

Red button. The second ball: 5.

Fifteen seconds.

Red button. The third ball: 1.

With one ball left to draw, the [list of 1,001 combinations](#) had been whittled down to 11 potential four-digit winners. The Hurricanes owned just one of those 11 combinations, a 9.1 percent chance of winning the lottery. Detroit, Vancouver and the New York Islanders also each had a 1-in-11 shot. Buffalo had a 3-in-11 (27.3 percent) chance to win, which would have triggered a redraw, while Ottawa's odds were best to hang on to the second pick, with four of the 11 remaining combinations (36.4 percent).

Red button. The fourth ball: 2.

1, 2, 5, 14.

Representatives from Ernst & Young checked and double-checked the sequence before relaying the winner to Bettman.

"The second selection in the 2018 NHL Draft," he announced, his wide eyes punctuating the significance, "belongs to the Carolina Hurricanes."



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • June 13, 2018



Hurricanes Need Serious Culture Shift

By [Mark Shiver](#) June 12th, 2018

Watching the recently completed Stanley Cup Playoffs revealed key aspects of playoff-caliber teams, and more importantly, championship caliber teams. The Stanley Cup Champions are the Washington Capitals, and as their play unfolded, the things that separate them from a wannabe team like the Carolina Hurricanes are glaring.

When Alexander Ovechkin loaded up repeatedly and launched his laser shots past defenseless goalies — the best in the league by the way — it was clear that the Hurricanes desperately need a player who will not hesitate to shoot and who has the ability to score consistently. The team needs playoff-caliber goaltending, too.

If the Hurricanes want to bring Lord Stanley's Cup back to Raleigh, they will have to change several key elements of their team. The most important of which is the culture.

Champions Have a Winning Culture

If you were to go to The Hockey Writers archives and comb through every article I have published since I have been covering the Hurricanes in 2014, you would find one topic recurring more than others. "[We did not start on time](#)," was a frequent, albeit unwelcome, subject that constantly came up in post-game press conferences.

The fact remains that no team is going to win the Stanley Cup, the Super Bowl, the World Series or the NBA Championship without a culture of winning that permeates the locker room. Even the horse named Justify, recent winner of the horse racing Triple Crown didn't have trouble starting on time. For a horse to be a winner at the highest level, they have to come out of the gate charging.

Team sports are no different. The Hurricanes have got to get over this slack mentality that finds solace in the excuse, "We didn't start on time." It reminds me of a statement someone made to me recently about Scott Darling, the Hurricanes starting goaltender. They said, "He has four million reasons to get his act together." That's really the bottom line for most people, that these guys are paid to play a game, and the least they can do is bring their best effort to the ice on a nightly basis.

Anyone that watched the playoffs, especially the Stanley Cup Final could not help but see that there was a fierce, all-out intensity on the faces of everyone involved. It's a culture of winning that shows up in going hard after pucks, getting in front of the net and fighting for rebounds. It's being aggressive on power plays instead of skating around and leisurely passing the puck back and forth.

Can Brind'Amour Change the Culture?

These Hurricanes have got to get serious about wanting to win. If anyone can help them with changing the culture it's their new head coach Rod Brind'Amour. Of course legends abound about his own commitment to fitness and his personal intensity. If he can transfer that to his team, they will be well-advanced on their journey to the playoffs. If not, he may join his predecessors Kirk Muller and Bill Peters on the coaches three to four-year plan.

Brind'Amour has won a Stanley Cup. Newly named assistant coach Jeff Daniels was with the team when they won it in 2006. There are players on the roster, like Justin Williams, who have also hoisted the Stanley Cup. In other words, there are interspersed within the organization and the locker room guys who have ascended the pinnacle of the NHL. They know what it takes to win and the intensity and sacrifice necessary to be the best.

Back in January [Luke DeCock of the Raleigh News & Observer wrote](#), "For all their youth and exuberance and skill, this is still a soft team, too soft to win a playoff round even if the goaltending somehow holds up." The goaltending holding up is another issue altogether. It is widely known that the Hurricanes must fix this element of their team and do so now if they want to make any progress toward the post-season.

Coaching Concerns

There are two main concerns about Brind'Amour. He has no head-coaching experience and his coaching of the power play for the Hurricanes was disappointing.

[Justin Gilliland wrote at Cardiac Cane a year ago](#) a piece that questioned if Brind'Amour might be in over his head as an assistant coach. Gilliland wrote: "The Canes man-advantage is actually not an advantage at all. It has been in the top two-thirds of the league only once since Brindy started behind the bench. Some may blame the lack of talent for the Canes' cellar-dwelling power play. This argument is invalid when the coach on the other end of the bench, Steve Smith, is icing a number one penalty-killing unit with the likes of Jay McClement and Ron Hainsey." Now Brind'Amour is the head coach.

All eyes will be on Brind'Amour as he tries to change the Hurricanes' culture. Hopefully his influence on the team as a whole will be better than his influence as the power play coach. Brind'Amour can inspire and challenge and leave some of the finer technical points to his assistants.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • June 13, 2018

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

1098750 Carolina Hurricanes

Hurricanes announce exhibition schedule

BY JONAS POPE IV

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1098751 Carolina Hurricanes

Carolina brings back Daniels, complete Brind'Amour's staff

The Associated Press

RALEIGH, N.C. -The Carolina Hurricanes are bringing back Jeff Daniels as an assistant coach.

General manager Don Waddell announced the hiring of Daniels on Monday and completed the staff for new coach Rod Brind'Amour.

The 49-year-old Daniels was an assistant with the team from 2003-08, was part of the staff that won the Stanley Cup in 2006 and has been the organization's manager of pro scouting since 2015.

He also coached the Hurricanes' AHL affiliate in Charlotte from 2008-15, and has worked in player development and scouting for Carolina.

Waddell says Brind'Amour "has a great understanding for the experience and knowledge that he brings to the table."

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1098813 Websites

The Athletic / The Athletic's 2018 NHL Mock Draft 2.0 — Projecting the first round and evaluating team needs

By Corey Pronman Jun 12, 2018

Today's mock draft is more involved than just making picks. We asked our writers to not only make a selection but also provide some context into the teams' drafting philosophies and organizational needs. I've added my analysis of their picks for the entire first round of the draft.

Next week will be my personal mock draft.

Check out Corey Pronman's complete preview of the 2018 NHL draft and all of The Athletic's draft coverage.

No. 1 Buffalo: Rasmus Dahlin, D, Frolunda-SHL

What does the team typically value in players?

Last year's draft was GM Jason Botterill's first after replacing Tim Murray, so it's early to detect trends. Botterill's previous organization, the Pittsburgh Penguins, has done well with college players in the past, and the Sabres took a seventh-round flyer on Wisconsin-bound Linus Weissbach last year. Weissbach followed it up with 26 points in 34 games during his freshman season.

Is there any major area of need?

Just about everything, although the Sabres are in pretty good shape at center.

Pronman's comments: There's only so much to say about taking the clear first overall prospect, especially when it fills a glaring organizational need at the same time. Good job, I guess?

No. 2 Carolina: Andrei Svechnikov, LW Barrie-OHL

Is there any major area of need?

The Hurricanes are loaded on defense so this pick presents an opportunity for Carolina to hit the sweet spot of taking the best player available while also filling a major need — goal scoring. The Hurricanes



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • June 13, 2018

need goaltending and haven't developed a homegrown goalie since Cam Ward.

Pronman's comments: Svechnikov is so physically advanced for his age that he's not only a pick and play, but he could play in a real top nine/PP role on Day 1. Carolina has a lot of good players but is missing those impact/star players. Maybe it's him, maybe it's Sebastian Aho. It's a step in the right direction, and he could be part of an immediate turnaround in Carolina.

No. 3 Montreal: Filip Zadina, RW, Halifax-QMJHL

What does the team typically value in players?

This is a loaded question because I think the guy running the draft and the GM look for different things. So, based on history, I would say a mix of high-end skill (Trevor Timmins) and some brawn (Marc Bergevin). I don't think they will mess around with No. 3, but the potential of looking at size in the second round definitely exists based on the past.

Is there any major area of need?

Center and puck-moving D, preferably left shooting D.

Rationale?

What seemed like a slam dunk pick for the Canadiens in this slot has become a bit more of a midrange jumper, if that works, because the emergence of Jesperi Kotkaniemi, the talented Finnish center, into the mix complicates matters somewhat. People who know far more than me about these players feel confident in saying Kotkaniemi — who fills a MAJOR position of organizational need — has the talent to justify going so early. Want to know another MAJOR organizational need? Scoring. From any position. Zadina provides that.

— Arpon Basu

Pronman's comments: The Habs do need a star pivot and Kotkaniemi could be that, but Zadina is the third best player on my board, and I think this is a perfectly reasonable pick, if not the one I'd make. He's full of skill and can project to score 30-plus goals annually.

No. 4 Ottawa: Evan Bouchard, D, London-OHL

What does the team typically value in players?

Pierre Dorion has typically gone for skill; as an example, when he was the Senators' scouting director, he went to bat for Erik Karlsson with little regard for size. Bryan Murray always liked some physicality during his time, but Dorion has been putting his stamp on the team, along with Trent Mann, by going more for guys like Drake Batherson and Alex Formenton.

Is there any major area of need?

Defense, with the uncertainty around Karlsson and the lack of depth on the right side.

Rationale?

I think with forward prospects like Logan Brown, Batherson and Formenton just a year away from getting their shot the Senators need to look at replenishing their blueline. With Karlsson's future up in the air and not much in the way of depth on the right side, I think they should use the No. 4 pick to take a right-shot defenseman.

— Chris Stevenson

Pronman's comments: I agree that Dorion tends to be a skill-heavy kind of evaluator, but if they want a defenseman, I think the guy who fits his profile (and mine) would be Quinn Hughes at this slot. That said, Bouchard was a big riser in the second half and his name has been buzzing in scouting circles. Him going in the top five would not shock me. He's one of the best puck movers and trigger men from the point in the class.

No. 5 Arizona: Brady Tkachuk, LW, Boston University-Hockey East

What does the team typically value in players?

GM John Chayka believes in building a franchise down the middle and on defense. Typically that would be the expected preference for the Coyotes while picking in such a premium draft slot.

Is there any major area of need?

The Coyotes are still building so they very much have to be in best-player-available mode. The organization still needs top-flight centers to complement the young talent being collected.

Pronman's comments: The Coyotes get one of the most coveted players in the draft and a guy who immediately complements what they are building in Arizona. Tkachuk is a player who can score but do so in a different, more powerful way than Clayton Keller, Max Domi and Dylan Strome.

No. 6 Detroit: Quinn Hughes, D, Michigan-Big 10

What does the team typically value in players?

The Red Wings ideal during their rebuild would be to build a team with skill and size. Even as the league is trending smaller, they value size along with character players they believe will put in the work to develop. That said, they understand the organizational need for high-end skill so they may be more willing to take on risk with their stockpile of draft picks.

Is there any major area of need?

The Red Wings focus at the top of the draft will be on defense and at center.

Rationale?

If the draft plays out like this, expect the Red Wings to look to trade down, although they won't go outside the top 10. They might prefer Noah Dobson in this spot because of his size and his right-handed shot, but it's hard to pass up Hughes' skating and playmaking.

— Craig Custance

Pronman's comments: The Wings pick out of their backyard to get the defenseman with the second highest pure upside in the class, and the best pure skater in the class. He immediately becomes the organization's top prospect and the most talented young defense prospect they've had in decades.

No. 7 Vancouver: Adam Boqvist, D, Brynas-J20 SuperElite

What does the team typically value in players?

Hard to say because they've taken all sorts, but right now the message from the organization is "speed and skill."

Is there any major area of need?

Defense, and to a lesser extent LW.

Rationale?

This was a tough one, especially after Dobson showed so well at the Memorial Cup. In the end, though, Boqvist has the higher upside, and the Canucks are desperate for a defenseman with an elite offensive package.

— Jason Brough

Pronman's comments: Vancouver takes my best available defenseman left on the board and one of the very best playmakers from the back end I've seen in the past few years. He's a few years away though, needing to build up strength and round out his game. He's a much more dynamic but less steady player than Olli Juolevi, who Vancouver took at fifth overall a few years ago.

No. 8 Chicago: Oliver Wahlstrom, RW, USNTDP-USHL

What does the team typically value in players?



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • June 13, 2018

The Blackhawks value skill first and foremost. They're not scared off by undersized players either. That's paid off with such selections as Alex DeBrincat, Vinnie Hinostroza and Dylan Sikura.

Is there any major area of need?

I think there's still a need for defensemen. They took two right-handed shots early last year.

Rationale?

The Blackhawks are in need of stockpiling elite defensemen, but they're going to take the best available player at No. 8. Wahlstrom is that.

— Scott Powers

Pronman's comments: There aren't many players in the Chicago organization who can score goals the way Wahlstrom can. Yes, they have DeBrincat, but he's stylistically a little different with a bigger build. He would provide a great complement to someone like Nick Schmaltz as a guy who can score from anywhere.

No. 9 N.Y. Rangers: Jesperi Kotkaniemi, C, Assat-Liiga

What does the team typically value in players?

I think this year and last, they're looking at character guys ... obviously along with skill. They're still thrilled with last year's first-round pick Lias Andersson and very fired up over their acquisitions of character guys in Brett Howden and Ryan Lindgren.

Is there any major area of need?

Their most obvious need is on defense, but they also lack real top-end wingers. I think they'd prefer wingers over D now that they have Livor Hajek, Lindgren and eventually Yegor Rykov coming, plus they've seen what Neal Pionk might be.

Rationale?

Another good character guy, which the Rangers are striving to collect. Kotkaniemi can play center or wing, has good skills — another Rangers' need — and is good along the walls, at the puck-possession game new coach David Quinn wants to play.

— Rick Carpiniello

Pronman's comments: While the Rangers picked two centers in the first round last summer in Andersson and Filip Chytil, Kotkaniemi shoots right to the top of their depth chart in terms of talent, as well they can all play wing if needed. Kotkaniemi would be the highest upside pick the Rangers have had since the late Alexei Cherepanov.

No. 10 Edmonton: Noah Dobson, D, Acadie-Bathurst-QMJHL

What does the team typically value in players?

Hockey sense seems to be the watchword for the moment. As with most organizations this spring, they're talking a lot about "playing fast."

Is there any major area of need?

The forward group has virtually nothing at the AHL level and very little in the pipeline, so all else being equal, they probably need forwards more than defensemen, and right-shooting D more than left-shooting (though, I think this is going to apply more to the picks after the No. 10, rather than necessarily to No. 10 itself).

Rationale?

Dobson is available in the No. 10 slot because he is perceived to lack the same degree of high-end upside as the players taken ahead of him, but he nevertheless projects as a wonderfully useful right-shot defenseman. It's extremely difficult to find a 6-foot-3 rearguard with superior skating, a heavy shot, passing vision and a sterling defensive reputation. Dobson is such a player, and as a bonus, is a strong fit for positional need within the Oilers organization.

— Jonathan Willis

Pronman's comments: The pressure to get picks right for the Oilers continues to build. Getting a safer pick in Dobson, who still does have NHL tools, gives them a right-shot D and could get to the league within a few years, makes sense for their situation.

No. 11 N.Y. Islanders: Joseph Veleno, C, Drummondville-QMJHL

What does the team typically value in players?

They don't seem to go off the board much. When they've picked top five, they tend to go with consensus rated guys — Michael Dal Colle, Ryan Strome, Nino Niederreiter. Further down they've definitely gone for offensive skill — Ryan Pulock, Mathew Barzal, Kieffer Bellows — and they seem willing to be patient with those guys.

Is there any major area of need?

They need to stock up on forwards. Bellows is really the best forward prospect they have, unless you include Joshua Ho-Sang. It's very thin after that, both at the pro and amateur levels.

Rationale?

Forward depth, especially at center, is a painful topic for the Isles below the NHL level. Veleno seems to project as a solid middle-sixer, which fits well on a team that will have Barzal leading the group for a long time.

— Arthur Staple

Pronman's comments: As Staple mentioned, it's really bare up the middle in terms of depth in the Islanders organization. Veleno fits in terms of best player and also helps a desperate need for their farm system.

No. 12 N.Y. Islanders: Ty Smith, D, Spokane-WHL

Rationale?

The team's track record with high-scoring D-men out of the WHL looks pretty good right now with the emergence of Pulock this year. Smith doesn't have the size the Isles prefer on D, but he fits the way the NHL game is going and, if the Isles are going to make both these picks, a potential top-four defenseman is a must.

— Staple

Pronman's comments: Smith's draft slot will be one of the more interesting for me to follow on draft day given he didn't end the season on a good note. That said, he's a great player and, despite having many good D prospects, the Islanders could use a real top-end guy in their pipeline.

No. 13 Dallas: Rasmus Kupari, C, Karpat-Liiga

What does the team typically value in players?

Size and high-risk, (hopefully) high-reward picks — which haven't panned out much lately. They rely heavily on European scouting and focus on that quite a bit.

Is there any major area of need?

Center depth is lacking.

Rationale?

The Stars have loaded up at wing and defense in recent years, and still really lack prospect depth down the middle. Kupari also fits the best player available model, and the Stars really need to stick to that after some reaches with prior top-15 picks.

— Sean Shapiro

Pronman's comments: Kupari is one of the players who isn't getting a ton of buzz lately due to not being part of the Finland U18 team a lot and not getting much ice time on a stacked Liiga team, but I know NHL teams salivating at the prospect of getting him due to his massive upside. Dallas



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • June 13, 2018

has taken a lot of shots at high-upside guys in recent years and the returns have been so-so, but Kupari fits their mantra and would become their top forward prospect.

No. 14 Philadelphia: Vitaly Kravtsov, RW, Chelyabinsk-KHL

What does the team typically value in players?

Under Ron Hextall, some common threads between the players they've taken with high picks: skill over size; commitment to two-way play (they don't have to be great at it yet, just have to show they care on a regular basis); late risers/players with strong finishes to their seasons (i.e. Travis Sanheim, Wade Allison, Pascal Laberge); and playmakers over snipers

Is there any major area of need?

The Flyers have a pretty deep prospect pool, but some possible areas of need: a shoot-first winger and D-men with top-four upside behind Philippe Myers. I could see them wanting someone who might not be ready for 2-3 years, just as guys like Sanheim/Myers are approaching their payday.

Rationale?

Joel Farabee would be tempting at this spot, but Hextall's tendency is to gravitate towards prospects who came on strong at the end of their draft years (Sanheim, Allison). Kravtsov exploded for 11 points in 16 games during the KHL playoffs, and the Flyers showed with their selection of German Rubtsov in 2016 that they're willing to do their homework on high-end Russian prospects and invest high picks in them if they like the skill set.

— Charlie O'Connor

Pronman's comments: Trying to project who will take a top Russian prospect playing overseas is a bit of dart throwing, but Hextall has shown a willingness to do so. Kravtsov had the best end to the season you could ask of any prospect and would fly up the Flyers' depth chart due to his great toolkit, even past top prospect Morgan Frost.

No. 15 Florida: Grigori Denisenko, LW, Yaroslavl-KHL

Is there any major area of need?

The Panthers have the luxury of having depth at center, so management can take a swing in an attempt to add needed scoring on the wing.

Pronman's comments: Florida the past few years has shown a shift to picking highly talented players who play fast, which Denisenko fits in bunches. They haven't used a high pick on a Russian in a long time, but they have shown a willingness to take KHL players if they like them. The rumor around the industry, as well, is that Denisenko wants to come overseas soon if he can get out of his contract.

No. 16 Colorado: Joel Farabee, LW, USNTDP-USHL

Is there any major area of need?

A year ago at this time, the Avs looked barren in the young defensemen category and fans probably couldn't fathom not loading up on defense this season. Now, after picking Cale Makar and Conor Timmins high last season, and trading for Samuel Girard, they have a lot of top young talent on the back end.

Pronman's comments: Farabee checks a box in terms of adding needed offensive production to the system, on top of hitting the character and two-way attributes the Avs scouts have historically coveted.

No. 17 New Jersey: Bode Wilde, D, USNTDP-USHL

What does the team typically value in players?

This regime has made it clear that they prioritize hockey sense, compete level and skating ability. They've tried to make every aspect of the process more efficient by laying out to amateur scouts, pro scouts and their coaches exactly what qualities are the most important for scouting, drafting and developing players to fit their identity and style of play.

Is there any major area of need?

They have lots of interesting prospects, but there probably isn't one that projects to be more than an average goal scorer up front. The biggest need in the near-term is at least one more top-three defenseman and, in the long-term, one or more that have that type of ceiling.

Rationale?

This Devils regime seems firmly entrenched on the side of best player available after the first two cycles with Paul Caston as scouting director, but they've also had 11 picks in the first four rounds and taken one defenseman. Wilde can really skate and has lots of offensive potential. That he offers more size than New Jersey's other top defense prospects is a bonus. Plus, he might also fit both the "best player available" and "fills a need" sides of the argument.

— Corey Masisak

Pronman's comments: The Devils' farm system has changed in a significant way the past few years, but they do lack that young game-breaking talent from the blueline in their pipeline. Wilde fits that despite the shortcomings in his game and would immediately become one of, if not their top prospect. He is a risky player, though, and it's plausible he slides well past this slot on draft day.

No. 18 Columbus: Barrett Hayton, C, Sault Ste. Marie-OHL

What does the team typically value in players?

GM Jarmo Kekalainen is really high on guys who can process the game at high speed. He loves physical specimens, too.

Is there any major area of need?

They need game-changing forwards.

Rationale?

With Seth Jones and Zach Werenski atop the blueline depth chart, look for the Blue Jackets to use this pick to add some future high-end talent up front. RW Jesse Ylonen and RW Serron Noel should be considerations, but Hayton has the type of hockey IQ that Kekalainen values.

— Aaron Portzline

Pronman's comments: Hayton is a high IQ type but also does possess quite a lot of skill. His skating isn't great, but Columbus took a similarly built prospect recently in Pierre-Luc Dubois and has managed to turn him into a fairly damn good player.

No. 19 Philadelphia: Isac Lundestrom, C, Lulea-SHL

Rationale?

The Flyers have always loved versatile, well-rounded forwards with high-end hockey IQ, and that's Lundestrom in a nutshell. There are questions about his ultimate offensive upside, but it's not easy to score 15 points in 42 games as a teenager in a league against men, especially when it's the SHL, one of the best leagues in the world. I could see Lundestrom's combination of a high floor and top-sixer ceiling being very attractive to Hextall.

— O'Connor

Pronman's comments: After rolling the dice with their first pick, the Flyers pick here is much safer in looking for a guy who could be a third line two-way forward with a chance at more. With Lundestrom, Kravtsov, Frost, Rubtsov and Nolan Patrick, it may seem like too much recent investment at forward, but it would be wise given how much they loaded up on defense in the earlier parts of the decade.

No. 20 Los Angeles: Dominik Bokk, RW, Vaxjo-J20 SuperElit

What does the team typically value in players?



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • June 13, 2018

With the recent changes in team management and coaching, there has been more of a push by the Kings to add speed and skill and less big, brawny types. Los Angeles is very high on its last draft – the first by Rob Blake as general manager – with the selections of Gabe Vilardi in the first round and Jaret Anderson-Dolan in the second round.

Is there any major area of need?

Organizational depth. Vilardi was Los Angeles' first first-round pick since the 2014 draft when the Kings took Adrian Kempe. In the past, Los Angeles used to reload its roster through the draft, but the team has traded away a lot of picks in recent years in order to keep its Stanley Cup window open.

Rationale?

Bokk's scoring ability on the wing would be a nice complement to L.A.'s recent first-round selections down the middle with Vilardi and Kempe. The Kings seem to be on the hunt for more offense these days, and Bokk certainly fits the bill.

Pronman's comments: The Kings putting an emphasis on skill would be quite evident if they picked Bokk, who is one of the purest skilled players in the class and would be right at the top of their system with Vilardi. After Vilardi, the Kings really do need players who can break a shift open, and while Bokk needs a few years to round out his game, he could be that player.

No. 21 San Jose: Mattias Samuelsson, D, USNTDP-USHL

What does the team typically value in players?

I think they go more for hockey sense than trying to go for the home run — low-risk guys.

Is there any major area of need?

My guess would be they are looking for a D-man, with Dylan Gambrell and Josh Norris in the mix, and some of their NHL wingers developing nicely this season.

Rationale?

After missing on first rounder Mirco Mueller in 2013 and 2015 second-rounder Jeremy Roy coming off of a second major knee surgery, the Sharks could use another top defensive prospect in the system. Samuelsson's size and defensive prowess could be just what they are looking for.

