



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • June 15, 2020

THE NEWS & OBSERVER

NHL to allow training camps to open July 10

By Chip Alexander

The National Hockey League has moved one step closer to resuming and finishing its season.

The NHL and NHL Players Association announced Thursday that team training camps will open Friday, July 10 for the 24 teams involved in the league's Return to Play format. The NHL and NHLPA stressed that the date was contingent on medical and safety conditions, given concerns about the coronavirus pandemic.

Still to be decided: the length of training camps and the official starting date for Phase 4 of the restart, in which the 24 teams will compete to determine the 2020 Stanley Cup champion.

Carolina Hurricanes president and general manager Don Waddell has said training camps might run for about 17 days. Waddell said he expected teams to be allowed one or two exhibition games before the start of the eight qualifying round series.

The NHL and NHLPA still have other logistical issues to agree on and resolve. The NHL has not designated the two "hub" cities that will host the competition. There are still

agreements to be reached by the NHL and NHLPA on COVID-19 testing, housing, transportation and how much contact players will have with their families during the competition.

The 24-team format will have the top four teams in each of the the Eastern and Western Conferences facing off in round-robin competition to determine the top four seeds in each conference. The other 16 teams will have best-of-five qualifying rounds , with the eight winners joining the eight top seeds in the 16-team Stanley Cup field.

The Hurricanes will face off [against the New York Rangers](#) — a team that won all four games against Carolina before the 2019-20 season was suspended March 12 — in the qualifying round.

The NHL and NHLPA are allowing players to use their team training facilities for voluntary, small-group workouts. On-ice training sessions are limited to no more than six players.

The Canes are hoping their [new practice facility](#) at the Wake Competition Center in Morrisville will be open for the beginning of training camp.

Carolina PHWA chapter nominates Canes' James Reimer for Masterton

By Chip Alexander

The Carolina chapter of the Professional Hockey Writers Association has nominated goaltender James Reimer for the Bill Masterton Memorial Trophy, which honors perseverance, sportsmanship and dedication to hockey.

The Hurricanes acquired Reimer from the Florida Panthers in June in a move that was mostly viewed as a way to shed the contract of Scott Darling. But rather than become an afterthought in Carolina's crowded goaltending situation, the 32-year-old Reimer instead became a [key part of the team's rotation](#).

Reimer went 14-6-2 with a 2.66 goals-against average and .914 save percentage in his first season with Carolina. Reimer did not have a regulation loss after the calendar

flipped to 2020, going 6-0-2 in his last eight decisions — the longest stretch of his career without a regulation loss since a 10-game run in 2011.

The Masterton Trophy honors the late Bill Masterton, the only NHL player to die from injuries sustained in a game. First awarded in 1968, the Masterton Trophy is under the trusteeship of the PHWA. Members of the PHWA also vote on the NHL's first and second All-Star teams as well as the Hart, Norris, Calder and Selke trophies.

The Carolina chapter also awards the Josef Vasicek Award to the Hurricanes player most cooperative with the media each season and annually selects a most valuable player.



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Carolina Hurricanes not reopening facilities for voluntary player workouts

By Chip Alexander

As of Monday, the NHL was allowing teams to hold small, voluntary group workouts as the second phase of its return-to-play format officially began.

While several teams planned to reopen their facilities for the players, the Carolina Hurricanes made the decision to wait. A team official said Monday that there were about seven or eight players in the area, but by mutual agreement they would continue to train on their own for now.

While the NHL and NHL Players Association agreed on Phase 2 and its rollout, there has been no date announced for a start of team training camps — or when Phase 3 will start. The best guess has been between mid-July at the earliest, but the league continues to consult with health officials about the coronavirus pandemic and work on the safety precautions and other logistics necessary in getting everyone back on the ice and competing.

The Arizona Coyotes and Pittsburgh Penguins are reopening their facilities for the voluntary workouts, which are limited to no more than six players on the ice at a time. According to NHL.com, the Philadelphia Flyers, New York Islanders, Toronto Maple Leafs, Edmonton Oilers and Vegas Golden Knights are expected to open up as well.

Canes captain Jordan Staal, in a recent Zoom video interview, said his training the past few months has involved “whatever you can get your hands on.” He said he’s been riding a stationary bike to “keep the heart rate at the right spot” along with some weight training.

“Basically just doing what you can to keep yourself in the best shape you can,” Staal said. “In talking to the group, everybody has kind of been doing the same and doing a good job keeping up, making sure we’re as close as we can to being 100 percent when we get going.

“It’s going to be different. There’s going to be some interesting hurdles.”

The NHL suspended play March 12 because of the rapid spread of COVID-19, joining the other major leagues in first postponing and eventually canceling regular-season games.

The Canes last played March 10 against the Detroit Red Wings, taking a 5-2 road victory and, at the time, maintaining their hold on the first wildcard playoff position in the Eastern Conference.

The NHL and NHLPA have agreed on a 24-team return-to-play format, with the teams divided at two “hub” cities that are still to be announced. After best-of-five qualifying rounds, the 16-team Stanley Cup playoffs will be conducted in best-of-seven series and a 2020 champion determined.

The Canes and Tampa Bay Lightning were the only two teams that voted against the format, which in effect added an extra playoff round, with three more wins needed to secure the Cup. The Canes are scheduled to face the New York Rangers in their qualifying round series.