— Kevin Kurz

Pronman's comments: This is a safer selection by the Sharks but does give them the hockey sense they usually covet in their picks and provides talent on the back end, which their pipeline needs. Having Samuelsson and Mario Ferraro, a second-round pick last season, on the same blue line will make nights tough and physical for opponents.

No. 22 Ottawa: Serron Noel, RW, Oshawa-OHL

Rationale?

At 6-foot-5 and 209 pounds, Ottawa native Noel (he's the son of former CFL running back Dean Noel) would bring some size up front, which the Senators could use, but not at the expense of mobility (he's improved his skating working with instructor Shelley Kettles). Serron Noel's size would be a good complement to other blue-chip prospects like Batherson and Formenton.

— Stevenson

Pronman's comments: I'm guessing Serron Noel goes around this range due to his elite size and elite athleticism. If Ottawa goes for Bouchard or Hughes with their first pick, it makes finding a new top-end D prospect not as big an issue and the team could go best player available at this slot.

No. 23 Anaheim: Ryan McLeod, C, Mississauga-OHL

What does the team typically value in players?

Hockey sense. They have trended toward playmaking centers but still try to look for that big left wing that can put the puck in the net. They have put more emphasis on guys who can skate, but then, who hasn't?

Is there any major area of need?

They're in real need of more skilled forwards. Defense should be set for a long time.

Rationale?

After years of drafting and developing defensemen to leave them well-stocked at that position, the Ducks have turned their focus in recent years to speed and skill up front with their top picks. They'll keep filling those organizational needs with McLeod, who moves easily on the ice and is able to create room for himself with quick bursts from a standstill. He can be inconsistent night-to-night but has great vision and passing ability to go with his size, which is too enticing to let slip by at 23 — especially with Ryan Kesler's long-term health a significant question and Ryan Getzlaf entering the final stages of his career.

Pronman's comments: McLeod is a divisive prospect within scouting circles, but I know some teams who are very high (and very low) on him. Sam Steel should help bridge the center gap in Anaheim, but McLeod could be a fast-track guy, too, given how physically advanced he is.

No. 24 Minnesota: Jesse Ylonen, RW, Espoo-Mestis

What does the team typically value in players?

They have a tendency lately to take sure thing/less risky guys (Luke Kunin, Joel Eriksson Ek, Jordan Greenway) as opposed to goal scorers who need to develop (Brock Boeser, Kieffer Bellows).

Is there any major area of need?

They are incredibly short on skilled prospects. No true centers in the pipeline, zero goal scorers other than Kirill Kaprizov, who's at least two years from coming over.

Rationale?

The son of longtime Phoenix Coyote Juha Ylonen, the Arizona-born Ylonen might be right up the Wild's alley. He checks off boxes for a Wild team that lacks skilled forwards at the prospect level: tremendous skater, right shot, can score and, uh, Finnish.

— Michael Russo

Pronman's comments: The Predators' drafts under the direction of new Wild GM Paul Fenton were known as an organization that invested heavily in hockey IQ and upside, and this would be that kind of swing in the first round. Ylonen is a dynamic playmaker who is very physically underdeveloped but would be a home-run swing type of pick for an organization that needs game breakers.

No. 25 Toronto: Ryan Merkley, D, Guelph-OHL

What does the team typically value in players?

We don't fully know what direction Kyle Dubas will take their draft strategy. But if 2015 (the year he ran the draft with Mark Hunter) or his time in the Soo are any indication, he's going to lean toward smaller, high-skill players with big upside, rather than attempt to fill around the edges.

Is there any major area of need?

It's no secret the Leafs are thin at center and on defense — with the NHL club and in their prospect pool. They've got an abundance of wingers on both sides up and down the depth chart, but they have zero legitimate prospects down the middle and very little on the back end outside Timothy Liljegren.

Rationale?



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • June 13, 2018

In 2017, the Leafs happily swung for the fences on a falling Liljegren. This year, they do the same and pounce on Ryan Merkley, whose age-adjusted production puts him in the last decade's upper echelon for defencemen. He's the most talented player left on the board and Toronto, confident they can work through his other issues, lacks depth on D in their system.

— Scott Wheeler

Pronman's comments: It's almost cliché projecting what is expected to be a very progressive front office that will likely emphasize skill and playmaking in Toronto to take Merkley, but it makes sense, too. He is going to need a while to bulk up, improve his defense and work on his discipline issues, but he could be the impact defenseman that team needs in four or five years.

No. 26 N.Y. Rangers: Akil Thomas, C, Niagara-OHL

Rationale?

The Rangers take a character guy, and another skilled forward, which they very much need. Thomas has the two-way ability and playmaking to potentially slot into a variety of roles for the rebuilding Rangers.

— Carpiello

Pronman's comments: This is a reasonable pick at this slot. Thomas in the teens would worry me, but 20s is fine. He's similar stylistically to the Rangers first pick in Kotkaniemi, but the ability is not of the same degree. The Rangers would become one of the deepest pipelines at center in the NHL, which is the most coveted position.

No. 27 Chicago: Rasmus Sandin, D, Sault Ste. Marie-OHL

Rationale?

Sandin's hockey sense and puck-moving ability should fit well with the other defense prospects coming through the Blackhawks' pipeline. The Blackhawks took a right-handed defenseman in the first round last year and now will take the best available left-handed defenseman in the first round this year.

— Powers

Pronman's comments: I could see Sandin go around this area of the draft and even a little earlier due to how strong his end of the season was. This would be the second straight year Chicago takes a D in the first round and, along with Ian Mitchell, would give them exceptional young talent on the blueline.

No. 28 N.Y. Rangers: Jonatan Berggren, LW, Skelleftea-J20 SuperElite

Rationale?

Berggren was a late riser and has a lot of the things the Rangers would covet between being skilled, having great hockey sense and being a hard-worker.

— Carpiello

Pronman's comments: Berggren would make the fifth forward the Rangers have picked in the first round in the past two years and the first true winger. He's turned himself into a very reasonable late first-round selection in the past few months.

No. 29 St. Louis: Jake Wise, C, USNTDP-USHL

What does the team typically value in players?

Blues director of amateur scouting Bill Armstrong always mentions hockey sense as the top trait he's looking for. Robert Thomas is a perfect example.

Is there any major area of need?

Probably defense. They have Thomas, Tage Thompson, Jordan Kyrou, Klim Kostin and several more forward prospects in the system. They

have Ville Husso and Evan Fitzpatrick as goalie prospects. They have a few D like Jordan Schmaltz and Jake Walman, but not as many.

Rationale?

I know I said the Blues probably want a defenseman, but to me, best player available and high hockey IQ override position in this situation.

— Jeremy Rutherford

Pronman's comments: Wise joins one of the better groups of forward prospects in the NHL in St. Louis. As a college-bound player, he'll arrive a few years later than Thomas and Kyrou, and provides some more depth to the center position, which is always sought after.

No. 30 Detroit: K'Andre Miller, D, USNTDP-USHL

Pronman's comments: The Wings reach into their backyard for both of their picks. Miller had a great end to the season, and I suspect on draft day he could be picked much higher than this slot. He's a high-end athlete and skater who will need a while to develop in school at Wisconsin but could be an impact guy if he hits.

No. 31 Washington: Ty Dellandrea, C, Flint-OHL

What does the team typically value in players?

The Washington Capitals have subtly altered their draft strategy since George McPhee was fired in the summer of 2014 and Brian MacLellan, who'd been the team's longtime assistant GM, was promoted to the GM chair. Occasionally, McPhee would target a specific skill set or trait ie. Size. But the Capitals almost invariably go after best player regardless of position now. If there is a need to bolster a position after the draft then MacLellan will work to trade prospect for prospect to do that, but the draft is all about which is the best player when the Capitals draft.

Is there any major area of need?

They are likely to lose backup netminder Philipp Grubauer, who is a restricted free agent. It's expected they will trade him, but the team has a top young prospect in Ilya Samsonov, who was the 22nd overall pick in 2015 and who has been playing the past three seasons in the KHL, so no pressure to move quickly to fill that void.

The team has a good cast of defensive prospects.

If there is an area the team would like to restock a little bit it would be at the forward position in large part because so many young forwards have made an impact at the NHL level this season, including Jakub Vrana and Chandler Stephenson, who were everyday contributors during the playoffs. Meanwhile, players like Shane Gersich, Nathan Walker and Travis Boyd all got a taste of playoff life this spring and will push for roster spots next season. Axel Jonsson-Fjallby is also close to being NHL ready.

— Scott Burnside

Pronman's comments: The Cup champs' farm system has gotten very light in recent years, particularly up front and down the middle. Picking a player like Dellandrea, who is a good pick on talent at this slot and had a great second half, provides some depth to the organization.

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The Athletic / LeBrun: Conversations among GMs picking up, Kovalchuk destinations, Thornton's future, Stastny watch

By Pierre LeBrun Jun 12, 2018



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • June 13, 2018

Those phones they are a ringing.

"Everyone is talking now, if a GM isn't talking to his counterparts right now, that means he's not doing his job," a GM, who requested anonymity, told The Athletic on Monday. "This is the busiest time of year for us. We're all prepping towards our roster next year. We're all talking about the draft, moving up and moving down, it's a busy time here. If someone tells you otherwise, they're smoking pot."

It really started at the combine in Buffalo, but on Monday, judging from conversations with executives around the league, things really started to pick up again as we head into the draft in Dallas next week.

There's the normal discourse about moving up or down in the first round and certainly, all eyes are on Montreal at No. 3 to see what the Canadiens do. But I will also say that over the years I've learned not to get caught up too heavily in that draft pick chatter until we get to the first round on Friday and GMs are on the floor having to finally show their hands. There's usually way more white noise attached to the draft pick chatter than actual movement when the music stops.

Interesting observation from one Western Conference team executive Monday about the first round: "So many teams are dying to draft centres and there aren't that many rated high. I think we could be in for a few surprises as the top 7-8 picks play out because of that. Some teams may just take their centre no matter what. We'll see."

It reminds me of the 2016 draft when Columbus GM Jarmo Kekäläinen had a number of trade conversations with teams about his No. 3 pick (and whether he'd consider moving down), but he ultimately kept the pick and took Pierre-Luc Dubois, which produced gasps in the crowd for the surprise factor. But already looking back that was clearly a good pick.

Elsewhere:

—Further to what my TSN colleague Darren Dreger reported over the weekend when he tweeted that Ilya Kovalchuk had weekend visits with Los Angeles and San Jose, my sense of the market for the Russian winger is made up of two groups. The top contenders, I believe, are the Kings (who met with Kovalchuk on Friday), the Bruins, the Rangers and the Sharks (who met with him Monday). Then I think there's a second group of teams including Detroit, St. Louis, Dallas and Anaheim. Now, other teams can still get involved, no question, but at this point, I think that's your list, which is already pretty deep. Again, the hope from his camp led by CAA Sports (J.P. Barry) is to have an agreement on terms with a team (he can't officially sign until July 1) right after the draft but before July 1.

—While it's pretty much a slam dunk Mike Hoffman gets traded out of Ottawa, as we talked about last week, another player to keep an eye on with the Senators is veteran centre Zack Smith. He's got three years left on his contract at a \$3.25 million salary. Word is the Senators aren't quite as eager to move him compared to Hoffman, but I think other teams have or will be circling back to Ottawa after Smith was out there a bit this past season before the trade deadline.

—A year ago, the Sharks had Marc-Édouard Vlasic and Martin Jones long-term extensions ready to unveil on July 1, both players signing one year before their deals expired. GM Doug Wilson not messing around with either core player. The expectation is that he'll have a similar announcement if all goes well over the coming three weeks with centre Logan Couture, who is one year away from UFA status. A source suggested talks are progressing on a long-term extension for the 29-year-old, stud two-way centre. He's earning \$6 million next season in the final year of his current deal. There's still lots of work to be done but perhaps Wilson can pull it off again this year with one of his core guys.

—Where Joe Thornton fits into the San Jose equation still has to play out but as of Monday, the sense was both the player and team have mutual interest to get something done when the time is right. Obviously the Sharks, who already signed Evander Kane to a seven-year deal, hope to continue to be busy in the coming weeks (John Tavares? Kovalchuk?) and there's lots of time to figure out a new deal for Thornton. A year ago,

Thornton dipped his toes in free agency for the first time in his career and my sense is that the experience, while educating and also revealing in terms of the long list of teams that wanted him, was also overwhelming to the veteran star. I don't think he's that interested in going through that again. I think he's focused on re-signing with San Jose. But again, so much can happen over next three-plus weeks.

—I think veteran agent Rick Curran will meet with Capitals GM Brian MacLellan at the draft in Dallas next week regarding pending UFA star blueliner John Carlson. Time is of the essence as the window for other teams to reach out to pending UFAs opens Sunday of draft weekend (June 24).

—It's really status quo at this point for pending UFA centre Paul Stastny. While his agent Matt Keator and Winnipeg Jets GM Kevin Cheveldayoff had a brief hello at the NHL draft combine in Buffalo, that's about it.

"We've really had no discussions to date," Keator said. "There's plenty of time so we'll see where it goes."

I'll just be happy if Cheveldayoff's head doesn't explode over the coming weeks. One of the by-products of drafting and developing so well as an organization is that eventually, the salary cap system comes off the top rope and hammers you. This summer and next will be tough, tough decision windows for the Jets, but I can think of many teams who only wish to have these types of decisions. Connor Hellebuyck (RFA), Jacob Trouba (RFA), Josh Morrissey (RFA), Adam Lowry (RFA) and Brandon Tanev (RFA) are among those needing new deals this summer while Blake Wheeler and Tyler Myers are one year away from UFA. Patrik Laine is one year away from his entry-level deal expiring.

Right now, the No. 1 priority for Cheveldayoff is to find out the exact number for next season's salary cap, which should be announced sometime next week just before the draft once the NHL and NHLPA come to an agreement on the growth factor.

As for Stastny, I can't see a fit in Winnipeg unless the Jets move some money out. Once John Tavares decides his future, Stastny is the top UFA centre left on the market coming off a strong playoff. There will be interest galore in him although having a chance to win will be paramount for Stastny, not so much top dollar, I don't think.

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The Athletic / Hotel employee obtains protection order against Senators' Randy Lee

By Katie Strang Jun 12, 2018

The 19-year-old Buffalo shuttle driver who said Ottawa Senators assistant general manager Randy Lee harassed him has obtained an order of protection against the longtime team executive, The Athletic has learned.

According to the temporary order of protection, obtained by The Athletic, Lee must stay 100 feet away from and refrain from coming within a one-block radius of The Westin Buffalo employee.

The employee told police that Lee had repeatedly touched him and made a lewd comment to him about his genitalia while the employee was driving Lee to the hotel. The 56-year-old Lee was in Buffalo for the NHL scouting combine.

Under the court-issued order, dated June 1, 2018, Lee must stay away from the home, school, business and place of employment of the young man, who still works at the hotel. According to the order, Lee must refrain



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • June 13, 2018

from "communication or any other contact by mail, telephone, e-mail, voice-mail or other electronic or any other means."

Lee was also ordered to "refrain from assault, stalking, harassment, aggravated harassment, menacing, reckless endangerment, strangulation, criminal obstruction of breathing or circulation, disorderly conduct, criminal mischief, sexual abuse, sexual misconduct, forcible touching, intimidation, threats or any criminal offense or interference with the victim or victims of, or designated witnesses to, the alleged offense."

The order, which is considered standard in cases of harassment and assault, remains in force until Oct. 1, 2018 and, if violated, may subject Lee to "mandatory arrest and criminal prosecution."

According to John J. Flynn, the Erie County district attorney, Lee asked the shuttle driver if he could sit in the front seat with him and was told he could. During the roughly one-mile drive from 716, a local sports bar, and the hotel, Lee proceeded to rub the man's shoulders.

The shuttle driver asked Lee to stop, Flynn said, but did so again when they arrived at the hotel and then made a lewd comment about his genitals. The employee reported the incident to the head of security at the hotel and it was investigated the following day by the Buffalo Police Department. Lee was arrested and charged with second-degree harassment on May 31.

Lee, who is a Canadian citizen, pleaded not guilty at his arraignment and is due back in court on July 6 for a pre-trial hearing. His next court appearance was originally slated for June 22, the first day of the NHL Draft, but Lee's attorney requested a scheduling change, which was granted by the DA's office, according to the Buffalo City Court Chief Clerk's office.

The young man who reported Lee was very disturbed by this behavior, Flynn said.

"He was very upset by this," Flynn told The Athletic by phone on Monday morning. "He was shaken up and still is."

When asked about the charges against his client, Paul Cambria Jr. declined to elaborate much further beyond stating that the incident in question was a "misunderstanding."

"I don't make comments like that," Cambria Jr. said by phone on Monday. "I can tell you as follows: He has entered a plea of not guilty. We believe that the matter emanated from a misunderstanding."

Cambria Jr. also represented Patrick Kane during a sexual-assault investigation in 2015.

Tom Long, the manager for The Westin Buffalo, said that the hotel is "fully cooperating" with the investigation and directed all questions to the Buffalo Police Department.

The Buffalo Police Department denied a Freedom of Information Law request for records and investigative materials related to the arrest, responding with a letter to The Athletic stating:

In accordance with the Public Officers Law 87 (2) (e) (i), an agency may deny access to records that are compiled for law enforcement purposes if disclosure would interfere with law enforcement investigations or judicial proceedings. This incident is still an active case therefore your request for information is denied.

Lee, who recovered his passport after having to initially surrender it, remains in his post with the Senators. He also serves as the general manager of the team's American Hockey League affiliate based in Belleville, Ontario.

Following the incident, the Senators released a statement saying they were monitoring developments. Last Monday, following Lee's appearance in court, the team announced his status with the organization remained unchanged.

In response to an email asking about Ottawa's decision not to suspend Lee pending the BPD's investigation of the matter, as well as whether

there have been any prior reports of concern about Lee's behavior during his time with the Senators, a team spokesperson said:

"Since it is before the Courts, we cannot comment other than what has been said before."

According to the team's media guide, Lee resides in Ottawa and has been with the Senators for 23 seasons. In addition to his role as assistant GM and GM of the Belleville Senators, Lee's role "continues to see him focus on a variety of tasks which include monitoring the development of players throughout the team's system, including prospects at the American Hockey League, college, junior hockey and European league levels and advising hockey management on the ongoing progress of each prospect. He also oversees the Senators player development team and works with current Senators players, guiding them with all aspects of their development."

NHL deputy commissioner Bill Daly said the league is not intervening in the matter at this stage, though it does have the latitude to levy discipline at its discretion.

"We have jurisdiction over and the ability to discipline all Club employees. We are aware of the Randy Lee situation and will monitor how it proceeds and plays out," Daly said in an email. "At this point, we are treating it as a Club matter and we will rely on Sens to treat the matter with appropriate seriousness, which I believe they have done."

Flynn said the young man was intent on seeing Lee prosecuted.

"I know he wants this case prosecuted," Flynn said.

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1098816 Websites

The Athletic / Kovalchuk's process of picking a destination: 'He's coming to the NHL to win a Stanley Cup'

Craig Custance Jun 12, 2018

Ilya Kovalchuk already texted congratulations to his friend Alex Ovechkin within minutes of Ovechkin clinching his first Stanley Cup.

While chatting with colleague Pierre LeBrun on the night Ovechkin raised the Cup, Kovalchuk's appreciation for his friend was filled with sincerity.

"I'm so happy for him," Kovalchuk told LeBrun that night.

And there's no doubt Kovalchuk has watched the very public celebration of his fellow Russian. The snow angels in fountains. Helping Jimmy Fallon with a Cup keg stand. Misfiring on a first pitch at a Nationals game. The dancing. The singing. All the beer drinking.

It looks like a blast. Now, Kovalchuk is returning to the NHL to chase his own version.

While Ovechkin was parading around D.C. with Capitals fans, Kovalchuk was quietly embarking on his own tour. According to an NHL source, there were visits to San Jose and Los Angeles. Another source confirmed that the Red Wings would like to bring him to Detroit. He's already got a place in New York.

There are going to be a lot of pitches made for the 35-year-old who scored 31 goals in 53 games last season playing in the KHL for St. Petersburg. And the most successful pitch may be the one that convinces Kovalchuk he can do something he wasn't able to do in New Jersey and Atlanta. Win it all.

"He won World Championships. He won Olympic Games. I think he's coming to the NHL to win a Stanley Cup," said former NHL defenseman



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • June 13, 2018

and KHL assistant coach Dmitri Yushkevich, who has seen Kovalchuk up close the past several years.

And one of the things Yushkevich noticed about Kovalchuk in the KHL is that he's evolved into a player who understood how to win.

Kovalchuk has always had a deep desire to have team success, but early on in his career it manifested itself in him trying to take over games by himself. As he matured and had team success, that started to change.

"He (became) more of a team player, playing in Russia and playing in SKA. That's always high demands. That situation teach him to be more of a team player," Yushkevich told The Athletic. "That's why he becomes captain."

It's what makes him one of the most fascinating unrestricted free agents in the class of 2018. In a one-goal league, one filled with parity, a player like Kovalchuk can elevate a team from the masses and into the top tier. To make it even more appealing, it's not a long-term commitment that high-end players typically demand in free agency.

One source said there are plenty of teams willing to do one or two years on Kovalchuk. The preference from the player might be a deal that looks like Patrick Marleau's three-year contract with the Maple Leafs worth \$6.25 million per season. Although this will be more about fit and winning than the dollar amount.

"If it was about the money, he'd just stay in Russia," said one NHL source.

Even the Marleau deal is a reasonable risk because it's off the books in three years. Considering some of the six-year deals veteran wingers have been getting in free agency over the years, that's pretty manageable.

As the Kovalchuk sweepstakes starts to heat up, there are still a lot of questions that remain. Let's dive in.

What should a signing team expect in Kovalchuk?

When Kovalchuk left the NHL, he was still a player capable of scoring in the high-30s at the NHL level. In 37 games during the 2012-13 season, his last with the Devils, Kovalchuk scored at a rate that would have produced 25 goals over an 82-game season.

Last season, he averaged 0.58 goals per game for St. Petersburg. That's a 48-goal pace over an 82-game schedule in the KHL, which puts him at a 38-goal rate in the NHL, according to Rob Vollman's translation factors. That's pretty darn good for a 35-year-old, although it's worth noting that these translations aren't necessarily built for the extremes.

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— ROB VOLLMAN (@ROBVOLLMANNHL) APRIL 11, 2018

It means high-30s might be a bit optimistic.

"I think he can score 25 goals," said one Eastern Conference executive. "He's a shooter. He's not a workaholic. He is what he is, he's a pull-the-trigger-guy."

He's an immediate boost to the power play, with a one-timer that rivals anyone's in the league and, at 6-foot-3, is an absolute force in the offensive zone.

"Ilya is a great athlete," Yushkevich said. "He's still very competitive."

What are the likely destinations?

Kovalchuk has been in California, the home state of his new agency CAA, and will get the full court press from the Los Angeles Kings, a team

very eager to increase its goal-scoring. The Kings were famously finalists for Kovalchuk during the summer in which he ended up signing with the New Jersey Devils.

The Sharks have the cap room and GM Doug Wilson is another big game hunter. It would be highly entertaining to watch Kovalchuk convert feeds from Joe Thornton, another potential unrestricted free agent. The Bruins and Rangers are also in the mix with the Rangers an intriguing option since they don't seem to align with the Cup-contender pre-requisite.

But according to an NHL source, the Rangers have long interested Kovalchuk and, if he can be convinced they have a legitimate shot at winning sometime in the window of a three-year contract, they'd become a real option. Another team to watch is the Tampa Bay Lightning, but it would have to be on a short-term deal. And by short, probably one year.

"There's no shortage of interest," said an NHL source.

LeBrun listed Dallas, Anaheim, St. Louis and Detroit as secondary options. Which brings us to the next question.

Why in the world are the Red Wings in the mix?

The one common theme to most of the mentioned teams is that they become Stanley Cup contenders with the addition of Kovalchuk. The Red Wings aren't one of those teams. In fact, their long-term rebuilding plan would be potentially sidetracked with a Kovalchuk signing. It doesn't make a ton of sense on the outside.

An NHL source confirmed the Red Wings' serious interest, initially reported by both LeBrun and TSN's Darren Dreger. And it's legitimate interest.

The Red Wings are rebuilding but management wants to do it in a way where the young players feel like they have a shot to win on any given night. The organization still wants Detroit to be a place where players still enjoy coming to the rink on a daily basis. Bottoming out completely typically doesn't create that kind of environment. There's also a new building in Detroit that was half empty at times in year one and would get some needed juice with a player like Kovalchuk.

But really, it only makes sense on a one-year deal that can be spun at the trade deadline. In fact, that's a great idea if you're Detroit. It's almost like buying draft picks and prospects in free agency. But if that's the case, why would Kovalchuk do it?

It's a longshot but the best pitch would have to be a one-year deal on a huge salary that also gives Kovalchuk complete control of where he goes at the trade deadline, with Detroit retaining some of the cost. Going that route would, in theory, buy Kovalchuk time to see which of the contending teams offer him the best chance to win. Again, that's just a working theory.

But it sounds like Kovalchuk wants to be part of a winning program from start to finish, part of building something and not parachuting in as a rental. It takes time to form a winning team. He saw it with Ovechkin.

He's lived it himself.

"That's probably the hardest (thing) for a player to understand what he have to do to win and win as a person, win as a team," Yushkevich said while explaining Kovalchuk's evolution. "Sometimes players like that, they think they can play this way and they're going to win. ... Some of the great players never win a Stanley Cup but they're always up high on the scoring. They always look good but it's not about this. It's about the team."

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CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • June 13, 2018

The Athletic / Bourne: When do players make the dreaded return to the gym to start next season's training?

By Justin Bourne Jun 12, 2018

The hockey season does some cruel things to the bodies of players. Yes, there's the obvious stuff – the nagging wrist injury that just needs some time to heal, the recurring groin pull that's always on the verge of getting worse, and the swollen ankle from that shot you blocked just last week. But there's also an overall change in physical composition.

During my playing days, I used to show up at training camp at roughly 190 pounds, with a body fat percentage somewhere around six/seven per cent (those days are faaar in the rearview now). Take any muscle-based exercise you want – bench press, pull-ups, squats and the like – and every year I came to camp with new personal bests in all those categories. When you're still trying to climb the rungs of the pro hockey ladder, anything less would've been deemed unacceptable.

The problem is, during the season it's not as easy to train as extensively as it is in the summer. Players today do their very best – and my lord do they do more than even a decade ago – but it's just not always possible, nor is it always in an individual's best interest. Whether it's long road trips, or injury makes it impossible, or your team has just deemed that rest is more important at a specific juncture of the season, it's extremely difficult to keep up with your hardcore summer habits.

Compounding all that is the type of food you eat in-season. NHL teams are mostly different in that they're extremely catered to, and many of the AHL teams are trying their very best (the Toronto Marlies do a great job with this), but sometimes on the road when the team is trying to leave as quickly as possible to get the bus on the road, the food can be pretty grab-and-go. There's usually plenty of pizza around (it's a decent enough combo of protein/carbs if you're in a rush), or chicken parm, or something else that may not be the healthiest, but suits a player's quick need for recovery food in that 20-30 minutes after the game.

Breakfasts of sausages and eggs, plates of pre-game pasta ... guys burn thousands upon thousands of calories a day, but over the course of the year, those things can catch up with you. Most people can only handle so many plain chicken breasts.

Which is to say that, by the end of a season when I played, I almost always lost weight, yet also managed a higher body fat percentage, and I was certainly far weaker. It can be really depressing knowing how hard you worked to get where you were by the end of summer, and how far you are from those fitness goals by season's end.

One caveat I'll throw in here before I go into summer's return to the gym: It doesn't have to be this way. If I'm a sports performance coach reading this I'm yelling at my screen, because everything for this not to happen is provided. You don't have to eat the grab-and-go post-game pizza. You could make a protein shake. You don't have to have a mountain of pre-game pasta. Salad and chicken and sweet potatoes are always offered. And you could find time to work out if it's that important to you.

I think of Colin Greening on the Toronto Marlies – he's endlessly diligent about his diet and training, and he's still a bull late in the season. But I'm talking about reality here, that over the course of the season, most players lose muscle, gain fat, and simply aren't in the same condition as they are when they arrive at the end of summer. Facts only.

When the season ends for these guys, and they're sporting their new, more Dad-bodesque look, it's only a matter of time before they've got to get started moving back towards not just where they were the summer before, but beyond that. I wrote about what the first few days after the hockey season are like here, in which I may have mentioned there's a little partying. (Saying the Washington Capitals are doing a "little partying" right now is like saying Keith Richards has "tried drugs." Some guys go harder than others.)

But eventually, that ends. Eventually, the hangovers go away, and the wrists and groins and ankles Wolverine themselves back to normalcy, and it's summertime.

So ... how long until you get back to training in the gym and on the ice?

There's always a period, roughly between two and three weeks, where the guilt starts to really set in. You finally feel better, you're finally rested, you have no excuse to not get back in the gym, it's just ... mentally, you know that once you show up in that gym the first day, it's on. You're back, the next season has started, here we go again. For me anyway, it was just so nice to not be in a season for a little while. As a hockey player, that's your whole life, basically 11 months and change per season. I enjoyed the time between, that little sense of normalcy with friends and family and non-pre-game meal style food.

But inevitably, you make your decision on when you need to return to the gym. I generally took about three weeks after the season ended, and by then I was usually ready to get back at it. For players who were on teams who've missed the playoffs, think about it – those guys have been done for over two months already. So they're able to put off the return to training a little longer, maybe take a nice vacation, and still have a leg up on a lot of the other players. If you just finished up last week – and say, still happen to be right pie-eyed at a parade party right now – you probably need the rest time more than anyone, but you can't afford to fall too far behind the guys who've been moulding themselves into machines for a month and a half.

This is why the phrase "Stanley Cup hangover" exists. It's not just the mental grind of one season ending and the next immediately beginning (which is very real), but it's also that most players on those teams are literally a step behind from a physical perspective. The physical side is another reason why it's going to be nearly impossible to match the New York Islanders amazing feat of winning 19 playoff series in a row: guys then didn't train like they do now, so they wouldn't have fallen as far behind. That physical aspect could be one of the reasons the Penguins simply ran out of gas in their quest for a three-peat.

The biggest variable I find between players is their preference of when to get back on the ice. I personally hated most other forms of cardio and loved hockey, so I was usually skating by late May, which would not be a common answer among players. I generally found that the more famous the player, the later they started skating. I used to be involved in a summer shinny game in Kelowna, B.C., that looked like a Canadian Olympic skate as of August 1, which is the most common return day for the stars.

It was always a trip, because the rink allocated the same ice slot for the players who were a part of those games. So early in the summer it'd be myself and a handful of other guys playing three-on-three from the blue line in. As summer went on, the game would stretch to full ice five-on-five, and on August 1, players like myself started getting real nervous. Not just because the caliber of player would go up so much, but because if too many guys showed up on a given day, some lower tier pro guys would get the shoulder tap and the head shake. Dammit. Healthy scratched.

(I need to throw in this random aside: Danny Heatley was one of the players who would come out August 1, and I swear you've never seen a more talented player suck harder at hockey, annually. It was hilarious. He used to toe-pick on breakaways, fan on everything ... it was beyond entertaining to watch until he inevitably found his game. So, yeah – great player. Slow starter.)

We're in that window now where basically everyone in pro hockey would be back in the gym working toward next season, save for those Capitals, the Vegas Golden Knights, the Marlies and the Texas Stars. If a player has a contract for next season, they likely have full workout plans and exercise goals from their respective teams. Others take what they learned from their season and exit meeting, and focus on addressing weaknesses. In general, whatever the plan, most players have a workout partner, even if that's just a personal trainer. It's a long summer in the



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • June 13, 2018

gym, so most prefer to have someone to talk to, someone to spot them, someone to help push them to where they're trying to get.

Summer is always a welcome breather, but that breather only lasts so long. Even though the Cup parade is just happening today, most players have already turned the page. 2017-18 is officially in the books; the focus on next season has already begun.

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The Athletic / Concussion depositions reveal Devils, Flames, Canadiens failed to follow protocols

By Katie Strang Jun 12, 2018

With new documents surfacing in the wake of the ongoing litigation between former players and the National Hockey League, more details are coming to light about the way the league and its member clubs handled concussions.

And judging by several depositions taken in the concussion suit vs. the NHL, which have become publicly available through court record, multiple teams were disciplined for the ways in which they failed to adhere to and enforce certain protocols concerning head injuries.

Testimony from league officials and NHL team executives revealed that the New Jersey Devils, Calgary Flames and Montreal Canadiens were all found to be noncompliant in following certain NHL-mandated rules. And though these depositions reference penalties to both the Flames and the Canadiens, testimony indicates the Devils were neither fined nor disciplined for their infractions.

Of the three teams, the Devils were most frequently mentioned in relation to noncompliance. Both deputy commissioner Bill Daly and NHL counsel Julie Grand acknowledged in their respective depositions the Devils' failure to follow certain standards — and in at least one case joked about it.

Former team president and general manager Lou Lamoriello admitted in his deposition that the team did not even perform baseline neuropsychological testing in 2007, even though it had been required by the league for a decade by that point.

This testing is performed before the onset of every season to provide teams with a "baseline" of where each individual measures, thereby allowing them to compare how a player scores when concussed, suspected of being concussed or suffering head trauma.

In an extensive review of documents performed by The Athletic, Lamoriello acknowledges that the Devils did not perform preseason baseline neuropsychological testing in 2007, though the rationale was not immediately clear, at least not in the unredacted portions of his deposition.

"I was never brought aware that we did not do it, other than the period of time that I did mention, and there was a reason, not an excuse, that that did not happen," Lamoriello states in his deposition, taken on Jan. 22, 2016.

Lamoriello, who is now the general manager of the New York Islanders, returned a message left by The Athletic but said he did not wish to comment on the deposition. The NHL also declined to comment when asked why the Devils did not perform preseason baseline testing in 2007, along with other questions related to the concussion litigation depositions.

In an NHL memorandum used as an exhibit in the deposition, the league states that under the Baseline Neuropsychological Evaluation rules, "all players under contract with the Club in the NHL shall undergo baseline (neuropsych) testing prior to engaging in full contact play." When asked about this rule, Lamoriello seemingly takes issue with the word "shall" ("I never saw the word in the dictionary, 'shall,' to be mandatory but ...") and responded with a "I have no comment" when asked what the words means, before ultimately answering that it means "will, should."

Lamoriello, when questioned in the deposition about the team's failure to perform preseason baseline testing in training camp, said the team did perform testing later that year.

"So just to be clear, the one year that the Devils did not perform baseline testing at the — before the start of the season, when did the Devils actually perform the baseline testing on those players?" Stuart Davidson, a lawyer for the plaintiffs in the concussion suit vs. the NHL, asks Lamoriello.

LAMORIELLO: "Postseason."

DAVIDSON: "Postseason. Does that mean during the playoffs or at the end of the entire season inclusive of the Stanley Cup?"

LAMORIELLO: "It would be at the end of the season."

Lamoriello added later that he did believe players who were "concussed or suspected of being concussed" during the 2007-08 season received the mandatory follow-up neuropsych testing as required by the NHL "to the best of my knowledge."

Grand's deposition, in which she is questioned by plaintiffs' lawyer Steve Grygiel, also confirms the league was aware the Devils may have failed to conduct baseline testing on more than one occasion.

GRAND: "Yes."

— one year hearing that they had not tested their players, and we followed up with them at various points throughout that season. And in April of that season, they did the neuropsych testing on their players."

GRYGIEL: "Do you remember speaking with (hockey operations VP) Steve Pellegrini of the Devils about that issue?" [editor's note: Pellegrini was named as the Islanders' new assistant general manager on Tuesday].

GRAND: "That sounds familiar."

GRYGIEL: "And do you remember telling him that Mr. Lamoriello needed to get on board with this, because the neuropsych testing was not optional?"

GRAND: "In sum or substance, that sounds familiar."

GRYGIEL: "And do you remember Pellegrini telling you that he would look into it?"

GRAND: "I probably would have followed up at that point on my call, sure."

Additionally, Grand's testimony, taken on Aug. 3, 2016, raises the question of whether the Devils had transgressed on this issue more than once. Following the aforementioned exchange, Grand is then asked whether she recalls an additional instance of this happening after the 2007-08 season, to which she responds:

"It, it has a vague familiarity, but I don't remember the time period."

The following section is redacted.

Daly also admitted to joking about the Devils' noncompliance in an email exchange with Grand that was raised in Daly's deposition, taken on Aug. 9, 2016. Daly acknowledged that he and Grand had "numerous discussions over time about Devils compliance issues" and revealed that the two were concerned that Devils defenseman Bryce Salvador's concussion diagnosis was possibly a way to circumvent the salary cap. (Salvador did indeed suffer a concussion.)



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • June 13, 2018

GRYGIEL: "And do you remember (Grand) telling you how convenient from a team that apparently has never had a concussion before?"

DALY: "I think we were both kind of making fun of the Devils in the context of an email exchange. It was probably inappropriate."

Daly went on to say, however, that the Devils were never fined for noncompliance with the neuropsych testing program, nor was the team ever fined for noncompliance with the concussion protocol. Daly later said that the Devils "have responded every time we have had interactions with them about compliance with the concussion protocol."

They may not have been fined, at least according to Daly's deposition, but there were already rumblings about how the team managed head injuries.

In a 2015 story, former Devils forward Mike Peluso told longtime beat writer Rich Chere that he blamed the team for "throwing" him back onto the ice after he suffered a concussion and seizure during the 1993-94 season and that he felt "used and beaten."

"I've come to the realization that I'm going to die young," Peluso said.

Lou Lamoriello from TheAthleticDetroit on Vimeo.

Peluso, who played for the Devils from 1993-97 and was a member of the vaunted "Crash Line" with Randy McKay and Bobby Holik, is among approximately 150 plaintiffs in the ongoing concussion lawsuit against the NHL.

He filed a \$5 million lawsuit against the Devils and St. Louis Blues, as well as Chubb insurance, in April 2017 for contributing to his early onset dementia and total and permanent disability.

The suit alleges that the defendants "deliberately, fraudulently, and with callous disregard for Mr. Peluso's health and safety, concealed medical records from him that stated very clearly that his health was in danger and that he must never sustain any further traumas to his head if he were to avoid debilitating, long-lasting brain damage."

The suit reveals a letter from board-certified neurologist Marvin Ruderman that warns of future head injuries following Peluso's seizure, which occurred in February 1994.

"I do not believe that the participation in playing hockey in itself poses an excessive risk for the development of further seizures," Ruderman's findings, copied to Lamoriello, team doctor Barry Fisher, team orthopedic surgeon Leonard Jaffe, state, with one major caveat — "unless he were to sustain head injuries."

Figure 3, via master complaint; Peluso vs. New Jersey Devils, St. Louis Blues, and Chubb Insurance

In December 2016, a workers' compensation appeals board ruled that the Devils "wrongfully withheld" medical records from Peluso, according to an article from TSN.

Some former Devils players, however, paint a very different picture of Lamoriello and his attitude on head injuries and player safety.

Salvador, the former Devils defenseman and captain who retired at age 39 in 2015, wrote an essay in The Players' Tribune about his struggles to return to play after being struck in the face by a slapshot in 2010 and ensuing, persisting vestibular issues.

In the essay, Salvador detailed his attempt to come back from the injury, describing how he dealt with high-pitched ringing in his ears that lasted for months, intense nausea and severe mood swings. During this time, Salvador said Lamoriello was nothing but encouraging when he sought out treatment from myriad specialists to address his injuries and pervasive symptoms.

"I went and sat down with Devils general manager Lou Lamoriello and I admitted to him that I was not getting better. That was a tough moment. Here I am making good money, and I'm telling my GM that the doctors can't figure out what's wrong with me. But Lou was phenomenal about it.

He said, 'Bryce, just keep seeing specialists. Wherever you want to go, whatever you want to do, take as much time as you need.'

"Lou, thank you," Salvador wrote.

Salvador said that, heading into the 2011-12 season, and following a year in which he was entirely sidelined from play, most GMs would have "found a nice and professional way to politely move on without me. But Lou gave me a real chance."

Salvador went on to play all 82 regular-season games that year and helped lead the Devils to the Stanley Cup final, appearing in 24 postseason games.

And while Salvador's essay paints a more nuanced picture of Lamoriello's approach as general manager, the depositions hardly portray Lamoriello and the Devils as the lone offenders in issues of compliance, either.

In Grand's deposition, she was asked: "Has any GM ever been disciplined by the league for failure to comply with concussion protocol?" to which she responds that both Calgary and Montreal were fined, though it is not clear in the unredacted depositions why each team was fined.

An NHL spokesperson declined to comment when asked via email why both teams were fined and when. Calgary also declined to answer questions. ("We will not be making any comment relative to this subject matter based on ongoing litigation," a team spokesperson said via email.) Montreal referred all questions to the NHL. ("The Club does not comment on league disciplinary decisions while litigation is ongoing. All requests will be referred to the NHL," a team spokesperson said via email.)

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The Athletic / 'Distant uncertainty': Beyond Artemi Panarin and Sergei Bobrovsky, several key members of Blue Jackets heading into final contract years

Aaron Portzline Jun 12, 2018

There's always the possibility of a surprise. One phone call from a rival GM. One outlandish contract demand from an NHL agent. That's all it would take to spark a move that could define the Blue Jackets' offseason.

Reminder: Almost one year ago, the Blue Jackets and Chicago Blackhawks rocked the opening day of the NHL draft with the blockbuster trade that sent Brandon Saad back to Chicago and delivered Artemi Panarin to Columbus.

But, barring the unforeseen, this summer's focus for the Blue Jackets will likely amount to housekeeping.

Much has been made of the fact franchise goaltender Sergei Bobrovsky and high-scoring Panarin are heading into the final season of their contracts in 2018-19, with the threat of unrestricted free agency looming only one year from now.

But that's only the beginning.

President of hockey operations John Davidson, general manager Jarmo Kekalainen and assistant general manager Bill Zito — the top three in the hockey operations department — all have contracts that expire after the 2018-19 season.

So does coach John Tortorella, whose Jack Adams Trophy win in 2017-18 was rewarded with only a one-year extension last summer.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • June 13, 2018

None of this should be an immediate worry. But it could be seen as distant uncertainty, even as the franchise seems to be on the right track, with two consecutive Stanley Cup playoff berths and the best five-year stretch of play in franchise history.

Maybe ownership is OK with so many of its high-level employees heading into the final years. Maybe the new standard so many have discussed — postseason success, not just regular-season success — has finally arrived in Columbus.

Blue Jackets majority owner John P. McConnell, who along with club president Mike Priest would prevail over Davidson's tenure with the club, declined an interview request from The Athletic.

Kekalainen, who presides over Tortorella's tenure, has shut down all summer when asked to discuss Tortorella's contract status.

And Tortorella has made it clear that he has no interest — "Zero!" — in discussing his contract publicly.

But that's never stopped us, right? Here's a deeper dive at the management, coaches and players who are heading into the final year of their contracts — where it's likely headed, what it means and what to expect.

Hockey ops

Two years ago, Davidson, Kekalainen and Zito were in the same situation — headed into the final year of their contracts — before signing two-year extensions only a week before training camp (Sept 6, 2016).

At the time, many in the fan base raised an eyebrow. A few were outraged. The Blue Jackets were coming off back-to-back horrific seasons, and it was only fair to question the outlook of the franchise.

But that's not the case anymore. In the past two regular seasons, only three clubs — Washington (107), Pittsburgh (97) and Tampa Bay (96) — have more wins than the Blue Jackets (95). Back-to-back playoff berths are a franchise first.

Davidson, 65, almost certainly will be allowed to remain in place however long he decides to keep working. Until he arrived in 2012, the Blue Jackets never had a "hockey guy" between ownership and the GM's chair. Davidson has been the perfect buffer, and ownership trusts him implicitly.

Kekalainen doesn't have a spotless record — who does in that chair? — but management doesn't blame him for letting William Karlsson (43 goals) go to Vegas in the expansion draft. They were all on board with the decision, and Karlsson's breakout was a shock across the entire league.

The trades to acquire Panarin and Seth Jones, the drafting of Zach Werenski and Pierre-Luc Dubois ... these are all solid pluses for Kekalainen.

But soon enough Kekalainen, like the coaches and players, will be judged by a higher standard: the playoffs, not the regular season. The Blue Jackets need to win a playoff series, stat. Still, there's no sense that Kekalainen's job is in danger.

Zito might not be in Columbus much longer, that will be by his choosing. The agent-turned-executive is starting to see his name pop up for GM openings around the league, most recently with the Minnesota Wild this summer. His serving as GM for Team USA in the IIHF World Championships can only help his resume, along with winning the AHL Calder Cup in 2017.

Look for something to get done with all three — and perhaps others in hockey operations — later this summer, say August or September, long after the other big moves are made.

Coaches

NHL coaches have earned staggering raises in recent years. Toronto's Mike Babcock (\$6.25 million), Chicago's Joel Quenneville (\$6 million)

and Montreal's Claude Julien (\$5 million) have all pushed salaries higher and higher.

Even first-year coach David Quinn — hired by the New York Rangers out of Boston U. — will make \$2.4 million per season.

Tortorella has won one Stanley Cup and two Jack Adams trophies and is the winningest U.S.-born coach in NHL history (575 wins). He's making \$2 million this season but is due a significant raise.

It's possible Tortorella would sign another one-year extension, but that seems unlikely.

When the Blue Jackets hired Tortorella early in the 2015-2016 season, it was viewed as a salvage operation. He'd been out of the league for a full season after being fired by Vancouver, and many wondered if he'd ever get a head coaching job in the NHL again.

But that's no longer the case. The job Tortorella has done in Columbus — building toughness, professionalism and character — would almost certainly earn him another shot with another NHL club if he leaves without a new contract next summer.

As noted previously, the Blue Jackets have signed assistant coach Brad Larsen to a contract extension. It's a done deal, sources say, but it won't be announced until later this summer.

Why?

Larsen's contract term will almost certainly match that of Tortorella's. It's possible that Larsen has settled on the money he'll make, but the term will be tweaked to match Tortorella's after his contract is signed. (If he doesn't sign an extension — also possible — maybe Larsen's deal is just a one-year contract.)

It's not uncommon for a head coach and an assistant he really likes to seek the same term, that way the head coach can bring the assistant with him on his next venture. (Think Mike Sullivan, who coached under Tortorella in Tampa Bay, New York and Vancouver.)

The rest of the coaching staff — assistants Brad Shaw and Kenny McCudden — are signed through next season, too. They could sign extensions when Tortorella does, allowing the club to make one big announcement regarding its coaches.

Kekalainen said they've put all of these talks, along with the search for a new goaltending coach, on hold until they get through the NHL draft (June 22-23) and free agency (beginning July 1).

The Jackets announced shortly after the season that goaltending coach Ian Clark and the club had mutually agreed to part ways. But in recent weeks the idea of Clark staying on in an advisory capacity has been considered, too.

"We're so jammed up right now," Kekalainen said. "We've just kind of pushed everything back until we get through the next few weeks.

"We've done a little bit of a list (with the goaltending coach), interviews. But let's not try to jam it all in before the draft. We'll take our time."

Players

No offense to the aforementioned management and coaches, but Bobrovsky and Panarin contract extensions are the stories of the summer. We've only pushed this to the end of the article because it's been a topic for many months now.

And not much has changed.

As of late last week, the Blue Jackets had not had any contract talks with Panarin's agent, Daniel Milstein. Expect this to change soon, with Milstein and Panarin set to meet to discuss the player's wishes.

It is widely accepted that Panarin would be open to staying in Columbus, that the Blue Jackets will offer him an eight-year contract and that the deal will get done.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • June 13, 2018

But Panarin's asking price will bear watching. Since he joined the NHL three seasons ago, only six players have scored more points: Patrick Kane, Sidney Crosby, Connor McDavid, Nikita Kucherov, Blake Wheeler and Jamie Benn. That's the high-rent district.

Less is known about Bobrovsky's contract talks — if there have been any yet — but there is great trepidation on what lies ahead from the Blue Jackets' perspective.

In 2013, after Bobrovsky had just won his first Vezina Trophy, the contract negotiation between the Blue Jackets and Bobrovsky's agent, Paul Theofanous, was utterly toxic. Behind the scenes it was every bit as contentious, perhaps more so, than the public spat between the club and Ryan Johansen one year later.

This is the first time Bobrovsky has carried the threat of unrestricted free agency to the table. When it comes to leverage, that's the ultimate hammer.

The Blue Jackets can sign both players to extensions after July 1. They also can sign defenseman Zach Werenski, but he's still in his restricted free-agency years.

The timing with Panarin and Bobrovsky is difficult.

It's a pipe dream that New York Islanders soon-to-be-free agent John Tavares would even consider signing with the Blue Jackets, but they'd like to take a run at him if he's moving on from Long Island.