“The goal is to win the Stanley Cup and obviously this gives a lot more teams a chance at it,” Canes forward Jordan Martinook said in a recent Zoom interview. “I know everybody on our team wants to win it, wants to come back and play.”

The Canes hope to open their new practice facility at the Wake Competition Center in July. The players have used PNC Arena and the Raleigh Center Ice facility for voluntary workouts in past years before the start of training camp.

The Coyotes, in a news release, detailed how they were approaching group workouts at Gila River Arena in Phase 2. It began Monday with medical evaluations as all players and staff were to be tested for COVID-19. The plan was for the on-ice workouts to begin Thursday.

Arizona said: “All individuals expecting to enter Gila River Arena will have completed a remote educational meeting prior to arriving at the rink. Club personnel will be divided into two groups, ‘Player Access’ and ‘No Player Access.’ ... The players will train in groups of six and must remain socially distant during both on- and off-ice sessions. Player groups will have specific arrival and departure times, as well as designated non-contact points of entry/exit to the building.”

Neither the media nor fans will be admitted for the workouts.



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NORTH STATE JOURNAL

Hurricanes' Reimer nominated for Masterton Trophy

BY CORY LAVALETTE

RALEIGH — Goalie James Reimer has been selected by the Carolina chapter of the Professional Hockey Writers Association as the Hurricanes' nominee for the Bill Masterton Memorial Trophy, which honors perseverance, sportsmanship and dedication to hockey.

After coming to Carolina in a trade with Florida that helped the team shed Scott Darling's contract, the 32-year-old Reimer overcame a crowded goaltending situation and went 14-6-2 with a 2.66 goals-against average and .914 save percentage in 25 appearances in his first season with the Hurricanes.

It marks the second straight year that a first-year Hurricanes goalie was selected as the team's nominee for the award. Curtis McElhinney was last year's nominee. Reimer is the fifth goalie nominated by Carolina since the franchise moved to North Carolina in 1997, joining McElhinney, Dan Ellis, Kevin Weekes and Arturs Irbe.

Three Hurricanes have been named finalists for the award. Forwards Derek Ryan and Jordan Staal were finalists in consecutive years in 2017 and 2018, and Ron Francis was a finalist in 2002. Current Hurricanes coach Rod Brind'Amour

was nominated by the PHWA Carolina chapter three times (2004, 2009, 2010). NHL ironman Doug Jarvis is the franchise's lone Masterton winner, earning the award in 1987 with the Hartford Whalers.

The Hurricanes are Reimer's fourth team in 10 NHL seasons. A fourth-round pick by the Maple Leafs in 2006 out of the WHL's Red Deer Rebels, Reimer played six seasons in Toronto and appeared in at least 32 games in each campaign before he was traded to San Jose at the 2016 trade deadline.

Reimer then signed a five-year contract to be the heir apparent to Roberto Luongo in Florida, but the Panthers instead traded the Manitoba native to the Hurricanes in exchange for Darling and a 2020 sixth-round draft pick and signed Sergei Bobrovsky to a seven-year, \$70 million contract. Reimer has one year remaining on his contract that will pay him \$3.1 million and cost \$3.4 million against the salary cap.

Reimer has split the net this season with Petr Mrazek, who started 38 games to Reimer's 24 before the season was paused due to the coronavirus pandemic.

THE ATHLETIC

Wait, who are the Hurricanes?: Part I of a line-by-line crash course

By Sara Civian

I caught up with my good friends at 99.9 The Fan last week out of the goodness of my own heart. Despite this act of generosity, they mustered up the sheer audacity to blindside me with a near-impossible question.

"Do you remember the Carolina Hurricanes?"

It gets worse.

"What, specifically, do you remember about the Carolina Hurricanes?"

I realized that was the first time in more than a month where I thought about on-ice hockey things.

If you're anything like me, you're getting all these notifications about Phase 500 and "training camp" and 700-paged plans and "The NHL and the NHLPA have reached an agreement, BUT..."



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All of that is pretty exhausting in itself, then you remember why you get these notifications in the first place: you love this game, specifically the Carolina Hurricanes, and you love the players on that team.

Wait. Who are they, again? Let's revisit that together in a multi-part series. We will do this objectively, line by line, based only on points. Somewhere out there, [Dom Luszczyszyn](#) just shuddered and he doesn't know why.

Forwards

Sebastian Aho

Projected roster spot: First-line center

"Why don't you explain this to me like I'm five?": Every season is a "breakout season" when you play for the Hurricanes and find yourself on some sort of Top-10 list, but the Hurricanes' leading scorer (38-28—66 in 68 games played) was developing into the on- and off-ice leader the team has needed in a first-line center. Aho was tied for sixth in the league with 38 goals and tied for first with four shorthanded goals. He hates losing.

First memory that comes to mind: When I think about Aho, I think about his hilarious sass. [When he got his 100th career goal](#) on Dec. 11, it was a two-goal game. [Hurricanes.com's Michael Smith](#) asked if he knew it was happening and he said yes. I then asked if he knew the next one was his 101st just to be a smart ass, and he said "I did the math."

Need an in-depth article?: [Here it is.](#)

Teuvo Teravainen

Projected roster spot: First-line right wing

"Why don't you explain this to me like I'm five?": I wouldn't say Teravainen is the "star" of the Hurricanes, but I'd say he's on a three-person list of "most important to overall team success." [Let's revisit him and Aho on the penalty kill.](#) Teravainen was 14th in the league with 48 assists (15-48—63), and I've never met someone with such a good shot who seems to hate shooting the puck — but it works so well for the Canes.

First memory that comes to mind: This is hard because I think Teravainen is the funniest person on the Canes. When we were doing the dressing room cleanout interviews last season, I noted that Rod Brind'Amour said he was impressed by how Teravainen's compete level improved.

He said: "Wait, he said something nice about me? That's good."

Need an in-depth article?: [Here is one of many.](#)

Andrei Svechnikov

Projected roster spot: [First-line left wing \(maniacal grin\)](#)

"Why don't you explain this to me like I'm five?": Proud owner of the first two self-proclaimed "Michigans" in NHL history — accomplished as a teenager. Work ethic as incredible as his talent, [elucidated when even Brind'Amour](#)

[gushes over him.](#) Stat line of 24-37—61 in 68 games. Future of the franchise.

First memory that comes to mind: There's so much generic back-and-forth in hockey media scrums at this point, I hate how transactional it feels but it is what it is. This is why I live for Svechnikov interviews on the road. He'll walk into the scrum and be like, "Hello, how is everyone?" and it will turn into an actual conversation, and no one from the opposing team media knows what to do. It's amazing.

Need an in-depth article?: There are too many, but Svechnikov himself is all about family. [So you should revisit his first NHL goal.](#)

Defensemen

Jordan Martinook was on the Spittin' Chiclets podcast this week and probably the best part of it was this statement about the Hurricanes defense:

"It's frustrating when you have to go up against these guys every practice," he laughed. "Your confidence isn't that high to begin with, then you get shut down every practice. It is not very fun."

Going toe-to-toe with the Hurricanes' blue line: Not Very Fun™

Jacob Slavin

Projected roster spot: First pairing, left side

"Why don't you explain this to me like I'm five?": Your favorite defenseman's favorite defenseman. His plus-30 was a tie for second-best in the NHL with — wait for it — his partner Dougie Hamilton. Colleague Adam Vingan [summed it up well in his Norris Trophy voter guide.](#)

First memory that comes to mind: One time I was having a meltdown in the bowels of Well Fargo Center and Slavin appeared out of nowhere and he's like "Are you OK?" I'm like "I'm lost," and he just pointed in the opposite direction and calmly says "Go that way."

He was correct!

But instead of that full story, recently [Slavin has been the most outspoken of the Hurricanes in response to George Floyd's death and the ensuing international conversation about racism.](#)

Need an in-depth article?: There's a good one on the way. [But for now, here you go.](#)

Dougie Hamilton

Projected roster spot: First pairing, right side

"Why don't you explain this to me like I'm five?": I will let [Brind'Amour's words from the game on Jan. 16 after Hamilton's regular season ended explain it:](#) "It's a huge loss, obviously. He's arguably our No. 1 guy on everything." Hamilton became the "No. 1 guy on everything."



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The bad news was the injury that thwarted Hamilton's projected career year on all fronts. He was averaging the most time on ice he ever had played, he seemed to actually enjoy having a spot on the penalty kill — because that means Brind'Amour respects you. His defense was the best it had ever been paired with career offense, and that amounted to his first-ever All-Star Game nomination, what would have been a top-three spot in the Norris Trophy conversation and a feeling like he finally found his home.

Fortunately for the Hurricanes, he still gets to keep that feeling, as he's been cleared for months and has been allowed to skate because of his injury recovery. [Svechnikov](#)

Cue the 'Brass Bonanza' – The Ballad of the 1985-86 Hartford Whalers

By Scott Burnside

On March 8, 1986, Quebec Nordiques forward John Anderson showed up for a road game in Hartford and was told by the trainer that GM Maurice Filion wanted to see him.

Uh oh.

Anderson had been acquired the previous offseason from the Toronto Maple Leafs, the team that had taken him 11th overall in the 1977 draft.

He'd had a pretty good gig in Toronto playing with Rick Vaive and Bill Durlago, but Quebec wasn't so bad either. The team was rock solid, with Peter Stastny, Michel Goulet and Dale Hunter, and his life away from the rink included a house with an indoor pool that was situated on a mountain outside Quebec City.

So when Filion told Anderson that the Nords had made a trade, Anderson's first thought was: Where am I going? Other side of the rink, Filion told him.

Uh oh.

When Anderson trudged around the event level at the venerable Hartford Civic Center, he soon ran into the man who'd just turned his world upside down, Hartford GM Emile Francis.

Francis told him he'd been trying to land him since Anderson had broken into the league. Then, as they approached the Whalers' locker room, Francis stopped.

"He said, 'Look, I'm going to level with you,'" Anderson recalled. "The locker room is kind of shitty compared to what you're used to in Quebec."

But the man known as "The Cat" told him it was good enough for Bobby Hull and Gordie Howe, so it'd be good if Anderson didn't make a big deal of it with the guys. And so began Anderson's run with what might be the smartest hockey team in the history of the NHL, the 1985-86 Hartford Whalers, for what would be their greatest season ever.

[only half-joked to me last week that no one is more ready for these playoffs than Hamilton.](#)

We will have to see.

First memory that comes to mind: Me, after the power play was good for a while then bad again: "So, what's wrong with the power play?"

Hamilton: "I don't know. Other teams in the league aren't stupid."