If it becomes apparent that Tavares is changing teams, most expect the Islanders to trade his rights to another club before he hits free agency. This will benefit the Islanders — they'll get something for letting their superstar walk — and it'll benefit Tavares, because he can only sign for eight seasons with a club that holds his rights.

But it's hard to see Columbus being in the mix, not just with Tavares controlling his destination, but also with all the uncertainty the Blue Jackets face over the next few weeks: What's the new NHL salary cap figure? What are the salary demands of Panarin and Bobrovsky?

The housekeeping will need to be done before they know whether they can afford to go shopping.

The Athletic LOADED: 06.13.2018

1098820 Websites

The Athletic / NHL referee Garrett Rank trades whistle for clubs as he gets set to tee off in U.S. Open

By Chris Stevenson Jun 12, 2018

SOUTHAMPTON, N.Y. — At least Garrett Rank won't have to worry about officiating a hockey game between rounds at the U.S. Open this week.

The 30-year-old from Elmira, Ont., who has been a full-time NHL referee for the past couple of seasons while playing amateur golf at its highest levels, qualified to play in the U.S. Open at Shinnecock Hills.

Rank, 74th in the World Amateur Golf Ranking, is one of those individuals who makes much of the rest of the world feel quite inadequate. It's remarkable enough to ascend to world class in one chosen activity.

But two? He's also a cancer survivor after being diagnosed with testicular cancer in 2011, and the experience he said has helped put both a bad shot in golf or a bad call in hockey in their proper perspective.

The collision of Rank's two passions have made for some interesting accommodations to allow him to do both and helped lead him here to a place among the best in the game.

Like that time in 2016 at the USGA Four-Ball Championship which was being played at the venerable Winged Foot Golf Club in Mamaroneck, N.Y. Rank was working his way up the hockey officiating ranks at the time, officiating some games in the NHL (he worked his first NHL game in 2015) and in the AHL. He was working the AHL final that spring between the Lake Erie Monsters and Hershey Bears.

He was partnered with Patrick Christovich in the Fourball (they have been semi-finalists twice and made it to the quarterfinals this year) and the pair opened with a 66 with an early tee time in the first round.

Rank then drove 3-1/2 hours to Hershey, took a nap in the dressing room, worked the game and drove back to Winged Foot.

"We had an afternoon tee time the next day and my reffing gear was still wet. I needed to dry it out for the game the following weekend, so I aired it out underneath my car in the parking lot of the Winged Foot Golf Club," Rank said Monday before heading out for a practice round at Shinnecock.

"I'll probably never be invited back to Winged Foot and I don't know if my boss at the NHL knows this, so I might lose my job, too."

There are no hockey games to be worked this week (Rank worked 73 regular season games and three in the first round of the Stanley Cup playoffs), so the USGA doesn't have to worry about a funny smell coming from Shinnecock's parking lot.

The U.S. Open is just that, open, and Rank qualified by posting a pair of 1-under-par 71s to become co-medalist at sectional qualifying at the Settindown Creek course at Ansley GC in Atlanta.

His game is in great shape right now, thanks in part to being able to play a few rounds during the hockey season, though not with his own clubs (travelling with his officiating gear is hard enough). He picked some good spots, too: playing out of the bags of a couple of friends, Gavin Hall and Dominic Bozzelli, on the Web.com Tour, or with rentals at Medalist (Tiger Woods and Rickie Fowler among the membership) and Concession GC in Florida and Whisper Rock in Arizona, all among the U.S.'s top tracks.

The chance to play in one of golf's majors is helping to erase the burn from just missing out on an opportunity in 2012.

Rank had a shot at qualifying for The Masters in 2012, but he came up a hole short when he lost the final of the USGA Mid-Amateur (for players 25 and older). Nathan Smith won on the last hole of the 36-hole final and got the ticket to Augusta.

Rank said he has thought about that missed opportunity. Having the chance to tee it up this week alongside the world's best players is making up for it.

"What a dream come true for me," he said. "I've played a lot of USGA events in the past. Like you touched on, in 2012, it was, I wouldn't call it a disappointment, but I definitely thought about The Masters a few times post mid-am.

"Just going and playing in any USGA championship is a huge honour and gaining the experience in the (Amateurs) and the (Amateur Public Links) and then the Mid-Am that I've played and will only be valuable this week.

"I've got a real job so I consider this like the pinnacle of my golf career this week. I'm going to go out there and I have internal expectations on how I want to play and what I want to do," he said. "But at the end of the day, this is just a celebration for me and my family and friends."

Rank's mom, Deby, and older brother, Kyle, are here. His dad, Rich, who got him started in refereeing, passed away in early 2014, about a year before Rank worked his first NHL game.

No doubt he'd be especially proud again this week watching Rank walk Shinnecock's fairways with the world's best players.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • June 13, 2018

Rank, who has played in three RBC Canadian Opens thanks to his hat trick of Canadian Mid-Amateur championships, said he will be nervous come Thursday, but being in a group with fellow Canadian and close friend Mackenzie Hughes will help. Aaron Baddeley from Australia completes the group which tees off at 7:18 a.m. from the 10th tee.

"That was great for me. I couldn't have got a better group, I don't think," Rank said. "I attended Mackenzie's wedding. We're great friends. We played on the Canadian national team for three years together, so very comfortable. It will be kind of nice for me, as I'm sure I'll be really anxious and nervous and just to have that familiar face beside me in battle is huge.

"And then it's cool, like Aaron Baddeley growing up was a huge name and still is a big name in golf. Secretly, it's cool. Like I saw all the guys on the range today and I'm just there kind of like a little fan boy, so it's cool to see those guys and be able to play with them, as well."

Rank was recently asked if he would rather finish in the top 10 in the U.S. Open or officiate Game 7 of the Stanley Cup final.

"I answered with the top 10 at the U.S. Open," he said. "And I said I'd save the Stanley Cup final for 15 years down the road when my golf game wasn't as strong."

The reaction in the hockey world blew up Rank's phone after he qualified in Georgia.

He had more than 100 text messages after the round. It grew to 238 by that night. He got it down to zero, played in the Dogwood Invitational in Atlanta the next day and had 77 more messages.

"I even had a few phone calls asking if it was me, like if that was the same Garrett Rank. I'm like, I don't know too many other people with the same name, but, yeah, that's me. I'm going to the U.S. Open. So that was really cool," he said.

Rank said he pretty much heard from all of his colleagues at the NHL and some players. He's had some interesting interactions with players because of his reputation as one of Canada's elite amateurs.

When asked if he had played with any NHLers, he said: "Yeah, I don't know if anyone really wants to play me anymore now that the secret's out. I did play a tournament with (Calgary Flames defenceman) Travis Hamonic. When he was on the Islanders, I played a charity event in his group in Winnipeg a couple of years ago and ended up shooting 58 that day.

"He knew how good I was and he uninvited me to the tournament one day on the ice when I made a bad call and he wasn't happy with me. He revoked my invitation."

Rank said there are players that want to talk golf on the ice.

"There's a lot of guys that love coming over and getting their mind away from hockey. They are sometimes like, 'yeah, coach told me to come over and ask you about this, but I don't really want to talk about that. I want to talk about golf.' So it kind of provides a cushion or layer of personality and interaction between me and the players on the ice."

It hasn't always been cozy.

"A player asked the linesman who was the new ref and he told him it was Garrett Rank and he's actually a pretty good golfer," Rank said. "He quipped back 'Tell him to work on his putting because he's not very good at this.'"

After two years in the NHL and a playoff assignment, Rank's proved himself as a referee.

The bronze badge that glittered as it hung from the left pocket of Rank's grey slacks, identifying him as a player in the U.S. Open, said all there needed to be said about his abilities as a golfer, if there was ever any doubt.

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Sportsnet.ca / NHL Rumour Roundup: Latest on John Tavares, Ilya Kovalchuk

Rory Boylen June 12, 2018, 3:26 PM

The Washington Capitals may have won the Stanley Cup five days ago, but it won't be long before rosters begin turning over.

Just four days after Pittsburgh won the Cup last year, Montreal went heavy into the trade market by moving Mikhail Sergachev for Jonathan Drouin. The NHL's buyout window opens on June 15 at 12:01 a.m. ET, which could add to the free agent pool and open up space for teams to explore bigger trades. The draft, which goes June 22-23 in Dallas, has become a huge trading period for both picks and players. And then of course there's Canada Day, July 1, when the free agent market opens and teams let the money fly.

You can bet the rumour mill will only heat up the closer we get to the draft and free agency.

This NHL off-season is set to be another exciting one, with no shortage of trade candidates or storylines to watch unfold. And as it goes on over the next few weeks, we'll keep you up to date on the buzz around the league.

A weekly deep dive into the biggest hockey news in the world with hosts Elliotte Friedman and Jeff Marek. New episodes every Thursday.

ILYA KOVALCHUK MAKES A TRIP TO CALIFORNIA

After spending the past five seasons in the KHL, we're about to find out how much 35-year-old Ilya Kovalchuk has left in the tank.

The reigning KHL scoring champion, Kovalchuk left the NHL in 2013 with 417 goals in 816 games, a 0.511 career goals-per-game mark that ranks 18th-best in NHL history and behind only Alex Ovechkin (0.605) and Steven Stamkos (0.524) among active skaters. Any team that needs to add scoring this summer will be interested in Kovalchuk, though there is some risk here. Not only has Kovalchuk spent the past five years playing in a lower league, but since he's 35 if a team wants to buy him out at a later date it won't get any cap relief.

He can't officially sign anywhere until July 1 like any other UFA, but Kovalchuk has already started talking to teams.

"As we know, Kovalchuk is touring the West Coast, but I think the Islanders are big into that, too," Sportsnet's Elliotte Friedman told Boomer and Warrenner on Calgary 960. "He was out in L.A. and San Jose on the weekend. I can see Anaheim not being interested just both for cap reasons and it doesn't really fit their philosophy — they're not a team that goes big into the Russian market."

The Los Angeles Kings are a team still trying to change and adapt themselves to an NHL that's getting quicker by the day, and move away from a heavy hockey style they won a couple Stanley Cups with, but a style that seems to be fading out. The Kings had the 16th-best offence and 17th-best power play in the NHL this past season and are very thin production-wise up front. Anze Kopitar may have scored 35 goals and 92 points, but a big reason why he's a Hart Trophy finalist is that he posted 31 more points than the next-highest King.

The biggest need for Los Angeles is to add scoring this summer, and Friedman noted they've already begun their due diligence.

"I think they were in on (Jeff) Skinner, I don't know if they still are," Friedman said. "I think they were in on (Max) Pacioretty. Kovalchuk fits with what they're trying to do."



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • June 13, 2018

But if Kovalchuk is coming back to the NHL with the Stanley Cup as his primary goal, the San Jose Sharks are an interesting potential destination. The Sharks had the 13th-best offence averaging 3.01 goals per game in 2017-18 and reached the second round of the Stanley Cup Playoffs. They already signed Evander Kane to a massive extension with a \$7-million cap hit, and figure to be players for John Tavares and could still bring Joe Thornton back.

On top of money and a chance to contend, San Jose can offer a bit of a comfort factor with the head coach they have.

"They got a lot of cap room and Peter DeBoer went to a Stanley Cup Final with Kovalchuk and I think their relationship was pretty decent," Friedman continued.

Beyond just these two California teams, the list of potential suitors for Kovalchuk is a long one. The New York Rangers have long been rumoured as the top destination of choice, and though they have shifted a bit and signalled a minor re-tool/rebuild, local columnist Larry Brooks thinks it would be a mistake to not pursue Kovalchuk.

The New York Islanders will be motivated buyers this summer as they try to get back on track under Lou Lamoriello, who signed Kovalchuk to his last NHL deal with the New Jersey Devils. Neither of these teams looks primed to offer Kovalchuk a chance at a Stanley Cup, however.

Both New York teams do have more than \$24 million in cap space, though, and could offer enough money to make Kovalchuk think twice.

The St. Louis Blues and their 24th-ranked offence are another potential landing spot and the Detroit Red Wings, who have \$17.3 million in cap room, have also reportedly shown interest. According to Friedman, Kovalchuk has also met with the Florida Panthers.

"Ilya's doing the right thing, he's building up the interest so that will benefit him at the end you would expect," Friedman said.

ISLANDERS WORKING ON WAYS TO ENTICE TAVARES?

The No. 1 storyline heading into the summer is what's going to happen with John Tavares. If he goes unsigned and hits the open market on July 1, the 27-year-old would be the most impactful and in-his-prime player to become a UFA in the salary cap era and could, potentially, end up as the highest-paid player in the league under that scenario. The Islanders could also trade his rights to another team before July 1, which would signal a break in negotiations.

In the meantime, Lamoriello can get to work on improving the roster to help him give a better pitch to Tavares.

"I still think there's a chance he's going back. I do think that Tavares is looking for them to give him a reason to stay," Friedman told Evanka Osmak. "I do expect the Islanders to be big on (Kovalchuk) and I think the Islanders are going to be big on (Philipp) Grubauer too, the goaltender in Washington. They gotta show Tavares they're going to make improvement. I believe they plan to do that and I don't think it's over yet between Tavares and the Islanders."

ERIK KARLSSON MARKET MORE FAVOURABLE FOR SENATORS?

There is no shortage of big names who could be moved via trade, or free agency, this summer but one of them appears to be off the board.

Although Oliver Ekman-Larsson can't officially sign an extension with Arizona until July 1, reports have surfaced that he has a verbal agreement with the team on an eight-year extension that would lock him in place for the long term.

A few teams are indicating tonight that upon inquiring about Oliver Ekman-Larsson, they are being told he is off the market. No comment from ARIZ or agent, but it appears as if some kind of verbal agreement is in place. He cannot officially sign until July 1.

— Elliotte Friedman (@FriedgeHNIC) June 11, 2018

Formerly one of the bigger tickets potentially available, the removal of Ekman-Larsson from the trade market narrows it a bit and helps a team looking to trade a high-end blueliner of its own, or for a UFA who could be looking for a new home. So the main beneficiaries of OEL's extensions could be UFA-to-be John Carlson, and the Ottawa Senators.

"I think the one thing about the Ekman-Larsson signing is it takes one big name off the market," Friedman said. "A lot of people are expecting (Drew) Doughty's going to re-sign in L.A. until they're told differently, so if you're looking for a defenceman there's John Carlson, who's a free agent this year — unrestricted — and there's Erik Karlsson if he doesn't re-sign in Ottawa. And I do think this is going to drive up the market for Erik."

Like Ekman-Larsson, Karlsson is one year away from unrestricted free agency and can sign an extension with Ottawa no earlier than July 1. But after a tough season for the Senators where there was plenty of disconnect between the team's fans, its owner, and all sorts of speculation that Karlsson could be traded at the deadline, this move seems the most likely blue line blockbuster to happen.

However, since the Senators have to either give up their first-round pick this year or next to Colorado as a condition of the Matt Duchene trade (and they've indicated they'll keep this year's), they'd surely be interested in getting some collection of futures back for their star player.

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.

"I think Vegas is interested," Friedman said. "I think they were pretty close to getting him at the deadline — that deal fell apart."

In his 31 Thoughts column this week, Friedman noted that Cody Glass was a hang-up in getting a Karlsson-to-Vegas deal done in February. Although the Golden Knights enjoyed instant success in their inaugural season, GM George McPhee has always had a goal to be stable for the long term and the one area he wasn't guaranteed anything in when he picked the Vegas team a year ago was draft picks. This team is still building out a pool of prospects from scratch and already traded away its 2018 first-rounder in the Tomas Tatar trade, leaving it with one pick in the first three rounds this summer.

Glass was the sixth-overall pick by Vegas last summer and he scored 37 goals and 102 points in the OHL this season. He is the Golden Knights' top prospect, which likely won't change until he arrives in the pro ranks.

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Sportsnet.ca / 31 Thoughts: Is Vegas thinking about re-visiting Erik Karlsson deal?

Elliotte Friedman June 10, 2018, 2:02 PM

I don't have much of a rooting interest for one team over another, but, watching the hilarious videos of the Capitals storming through Washington serves as a vivid reminder of something I wish to witness — a Canadian Stanley Cup victory.

Never covered one, so I don't care which team it is. Just want to see the celebration, and how it compares to this.

The ringleader is Alex Ovechkin, the captain and Conn Smythe Trophy winner.

Prior to this victory, with all of the debate about his legacy, it was easy to forget Ovechkin's popularity at the beginning of his career. He was Washington's leading scorer by almost 50 points, he beat out Sidney



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • June 13, 2018

Crosby for the Calder Trophy and, even though English was not his first language, he threw himself into interviews as best he could. He was not afraid, on the ice or off.

It took one informal skate for Olaf Kolzig to proclaim Ovechkin the real deal. Kolzig was notoriously careful with praise for young players, but this was something special.

"We didn't have a lot of big names," said Jeff Halpern, the captain in that 2005-06 season. "We were journeymen ... good players, but nothing at his level. We were basically eliminated from the playoffs in October, but he gave us a little bit of hope, a belief the team would move in the right direction."

Halpern was injured, but on the trip when Ovechkin scored the signature goal of his rookie season — a twisting, falling, blind backhand past Arizona's Brian Boucher.

"We were in Anaheim the game before, and he had a hat trick to beat the Ducks," the 976-game NHLer recalled with a laugh. "We had a couple days off, so we asked the coaches for a bit of a longer rope. We were going to have our rookie dinner. That year, Brendan Witt was at the end of his contract. The whole night, whenever he tried to talk, we drowned him out with 'one more year.' He couldn't even speak."

"When Ovie scored that goal, Witt was on the ice. When they huddled up, I heard Ovie yelled 'one more year' at him. That was [Ovechkin]. He just wanted to fit in and be part of the group."

After the season, worried their star wouldn't say no to any request, the organization dialled it back. When a young player gets that much attention, there can be jealousy, but that first year, it wasn't a problem.

"Michael Farber [from Sports Illustrated] came to do a story on him, and interviewed Halpern for awhile," said Nate Ewell, who handled day-to-day media relations from 2005-2011. "After it was over, I asked Jeff, 'Is it too much?' He replied, 'Absolutely not. He's way better than anyone and he deserves it.'"

Everybody's got an opinion on when it started to change. Was it the 2009 loss to Pittsburgh? The 2010 Olympic crushing in Canada? Sochi 2014? Pittsburgh 2017? The fire stick? You name it, someone's got a theory. When you're the star, and you make the most money, you get the credit. But you also take the heat.

We didn't know it at the time, but the low moment might have been April 2, 2014.

The night before, down 3-0 at home to Dallas, Ovechkin gave up on a backcheck, allowing Ray Whitney to set up Dustin Jeffrey for a score — Future Cup teammate Alex Chiasson was on the ice at the time, too.

At a team meeting the next morning, a few teammates blasted Ovechkin. I heard rumours a few weeks later, and asked Barry Trotz about it when he became coach. He wouldn't discuss it, although it was clear he knew it happened, and neither would any players.

It was a nasty, painful tongue-lashing — and Ovechkin didn't defend himself.

(The story I've heard is that he didn't say anything because he was so upset that he "forgot his English.")

In the aftermath of that incident, the organization decided two things: It would demand more of its captain, while surrounding him with accountable but encouraging players.

That was the summer Matt Niskanen and Brooks Orpik were signed, with Orpik, in particular, becoming a major, behind-the-scenes positive force. T.J. Oshie and Justin Williams followed.

"Whether you want to admit it or not, Ovie evolved" one former teammate said. "Look at all the other things he does so well now."

It should not go unnoticed that, four years after that internal meltdown, Ovechkin may have saved Game 5 with a brilliant backcheck on a Pierre-

Edouard Bellemare's shorthanded breakaway. Ovechkin clearly picked his pocket from behind, not even allowing a shot.

Hall-of-Famer Mike Bossy, working the series for French-language TVA, said, "Hard work beats skill, but when elite skill works hard, you can't beat that."

Still, there was the painful Pittsburgh defeat of last May.

When the Capitals won last week, I thought of Ewell. His time with Ovechkin coincided with my time as a Hockey Night in Canada sideline reporter. I would interview the Great Eight, and he'd be there. Friend and protector, as Sergey Kocharov is now.

"It was real emotional, seeing him win," Ewell said. "It was something I always thought would happen, but probably last summer started to think it might happen somewhere else."

A trade?

"Not now," he answered, "But maybe at the end of his contract, that's when he goes and wins the Cup like Ray Bourque. I never had any doubt it would happen, he's that good and that driven. I didn't buy for a second that he was washed up. That's the thing people never got ... how much he wanted to win."

"I lost it when Ovechkin lifted the Cup. And it was worse when he lifted it with [Nicklas] Backstrom."

Ewell compared the Capitals beating Pittsburgh to the Boston Red Sox beating the New York Yankees in 2004.

Two weeks after that monumental comeback from a 3-0 deficit in the American League Championship Series, the Sox ended an 84-year World Series drought with a sweep of the St. Louis Cardinals.

It wasn't that simple for Washington, but it makes a lot of sense. Both teams breathed much easier after eliminating a rival that tormented them mercilessly.

"I figured Ovie would score 60 next year with the weight off him," Ewell laughed. "He would play with joy again. But watching those videos, he might be too hungover."

And the party hasn't even reached Russia yet.

A weekly deep dive into the biggest hockey news in the world with hosts Elliotte Friedman and Jeff Marek. New episodes every Thursday.

31 THOUGHTS

1. Let's empty the Stanley Cup notebook before we go around the league, starting with Niskanen on Trotz: "It was February or March, I can't remember exactly when. But he told us the reason we always lose to Pittsburgh is because we let little guys like Conor Sheary and Bryan Rust win battles against us. I don't know if that stayed with anyone else, but it sure stuck with me."

2. Trotz reportedly made \$1.5M last season. Coach salaries aren't public, but, from what I understand, that is lower than anyone currently under contract who has won a Stanley Cup.

Anaheim's Randy Carlyle is believed to be around \$2 million. Peter Laviolette and John Tortorella are believed to be in the mid-twos. Dan Bylsma (still under contract to Buffalo) and Mike Sullivan are three-ish. Darryl Sutter's last deal was \$3.5 million. Claude Julien's contract has been publicly reported at five, while Mike Babcock and Joe Quenneville are over six.

The even-better news for Trotz is that the numbers go up the more recently you win. During the Final, GM Brian MacLellan said there was plenty of time to sort this out before the coach's contract ends July 1, and both said all the right things during the celebration. Sometime after the parade, we will truly see where we are.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • June 13, 2018

It's rumoured that, after ugly losses in Nashville and Colorado on Nov. 14-16, he was facing the coaching guillotine with a home defeat Nov. 18 against Minnesota, but the Capitals won 3-1, taking 11 of the next 14.

He, along with several of his players, marvelled at how their luck changed from playoffs past, starting with Game 3 in Columbus. Cam Atkinson hit the crossbar, inches away from putting the Blue Jackets up 3-0. Later, the puck pinballs off Lars Eller for the double-overtime winner.

"If neither of those things happens," one Capital said, "we aren't here right now."

If you are looking for more insight into Trotz, when he did some studio work for Hockey Night in Canada several years ago, he presented us with a copy of *Fearless*, by Eric Blehm. Trotz said it resonated with him for two reasons: Faith, which is important to him and his family, and the idea that people have layers to them.

"What you see at the beginning is not often the full picture."

3. It's well known that Orpik pressed for Oshie to be re-signed last summer. MacLellan agreed, saying the winger's positive attitude was essential.

Asked about it, Oshie said, "I just don't understand negativity."

What makes you angry? Oshie thought about it a little.

"People who don't treat the trainers well. People who get out of the way instead of blocking shots. Selfish things like that."

4. Prior to joining Washington, Oshie was in St. Louis, another historically strong organization that hasn't climbed the mountain.

Asked if he saw any similarities between the Blues and Capitals, he replied, "I thought we had a great team in 2015. Just as good as this one. The difference between then and now is we couldn't score when it mattered and we are getting the saves."

That St. Louis club finished fourth overall with 109 points and lost 4-2 to Minnesota in the first round of the playoffs.

5. Two years ago, coming off a post-season where he scored two points in 12 games, Evgeny Kuznetsov sat in the interview room before the World Cup of Hockey. He pointed to his head and said, "What I have to fix is in here."

The day before the Capitals clinched, two of his veteran teammates said they were very surprised.

"I have never, ever seen that to be a problem," Jay Beagle said.

"I'm not sure about that," Orpik added. "To me, it's all about how hard he comes back. You come back with speed, you turn up ice with speed. Look at the series-winning goal against Pittsburgh. Perfect example."

Whatever the case, Kuznetsov was spectacular.

One habit: he never looks at his shifts.

Even when you play this well?

"No," he smiled. "Because I'm always thinking, 'You could have done this, or I could have tried it this way.' I know when I'm good ... or when I'm not good. I'm better at forgetting now when I'm not good."