Points were made.

Even now, more than 35 years later, the roster boggles the mind for the influence they continue to have on hockey.

- Joel Quenneville: Florida Panthers head coach, second all-time in wins among NHL coaches and a lock to go to the Hall of Fame.
- Ron Francis: a Hall of Fame player and the GM of the expansion Seattle franchise.
- Dave Tippett: Edmonton Oilers head coach and a former Jack Adams Trophy winner (coach of the year).
- Doug Jarvis: four Stanley Cups as a player in Montreal, two more Cups as an assistant coach in Dallas and Boston, and remains in an advisory position with the Vancouver Canucks.
- Kevin Dineen: played almost 1,200 NHL regular-season games, won a Stanley Cup as an assistant in Chicago in 2015 on Quenneville's staff, won an Olympic gold medal as head coach of Canada's women's team at the 2014 Olympics, and is currently the head coach of the AHL's San Diego Gulls.
- Ulf Samuelsson: won two Stanley Cups as a player in Pittsburgh (with Ron Francis). He's been an assistant coach at the NHL and AHL, including several years as an assistant to Tippett in Arizona and with Quenneville in Chicago, where he won a Cup in 2015. He was part of Francis' pro scouting staff in Seattle before recently taking over the Leksands IF head coaching job in Sweden.
- Dean Evason: interim head coach of the Minnesota Wild.
- John Anderson: has coached for decades at the NHL and minor pro level. He has won multiple championships at the International Hockey League and AHL level.
- Tim Bothwell: was a head coach in major junior and the IHL, and was an assistant in Atlanta for two years. He coached women's hockey at the Olympic level, winning a gold medal as an assistant with Team Canada in 2006.
- Mike Liut: player agent



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- Ray Ferraro: broadcast analyst
- Steve Weekes: goaltending coach and assistant coach in the NHL
- Brad Shaw: associate and assistant coach in the NHL for 15 years
- Paul MacDermid: owner of the OHL's Owen Sound Attack. His son Lane was born in Hartford and drafted by Boston. Ferraro called one of his first NHL games.
- Paul Lawless: part of the ownership group of an ECHL team in Austin, Texas.
- Paul Fenton: executive in Nashville and briefly the GM of the Wild. He played in just one game during that 1985-86 season.
- Stew Gavin: an investment specialist in Toronto. Many of his clients are tied to the hockey community.

Whew. Cue the "[Brass Bonanza](#)" one more time.

But beyond the post-career accomplishments, what makes this group special is the lasting impression on the community and a legacy that continues to this day with autograph sessions at the local ballpark, reunion events, alumni games and Whalers jerseys hanging from the XL Center in Hartford where the AHL Hartford Wolf Pack play.

And then there's this.

The 1985-86 Whalers team might well be the only team, at any level, that was honored with a full-blown parade — after they were knocked out in the second round of the playoffs.

Truth.

The Whalers arrived at the start of the 1979-80 season along with Quebec, Edmonton and Winnipeg from the remnants of the World Hockey Association. The Whalers made the playoffs that first season and were promptly swept in the first round by Montreal. They then missed the playoffs for five straight seasons.

"We were the Bad News Bears," said Lawless, the 14th-overall pick in the 1982 draft.

Lawless figures he might have been the first player who was angry to be called up to the big leagues. He'd just made Canada's World Junior team when he got the news. It would take some time to get over it.

Before Ron Francis became the Whalers' first and arguably only superstar player, the skilled center expected he'd be a Washington Capital.

Dale Hawerchuk, one of four centers expected to go at the top of the draft, had been tabbed by the Winnipeg Jets at No. 1. Los Angeles had its sights set on Doug Smith. Hartford originally had the third pick and was expected to take Bobby Carpenter, leaving the Caps with the fourth pick and presumably Francis.

But the Caps made a deal to move into the third spot and took Carpenter.

"Apparently neither team wanted me," Francis joked.

The only person who seemed really enthused with the pick was the team's head scout, Bill Dineen, father of Francis' future teammate Kevin.

"Everyone else, not so much," Francis said, laughing. Francis went back to his junior club in his hometown of Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario, after his first training camp, but by November 1981 he was back with the big club.

Francis' first road roommate was longtime Toronto captain Dave Keon.

For the first month they roomed together, Keon didn't say a word to him. Their first conversation consisted of Keon asking Francis how old he was.

"I'm 18," Francis told the future Hall of Famer, who was 41 at the time.

"He said, 'Hmph, I got three kids that are older than you.' Then he turned out the lights and rolled over," Francis recalled.

But Keon watched over Francis, taking him out to dinner on the road and teaching him the finer points of being an NHL player. The two developed a lifelong friendship.

It was the kind of education that would be passed on to other young players who followed Francis into the Whalers locker room.

Those young teammates, guys like Dineen and Ferraro, Gavin and Dana Murzyn, all looked up to Francis and revered him as though he were a grizzled veteran.

"We were like, geez, this guy's done it all," Evason said. "And he was a year older than us."

And while there was some rookie initiation stuff going in other places, it didn't happen in Hartford.

"Ronnie really stopped a lot of that for our group," Evason said.

He told the guys that if they were a team, they weren't going to be doing stuff like shaving the rookies and stuff like that. Dave Tippett came to Hartford out of the Canadian national program and played for Canada at the 1984 Olympics in Sarajevo.

Tippett's wife, Wendy, used to joke that if the Whalers were selling out games with 15,000 people she felt she knew 5,000 of them.

The wives and girlfriends were an integral part of the fabric of the Whalers franchise. They helped with the team foundation and took turns overseeing charitable events including the Whalers' Waltz, a black tie event for 500 that was one of the highlights of the charitable scene in Hartford.

Many of the players met their future wives in Hartford. Francis met his wife, Mary Lou, at a charity event.



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Quenneville's wife, Boo, was from the area and her family would frequently host holiday gatherings for the Whalers family.

Gavin became a Whaler on the eve of the 1985-86 season. On his first day in Hartford, Gavin was at the Sheraton next to the rink and met a Whalers fan. Later, he went to do some shopping and ran into the same fan.

"My original thought was, geez, this place must be really small," Gavin said.

All roads to the Hartford Whalers led through the Sheraton, which opened at the same time as the Hartford Civic Center in early 1975.

For three months, Ferraro lived in Room 1001 with Paul MacDermid after they were called up from the AHL. Ferraro said he's not sure why he didn't ask for his own room.

The only time Ferraro ended up with his own space was when MacDermid's future wife, Pam, came to visit and MacDermid paid for a separate room.

The next year at training camp, MacDermid was back in Room 1001.

Ferraro was taken by Hartford 88th overall in the 1982 draft. In his last year as a junior in Brandon, he scored 108 goals. "I figured, not knowing anything, that I would probably make the (big) team," Ferraro said.

Four days into camp in 1984, he was sent to Binghamton of the AHL.

At the time, Washington and Hartford shared the farm team there. Ferraro had run into Evason, an old Western Hockey League foe and Washington prospect, at the airport on the way to their respective training camps.

They agreed that if they ended up in Binghamton they would room together.

And so they did.

"We didn't know what the hell we were doing," Ferraro said. "You can imagine. It was a gong show."

The two pooled their money and bought an AMC Matador for \$600. Three weeks later, the muffler fell off. They never replaced it. Later that season, they left the keys in the ignition and abandoned the car on the street.

"Because it was such a piece of garbage," Ferraro said. From the moment he got to Hartford, Ferraro (5-foot-9 and 170 pounds when he was drafted) was "Peewee."

"I haven't been called Peewee since," Ferraro said. "But with them, I'm Peewee all the time. I love those guys. I love that team."

Murzyn, the fifth overall pick in the 1985 draft, signed his first contract just four days before the start of the 1985-86 training camp and then made the club out of camp. Management suggested that he and another young player, Lawless, move in with a man named Jim Ellis, a retired school principal and avid Whalers fan.

Ellis refused to take any rent payment, but the players paid all of the utilities.

In the basement was a fridge. When Murzyn and Lawless moved in, it was full of soft drinks, chocolate and all kinds of snacks.

Murzyn recalled asking politely if there was a way to find some room for a few beers.

The next day it was wall to wall Miller Lite.

The two young players got along famously and were an important part of the young core being assembled in Hartford.

To this day, Murzyn believes Lawless might have had the largest head in the NHL, although there are no records to confirm this.

Lawless' former teammates referred to him as "Jughead" and Lawless was a good sport about it.

One game in late October, Lawless took a puck to the face and the corresponding picture with his face all stitched together made the front page of the Hartford Courant with the words: "I thought my head exploded."

"We were all over him about that," Murzyn said. Lawless remembers the shot, which came off the stick of Moe Mantha.

The trainer was stitching him up and it's a big number — 63 stitches as Lawless recalls.

And he's thinking, that's it for the night. Might as well grab a beer and relax.

Nope.

Head coach Jack "Tex" Evans made his way to the trainers' room between the second and third periods and after a brief discussion with the training staff, Lawless was back on the ice for the third.

A different time? To be sure.

One of the team's biggest offensive stars outside of Francis was Sylvain Turgeon, who hailed from the mining town of Rouyn-Noranda in northern Quebec and scored 43 times in that '85-86 season.

Turgeon's pride and joy away from the rink was a Volkswagen bug that he was always working on. In fact, Anderson recalled Turgeon had two, one that he used for parts.



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One day, Turgeon showed up at practice and his eyes were almost completely shut.

The players asked him what had happened and Turgeon told them he'd been working on the VW and since he was only doing a little bit of work he hadn't bothered to use a welding mask.

Turns out he missed a couple of games, Anderson said. Evans, the coach of few words, was not amused.

"What the fuck?" was all he mustered.

This was not a time when players went off to lavish summer homes in Kelowna or the Muskokas. Many of the players set down roots in the Hartford area and stayed.

There were charity softball games in the summer and lots and lots of golf.

"You basically got a place in town and you stayed there all year," Dineen said.

Quenneville took summer courses so he could become a licensed stockbroker.

Torrie Robertson helped build stages for local concerts. Tippett got into real estate and renovation, buying derelict older homes that he and his wife would fix up and then resell. Occasionally, he'd hire some of his teammates to help out. During the season, the team would often practice outside at one of a handful of local rinks, and that would mean changing in the Whalers dressing room, getting bundled up in Whalers parkas and driving somewhere. Often at high speed.

"There were a lot of races," Tippett said.

"It probably wasn't smart in hindsight," he said. "But back then it seemed like a lot of fun."

There was at least one fender bender on the return trip to downtown Hartford. That accident featured five or six Whalers standing around in their hockey gear trying to assess the damage.