6. Beagle is an unrestricted free agent, and centres are hard to find.

He stayed three years ago, but it was tight.

Make no mistake, his teammates love the guy. After he blocked a shot and hurt his foot, he explained that he never removes his skate until the game is over.

"I learned that the hard way in 2012. I took the skate off, and couldn't get it back on."

That was on an Anton Stralman shot, forcing Beagle to miss Games 6 and 7 of a second-round loss to the Rangers.

"So, if there's any doubt, I never remove it in the intermission."

7. One Capital skated in the optional between Games 3 and 4 — Jakub Vrana. Asked why, he replied, "I hope it's good luck."

It took an extra few days, but he was rewarded with a beautiful goal in Game 5.

8. Speaking of lucky (or unlucky) bounces, the NHL has tracked posts hit since 2010. The Vegas Golden Knights pinged three in both Games 3 and 4. That ties the most in any Cup Final game.

9. What comes next in Vegas will be fascinating. They've got a ton of cap room, a boatload of flexibility and players from all over the league asking their agents about going there. It's a destination.

Gerard Gallant's reputation for being a players' coach is growing, too, with Reilly Smith saying he's never had someone "with a shorter memory."

Beagle praised them as "a team built on hard work." Can that happen again? Or will the business of the sport seep in now that some will be paid and some won't be?

A Marc-Andre Fleury extension seems certain. After him? Well, the biggest contract they've given out so far is Jonathan Marchessault's \$5 million. That puts him right in line with Smith (although that deal was done by Florida) and just under Tomas Tatar's \$5.3 million (signed in Detroit).

If UFAs James Neal and David Perron want to stay, you have to assume the club wants them in that area. Same for William Karlsson. He's arbitration eligible, but two years from unrestricted free agency. Even with the Game 4 healthy scratch, Perron may be kept on a shorter-term deal.

10. The Golden Knights came close to acquiring Erik Karlsson at the deadline. After seeing how the Capitals locked down the neutral zone and point men in the final, you can see how they might revisit something like this.

Word is one of the biggest hang-ups at the end was Cody Glass, drafted sixth overall last June. Vegas didn't want to include him.

The Knights have just one pick in the top three rounds (a second), and since they're still creating a prospect pool, a Karlsson deal could be very tricky. It's why they're being linked to John Carlson, because he only costs you money.

11. For those of you praying for the chaos and carnage of offer sheets, here are this year's thresholds, along with the draft picks that must be surrendered as compensation if the original team doesn't match.

Remember: you must use your own original picks, not those acquired from somewhere else.

Offer Sheet (AAV) Compensation

\$1,339,575 or below None

Over \$1,339,575 to \$2,029,59 3rd

Over \$2,029,59 to \$4,059,322 2nd

Over \$4,059,322 to \$6,088,980 1st, 3rd

Over \$6,088,980 to \$8,118,641 1st, 2nd, 3rd

Over \$8,118,641 to \$10,148,302 (2) 1st, 2nd, 3rd

Over \$10,148,302 (4) 1st

Personally, I believe we are getting closer to the day it happens, but my prime pick for 2018, Mark Stone, seems less likely because Ottawa has a ton of cap room. The league average salary for 2017-18 was \$3,115,115



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • June 13, 2018

— up 3.4 per cent from last season. And, NHL teams have the option to walk away from a salary arbitration award at \$4,222,941 or more.

12. The NHLPA hopes to let the league know by June 18 how much it will raise the salary cap for 2018-19.

The league indicated the limit will be between \$78-\$82 million, with the players having the option to raise the ceiling by up to five per cent.

It has done the max every year but two. The first was 2006, because the cap went up 13 per cent. The second was last summer, because of high escrow. Last year's percentage was 1.35, which bumped the number \$2 million.

13. Twenty-three years ago, as I prepared to cover my first NBA draft, inaugural Raptors GM Isiah Thomas warned: "Around the draft, everybody lies. Remember that."

We're still a couple of weeks away from most teams getting serious about their offers to move around in the draft.

Buffalo isn't moving. Carolina GM Don Waddell indicated the Hurricanes will likely stay put, and they probably will, but this is a new regime and we are still learning its true approach. We know owner Tom Dundon is unafraid to think differently – I'm curious to see if we get a surprise.

If Carolina decides to stay put, the draft starts with Montreal. GM Marc Bergevin is looking for centres and defencemen, telling anyone who will ask that the players they need are only available here.

We've all heard the rumours about his interest in Finnish centre Jesper Kotkaniemi, but there are teams who believe he's really interested in one of the top blue-liners. So he's got everyone guessing, which is the idea. If Bergevin wishes, he can trade down a little and still get what he wants.

I'm not sure about Ottawa and Arizona, although, at some point, I imagine Senators GM Pierre Dorion will ask Colorado if there's something he can do to erase the stipulation that he must give one of his next two first-rounders to the Avalanche. You have to assume the price would be high.

I don't think Detroit is moving, barring an offer that gives them great assets for their rebuild. After that sixth pick, teams willing to move are Vancouver (at seven), Edmonton (at 10) and possibly the Islanders (11 and/or 12).

(Addendum to the Thomas warning: One year later, he me told six weeks before the draft he was going to pick Marcus Camby. Gave me the scoop. I didn't believe him. He took Camby. I said, "I thought everyone lies." He gave that million-dollar smile and said, "That time, I told the truth." I could only laugh.)

14. I do think Montreal is a stealth destination for unrestricted free-agent-to-be Jack Johnson.

15. There were reports Montreal began some preliminary discussions with Max Pacioretty, who is one season away from unrestricted free agency. There's a serious sense that those brief discussions are being prompted by other teams curious to hear what the winger is looking for on an extension.

A sign-and-trade makes a lot of sense for the Canadiens, too, as cost certainty makes him more valuable. Technically, he can't sign a new contract until July 1, but there can be a "nudge, nudge, wink, wink" verbal agreement.

Somehow, Los Angeles is going to add scoring, and I can see the Kings being one of the clubs involved. Evander Kane's seven-year, \$49-million extension is good news for James van Riemsdyk, Pacioretty and maybe even the Penguins and Phil Kessel – you can certainly see a team considering the four years and \$6.8-million AAV remaining for Kessel rather than something like Kane's commitment, and the Penguins might be willing to eat money, too.

16. The Kings have been linked to Jeff Skinner. Enter Florida in that market. The Panthers, who narrowly missed the playoffs after a late-season charge, are looking to add.

17. I have a theory on Dundon: when he said everyone was available (except Sebastian Aho and Martin Necas), his real goal was to learn the trade value of all the players.

Carolina's going to make some moves, but isn't trading 18 guys. Dundon's new. He wants to know how everyone else thinks and how the league works.

18. Trade that might only make sense to me: Scott Darling for Marian Hossa, with the Hurricanes keeping money on the goalie.

Blackhawks clear cap room and gain security if Corey Crawford is unavailable. Carolina can go elsewhere in net and save actual dollars.

I have been told that the league isn't thrilled with the idea of Hossa being used as a trade chip, but the Blackhawks need the room.

19. There's a chance the changes in Carolina may mean the end of Glen Wesley's time there, too.

The defenceman, who played 1,457 NHL games, joined the old Hartford Whalers in 1994, and has been with them ever since, minus a seven-game stint in Toronto.

After retiring in 2008, he moved into player development and has been there since. However, another former Hurricane may be returning, as Jeff Daniels is under consideration to join the coaching staff.

Daniels joined the organization in 1995, staying until 2015 as a player, NHL assistant and AHL bench boss and has been on the scouting staff since then.

20. After his Game 5 scratch versus Nashville, Tobias Enstrom let Winnipeg know he won't be returning. The Jets/Thrashers are the only franchise he's known during his NHL career, but it's time for a change.

There have been some talks between the team and Paul Stastny, but it doesn't sound too in-depth. As Winnipeg prepares to pay the price for good drafting/development plus success, I wonder about someone like Mathieu Perreault. He might be at a number the Jets can't afford. You have to think there'd be interest.

21. Mike Hoffman is very much in play for Ottawa. The ask is high.

I also wouldn't be surprised if the Senators tried to recoup some draft picks. They have two firsts, but no second- or third-rounder.

22. We're dealing with some verbal semantics when it comes to Milan Lucic in Edmonton.

I'd heard rumours he'd asked for a trade, but that was denied. However, it's clear he and the Oilers are working together to gauge interest. It doesn't look like an easy trade to make without taking back a big contract, but the team seems confident there will be a fit.

23. Pittsburgh has shown legit interest in Max Domi – there's a long history between Tie Domi and Mario Lemieux.

Toronto is looking for a third-line centre, Tampa Bay a right-shot defenceman.

I'm curious to see what the Rangers do with Vladislav Namestnikov. He's arbitration eligible, and the numbers are very good.

24. Another very interesting arbitration case: Devante Smith-Pelly. Seven goals in the regular season, seven big ones in the playoffs.

Two years ago, the Capitals signed Brett Connolly to an \$850,000 contract. He scored 15 goals, and was rewarded at two years and \$3 million total. Smith-Pelly is one year from unrestricted free agency, and those numbers are too low for him.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • June 13, 2018

I wasn't surprised to hear he had to give up soccer to concentrate on hockey, with the great plays made by his feet to create his goals.

25. Oshie signed his eight-year extension last summer at age 30 and rewarded the Capitals with an impactful season.

He was a physical force in the final, with his Forsberg-esque reverse hits taking a toll on Colin Miller in particular.

Seeing that makes you wonder the impact it will have on Wayne Simmonds' future. The powerful winger played hurt, still scored 24 goals and turns 30 in August. He's also one year away from free agency.

Simmonds is a great teammate – the only complaint I've ever heard about him is that he can't put on weight, a problem I'd love to have.

In a sporting world that's becoming more and more ageist, Oshie's performance is good news for comparables like Simmonds.

26. The market for Philipp Grubauer starts with Carolina and the Islanders. We'll see if it grows from there.

27. Others believed to be out there: Anthony Duclair and Tomas Jurco from Chicago; Minnesota's Tyler Ennis.

28. Coaching stuff: It's expected Lindy Ruff will stay with David Quinn in New York.

There are rumblings Dan Bylsma may return somewhere as an assistant coach if he's not on the Islanders' radar. A logical spot would be Detroit, since he and Jeff Blashill just worked together at the World Championships.

We're all wondering about Trotz and the Islanders. Lou Lamoriello is a DJ Smith fan, too.

There's little doubt Jacques Lemaire will join Lamoriello in New York, and I'm wondering if he suggests Michel Therrien for some kind of role. His teams tend to start well when he arrives.

29. It's believed assistant GM Mike Futa — linked to almost every job opening in existence — signed an extension with Los Angeles.

Mark Hunter, involved in almost as many rumours, has been linked to Detroit, Montreal and the Islanders. We'll see. He's (officially) unavailable until July 15.

30. Word at the combine was Netflix is out, Fortnite is in. This is all Jeff Marek's fault.

31. Years from now, when we're all gossiping over Mahjong at the retirement homes, I hope we look back at the last 12 months as a time hockey changed for the better.

I'm not talking as much about the play, but the presentation.

When the puck drops, it's about the game, and it always should be about the game, but the celebrations around it are going to a new level, and it needs to happen even if future sites don't include Nashville and Las Vegas.

Some things might not work, but we shouldn't be afraid to try — I'm told Hockey Operations wouldn't allow fire on the ice, which is probably a good call. (For example, if Toronto ever gets in, I want to see Drake sitting on the CN Tower — for real.)

As a reporter, the last two Cup finals have been among the best things I've covered because they were fun and different. I think the fans and players liked it, too.

Sometimes, we confuse personality for selfishness. That's wrong. Yes, the lines can blur on a person-to-person basis, but it's time hockey allowed its players to show themselves on social media, to wear something stylish but different to the rink, to step out from its conservative nature.

If you really want to sell and grow the game, that matters to the "reality generation." And, I'd bet that the vast majority of players who took advantage would still be serious and competitive when it mattered.

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Sportsnet.ca / Interest in Slava Voynov as he explores NHL comeback

Elliotte Friedman June 12, 2018, 2:48 PM

Last weekend, an Instagram photo surfaced with Slava Voynov and wife Marta together in Miami. That was followed by a report from Sport-Express's Igor Eronko indicating Voynov could apply for a U.S. work visa on July 2.

So, what does this mean?

First, the context. The former Los Angeles Kings defenceman has not played an NHL game since Oct. 19, 2014. Hours after assisting on the first goal in a 2-1 win over Minnesota, authorities were called to his home. A graphic police report detailed a domestic assault, and a hospital social worker testified he was told it wasn't the first time.

Voynov would eventually plead "no-contest" to a misdemeanor charge of corporal injury to a spouse and served two months in jail. He returned to Russia instead of facing deportation. His six-year, \$25-million contract was terminated by the Kings.

He was not allowed to play in the 2016 World Cup of Hockey, but spent the last three seasons in the KHL and won a gold medal with the Russian National Team at the 2018 Olympics.

Voynov can't apply for re-instatement until he can get the work visa, so we're still a few weeks away. An expungement hearing is scheduled for July 2 in California court to remove the no-contest plea from his record. If that request is granted, he will have no criminal record. That would mean no further immigration problems in the U.S. or Canada. In fact, he's had a U.S. Visitors' Visa for at least a year, and, last summer, had some surgery done in Denver.

He and Marta remain married, with two children.

According to multiple sources, he has made it clear he'd like to return to the NHL. And it sounds like there is quite a bit of interest. He's a talented, 28-year-old, right-shot defender.

But whoever signs him — or considers it — is going to take some serious heat, especially on social media. No one wants to go on-record because of the sensitivity.

Word is that Voynov met with NHL Commissioner Gary Bettman and the NHLPA about a month ago. There was no decision on any further discipline. Everyone believes that an additional suspension is coming before he can play, but no one is giving any indication of what that will be. This conversation was more about the current legal situation and what led to it.

From what I understand, once Voynov does apply, he, the NHL and the NHLPA can work together on a process. But, if they can't agree, the CBA allows Bettman the right to hold a formal disciplinary hearing.

No team that takes him is going to get him free and clean.

It should also be noted that the Kings still have Voynov's rights, even though his contract was terminated. He is on the Voluntary Retirement List, similar to Ilya Kovalchuk. You'll remember that, last summer, since he wasn't yet 35, anyone who wanted to sign him had to make a deal



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • June 13, 2018

with New Jersey. Because Voynov has not missed at least one season of professional hockey, that's the case here, too.

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Sportsnet.ca / Marlies drop first attempt at championship, Stars force Game 7

Daniel Nugent-Bowman | June 12, 2018, 10:03 PM

TORONTO – Garret Sparks knows he can't repeat his Game 6 performance if his Toronto Marlies are going to win the Calder Cup.

And he's not the slightest bit concerned he can't return to the form that won him the AHL's top goaltender award either.

"Extremely confident," Sparks said minutes after a 5-2 loss to the Texas Stars.

That would be a welcome change because Sparks looked nothing like himself on Tuesday as the Marlies missed their first chance to win their first championship in franchise history. Game 7 is Thursday in Toronto.

The 24-year-old goalie surrendered four goals on 17 shots before ceding the net to partner Calvin Pickard early in the third period.

It was a less-than-stellar outing witnessed by Brendan Shanahan, Kyle Dubas and Mike Babcock, the top decision-makers of the Toronto Maple Leafs – the club he expects to play for next season.

While he was left defenceless on multiple occasions on goals from the Stars, the biggest blunder was self-inflicted.

With the Stars up 1-0 late in the second period, Sparks made a poor clearing attempt that landed right on Justin Dowling's stick in the slot without a defenceman in sight.

Sparks stopped Dowling, but left the rebound in the crease and Travis Morin tapped it in.

Barely two minutes later, Marlies forward Colin Greening was stripped by Austin Fyten at the Toronto blue line. He walked in and beat Sparks on the unfettered chance.

"One of them was clearly my fault," Sparks said of the turnovers. "We can't be turning pucks over like that to a team like that that's opportunistic. If we're going to do that, you have to make saves. I didn't do that."

While Calle Rosen pulled the Marlies within two early in the third, the Stars quickly restored their three-goal margin when Sheldon Dries scored on a short-handed breakaway 91 seconds later.

Marlies coach Sheldon Keefe decided that goal would be the end of the night for Sparks.

"I had some concerns about Sparky and where he was at," Keefe said. "He deserves the opportunity to be in the net for us. We didn't do him any favours either. Let's be honest.

"The second one he wants to have back, but we're not very good on the first or third goals at all. We don't give him any help on the fourth goal either. It's not just on Sparky here by any means."

More concerning to Keefe was the way the Marlies crumpled after such a dominating first period.

The Marlies hemmed the Stars in their end for much of the frame, particularly in the second half, as they controlled the shot attempts. The shots on goal were 16-4. It resulted in nothing on the scoreboard.

After Stars captain Curtis McKenzie netted his 11th of the post-season 6:46 – a goal in which he deked out Sparks in front – the Marlies slowly unravelled.

"We felt like we should have come out of that first period more than 0-0," Keefe said. "We weren't able to do so. We just weren't able to stick with it and that's disappointing."

Marlies blueliner Justin Holl netted a late goal after plenty of sustained pressure before Stars' Colin Markison scored into an empty net.

Mike McKenna stopped 43 shots for Texas. He certainly helped the Stars' cause, whereas the Marlies didn't help their own.

They were afforded all four power plays. The Stars got the only goal during those eight minutes.

"We carried the play for long stretches of the game. But we gifted them goals," Keefe said. "They didn't gift us anything."

The biggest gift came courtesy of Sparks on the Morin marker.

Not only that, but he wasn't nearly as sharp as his .936 save percentage and 1.79 goals-against average from the regular season would suggest.

But he's not worried about an encore on Thursday.

"Five years of experience (in the AHL). Seventeen games in the NHL. Everything that I've done to this point in my career," Sparks said when asked about what he draws from ahead of Game 7.

"I feel like everybody in the locker room will do the exact same. We know who we are as players. We know it didn't go our way tonight. That doesn't change what we're doing."

Keefe felt the Marlies let one slip away, but they've "earned the opportunity to have two cracks at this."

That's the way Sparks feels, too. And he's ready to help his team make amends.

"We're fine," he said. "We got away from what we were doing a little bit in the second period. It kind of snowballed on us. We're a resilient team. I like our odds in Game 7."

NOTES: The Marlies got defenceman Travis Dermott back after he missed Game 5 with a reported upper-body injury. Andrew Nielsen, Dermott's replacement, came out of the lineup to make room for him.

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Sportsnet.ca / Canadiens, Flames among teams facing toughest summers

Sean McIndoe | June 12, 2018, 11:13 AM

We're several days into the off-season, and so far it's been a slow start. That's to be expected. After all, we're 10 days away from the draft, which is when business tends to pick up. We're still waiting on a final number for next year's salary cap, which is important. Also, and we're not naming any names here, certain teams are still drunk right now.

So as we wait for the action to start, let's figure out which teams are facing the toughest decisions as we head into the off-season. Everybody has a lot on their to-do list at this time of year, and some GMs will need a



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • June 13, 2018

strong showing over the next few weeks to ensure they still have a job this time next year. But some teams are facing more pressure than others, so let's count down 10 that will be under a spotlight over the coming days.

10. Calgary Flames

Already done: They changed coaches, clearing out Glen Gulutzan to make room for former Hurricanes' boss Bill Peters. The bench will also feature two new assistants, including Geoff Ward, who'll be tasked with fixing the anemic power play. And the team parted ways with team president Brian Burke.

The job ahead: The Flames don't need a massive overhaul. But something clearly isn't clicking in Calgary, where a talented young roster hasn't won a playoff game in three years. There have been rumblings that the effort level isn't where it needs to be, which Peters will have to address. And Brad Treliving will be looking to add offence, ideally a top-line winger to slot in with Sean Monahan and Johnny Gaudreau.

GM hot-seat factor: Treliving signed an extension last year, so he's relatively safe for now. But the team is underperforming and he's just played his coaching card, so another underwhelming season will turn up the temperature. How high? He'd probably rather not find out.

Bottom line: Treliving will have to walk the line of worrying about right now while keeping an eye on the future; the Flames only have four picks in this year's draft, none of which are in the first three rounds.

9. Washington Capitals

Already done: They drank the alcohol. All of it. It's gone now; we have no more alcohol.

The job ahead: Once he's done celebrating, Brian MacLellan is faced with the possibility of losing two of the league's top free agents. The first is John Carlson, who'll likely prove too rich for the Caps and land elsewhere. The second is Barry Trotz, which should be a fascinating situation to watch. MacLellan was apparently close to firing Trotz during the season, and it was only a few weeks ago that the coach himself seemed to think he was all but gone. But with a Cup win and an expiring contract, now it's Trotz who holds the power. He'll likely be back with a hefty raise, but there's at least a chance he becomes the first coach since Mike Keenan to leave a Cup winner for work elsewhere. The question is how hard MacLellan wants to work to prevent that.

GM hot-seat factor: None.

Bottom line: Heavy is the head that wears the crown. MacLellan also needs to re-sign Tom Wilson and figure out what to do with Philipp Grubauer. This will be a challenging off-season in Washington, but it will be a lot more fun than the last few.

8. Edmonton Oilers

Already done: They traded for Nolan Vesey and got the big Keegan Lowe extension done. So, not much.

The job ahead: The first task for Peter Chiarelli is to figure out just how big a change this team needs. It sounds like he's leaning towards staying conservative, and treating 2017–18 like a bad year that doesn't reflect what the roster can do. That's fair, but it's risky, because patience is wearing thin in Edmonton.

Even if the Oilers largely stay the course, it sounds like we could see a significant deal or two. Oscar Klefbom is rumoured to be in play, for reasons nobody is quite clear on. And recently there have been reports that the team is trying to wriggle out of the five years left on Milan Lucic's deal.

GM hot-seat factor: High. Chiarelli was on thin ice during the season, and managed to survive. But you'd have to figure that the clock is ticking.

Bottom line: Oilers fans don't seem to have much confidence in Chiarelli's ability to trade his way out of a hole, so no news may be good

news in Edmonton. But after last year, the status quo could be a tough sell.

7. Toronto Maple Leafs

Already done: The Leafs went into their off-season with major questions around the future of their front office. Those questions have been answered, although the results were messy. Kyle Dubas is the new GM, while Lou Lamoriello and Mark Hunter have moved on. Beyond that, the roster is the same apart from one very minor trade.

The job ahead: It's a big one. The Leafs' rebuild has largely been a success so far, with two straight trips to the playoffs after their last-place finish in 2015–16, and they just set a franchise record for points in a season. But now they need to take the next step, and based on this year's playoff loss to the Bruins, they may have more ground to cover than they thought. Dubas will need to find a top-three center, and Leaf fans will be hoping he can land a top-tier blueliner. There will be John Tavares talk, although that feels like a longshot, and this being Toronto the Leafs will be linked to any big name who could be available.

But the three biggest jobs all involve players who are already here, as the team's trio of young forwards are all ready for new contracts. William Nylander is an RFA and needs a new deal, while Auston Matthews and Mitchell Marner are eligible for extensions. There's enough cap room to sign all three, but the final numbers will go a long way towards determining how much flexibility the team has going forward.

GM hot-seat factor: Dubas was Brendan Shanahan's pick for the job and he'll be given time to do it, so job security isn't an issue. But in terms of having his every move analyzed, debated and nit-picked, the 31-year-old Dubas will be under a microscope.

Bottom line: There are worse problems to have than being an overachieving team with too many good young players. But the job isn't anywhere close to being done in Toronto, and plenty of teams have stalled on the path from good to great. Fair or not, the pressure is on Dubas to make a big first impression.

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6. Vegas Golden Knights

Already done: Not much. I guess they were doing something else in May and June.

The job ahead: The Knights just finished a season that bordered on the miraculous, and will go down in history as the greatest expansion team in pro sports history. OK, now what?

In theory, a team that falls three wins shy of a Stanley Cup should be looking to add the final pieces that will get it over the finish line next year. If so, George McPhee has a ton of cap space to play with. New deals for William Karlsson and (maybe) James Neal and David Perron will eat up some of that, but there's still enough room to add at least one big name and maybe more. Remember, the Knights were reportedly very close to an Erik Karlsson trade at the deadline. They could revisit that, woo John Tavares, chase Joe Thornton, or maybe even all three.

One other thing to keep an eye on: Marc-Andre Fleury has one year left on his deal and could sign an extension this summer.

GM hot-seat factor: Right now, McPhee could walk through every casino on the Strip flipping over blackjack tables and nobody would do a thing other than high-five him.