Samuelsson, if he wasn't riding with Murzyn, would make the trip to practice in his Saab.

"He would always have his helmet on and his visor and his chin strap done up. Every single time," Evason said. "You can imagine people driving by him at that point in Hartford." One day, Samuelsson got to practice only to realize he'd left his skates downtown. The arena had a skate rental kiosk and Samuelsson rented a pair.

"I'll never forget it, the skates had to be 35 years old," Murzyn recalled. "Even Tex noticed. He was like, 'What the hell?' But at least he wasn't late for practice."

"There's a 1,000 Ulfie stories," Ferraro said. "He is like his own show all by himself."

Like the night in Toronto when Samuelsson got kicked out of the game.

"He loses his mind," Ferraro recalled.

No helmet. No gloves. But as he's leaving the ice at Maple Leaf Gardens, he spies the squeegee they used to sweep away excess water at the end of the arena

"And he beat a hole in the front of the Zamboni," Ferraro said. "We're all watching him from the benching going, what is he doing?"

"That was not out of the ordinary for Ulfie."

Perhaps no single player was as critical to that 1985-86 team than netminder Mike Liut, who was acquired the previous season from St. Louis along with Jorgen Pettersson for Greg Millen and Mark Johnson.

"There was no more galvanizing thing for this young team than getting Mike," Ferraro said.

In one of Liut's first games, the Whalers had a 4-2 lead against Vancouver and ended up losing 7-6 in overtime. "The drink cart in the middle of the room had no chance," Ferraro said. "He destroyed it. We'd never had anybody like that."

If players ended up shooting too high at the end of practice, Liut would scream at them to go and shoot at the other end of the ice on an empty net.

"He'd say, 'When you can hit the net come back,'" Ferraro said.

When the dust cleared at the end of the 1985-86 regular season and the Whalers were playoff-bound, it was on Liut who led them there.

"There's no way our team would have taken that jump without Mike," Ferraro said.

From Liut's perspective, the cumulative hockey intelligence on the Whaler roster helped define the team's identity. "It was kind of their team," Liut said. "They took ownership of it. You have to."

Francis, Turgeon, Ferraro, MacDermid, Anderson and Dineen made up the top six of the group by the time the season was heading into the stretch, providing a dynamic one-two punch offensively on a team that finished fifth in goals scored.

"Kevin was a dynamic player," Quenneville said. "He could change the complexion of a game."

"One thing about it, man, Andy could pass," Ferraro added. The bottom two lines were different but equally important. Lawless, Gavin and Evason provided energy, skill and youthfulness and were a great complement to the team's hard-working shut-down pair of Tippett and Jarvis.



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"They weren't huge but they played hard all the time," Anderson said of the team's role players.

Anderson said the Whalers had a "bunch of real good hockey guys," players who just process the game differently. On the back end, there was Dave Babych, who arrived via trade with Winnipeg and played mostly with Quenneville. "Just give Babber the puck and let him go," Quenneville said. Quenneville was a reliable, calming force.

During his call-up during that 1985-86 season, Shaw remembers the Whalers locker room as a casual place. "Just do your job and be a pro and everything's going to work out kind of thing," Shaw said. "The simplicity of that was shocking for me."

Shaw recalled how Quenneville often employed a move when it looked like an opponent was about to beat him wide, turning at the right moment and flicking his stick to send the puck into the corner.

"He called it the lizard tongue," Shaw recalled.

"I really learned the NHL game by watching these guys," Shaw said.

The sheer hockey brainpower that showed up for work every day might have been the absolute best fit for the low-key head coach, Evans, and his assistant, Claude Larose.

Evans was not from Texas but in fact had been born in Garnant, Wales, in 1928. A defenseman, he played 753 NHL games and hundreds more in the minor pros.

His coaching gig with the Whalers lasted almost five seasons and was the only NHL head coaching job his career. Evans' practices were, well, consistent. Every one the same. Some players referred to him as "Groundhog Jack."

"Every day it was the same thing," Lawless said. "It was frigging hilarious. It was just a simple way of coaching. He wasn't a technical guy but let me tell you, it worked." Evans' pregame addresses to the team were equally minimalist. "It would literally be anywhere between three and five words," Gavin said.

"Let's go" or "Work hard" or "Go get 'em."

But it was a team that didn't require a lot of coaching. As their careers evolved, it turned out "we had a boatload of coaches," Ferraro said. "We had smart people that were playing."

Today, special teams groups almost always meet as a unit. The Whalers' special teams meetings were a little less structured, usually consisting of a bunch of guys standing around listening to Tippett and later Jarvis explaining how Peter Stastny liked to play low or how they could take Guy Lafleur's one-timer away when they played the Canadiens. "Those were our penalty killing meetings," Tippett said. "I don't even know if we had white boards."

The Whalers finished fifth in penalty killing efficiency that season.

"His ability to think the technical part of the game was something that was very natural to him and was a great ingredient for our team," Quenneville said of Tippett. "He took relentless to a whole different level. Jarvy's the same." On the other side of the puck, Francis was the focal point of the power play. "Everything we did on the power play went through Ronnie's hands," Ferraro said.

As the playoffs approached, Evans subtly changed tactics, sometimes matching lines against opponents. His signal to change lines for the matchup he wanted was to touch his nose with a rolled up program or roster.