Bottom line: McPhee could always play it safe, and resume the slow-and-steady approach that the Knights were telling us was the plan last summer. That might even be the right play. But with so much momentum after this season, it will be hard to resist the temptation to push hard for a big move or two. That's pressure, even if it's the sort that most teams would love to have.

5. Buffalo Sabres



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • June 13, 2018

Already done: They won the draft lottery. Honestly, that was the one thing they really needed to figure out a way to do.

The job ahead: They'll draft Rasmus Dahlin, and then get to work on finding out just how much of the hype he can live up to. That's the easy part. They'll also have to figure out what to do with Ryan O'Reilly, which is a tricky situation. Then there's the goaltending, where neither Robin Lehner nor Chad Johnson has a contract for next season. Then they have to fix a roster that finished dead last in the league.

GM hot-seat factor: Jason Botterill's been on the job for only a year, so he's safe for now. But after watching other rebuilding teams sprint past them and an expansion team play for the Cup, it's fair to say that Buffalo isn't exactly a haven of patience right now.

Bottom line: We've seen teams make big jumps in recent years, and if a team like the Avalanche can shoot up the standings then maybe the Sabres can, too. But, man, there's a ton to do in Buffalo.

4. Ottawa Senators

Already done: It's been fairly quiet, with the biggest decision being the one to keep head coach Guy Boucher.

The job ahead: It's big. The Senators were a disaster last year, so there are plenty of holes in the roster for GM Pierre Dorion to work on. Mark Stone needs a new deal, as does Cody Ceci. Matt Duchene can sign an extension this summer, and there's persistent talk that Mike Hoffman is available.

But of course, all of that pales in comparison to the Erik Karlsson situation. The Norris winner has one year left on his deal, meaning he could sign an extension in July. That would be great for the Senators, assuming they could fit him under their notoriously tight budget. But a trade still seems like the more likely option, and it would be the kind of deal that can define a team's short and long-term future.

GM hot-seat factor: In Ottawa, who knows? You'd think it would be high, given how the season just went. But while the Senators are known for churning through coaches, they've had only three GMs since 2002. If Dorion has found a way to work with Eugene Melnyk, he's probably safe.

Bottom line: Moving Karlsson could go down as the biggest trade in franchise history. But look on the bright side, Sens fans — when it comes to trading an unhappy superstar, it's worked out pretty well in the past.

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3. Montreal Canadiens

Already done: They locked up Antti Niemi. Mission accomplished, am I right, Habs fans?

The job ahead: Stop me if you've heard this one before, but Marc Bergevin should really try to find a top-line centre. That search has been going on for years, of course, but there are some options available this year. Bergevin will probably take a run at Tavares and maybe O'Reilly, and he can dangle trade bait like Alex Galchenyuk or his four second-round picks. Does he also move Max Pacioretty? It seemed inevitable for much of last season, but a deal never came, so it's possible the two sides agree that it can still work in Montreal.

GM hot-seat factor: You'd have to figure it's near-nuclear by now, and yet Bergevin is still on the job. We had him ranked No. 1 on last off-season's pressure index, and No. 1 again at last year's trade deadline. He didn't do much in either case, but apparently it was enough. At some point Montreal fans may have to accept that Bergevin's job might be safer than logic says it should be.

Bottom line: Montreal is a tough town even when things are going well. It's fair to say that right now, things are not going well. Bergevin gets at least one more chance to fix that.

2. Carolina Hurricanes

Already done: They held a GM search, kind of, before settling on promoting Don Waddell. They also replaced Peters with Rod Brind'Amour, and managed to make a trade when they didn't have a GM, which was admittedly kind of impressive.

Also, their new owner spent months studying how the NHL works and then figured out that they just have to try harder and everything will be fine.

<https://twitter.com/CanesCountry/status/994252451044843521>

The job ahead: When you're facing an NHL-high eight straight years and counting without a playoff appearance, there's going to be lots to do, and the Hurricanes have been rumoured to be discussing some fairly big names off the roster, including Jeff Skinner and Justin Faulk. They need major help in goal, and the rest of the lineup could use improvement, too. And they hold the second-overall pick in a draft with one surefire franchise player, which gives them a ton of options.

GM hot-seat factor: Waddell was just given the job so he's safe for a while, although Dundon seems like the sort of owner who could make "a while" hard to define.

Bottom line: Dundon is the wild card here. He arrived on the scene sounding like someone who was open to new ideas, then went relatively conservative on his first hires. That may be either comforting or disappointing depending on your perspective, but it certainly sounds like Dundon plans to take a hands-on approach to his new team. That's worked a few times in pro sports and failed miserably in others, but it's never dull.

1. New York Islanders

Already done: Lou Lamoriello has arrived, and he didn't take long to start making changes. GM Garth Snow and coach Doug Weight were both relieved of their duties; Weight's dismissal leaves the Islanders as the only team in the league with a coaching vacancy right now.

The job ahead: Re-sign John Tavares. That's not the only job, but it's the only one that matters right now. The 27-year-old centre has been the Islanders' franchise for almost a decade, but now sits just weeks away from reaching unrestricted free agency. He's been eligible for an extension since last summer, so the fact that the situation remains unresolved is clearly a bad sign for the Isles. Losing Tavares for nothing (or for some pittance of draft picks in a late-June trade of his rights) would be a disaster. They need to get this done.

So can they do it? It didn't seem likely with Snow at the helm, but Lamoriello's arrival may change that. It's hard to imagine that Tavares would have been all that eager to buy into the status quo, so promises of a new direction can't do anything but help. But with less than three weeks until July 1, the question is whether the Islanders just left this all too late.

GM hot-seat factor: Non-existent. Lamoriello wouldn't be here if he hadn't been given total control.

Bottom line: In addition to either signing or somehow replacing Tavares, Lamoriello needs to find a new coach and probably a new starting goaltender. It's going to be a busy summer.

Near-misses: The Kings have to sort out the Drew Doughty situation, the Jets and Predators will be staring down an arms race in the Central, the Blackhawks need to figure out which way they're headed, and Paul Fenton is a first-time GM looking to make an impression in Minnesota. Mix in some of the GMs on hot seats, teams facing cap crunches and the fallout from disappointing seasons, and there's at least some pressure on [checks list] everyone.

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NEWS CLIPPINGS • June 13, 2018

Sportsnet.ca / Edmonton Oilers Off-Season Report: Playoffs or bust in 2019

Mark Spector June 12, 2018, 10:11 AM

EDMONTON — How to best characterize the pressure in Edmonton this summer...? Acute, perhaps?

Let's put it this way: After missing the playoffs by 17 points in 2017-18, Oilers general manager Peter Chiarelli and head coach Todd McLellan were given a chance to right the ship for next season. But miss the playoffs again, with one year remaining on each of their deals, and you can rest assured that owner Daryl Katz will be in replacement mode a year from now.

On the ice, several players whose games dipped last season — Cam Talbot, Milan Lucic, Oscar Klefbom, Adam Larsson, and many more — will be expected to revert to the mean. Off the ice, Chiarelli had better not waste another year of Connor McDavid without bringing in any playoff revenue, after the organization pared down internally this summer due to a lack of said playoff revenues.

Chiarelli cleared out McLellan's assistant coaches this spring, firing Jim Johnson and Ian Herbers, while assigning Jay Woodcroft to run AHL Bakersfield. He replaced them with Glen Gulutzan, Trent Yawney and Manny Viveiros, a veteran staff that should be able to figure things out in Edmonton.

Now, Chiarelli has to make a few personnel tweaks and get this train back on the tracks. There is too much talent here, on paper, to miss the playoffs again.

The next firings, if this program doesn't get fixed, will happen above the assistant coaching level.

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Salary Cap Space: \$10,103,834

UFAs

Mike Cammalleri, left wing, \$1.2 million

Yohann Auvitu, defence, \$700,000

Mark Fayne, defence, \$3.625 million

Laurent Brossoit, goalie, \$750,000

RFAs

Ryan Strome, centre, \$2.5 million

Drake Caggiula, left winger, \$925,000

Anton Slepyshev, right winger, \$925,000

Iiro Pakarinen, right winger, \$725,000

Darnell Nurse, defence, \$832,000

Matt Benning, defence, \$925,000

2018 draft picks: 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 5th, 6th, 7th.

Biggest off-season need

An offensive defenceman. A John Carlson to Washington's Alex Ovechkin. A Kris Letang to Pittsburgh's Sid Crosby.

We're not saying the Oilers are in on UFA Carlson or Drew Doughty — they'd have to move too much salary for that to become realistic. They simply need someone who can pound a puck when McDavid puts it on a tee on the power play. A guy who trails the rush the way Paul Coffey did

here so many years ago, and knows what to do with the puck in offensive situations.

They'd prefer a right shot D-man, and Edmonton would also rather not have to trade Oscar Klefbom to acquire that player, but would do so if necessary. Again, they don't need a Norris Trophy defenceman here. Think Tyson Barrie or Torey Krug — a reasonably offensive defenceman who can run a power play and consistently get a one-timer through. That player would aid a power play that was awful in 2017-18, and find much opportunity on a team with some excellent passing ability up front.

Possible Off-Season targets

Tyson Barrie: A right-hand shot, can run your power play, shoots the puck well, and is mobile. It's not a question of whether Barrie is the right man for the job in Edmonton, it is what the Avalanche would want in return. Ryan Nugent-Hopkins is off the table, or at least should be.

Torey Krug: He's a lefty, but could likely be attained for less cost than Barrie. At 27 Krug is experienced and possesses the necessary assets. Chiarelli would likely consider moving Klefbom for Krug, though reluctantly so.

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Sportsnet.ca / Canucks GM expects Elias Pettersson to be in lineup in 2018-19

Sonny Sachdeva June 12, 2018, 8:06 PM

Much has been made about Swedish teenager Elias Pettersson's inevitable arrival in the NHL.

Fresh off one of the most dominant campaigns we've seen from an NHL prospect, the 2017 fifth-overall pick has seemingly done everything within his power to convince the Vancouver Canucks he's worthy of an extended stay in the big leagues next season.

According to general manager Jim Benning, that's precisely how the team sees it all shaking out. Though the Canucks are expected to practice some patience with their prized forward, Benning said he expects the 19-year-old to be on the roster when his club aims to take the next step in 2018-19.

Speaking with NHL.com's Mike Zeisberger on Monday, the GM was asked whether he sees Pettersson cracking the lineup next season:

"Oh yeah. I think given the retirement of the Sedins, we need skill in our lineup," Benning told Zeisberger. "He had, quite frankly, an outstanding year this year."

Pettersson dominated in the Swedish Elite League in 2017-18, leading the league in scoring during both the regular season and playoffs (earning MVP honours for each, as well) en route to a league championship — an unprecedented run of success for a teenaged player in the league. His winning ways didn't wane on the international circuit either, as Pettersson added a silver at the 2018 World Juniors and helped Sweden claim gold at the 2018 World Championship.

"We've never heard of that before. There's been some great Swedish players, the (Peter) Forsbergs, the Sedins, that have come through that, through the years, haven't been able to accomplish that," Benning said. "I don't want to put too much pressure on Elias but we feel real strong about his ability to make plays and add skill to our team. A lot will be determined when he comes to training camp. We don't want to put the player into a position he's not ready for."



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • June 13, 2018

"But his accomplishments this year, like at the World Championships (with Sweden), where he didn't look out of place, we just feel he can come in and prove, like Boeser did last year at training camp, that he belongs and can contribute next year."

Pettersson looks set to serve as the next piece in an on-the-cusp Canucks core already off to a good start with Bo Horvat and Brock Boeser. Adam Gaudette, who led the NCAA in scoring last season and snagged the Hobey Baker Award as a result, is vying for membership in that inner circle as well.

That said, Benning said that although he believes the seeds of a new era in Vancouver have been planted, it'll take time for the young group to lead the Canucks to true contender status. To that end, the club is focused more on giving them what they need to grow into an elite group than banking on their talent right away.

A weekly deep dive into the biggest hockey news in the world with hosts Eliotte Friedman and Jeff Marek. New episodes every Thursday.

"With the Sedins retiring, for us it's going to be about that next group of core players we're going to win with," he told Zeisberger. "It's about finding that next group of core players we can win with in the next six, eight, 10 years, and developing them the right way. Look at the playoffs. It's that age group, from 26-32, that you win with. ... It's about adding pieces that will help push our young guys to develop."

"I don't know if that's necessarily making a [free-agency] splash, but surrounding them with pros in and out of the dressing room, guys they can talk to. When I look at the big picture, it's going to take time but it's what we're looking to do."

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TSN.CA / Off-Season Game Plan: Nashville Predators

Scott Cullen

The Nashville Predators had a franchise-record 117 points to win the Presidents' Trophy before running into a tough second-round matchup with Winnipeg.

Off-Season Game Plan looks at a Predators team that is still very much a championship contender.

It's not as though the Predators shouldn't examine what they need to do in order to beat the Jets – that's a tough Central Division to escape – but Nashville is still a title contender.

The one area of concern for the Predators, particularly when compared to Winnipeg, was the amount of offence generated by Nashville's forwards. A lack of secondary scoring in the playoffs ultimately contributed to Nashville getting eliminated, but with young wingers like Kevin Fiala and Eeli Tolvanen in the fold, it's reasonable to think that internal improvement can help address that concern.

With the league's best top four on the blueline, a quality number one line and a top-tier goaltending tandem, there is a lot of good going on in Music City. Enough that some off-season tweaking may be all that's needed to get over the top.

HEROES

Pekka Rinne – The 35-year-old, who has had some ups and downs over the course of his career, is a Vezina finalist after he posted a .927 save percentage, his best since 2010-2011, and his 27.49 Goals Saved Above Average was tops in the league.

P.K. Subban – A Norris Trophy finalist, Subban finished the season with 59 points, one shy of his career-high, and while he didn't drive plays as favourably as in his first season with the Predators, Nashville outscored the opposition 76-57 at evens with Subban on the ice.

Roman Josi – It's an embarrassment of riches on the Nashville blueline, and if Subban wasn't a Norris Trophy finalist, Josi would be in the discussion. He had 53 points in 75 games, drove play and Nashville outscored opponents 79-58 with Josi on the ice.

ZEROES

Nick Bonino – This may not have been entirely unexpected, considering that the Predators were, at least in part, paying for his playoff pedigree, but Bonino had poor possession stats (47.8 CF%, -5.2 CFRel%) finished last season with 25 points, his fewest since the 2012-2013 lockout season.

Alexei Emelin – It was somewhat of a surprise when the Predators dealt for the veteran defenceman, in part because of the cost relative to his contributions. He played a career-low 16:53 per game and had abysmal shot differentials (46.6 CF%, -7.3 CFRel%), results that could have been achieved for less.

Mike Fisher – Not to pile on a veteran centre who came out of retirement, hoping for one last run to the Cup, but it turns out it's a tough league to join when it's in full flight. Fisher was unable to generate anything offensively, putting up five points in 28 (regular season plus playoff) games with a meagre output of shots when he was on the ice.

Filip Forsberg	67	28	36	64	53.5
	3.2	104.4	54.2	17:28	\$6.0M
Viktor Arvidsson	78	29	32	61	51.2
	-0.6	102.6	55.9	17:45	\$4.25M
Ryan Johansen	79	15	39	54	52.6
	1.1	101.7	54.8	18:33	\$8.0M
Kyle Turris	76	16	35	51	54.3
	5.1	102.9	65.9	16:37	\$6.0M
Craig Smith	79	25	26	51	56.8
	7.7	102.5	61.5	15:23	\$4.25M
Kevin Fiala	80	23	25	48	56.0
	6.2	102.9	64.0	15:09	\$863K
Calle Jarnkrok	68	16	19	35	49.1
	-3.3	104.2	45.1	15:53	\$2.0M
Colton Sissons	81	9	18	27	50.6
	-1.1	99.5	32.3	16:06	\$625K
Nick Bonino	71	12	13	25	47.8
	-5.2	100.7	37.9	15:38	\$4.1M
Austin Watson	76	14	5	19	47.0
	-5.9	98.5	31.8	12:20	\$1.1M
Miikka Salomaki	58	2	6	8	51.0
	-0.9	96.5	31.6	10:17	\$613K
Ryan Hartman	78	11	20	31	53.0
	0.0	99.4	56.0	13:04	\$863K RFA
Scott Hartnell	62	13	11	24	51.1
	-1.5	100.2	50.7	12:01	\$1.0M UFA
Mike Fisher	16	2	2	4	41.4
	-12.3	100.3	31.9	12:21	\$1.0M UFA

He tied a career-high with 64 points, but that total doesn't accurately reflect how much of a star Filip Forsberg has become. The 23-year-old winger did that in 67 regular-season games, before adding 16 points in 13 playoff games, and he's daring enough to attempt dangles with the



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • June 13, 2018

puck that only a tiny percentage of NHL players even consider as a realistic in-game option.

Nashville's whirling dervish winger, Viktor Arvidsson has scored 60 goals over the past two seasons, including eight while shorthanded. He's tenacious on the puck and his contract (\$4.25-million for six more years) is extraordinarily team friendly.

It's certainly true that Ryan Johansen fills the No. 1 centre spot for the Predators, but he has been somewhat underwhelming offensively, scoring 37 goals in 213 games since arriving in a trade from Columbus. His shot rate has declined, to 1.63 per game last season, his lowest since his rookie season 2011-2012, when he played nearly six fewer minutes per game. Nevertheless, he has the skill to make big plays, and has produced 27 points (8 G, 19 A) in 27 playoff games for Nashville, but his big ticket contract would make more sense with better regular-season performance.

Kyle Turris was fantastic after he was acquired from Ottawa, putting up 42 points in 65 games, with the Predators outscoring the opposition 50-27 at evens with the 28-year-old centre on the ice. With linemates Craig Smith and Kevin Fiala, it was even more lopsided (32-13) with Nashville earning 71% of the goals and 61% of the expected goals, both near the very best in the league among lines that played at least 300 5-on-5 minutes together.

After a miserable 2016-2017 season, Craig Smith bounced back with a career-high 25 goals, the fourth time in the past five seasons that he's surpassed the 20-goal plateau. He is mentioned as a trade candidate, from time to time, but a couple of years at his current deal is fair value.

Kevin Fiala's 2016-2017 season ended with a broken femur in Game One of the second round playoff series against St. Louis, and the 21-year-old recovered to produce 23 goals and 48 points in a real breakthrough season. Fiala's potential is a reason to hope for even more offensive production from Nashville's forwards in the future.

For the third straight season, Calle Jarnkrok put up more than 30 points, and he did so in just 68 games last season, but he also got shuffled away from centre once the Predators added Turris and Bonino down the middle. Jarnkrok's versatility and inexpensive contract still makes him valuable, but could make him valuable to other clubs, too.

Colton Sissons has made steady progress and the 24-year-old put up 27 points in 81 games, both career-highs. He's also been an effective playoff performer in the past couple of seasons, contributing nine goals and 19 points in 35 games, which is really strong from a fourth-line centre.

A two-time Stanley Cup winner with the Penguins, Nick Bonino cashed in as a free agent, signing a four-year deal in Nashville. He's been an effective complementary player throughout his career, but was outshot rather soundly in his first season with the Predators (much as he was in his last season with Pittsburgh).

While 2010 first-rounder Austin Watson may not live up to that draft slot, he's found a role as a checking winger and scored a career-high 14 goals in 2017-2018, before adding five goals in 13 playoff games.

A winger who has managed just eight goals in 125 career games, Miikka Salomaki is a servicable, but also entirely replaceable, fourth-line winger.

Acquired from the Blackhawks for a first-round pick and a prospect, 23-year-old winger Ryan Hartman is an agitator, but one who is skilled enough to move up the lineup when necessary. As it is, on a team as deep as the Predators, he may be a fourth-line player, but he can make a positive contribution.

Somehow, Eeli Tolvanen fell to 30th in the draft last summer, and the Predators accepted that gift. He scored 25 goals in 60 (regular season plus playoff) games in the KHL and played for Finland at the World Juniors, Olympics and World Championships. The 19-year-old had 13 points in nine games at the latter two tournaments and skated in three games with the Predators late in the season. Next season, he should have a top-

nine role to start, and his offensive upside is another reason for higher hopes about Nashville's attack.

The Predators have popped up a bit in discussions about John Tavares' potential destination. He would certainly upgrade their forward lines, but would also likely require some additional moves to create room. At the very least, a centre with a long-term contract would figure to be on the way out in order to facilitate such a deal.

Nashville did seem to think that they needed more forward depth last season, and they have Mike Fisher and Scott Hartnell headed for unrestricted free agent status. If they don't retain Hartnell, some inexpensive veteran wingers that could contribute in depth roles include Chris Kunitz, Tommy Wingels, Daniel Winnik or Dominic Moore (among many others).

P.K. Subban	82	16	43	59	51.6	
	0.2	101.9	43.2	24:07	\$9.0M	
Roman Josi	75	14	39	53	53.5	
	3.7	102.3	52.4	24:28	\$4.0M	
Mattias Ekholm	81	10	24	34	54.5	
	4.7	100.5	48.1	23:35	\$3.75M	
Ryan Ellis	44	9	23	32	45.5	
	103.4	55.6	23:21	\$2.5M	4.5	
Matt Irwin	50	2	6	8	50.9	
	100.6	49.9	13:26	\$675K	-0.4	
Yannick Weber	47	2	3	5	46.6	
	-6.7	101.4	57.2	12:03	\$675K	
Anthony Bitetto	32	1	2	3	44.1	
	-7.5	101.2	53.8	13:26	\$650K	
Alexei Emelin	76	1	8	9	46.6	
	-7.3	102.2	43.7	16:53	\$4.1M	UFA

P.K. Subban is a star like few others in the NHL. He performs at a very high level, and that was no different last season, as he played in all 82 games and was very productive even though his ice time (24:07) per game was his lowest since 2012-2013; these are the luxuries of Nashville's situation, as they can afford not to overwork their Norris Trophy finalist. However, his name also has crept into some trade rumours, under the notion that his \$9-million cap hit is challenging when the team has other needs but, man, that had better bring a serious return to even be contemplated. Otherwise, it's taking a core piece away from a championship contender.

Roman Josi had a tremendous season for the Predators.

A brilliant talent in his own right, Roman Josi creates a lot of offence for the Predators and, over the past five seasons, he ranks seventh among defencemen in goals and fifth in points (Subban is 12th and fourth, respectively). He's also under contract for two more years at an outrageous bargain price of \$4-million per year.

While Subban and Josi draw the most attention on the Nashville blueline because of their offensive contributions, Mattias Ekholm is more of the defensive conscience, and he's really good at it. Stop me if you've heard this before but, he's on a very team-friendly contract for the next four seasons.

While he missed nearly half of the season recovering from knee surgery, Ryan Ellis returned in fine form and the 27-year-old played as well as he ever has in the second half of the season. He struggled a bit in the playoffs, but that's small-sample quibbling for a player who has reached a very high level and has one year left on his contract. Presumably, the Predators would like to keep Ellis around, so they could get him signed to an extension this summer.

The Predators don't ask a whole lot of their third pairing, but Matt Irwin has been solid in that role for a couple of seasons. Yannick Weber's possession numbers haven't been great for a couple of years and



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • June 13, 2018

Anthony Bitetto saw action in a career-high 32 games last season. With Alexei Emelin a free agent, would they consider adding a free agent like Luke Schenn, Brandon Manning or Christian Folin? They could conceivably take a run at a bigger name free agent, like Calvin De Haan, though that would seem to require a pretty significant commitment from both sides (in terms of cost for Nashville, and role for De Haan). What about Greg Pateryn, a defensive right-shot defenceman who had a solid year for Dallas?

Pekka Rinne	59	42	13	4	.927
.938	\$7.0M				
Juuse Saros	26	11	5	7	.925
.930	\$693K	RFA			

A few years ago, it was easy enough to pin a portion of blame for Nashville's struggles on Pekka Rinne. He had below average save percentage in three of four seasons from 2012-2013 through 2015-2016, but his impressive playoff run in 2017 helped improve his tarnished reputation. He followed that up with an outstanding season in 2017-2018, before some trouble in the postseason. He's on top of his game once again, it appears, but is also 35-years-old and it's fair to wonder how long he'll be able to remain there.

Pekka Rinne had one of his best seasons in 2017-2018.

Backup Juuse Saros had three rough starts to open last season, during which he allowed 13 goals on just 71 shots, but after that he was spectacular, posting a .935 save percentage in the remaining 23 games in which he appeared. He doesn't have Rinne's towering presence, but there's a pretty easy argument to make for 23-year-old Saros to get more playing time and eventually take over the starting role as Rinne declines.