"So we'd have to look back to see if Jack was touching his nose," Tippett said.

Still, through the first half or even two-thirds of that season, it looked as though it would be more of the same for the luckless Whalers franchise.

Ferraro recalls being in the team's travel agency office trying to book a trip into Hartford for his father and saw that a teammate had booked a trip to Florida the day after the regular season.

Hartford went winless in 10 games at one point in late January and into February (0-9-1), tumbling to last place in the Adams Division, six points behind Buffalo for the last playoff spot. But they went 12-4-2 in their last 18 games and ended in fourth place, four points ahead of Buffalo. That set up a first-round matchup with the talent-laden, first-place Quebec Nordiques.

Ferraro has a distinct impression that early on in the best-of-five series it looked ugly.

"My recollection is we didn't touch the puck. And Lutie (Liut) was amazing," Ferraro said. "None of us had been in an NHL playoff game."

Liut made 37 saves in Game 1 and Sylvain Turgeon scored the OT winner to give the franchise its first postseason NHL win.

The next night, the Whalers took a 3-0 lead into the third period and won 4-1.

The Whalers dominated Game 3 at home, winning 9-4 with Anderson collecting six points. It was the franchise's first and ultimately only playoff series win in the NHL.

That set up a second-round series against Montreal. It was epic.

"We played our hearts out and so did they," Anderson said. The Whalers won the opener at The Forum in Montreal 4-1, but the Canadiens bounced back to win Games 2 and 3. Dineen scored 1:07 into overtime in Game 4 to make it a best-of-three.



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After a Montreal win in Game 5, it was Dineen who was again the hero, scoring the only goal in a 1-0 win in Game 6 at home, setting up a deciding game at the legendary Forum against the sparkling rookie netminder Patrick Roy.

The Habs took a 1-0 lead late in the first period and that's the way it stayed for much of regulation. But with 2:48 to go in the third period, Dave Babych hammered one over Roy's shoulder to tie send Game 7 to overtime.

"It stunned them," Anderson said. "They were on the ropes for a bit."

"It was like a lightning bolt," Ferraro said of Babych's goal. "We were, 'Oh my God, we're in it.'"

Early in overtime, Ferraro had the puck in the Montreal slot with Anderson breaking for the net on the right side. Anderson opened up, ready to take a shot.

But just as the puck got to Anderson, a backchecking Chris Nilan broke up the play.

A few shifts later, with 5:55 gone in overtime, Canadiens forward Claude Lemieux came out of the corner with the puck and beat Liut with a wicked backhand from in close to end the series.

"That was the end of it," Anderson said.

Francis would go on to win back-to-back Cups in Pittsburgh in 1991-92 after a trade that many observers believe was a death knell for the Whalers franchise. But the '86 loss still brings with it a sense of regret.

In Game 3 of the opening round, Francis crashed into the boards and broke two ribs against the Nordiques.

He was able to play in the Montreal series, but needed a flak jacket. "So there's a lot of frustration ... not being able to contribute maybe at the level that I could," Francis said. "How well we were playing. How much we cared for each other and how much we believed in each other. You always kind of have those 'what-ifs' when you lose."

Ferraro called the loss devastating. "I remember thinking that this team is really good. We're going to be good," he said.

By the time the Whalers got back to Hartford, plans were in place for a parade.

So what if the Whalers' playoff run ended halfway to a Cup? That didn't seem to matter to the people who lined the streets of downtown Hartford.

Players wondered if it was some kind of a joke. "Guys were a little embarrassed, but I'm telling you, there were 50,000 people out on the street," Anderson said.

"Amazing," Lawless added. "It was six, seven people deep in downtown Hartford. It was unbelievable. ... To this day,

people are still coming up to me and saying, 'we miss you guys so much.'"

No one knew then that this would be as good as it would get for the Whalers.

They finished first in the Adams Division with a franchise-record 93 points the following season. But the Nordiques exacted revenge in the first round, winning in six games. They made the playoffs the next five years, from 1988-92 but didn't win a single series.

They missed the playoffs the next five years and in the summer of 1997 they were gone to Carolina where they became the Hurricanes.

Gone but not forgotten.

One summer a few years back Quenneville's in-laws hosted a weekend gathering of friends and former teammates that morphed into a major Whalers reunion.

As the weekend wound down, there was a public gathering where a lot of the former Whalers signed autographs and mingled with fans.

Some 5,000 people showed up. "We were kind of floored by it," Murzyn said.

That spring of '86 remains a singular moment in the star-crossed franchise.

Coach Evans passed away from prostate cancer in 1996. He still lived in Connecticut.

Scot Kleinendorst died as a result of injuries sustained in an accident at a paper mill in Minnesota last December. The real-life losses add a sense of melancholy when those that remain convene and the discussion turns, as it always does with this group of players and their extended families, to the Whalers.

What happens if Nilan doesn't thwart that golden scoring chance in overtime?

What if the Whalers and not the Montreal Canadiens had won a Cup that spring?

Does it change everything? Or nothing?

Questions without answers.

"People didn't know how good we were," Anderson said. "It's kind of what if? What if? It always sticks in your mind."



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The Path to Puck Drop

By Michael Smith

The National Hockey League intends to resume play in the summer of 2020, with 24 teams returning to compete for the Stanley Cup.