Eeli Tolvanen	RW	49	19	17	36
+4	Jokerit (KHL)				
Dante Fabbro	D	38	9	20	29
+4	Boston University (HE)				
Yakov Trenin	C	44	5	11	16
+3	Milwaukee (AHL)				
Patrick Harper	C	20	8	13	21
+3	Boston University (HE)				
Rem Pitlick	C	38	12	19	31
+2	Minnesota (Big 10)				
Emil Pettersson	C	72	13	33	46
-4	Milwaukee (AHL)				
Grant Mismash	LW	38	9	13	22
+4	North Dakota (NCHC)				
Alexandre Carrier	D	73	4	24	28
-14	Milwaukee (AHL)				
Tom Novak	C	34	3	23	26
+6	Minnesota (Big 10)				
Anthony Richard	LW	75	19	17	36
+2	Milwaukee (AHL)				
Frederic Allard	D	55	8	16	24
-1	Milwaukee (AHL)				
Miroslav Svoboda	G	47			
.926	HC Plzen (CZE)				
Jack Dougherty	D	63	1	11	12
-15	Milwaukee (AHL)				
Filip Pyrochta	D	42	3	9	12
-3	Tygrí Liberec (CZE)				
Frederick Gaudreau	C	54	22	21	43
+9	Milwaukee (AHL)				

DRAFT

No first-round pick.

FREE AGENCY

The Predators have approximately \$67.5M committed to the 2018-2019 salary cap for 19 players.

NEEDS

One top-nine forward, one defenceman

WHAT I SAID THE PREDATORS NEEDED LAST YEAR

A centre, forward depth

THEY ADDED

Nick Bonino, Scott Hartnell, Alexei Emelin

TRADE MARKET

Craig Smith, Nick Bonino, Miikka Salomaki, P.K. Subban

Filip Forsberg Ryan Johansen Viktor Arvidsson

Kevin Fiala Kyle Turris Craig Smith

Calle Jarnkrok Nick Bonino Eeli Tolvanen*

Austin Watson Colton Sissons Ryan Hartman

Chris Kunitz* Frederick Gaudreau Mikka Salomaki

Anthony Richard Yakov Trenin Emil Pettersson

Mattias Ekholm P.K. Subban Pekka Rinne

Roman Josi Ryan Ellis Juuse Saros

Matt Irwin Greg Pateryn* Miroslav Svoboda

Anthony Bitetto Yannick Weber

Frederic Allard Alexandre Carrier

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TSN.CA / Off-Season Game Plan: Boston Bruins

Scott Cullen

The Boston Bruins put up a 112-point season, and looked like they could be Stanley Cup contenders, but lost in the second round to the Tampa Bay Lightning.

Off-Season Game Plan looks at a Bruins team that has rebuilt on the fly, supplementing their veteran core with an impressive rookie class last season.

It was the first full season for Bruce Cassidy behind the bench and, after a mediocre start to the season, the team took off and went on a run during which they suffered two regulation losses in a 27-game stretch through the middle portion of the season.

While the playoffs ended sooner than the Bruins would have liked, it's not as though they need to make moves out of desperation as a response.

As long as Patrice Bergeron and Brad Marchand are playing at a high level, they are a top contender, and if last season's rookies can continue



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • June 13, 2018

to make progress next season, there's no reason to think that Boston will fade away.

HEROES

Brad Marchand – If he hadn't missed 14 games, Marchand could very well have been in the Hart Trophy conversation. As it was, he still tied a career-high with 85 points.

Patrice Bergeron – Before suffering a broken foot, it was Bergeron who was front and centre in Hart Trophy discussion, as his two-way game was typically stellar and he nearly had a point-per-game for the first time in his career.

David Pastrnak – During his age 21 season, Pastrnak put up 35 goals and 80 points, adding a game-breaking dynamic to the league's best possession line.

ZEROES

Rick Nash – He wasn't healthy the whole time, but after arriving in trade from the Rangers, the veteran winger had 11 points in 23 (regular season plus playoff) games, scoring six goals on 80 shots.

Adam McQuaid – After playing a career-high 77 games in 2106-2017, the veteran blueliner dressed for only 38 games last season, and his 15:42 of ice time per game was his lowest since 2012-2013.

Brad Marchand	68	34	51	85	56.3
	4.0	102.9	59.0	19:43	\$6.125M
David Pastrnak	82	35	45	80	55.5
	2.5	103.4	62.8	17:58	\$6.666M
Patrice Bergeron	64	30	33	63	57.6
	5.1	102.3	61.2	19:26	\$6.875M
Danton Heinen	77	16	31	47	55.0
	1.8	101.6	54.9	15:01	\$873K
David Krejci	64	17	27	44	54.5
	1.0	100.7	67.9	16:53	\$7.25M
Jake DeBrusk	70	16	27	43	54.5
	1.0	102.9	70.1	14:22	\$863K
David Backes	57	14	19	33	55.2
	1.6	96.5	47.2	15:24	\$6.0M
Anders Bjork	30	4	8	12	54.0
	0.1	102.2	70.4	12:21	\$925K
Noel Acciari	60	10	1	11	48.6
	-6.2	96.2	33.0	12:55	\$725K
Ryan Donato	12	5	4	9	54.3
	1.3	101.9	63.7	14:42	\$900K
Riley Nash	76	15	25	41	52.4
	-1.7	101.2	47.3	15:25	\$900K UFA
Rick Nash	71	21	13	34	50.1
	3.5	97.0	57.4	17:03	\$7.8M UFA
Tim Schaller	82	12	10	22	51.4
	-3.0	97.0	36.2	13:17	\$775K UFA
Tommy Wingels	75	9	8	17	48.9
	-5.8	96.0	44.0	11:29	\$750K UFA
Sean Kuraly	75	6	8	14	50.1
	-4.6	96.9	36.5	12:15	\$809K RFA
Brian Gionta	20	2	5	7	53.2
	-0.4	100.2	48.3	13:04	\$700K UFA
Austin Czarnik	10	0	4	4	57.7
	1.5	94.5	62.7	10:55	\$675K UFA

Over the past three seasons, only Alex Ovechkin and Vladimir Tarasenko have scored more goals than the 110 tallied by Brad Marchand, who has gone from being an effective pest to a star who still has some troubling behavioural attributes that he needs to remove from his game. He says that he's going to try to fix that, but we'll see next season if he's got the problem licked.

Brad Marchand and David Pastrnak are Boston's game-breaking goal-scorers.

David Pastrnak has stepped to the forefront of the Boston offence and has put up 150 points in the past two seasons. Connor McDavid is the only player 21-and-under to have more points than Pastrnak in the past two years. He's a great talent, and putting him with a dominant duo like Marchand and Bergeron leads, not surprisingly, to outstanding results.

Corsi God Patrice Bergeron had one of his best seasons in 2017-2018, until he was sidelined by a broken foot, but the Bruins consistently dominate play with Bergeron on the ice. In fact, in his entire career, Bergeron has been outscored at even strength just once – 2014-2015, when he was outscored 50-49 when he had a career-low .895 on-ice save percentage. It's hard to imagine a dramatic drop-off, given his fundamentally strong two-way game, but Bergeron does turn 33 this summer, so who knows how much longer he will remain a top-tier performer?

Coming out of Denver University without too much fanfare, Danton Heinen stepped into the lineup and had a productive rookie campaign. He faded down the stretch and in the playoffs, though, finishing with 10 points in his last 38 (regular season plus playoff) games.

Like Marchand and Bergeron, David Krejci also missed time due to injury, playing just 64 games and his average ice time (16:53) was his lowest since 2008-2009. Even so, he's a productive playmaker, but in more of a supporting role while the 32-year-old's cap hit is closer to star status.

Not only did 2015 first-rounder Jake DeBrusk have a solid rookie season, putting up 43 points in 70 games, but he followed it up with six goals in a dozen playoff games. The 21-year-old winger is a promising talent, and valuable as a source of secondary scoring.

The refrain out of Boston is that 34-year-old winger David Backes is so disappointing, but last season's shot rate (2.81 per game) was the second-highest of his career, and his points per game (0.58) was his best since 2014-2015. He remains a physical presence and the puck was moving the right way when he was on the ice.

21-year-old winger Anders Bjork started the season playing with Marchand and Bergeron, but then injuries and slumps conspired to limit his playing time. With so many other rookies stepping in, Bjork kind of got lost in the shuffle, but he's an intriguing option for next season.

Noel Acciari is a 26-year-old winger who adds some grit to Boston's fourth line, but he's also stuck in the defensive zone quite a bit. He's inexpensive and tries hard.

Ryan Donato had a terrific junior year at Harvard, and scored five goals in five games for Team USA at the Olympics, before adding nine points in 12 regular-season games for the Bruins. So, naturally, he was a healthy scratch for most of the postseason, appearing in just three games. Presumably, Donato will not be fighting for a roster spot next season.

Another rookie, 25-year-old centre Sean Kuraly anchored Boston's fourth line. He's a physical player who has shown that he can generate shots, if not necessarily goals, in his brief NHL career.

If the Bruins can't keep free agent centre Riley Nash, they will have some options to consider. They could take a big swing at a veteran like Paul Stastny or a less expensive alternative in Derek Ryan. Or, maybe the Bruins could move Backes or Heinen into the third-line centre role and sign a free agent winger like Blake Comeau.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • June 13, 2018

The Bruins may also want to explore the trade market. The likes of Charlie Coyle or Patrik Berglund might fit in that third-line centre spot if nothing materializes on other fronts.

Torey Krug	76	14	45	59	54.1
	0.0	100.1	64.7	20:24	\$5.25M
Charlie McAvoy	63	7	25	32	55.5
	2.7	101.5	55.7	22:09	\$917K
Zdeno Chara	73	7	17	24	53.9
	0.0	99.7	50.9	22:54	\$5.0M
Kevan Miller	68	1	15	16	52.9
	-0.4	99.5	53.5	19:28	\$2.5M
Brandon Carlo	76	0	6	6	52.1
	-2.1	100.5	54.3	19:14	\$789K
Adam McQuaid	38	1	3	4	51.5
	-4.8	98.0	63.0	15:42	\$2.75M
Nick Holden	73	4	13	17	47.4
	-0.5	99.6	42.2	19:00	\$1.65M UFA
Matt Grzelcyk	61	3	12	15	55.6
	2.7	103.8	55.5	16:44	\$859K RFA

Torey Krug is on the small side, but he's steadily improved, going from undrafted free agent signed out of Michigan State to putting up a career-high 59 points last season, the third straight year in which he played more than 20 minutes per game. His name has snuck into some trade rumours since the Bruins were eliminated, but that would be a risky move to be sure, as puck-moving defencemen are gaining more appreciation around the league.

Charlie McAvoy had an instant impact on the Boston blueline.

It's looking like the Bruins hit a home run when they selected Charlie McAvoy 14th overall in the 2016 Draft. He suffered a knee injury that limited him to 63 games, but McAvoy played big minutes as a rookie and the Bruins dominated with the 20-year-old on the ice (55.7 CF%, 56.1 SCF%, 60.0 GF%). He has the look of a number one defenceman and, potentially, a Norris Trophy candidate some day.

He's clearly not the dominant force that he was in his prime, but Zdeno Chara is 41-years-old and still playing effectively for nearly 23 minutes per game, though last season's average time on ice was his lowest since 2001-2002. Nevertheless, Big Z is now the steady defensive complement to McAvoy on Boston's top pair and keeps himself in such amazing physical condition that he may still have a few more years left.

30-year-old Kevan Miller isn't flashy, but he's established himself as a steady and hard-nosed presence on the back end for the Bruins. He played a career-high 19:28 per game last season and had a positive goal differential for the fourth time in five seasons.

A late-season ankle injury kept Brandon Carlo from playing in the postseason, but the 21-year-old showed some improvement in his second season. The hope will be that he can develop into a shutdown defender, but is still a work in progress.

Veteran Adam McQuaid saw his role reduced last season, and that may be a reflection of the league getting faster, which poses problems for the rough-and-tumble blueliner. He's going into the last year of his deal, so if there isn't a regular spot for McQuaid in Boston, perhaps another team would be interested in his services.

An undersized puck-moving defenceman, Matt Grzelcyk thrived in a third-pair role for the Bruins as a rookie – the Bruins outscored the opposition 44-22 at evens with Grzelcyk on the ice.

2017 first-round pick Urho Vaakanainen is in the pipeline, but he's still just 19-years-old, and the rest of Boston's defence prospects are kind of lean at the moment – this happens when two rookies step into regular

roles, as McAvoy and Grzelcyk did last season - so they may need to find some veteran depth just to have at the ready in case of injuries.

If the Bruins want to make a bold move on the blueline, they could take a run at John Carlson, the unrestricted free agent defenceman. He won't come cheaply, and it might require the Bruins to move a body (contract) or two, but he would certainly provide an immediate upgrade.

Tuukka Rask	54	34	14	5	.917
	.924	\$7.0M			
Anton Khudobin	31	16	6	7	.913
	.917	\$1.2M	UFA		

Tuukka Rask is now 31-years-old, and played 54 games last season, his fewest since 2012-2013. While his numbers aren't what they were in his best seasons, last year's .917 save percentage was still above average and that may be where he sits at this stage of his career: above average but not pushing the top tier like he was from 2012 through 2015.

The Bruins liked the work of backup Anton Khudobin, so they could try to keep him around, but given the decline in Rask's performance, Boston may want to shoot for an upgrade at the backup spot. Jonathan Bernier may be the best chance to do that via unrestricted free agency.

Urho Vaakanainen	D	43	4	7	11
	+8	Saipa Lappeenranta			
Ryan Donato	LW	29	26	17	43
	+15	Harvard (ECAC)			
Trent Frederic	C	36	17	15	32
	-9	Wisconsin (Big 10)			
Jakob Forsbacka-Karlsson	C	58	15	17	
	32	+3	Providence (AHL)		
Alexander Khokhlachev	C	52	19	31	
	50	+3	Moscow Spartak (KHL)		
Zach Senyshyn	RW	66	12	14	26
	+3	Providence (AHL)			
Jakub Zboril	D	68	4	15	19
	+12	Providence (AHL)			
Peter Cehlarik	RW	35	11	12	23
	+2	Providence (AHL)			
Jerrey Swayman	G	31			
	.921	Maine (HE)			
Jack Studnicka	C	66	22	50	72
	+18	Oshawa (OHL)			
Joona Koppanen	LW	45	2	12	14
	-2	Ilves Tampere (SML)			
Ryan Fitzgerald	C	65	21	16	37
	+5	Providence (AHL)			
Daniel Vladar	G	41			
	.911	Atlanta (ECHL)			
Colby Cave	C	72	11	22	33
	-1	Providence (AHL)			
Jeremy Lauzon	D	52	1	6	7
	+1	Providence (AHL)			

DRAFT

No first-round pick.

FREE AGENCY

The Bruins have approximately \$66.1M committed to the 2018-2019 salary cap for 17 players.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • June 13, 2018

NEEDS

One top-nine forward, depth forward, depth defenceman, backup goaltender

WHAT I SAID THE BRUINS NEEDED LAST YEAR

One top-nine forward, depth forwards, one top-pair defenceman

THEY ADDED

Danton Heinen, Jake DeBrusk, Sean Kuraly, Anders Bjork, Charlie McAvoy

TRADE MARKET

David Backes, Anders Bjork, Torey Krug, Adam McQuaid, Brandon Carlo

Brad Marchand	Patrice Bergeron	David Pastrnak
Jake DeBrusk	David Krejci	Danton Heinen
Ryan Donato	Derek Ryan*	David Backes
Tim Schaller	Sean Kuraly	Noel Acciari
Anders Bjork	Jakob Forsbacka-Karlsson	Peter Cehlarik
Colby Cave	Trent Frederic	Ryan Fitzgerald
Zdeno Chara	Charlie McAvoy	Tuukka Rask
Torey Krug	Kevan Miller	Jonathan Bernier*
Matt Grzelcyk	Brandon Carlo	Zane McIntyre
Jakub Jerabek*	Adam McQuaid	
Jakub Zboril	Emil Johansson	

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TSN.CA / Off-Season Game Plan: Toronto Maple Leafs

Scott Cullen

The Toronto Maple Leafs reached the playoffs for the second straight season, the first time since 2004 that they have gone to the playoffs in back-to-back seasons.

Off-Season Game Plan looks at a Leafs team that has lost in the first round in those most recent playoff appearances and is no longer satisfied with those results; they have expectations for more.

It's already been an interesting offseason for the Maple Leafs, as they promoted Kyle Dubas to general manager, resulting in the departures of Lou Lamoriello and Mark Hunter.

With Dubas now calling the shots, there are some big decisions on his desk. For starters, the Maple Leafs have lots of salary cap space for next season, enough that they could be big players in free agency, whether that means taking a shot at John Tavares or John Carlson or, I suppose, keeping James van Riemsdyk in the fold.

The issue for the Leafs is that the following season will be when new contracts are needed for Auston Matthews and Mitch Marner, presumably two big deals that will eat into whatever cap space still exists at that point, and those extensions could come as soon as this summer.

If Toronto can't secure the services of Tavares or Carlson, what will they do with their cap space? Will they be left to take a run at trades for players that have one year left on their contracts?

That seems like an approach that would be less than optimal and, with a new general manager and lots of cap room, it would come as no surprise if the Maple Leafs take advantage of this opportunity to make a big deal.

HEROES

Auston Matthews – He missed 20 games with injuries and may not have been 100% when he managed two points in seven playoff games, but the 20-year-old just had 63 points in 62 games. That'll play.

Mitch Marner – The sophomore winger had 16 points in the first 29 games of the season, but with the help of a line chance, he finished with a point per game the rest of the way.

Frederik Andersen – Matching his career average with a .918 save percentage might not be so noteworthy, but when the league is surrendering more goals and the Maple Leafs are giving up quality chances when he's in net, Andersen's steadiness in 66 starts kept this team on the playoff track.

ZEROES

Leo Komarov – After a couple of seasons in which he contributed solid secondary scoring, the veteran winger managed just seven goals in 74 games.

Ron Hainsey – It's possible that asking Hainsey to handle 22 minutes a night against top opposition is a little much at this stage of his career. He had his worst possession stats since 2012-2013 (47.7 CF%, -2.8 CFFRel%) and those shots against weren't easy pickings.

Tomas Plekanec – Granted, the Maple Leafs cut the veteran centre's ice time as he moved into a fourth-line role, and he was solid in the postseason, but two assists in 17 regular-season games was underwhelming.

Mitch Marner	82	22	47	69	51.7
	2.7	101.2	54.3	16:23	\$894K
Auston Matthews	62	34	29	63	50.0
	0.5	106.9	49.0	18:08	\$925K
Nazem Kadri	80	32	23	55	48.4
	-2.1	100.8	39.9	16:46	\$4.5M
Patrick Marleau	82	27	20	47	49.1
	-1.0	101.3	43.2	16:59	\$6.25M
Zach Hyman	82	15	25	40	49.7
	-0.1	104.2	47.5	17:21	\$2.25M
Connor Brown	82	14	14	28	49.4
	-0.5	100.5	51.6	15:01	\$2.1M
Matt Martin	50	3	9	12	49.0
	-1.5	100.1	41.3	7:59	\$2.5M
Kasperii Kapanen	38	7	2	9	50.5
	0.5	98.8	34.2	11:15	\$863K
Josh Leivo	16	1	3	4	47.7
	0.9	101.1	28.2	10:34	\$925K
Nathan Horton					\$5.3M
William Nylander	82	20	41	61	50.2
	0.5	105.7	47.6	16:41	\$894K
James van Riemsdyk		81	36	18	54
	54.3	6.0	100.5	60.8	14:54
					\$4.25M
					UFA



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • June 13, 2018

Tyler Bozak	81	11	32	43	52.3
	3.5	101.8	55.8	15:39	\$4.2M UFA
Tomas Plekanec	77	6	20	26	51.4
	0.0	98.4	39.1	15:08	\$6.0M UFA
Leo Komarov	74	7	12	19	45.1
	-5.8	99.2	34.8	15:47	\$2.95M UFA
Dominic Moore	50	6	6	12	49.3
	-0.3	100.8	37.5	10:18	\$1.0M UFA

He might look like a high school sophomore, but Mitch Marner is a bad man with the puck on his stick. The 21-year-old is one of the league's most creative, and daring, players. Once he joined Nazem Kadri's line, after a relatively slow start, Marner's production took off and there should be no question that he's a core piece around which the Maple Leafs can build.

Mitch Marner adds flair to the Maple Leafs' attack.

The first overall pick in the 2016 Draft, Auston Matthews ran into some injury problems in his second season, but he's still scored 61 even-strength goals in his first two NHL seasons; that's tied with Connor McDavid for the most even-strength goals in the past two seasons (and Matthews has played 20 fewer games).

Matthews has lived up to the hype, and then some, so the Maple Leafs know that he's central to their future, and explains why there could be any concern when it's suggested that there is a rift between Matthews and head coach Mike Babcock. It's not unreasonable for Matthews to want to play more than 18 minutes per game, and if ice time is all that's up for debate, that would seem to be an easily solvable problem. If there's something more, then the Maple Leafs will have to manage carefully so that two of their most expensive assets are headed in the same direction.

Nazem Kadri provides outstanding value for the Maple Leafs. He's a skilled player who plays with an edge and has notched a dozen power-play goals in each of the past two years to help him score 32 goals in back-to-back seasons.

He's 38-years-old, but Patrick Marleau just scored 27 goals and didn't miss a game for the ninth consecutive season. There probably isn't much reason to be concerned about Marleau's performance over the last two years on his contract, but the concern would be related to tying up more than \$6-million per season in Marleau because that will most likely cost the Maple Leafs other (obviously younger) players; a James van Riemsdyk, for example.

A favourite of head coach Mike Babcock, Zach Hyman was more productive in his second full season. He's still not a big scorer like linemates Matthews and William Nylander, but Hyman is the mucker who digs in the corners for loose pucks and complements those players. It's fair to wonder if that brings out the very best in those highly-skilled linemates, but this is an established preference for Babcock, who operated similarly for years in Detroit.

After a 20-goal rookie season in 2016-2017, Connor Brown slipped to 14 goals last season, but the rest of his game wasn't dramatically different. His ice time and shots per game were both down a little, but it's still reasonable to expect Brown will fill a complementary role in the Toronto lineup.

When the Maple Leafs signed Matt Martin to a four-year contract as a free agent, it appeared regrettable from the moment the ink dried, and yet he was a regular in the lineup for a year-and-a-half before the Maple Leafs finally made some changes and then suddenly Martin couldn't get back into the lineup, playing three games in the last two-and-a-half months. This doesn't mean that Martin can't fill a role, and maybe the Maple Leafs could find another team that would be more inclined to play Martin regularly, but it means that his physical presence doesn't necessarily provide a great return on investment.

When Kasper Kapanen earned his place in the Maple Leafs lineup, the injection of speed made the team more dangerous, and Kapanen could move up the depth chart more easily because he has the speed and skill to be more than a fourth-liner and penalty killer. Next season, he'll have a chance to play from the start.

There's a reasonable case to make that 25-year-old Josh Leivo is an NHL-calibre winger, as he's put up 22 points in 57 career games, but he's been kept in the press box so much that it's hard to really know what he could do with a real opportunity. Nevertheless, he's under contract for next season, so either the Maple Leafs can play him, keep him buried, or consider using him as an asset to deal.

One of the Maple Leafs' strengths is that they have inexpensive prospects coming in the pipeline and that helps free up money to spend elsewhere. Andreas Johnsson seems assured of a spot on next year's team after impressing in a late-season audition. Miro Aaltonen, Par Lindholm and Carl Grundstrom are some more forwards on entry-level deals that could earn a spot on the roster, or at least be a short cab ride away when needed.

Of course, the Maple Leafs have enough cap room to take a big swing in free agency and both John Tavares and John Carlson would fit various needs. Tavares is obviously the big prize in free agency this year and the Maple Leafs would surely love to bring him home. It would be expensive, but if Tavares wants to play in Toronto, the Maple Leafs can probably create the room to make it happen, and if it forces difficult decisions down the road, they can cross that proverbial bridge when they get to it.

If Toronto allows Leo Komarov to leave via free agency and manage to find a taker for Martin, they also might want to add a cheaper fourth-liner who could check and still play with some physicality. Maybe someone like J.T. Brown or Curtis McKenzie would do the trick.

Morgan Rielly	76	6	46	52	50.8
	2.0	101.1	45.2	21:36	\$5.0M
Jake Gardiner	82	5	47	52	49.4
	-0.7	102.3	47.8	22:32	\$4.05M
Ron Hainsey	80	4	19	23	47.7
	-2.8	102.3	41.3	21:52	\$3.0M
Nikita Zaitsev	60	5	8	13	47.4
	-3.7	102.3	45.6	22:13	\$4.5M
Travis Dermott	37	1	12	13	54.8
	6.4	103.8	51.3	16:00	\$863K
Connor Carrick	47	4	8	12	52.5
	3.1	101.0	58.1	15:08	\$750K
Andreas Borgman	48	3	8	11	50.2
	0.6	102.3	55.5	13:41	\$925K
Roman Polak	54	2	10	12	48.0
	-1.3	100.5	40.7	17:39	\$1.1M UFA

Given more of an offensive role in his fifth NHL season, 24-year-old Morgan Rielly delivered a career-high 52 points, with 25 coming on the power play. He's a terrific skater and moves the puck well, but his defensive game isn't necessarily where it needs to be if he's going to be considered a top-tier defenceman. He may well be Toronto's best defenceman, but it's not really known if that's going to be good enough get where they ultimately want to go.

Morgan Rielly had a breakout season, putting up 52 points.

A smooth skater who frequently makes zone exits look easy, then later make an egregious turnover, Jake Gardiner has consistently generated positive shot differentials and, over the past two seasons, the Maple Leafs have outscored the opposition 140-104 at 5-on-5 with Gardiner on the ice.

That doesn't sound like someone who should be under fire, but after an especially rough performance in a Game Seven loss against Boston, he



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • June 13, 2018

doesn't seem to have the steadiest footing in the organization. Gardiner is going into the last year of his contract and, given the deals that the team needs to get done elsewhere, he may be playing out that last year.

The Maple Leafs put a lot on 37-year-old Ron Hainsey, including asking him to spend about four minutes per game on the penalty kill. After a solid first month or so, his possession numbers dropped dramatically; perhaps an indication that he was being asked to do too much. The challenge for the Maple Leafs is finding someone to play the right side that will allow them to cut back on Hainsey's ice time.

Signing Nikita Zaitsev to a seven-year deal after he had played one year in the NHL was a questionable decision, putting an optimistic spin on those first-year results, and last season wasn't terribly encouraging for what lays ahead. The Maple Leafs outscored the opposition with Zaitsev on the ice, but he had the worst shot differentials among Toronto defencemen. Given their investment, Toronto had better hope he can handle a top-four role.

Calling up 21-year-old Travis Dermott gave the Maple Leafs another competent puck-moving defenceman. He rode ridiculous percentages (104.0 PDO) to have the Maple Leafs outscore opponents 28-13 with him on the ice at 5-on-5, but had outstanding possession stats (54.8 CF%, +6.4 CFRel%) too, so there is a lot of reason to be hopeful that the 2015 second-rounder will grow into a significant piece on the Toronto blueline.

He's on the smaller side, and maybe that's contributing to why he has a hard time securing a regular spot in the lineup, but Connor Carrick has had strong results (52.7 CF%, 53.1 GF%) in the limited role he's received with the Maple Leafs. It wouldn't be the worst idea in the world to just give him a regular role and see if those results can hold up.

The Leafs kept Andreas Borgman around until the beginning of February, before sending him to the American Hockey League, and his results were fine – Toronto outshot and outscored the opposition with him on the ice. He adds a physical dimension and could be worth another look next season.

Toronto has signed 25-year-old Russian blueliner Igor Ozhiganov, a right shot defender who is 6-foot-2 and plays a physical game. If he transitions smoothly to North America, maybe he can be a part of the Maple Leafs defence corps.

Toronto has some other candidates for playing time coming from the AHL Marlies. Top prospect Timothy Liljegren is still just 19, but if he's playing well next season, he could be ready for a look. Otherwise, Justin Holl or Andrew Nielsen, who both have multiple years of AHL experience, offer interesting depth possibilities.

Frederik Andersen	66	38	21	5	.918
	.921	\$5.0M			
Curtis McElhinney	18	11	5	1	.934
	.949	\$850K			

Frederik Andersen has been a very good goaltender for two seasons in Toronto, closer to outstanding if his Octobers of those seasons (during which he has a .889 save percentage) are thrown out of the equation.

Frederik Andersen gives the Leafs a chance to win most nights.

Before joining the Maple Leafs, Curtis McElhinney was a clearly below-average goaltender. In 32 games for Toronto, though, he has a .925 save percentage, which is surprisingly above average performance. He's still under contract for another year and, given that performance, it would be fine to keep him around, but they also might have more promising options.

Both Garret Sparks and Calvin Pickard could very well be NHL-calibre goaltenders. Sparks, 24, has been outstanding in the American Hockey League and is ready for the next level, whether it's with the Leafs or another team. Pickard is a 26-year-old who has a .913 save percentage in 87 career NHL games, but somehow he was stuck in the AHL.

Timothy Liljegren	D	44	1	16	17
+12	Toronto (AHL)				
Carl Grundstrom	RW	35	17	7	24
+8	Frolunda (SHL)				
Andreas Johnsson	LW	54	26	28	54
+16	Toronto (AHL)				
Joseph Woll	G	30			
.915	Boston College (HE)				
Jeremy Bracco	RW	50	6	26	32
+6	Toronto (AHL)				
Eemeli Rasanen	D	61	5	28	33
+16	Kingston (OHL)				
Garret Sparks	G	43			
.936	Toronto (AHL)				
Andrew Nielsen	D	65	6	20	26
+3	Toronto (AHL)				
Dmytro Timashov	LW	67	13	21	34
+5	Toronto (AHL)				
Josh Leivo	LW	16	1	3	4
0	Toronto (NHL)				
Miro Aaltanen	C	64	20	23	43
+29	Toronto (AHL)				
Pierre Engvall	LW	31	7	13	20
+12	HV71 Jonkoping (SHL)				
Trevor Moore	LW	68	12	21	33
+1	Toronto (AHL)				
Yegor Korshkov	RW	52	8	18	26
+4	Yaroslavl (KHL)				
Igor Ozhiganov	D	42	2	7	9
+12	CSKA Moscow (KHL)				
Calvin Pickard	G	33			
.918	Toronto (AHL)				
Adam Brooks	C	57	8	11	19
+7	Toronto (AHL)				
Justin Holl	D	60	7	21	28
+23	Toronto (AHL)				
Par Lindholm	C	49	18	29	47
+18	Skelleftea (SHL)				
Calle Rosen	D	62	4	18	22
+1	Toronto (AHL)				

DRAFT

25th – Ryan Merkley, Jared Mclsaac, Joe Veleno, Ryan McLeod

FREE AGENCY

The Maple Leafs have approximately \$52.7M committed to the 2018-2019 salary cap for 16 players.

NEEDS

Two top-nine forwards, depth forwards, one top-pair defenceman

WHAT I SAID THE MAPLE LEAFS NEEDED LAST YEAR

A fourth-line centre, one top-pair defenceman, backup goaltender

THEY ADDED

Patrick Marleau, Dominic Moore, Andreas Borgman



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • June 13, 2018

TRADE MARKET

Connor Brown, Matt Martin, Kasperii Kapanen, Josh Leivo, Nikita Zaitsev, Curtis McElhinney

Zach Hyman	Auston Matthews	William Nylander
Patrick Marleau	John Tavares*	Mitch Marner
Andreas Johnsson	Nazem Kadri	Connor Brown
Kasperii Kapanen	Miro Aaltonen	J.T. Brown*
Josh Leivo	Par Lindholm	Carl Grundstrom
Trevor Moore	Frederik Gauthier	Pierre Engvall
Morgan Rielly	Ron Hainsey	Frederik Andersen
Jake Gardiner	Nikita Zaitsev	Garret Sparks
Travis Dermott	Connor Carrick	Calvin Pickard
Andreas Borgman	Igor Ozhiganov*	
Andrew Nielsen	Justin Holl	

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TSN.CA / Off-Season Game Plan: Anaheim Ducks

Scott Cullen

The Anaheim Ducks made the playoffs for a sixth straight season, the fifth consecutive year that the team topped 100 points.

Off-Season Game Plan examines a Ducks team that has a mix of youth and veteran talent, but is running into some trouble with some of its more prominent older players.

With injuries getting the better of Ryan Kesler, and Corey Perry in steady decline that left Ryan Getzlaf and Cam Fowler among the four highest-paid players on the team and both missed significant time with injuries last season. When the money being spent is not met by production, that leads to trouble.

The challenge facing GM Bob Murray is how to get out of this mess. It's not like the Ducks are so bad that they should blow it up and start over, but there are going to be real challenges keeping this team in the playoff mix.

If there is one big, bold move to make this summer, it could be to trade Perry, a 33-year-old who had scored at least 30 goals in five straight full seasons before Randy Carlyle took over behind the Ducks bench. Perry has 36 goals in two seasons since; not enough production for a cap hit of \$8.625-million.

Failing a Perry blockbuster, and he has a no-movement clause to complicate matters even further, the Ducks may keep the core intact for another year. They have an excellent goaltender, one of the best shutdown defensive pairs in the game, and some high-end forward talent. It's enough to be competitive, but is it enough to go all the way?

HEROES

John Gibson – The 24-year-old netminder was my choice for the Vezina Trophy, finishing with a .926 save percentage in 60 games, and had the best all-situations differential between save percentage and expected save percentage.

Josh Manson – The shutdown blueliner added some offence to his game, scoring a career-high 37 points, and the Ducks outscored the opposition 70-40 with Manson on the ice for 5-on-5 play.

Rickard Rakell – For the second straight season, the Ducks winger topped 30 goals, this time netting a career-best 34 on his way to a career-high 69 points.

ZEROES

Corey Perry – It's hardly earth-shattering news that a 33-year-old winger might be declining, but Perry managed 17 goals and 49 points, his lowest full-season point total since 2006-2007.

Ryan Kesler – Hip surgery naturally slowed down the 33-year-old centre, but he managed just 14 points in 44 games after returning to the lineup, and he ended up with worst shot metrics (48.3 CF%, -2.7 CFRel%) of his career.

Kevin Biekša – The veteran blueliner missed time after breaking his hand, but also was buried in his own end (44.5 CF%, -5.9 CFRel%) and outscored 34-20 during 5-on-5 play.

Rickard Rakell	77	34	35	69	49.8
1.3	101.9	54.1	19:25	\$3.789M	
Ryan Getzlaf	56	11	50	61	52.0
2.5	101.6	51.3	21:26	\$8.25M	
Adam Henrique	81	24	26	50	48.1
-0.9	102.7	46.3	17:47	\$4.0M	
Corey Perry	71	17	32	49	47.4
-1.3	101.3	53.3	17:47	\$8.625M	
Jakob Silfverberg	77	17	23	40	50.1
1.8	101.6	40.7	17:58	\$3.75M	
Andrew Coglianò	80	12	23	35	49.7
1.5	102.3	46.3	15:12	\$3.0M	
Ryan Kesler	44	8	6	14	48.3
-2.7	98.4	39.0	18:02	\$6.875M	
Patrick Eaves					\$3.15M
Ondrej Kase	66	20	18	38	52.6
3.7	102.9	54.1	13:55	\$670K	RFA
Nick Ritchie	76	10	17	27	49.7
1.3	100.8	53.6	13:11	\$894K	RFA
Derek Grant	66	12	12	24	46.2
-1.7	103.0	49.5	11:06	\$650K	UFA
Antoine Vermette	64	8	8	16	45.4
-3.1	99.7	43.4	13:45	\$1.75M	UFA
Jason Chimera	74	3	10	13	43.2
-6.1	99.2	38.9	10:18	\$2.25M	UFA
J.T. Brown	47	2	5	7	50.5
-2.9	96	47.2	9:04	\$1.25M	UFA
Chris Kelly	12	0	2	2	39.6
-9.1	110.7	62.5	7:40	\$1.25M	UFA

The next generation of Ducks stars, 25-year-old Rickard Rakell has scored 67 goals in 148 games over the past two seasons; his 54 even-strength goals in that time has him tied with Nikita Kucherov for fourth. He's been a high-percentage shooter (16.5% over the past two seasons), but did generate nearly three shots on goal per game last season.

Injuries knocked Ryan Getzlaf out of the lineup for 26 games, the most he's missed in a single season, but the 33-year-old continues to be one of the game's top playmakers, putting up better than a point per game for the first time since 2013-2014.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • June 13, 2018

The Ducks got Adam Henrique, along with Joseph Blandisi, from the Devils in a trade for Sami Vatanen and Henrique buried 20 goals in 57 games for Anaheim. He gives the team much-needed help down the middle of the ice and has topped 20 goals four times in the past five seasons.

It's more than a little troubling that Corey Perry has seen his point totals drop so steadily (62 to 53 to 49 the past three seasons) and last season he generated 2.37 shots on goal per game, his lowest rate since 2006-2007. If he's going to be reduced to secondary offensive contributor, that's something of a problem since he brings a cap hit of \$8.625-million.

The Ducks have to make some tough decisions involving Ryan Kesler and Corey Perry.

A steady two-way winger, Jakob Silfverberg has ranged between 39 and 46 points in each of the past four seasons, all while starting more shifts in the defensive zone because he's taking on difficult defensive assignments. He will be going into the final year of his current contract, so there is going to be a decision to be made on his long-term status.

The only two games that Andrew Cogliano has ever missed in his 11-year NHL career are due to a suspension from last season but, otherwise, it was a pretty typical season for Cogliano, who plays a reliable two-way game and has had 35 points in each of the past two seasons.

As Ryan Kesler tries to recover from his hip woes, it has been mentioned as a possibility that he could miss next season. That would leave a hole in the Anaheim lineup, but if Kesler isn't physically capable of playing better than he did last season then that hole already existed. He's played hard for a lot of years and that may finally be catching up to him.

Drafted in the seventh round of the 2014 Draft, Ondrej Kase has emerged as a steal, scoring 20 goals in 66 games last season. His role, and hopefully his production, should continue to increase.

Power forward Nick Ritchie has recorded more than 200 hits in back-to-back seasons and has managed 55 points over the past two years. He was the 10th overall pick in 2014; will he show more offensive acumen and turn into something better than a third-line banger?

The Ducks do have a couple of very good forward prospects that may be close to challenging for jobs, but it probably makes sense for Sam Steel and Troy Terry to start in the American Hockey League.

That means that there should be a need for the Ducks to grab a couple of free agent centres to fill the third and fourth-line spots. Tyler Bozak, Derek Ryan, Tomas Plekanec, Valtterii Filppula, Kyle Brodziak and Mark Letestu are among the candidates that would seem to fill the holes in the Anaheim lineup.

Josh Manson	80	7	30	37	50.7
2.6	103.9	43.9	20:21	\$825K	
Cam Fowler	67	8	24	32	48.8
0.6	100.5	47.8	24:51	\$4.0M	
Hampus Lindholm	69	13	18	31	52.6
5.3	101.7	48.1	22:44	\$5.206M	
Marcus Pettersson	22	1	3	4	44.4
-5.6	104.6	51.3	13:37	\$794K	
Korbinian Holzer	16	0	0	0	41.9
-2.3	98.3	54.9	11:37	\$900K	
Brandon Montour	80	9	23	32	49.3
1.4	101.2	51.8	20:21	\$925K	RFA
Kevin Bieksa	59	0	8	8	44.5
-5.9	98.2	46.5	18:01	\$4.0M	UFA

A physical presence on the blueline, Josh Manson upped his offensive game last season and plays a big role on the Ducks' shutdown pairing.

The 26-year-old is inked to a reasonable deal for his significant two-way contributions.

John Gibson and Josh Manson are, along with Hampus Lindholm, the defensive backbone of the Ducks.

The return of Randy Carlyle has worked out well for Cam Fowler, the 26-year-old who has had two of his best seasons in the past two years. A late-season shoulder injury prevented Fowler from participating in the playoffs, leaving a big hole on the Anaheim blueline.

Although he has recorded 30 or more points three times in his five NHL seasons, Hampus Lindholm doesn't score enough to get big fanfare, but he's a legitimate star on the Ducks defence. His relative possession stats rank near the top among defencemen over the past three seasons and, in his career, the Ducks have averaged 18.8 more goals for than against per season at evens when Lindholm is on the ice.

Lanky 22-year-old Marcus Pettersson got a taste of NHL action last season and while he was soundly outshot, he rode favourable percentages (104.6 PDO) to a positive goal differential. With some potential turnover on the Anaheim blueline, Pettersson may be in line for a regular role next season.

Korbinian Holzer's whole career has been spent on the roster bubble, as he's never played more than 34 games in a season, and he played just 16 games for the Ducks last season. He's still under contract for another year, but the Ducks should be able to do better.

In his first full NHL season, 24-year-old Brandon Montour established himself as a bona fide top four defenceman, playing 20 minutes per game, putting up 32 points with favourable possession numbers. As a restricted free agent, he's due for a new contract and the Ducks may want to invest long-term in Montour.

If the Ducks don't bring back Kevin Bieksa, there may be opportunities available on the third pair. Anaheim could look for an inexpensive free agent like Andrej Sustr, Luke Schenn or Christian Folin, but there may also be room for prospects Jacob Larsson and Andy Welinski.

John Gibson	60	31	18	7	.926
.927	\$2.3M				
Ryan Miller	28	12	6	6	.928
.941	\$2.0M				

Over the past two seasons, John Gibson has a .925 save percentage in 112 games, performance that moves the 24-year-old among the top players at the position. He can improve his consistency, but his results behind a spotty defence have been impressive.

37-year-old Ryan Miller has settled into a backup role, and has been very good. Although he played just 28 games last season, Miller posted a .928 save percentage, the second best mark of his career.

Sam Steel	C	54	33	50	83
+27	Regina (WHL)				
Jacob Larsson	D	50	3	13	16
+12	San Diego (AHL)				
Troy Terry	RW	39	14	34	48
+21	Denver (NCHC)				
Maxime Comtois	LW	54	44	41	85
+43	Victoriaville (QMJHL)				
Marcus Pettersson	D	44	0	14	14
+7	San Diego (AHL)				
Max Jones	LW	31	19	5	24
-6	Kingston (OHL)				
Kevin Roy	LW	45	14	23	37
+4	San Diego (AHL)				



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • June 13, 2018

Josh Mahura +36	D	60	22	47	69
		Regina (WHL)			
Antoine Morand +16	C	66	26	50	76
		Acadie-Bathurst (QMJHL)			
Jack Kopacka +28	LW	66	31	32	63
		Sault Ste. Marie (OHL)			
Giovanni Fiore -4	RW	65	18	12	30
		San Diego (AHL)			
Kalle Kossila +2	LW	55	21	33	54
		San Diego (AHL)			
Andy Welinski -11	D	51	10	24	34
		San Diego (AHL)			
Joseph Blandisi +1	LW	46	8	21	29
		San Diego (AHL)			
Keaton Thompson -12	D	64	5	11	16
		San Diego (AHL)			

Jeff Paterson

VANCOUVER – There's an adage in hockey that coaches coach and managers manage. And for the most part, that's the way the Vancouver Canucks operate. But with plenty of time on his hands since the season ended on April 9th and with oodles of organizational money to spend, head coach Travis Green admits he's spent the past few weeks poring over lists of potential players he'd like the hockey club to pursue when National Hockey League free agency begins on July 1st.

With a laugh, Green says he makes those desires abundantly clear to GM Jim Benning on an almost daily basis.

"Jim and I have a really good relationship that way," the coach tells tsn1040.ca in a telephone interview from his off-season home in Southern California. "I talk to Jim every day and we're going through players every day. I go through the list and he goes through the list. I feel lucky I get to work with a guy who is 'on' 24/7. We've got a good relationship that way and we can be open and honest about players and what we like and what we don't."

While Green refused to name names or get into specifics about the kinds of players the Canucks may be seeking when this year's signing window opens (tampering comes with a hefty fine as the Canucks found out at the draft two years ago in Buffalo), the coach believes there are players at varying price points that meet the needs of a hockey club with plenty of holes to fill.

According to capfriendly.com, the Canucks have \$22 million in available cap space for the coming season although they still have five of their own restricted free agents to deal with: Sven Baertschi, Markus Granlund, Jake Virtanen, Derrick Pouliot and Troy Stecher. Even with modest raises for that group, the Canucks will wade into the free agent waters with plenty of money to spend if they so choose.

Green knows the challenge for a hockey club trying to rebuild is to resist the temptation to overspend on free agents. It's equally important that the Canucks don't add veteran players who might stunt the growth of emerging prospects like Brock Boeser, Elias Pettersson, Adam Gaudette and possibly Jonathan Dahlen.

"With the Sedins gone you look at our lineup, I think we have only seven guys in our lineup who were drafted (by the Canucks) and within a couple of years that number could be up to 14," Green says. "And that's what you need to win Stanley Cups. We're obviously looking at free agency and seeing how we can tweak it and see if there's something that works. It's easier said than done to just add a free agent in today's world."

While his job is to coach, Green feels he's in a much better position this summer to offer opinions on potential free agents than he was a year ago when he took the job behind the Canucks bench. At that point, he'd been in Utica for four years at an arm's length from the NHL and without the working knowledge of players around the league that he has now.

Not only does he better understand the needs of his own team, he believes he knows the types and tendencies of players available that could help the Canucks next season and beyond.

"For sure, it has definitely helped," he says of his first season as an NHL head coach. "It's like anything – you watch from a far and then you get there, I just feel like I know the league better. I feel better prepared this year than last year."

Last year on July 1st, somewhat surprisingly, the Canucks emerged as one of the busiest teams in the league adding Sam Gagner, Michael Del Zotto, Anders Nilsson, Alexander Burmistrov and Patrick Wiercioch. On September 1st, they added Thomas Vanek in what proved to be their most-prudent foray into the free agent market.

With nearly a year to reflect on the actions of the hockey club, Green liked a lot of what management did in free agency last summer, a notion not embraced by many in the Canucks' fan-base.

DRAFT

23rd – Ty Smith, Ryan Merkley, Jared Mclsaac, Ryan McLeod

FREE AGENCY

The Ducks have approximately \$65.8M committed to the 2018-2019 salary cap for 17 players.

NEEDS

One top-nine forward, depth forwards, a couple of defencemen

WHAT I SAID THE DUCKS NEEDED LAST YEAR

One top-six winger, backup goaltender, financial flexibility

THEY ADDED

Derek Grant, Dennis Rasmussen, Francois Beauchemin, Ryan Miller

TRADE MARKET

Corey Perry, Jakob Silfverberg, Nick Ritchie

Rickard Rakell	Ryan Getzlaf	Ondrej Kase
Andrew Cogliano	Adam Henrique	Jakob Silfverberg
Nick Ritchie	Tyler Bozak*	Corey Perry
Kevin Roy	Kyle Brodziak*	Eric Fehr*
Kalle Kossila	Sam Steel	Troy Terry
Nic Kerdiles	Ryan Kesler	Giovanni Fiore
Hampus Lindholm	Josh Manson	John Gibson
Cam Fowler	Brandon Montour	Ryan Miller
Marcus Pettersson	Andrej Sustr*	Kevin Boyle
Jacob Larsson	Andy Welinski	
Jaycob Megna	Korbinian Holzer	

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TSN.CA / Canucks' Green has wish list heading to July 1st



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • June 13, 2018

"I think a lot of people think maybe we didn't do that well, but we needed to get some players on our team," the coach explains. "You saw how many players deep we went on the roster during the season. You have to put a lineup on the ice. Vanek brought a great veteran presence, timely goal-scoring and probably helped Brock along the way. Hey, he helped me along the way. I really enjoyed coaching Vanek."

"I don't think Gagner had the year he wanted, but I was glad he got it going a little bit at the end of the year. He's a guy who has been in the league a while and he'll be able to help a lot of our young guys through some tough times."

"And Del Zotto was a great example for some of our young guys off the ice as far as working out and being a real pro. After looking at, I thought it was a pretty good year in free agency for us."

The coach may have liked last year's additions and what they brought to the organization off the ice, but games aren't won in the weight room and mentorship doesn't score many goals. The Canucks need to be strategic in their free agent signings this year and try to find value on the market rather than writing blank cheques.

Reading between the lines, Travis Green doesn't sound like the Canucks will be chasing the biggest fish swimming in this year's free agent waters. They may leave their lines in a little longer and hope to get a nibble from players they feel can help them address specific needs.

"I think you can add players in free agency that are going to help you in certain areas," he says. "You're not always going to just sign big-name players who are going to come in and be 30-goal scorers and top players for you. A lot of times, those guys don't make it to free agency these days. Sometimes you're looking to add character to your group or mentorship. We have lots of things to consider as we move to July 1st. Every year, it's an exciting time, and I'm confident Jim is going to do a great job again."

It's only three weeks now until the Canucks, and their fans, will get the answers they're looking for.

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