The Carolina Hurricanes will be among those 24 teams and are slated to match up against the New York Rangers in a best-of-five Stanley Cup Qualifier, the winner of which will advance to the First Round of the 2020 Stanley Cup Playoffs.

That marks the fourth and final phase of the league's transitional protocol, but there are still hurdles to clear in order for the puck to drop again. It's important to note that, while a plan is in place, a return to play is not guaranteed; this is all contingent upon optimal medical and safety conditions - COVID-19 numbers, testing ability and government regulations all factor into decision making - and a formal agreement between the league and the Players' Association.

With that in mind, here is the latest on what we know about the league's return to play timeline.

Last Updated: June 11

Phase 1: Self-Isolation - **COMPLETE**

Since the 2019-20 season was paused on March 12, teams and players were instructed to self-isolate as much as possible.

Phase 2: Voluntary Small-Group Workouts - **ACTIVE** (began June 8)

Reimer Nominated for Masterton Trophy

By Michael Smith

The Carolina chapter of the Professional Hockey Writers Association (PHWA) today announced that goaltender [James Reimer](#) has been selected as the Carolina Hurricanes' nominee for the 2019-20 Bill Masterton Memorial Trophy.

The Bill Masterton Memorial Trophy is awarded annually by the PHWA to the player who best exemplifies the qualities of perseverance, sportsmanship and dedication to ice hockey.

The league transitioned into Phase 2 on Monday, June 8, allowing clubs to reopen their home training facilities to allow players to participate in small-group (limit of six players at one time) on- and off-ice training activities. This phase is strictly voluntary and is subject to various measures and requirements spelled out in the [Phase 2 protocol](#).

After internal team discussions, the Hurricanes chose to delay their transition into Phase 2. Players, with only a handful still in the Raleigh area, are permitted to continue training on their own for the time being.

Phase 3: Training Camp - **July 10**

Formal training camps for the 24 teams resuming play will open on Friday, July 10, barring any unforeseen negotiation or pandemic setback.

It's unknown how long the training camp period will last - that's something that remains to be negotiated between the NHL and NHLPA. Canes President and General Manager Don Waddell said he envisions a two- to three-week training camp, plus one or two exhibition games once teams arrive in their designated hub city.

Phase 4: Return to Play - **TBD**

The one target date not yet set is for resumption of play, as that's dependent on timing and length of Phase 3 and remains subject to approval by both the NHL and NHLPA. There are also decisions to be made on the two hub cities and medical and safety protocols that will need to be in place.

Assuming Phase 3 lasts around three weeks, Phase 4 could begin in early August.

In its news release announcing Reimer as the Hurricanes' nominee, the Carolina chapter of the PHWA stated:

Rather than become an afterthought in Carolina's crowded goaltending situation, the 32-year-old Reimer instead became a key part of the team's rotation.

Reimer went 14-6-2 with a 2.66 goals-against average and .914 save percentage in his first season with Carolina.



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Reimer did not have a regulation loss after the calendar flipped to 2020, going 6-0-2 in his last eight decisions - the longest stretch of his career without a regulation loss since a 10-game run in 2011.

Reimer, 32, is in his 10th NHL season and first with the Hurricanes. Acquired from Florida on June 30, 2019, Reimer posted a 14-6-2 record, a 2.66 goals-against average, a .914 save percentage and three shutouts in 25 games during the

shortened 2019-20 regular season. Before he exited what turned out to be his final regular-season game on Feb. 22 in Toronto, the 6-foot-2, 220-pound netminder was 6-0-2 in his previous eight starts. Dating back to mid-November, Reimer was 12-2-2 with a 2.50 goals-against average, a .919 save percentage and three shutouts.

SportScan

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

The Athletic / With Vegas the frontrunner to host NHL's return, which city is the second hub?

By Michael Russo and Joe Smith

Jun 13, 2020

As we hit the midway point of June, it sure feels like we're getting closer to hockey becoming a reality.

A tentative date of July 10 was set for the start of 24 training camps and the NHL and NHL Players' Association have entered into the early stages of negotiations for the return to play protocols. Looking at the math, if July 10 is going to work, these protocols must be agreed upon and approved by the players in an official vote in the next 10 days in order for players outside the continent to return and satisfy quarantine requirements. Also, the league probably needs at least a month to lay a foundation in each hub city in order to prepare the logistics of operations at the hotels, contracted restaurants, practice facilities and arena.

Return to play later this summer is still not a slam dunk, however.

Both sides still must work out the terms of COVID-19 testing protocols, the specifics of what the protected bubbles these players could live in for upward of two months will be like and the true picture when it comes to the economics.

Players want to know: Is returning to play for the minimal revenue that will come by playing games without fans in the stands enough to shave a few percentage points off escrow when factoring in how much it will cost to house and feed these players, and put on games? And is it worth it?

The other significant decision that must be made is which two cities of the 10 finalists will house these teams for this made-for-TV tournament.

According to multiple sources on both the league and players' side, the NHL and NHLPA met for the first time Friday, specifically about hub cities, and the players were told that Las Vegas was the frontrunner to be one of the hubs.

However, nothing is official. The NHLPA executive board is expected to meet as early as Monday to discuss hubs, but the NHLPA has not yet agreed to any hub city, and the multimillion-dollar contracts needed to secure hotels, rinks and restaurants have not been fully negotiated, agreed upon and signed.

So while sources say that a report out of Las Vegas on Friday night stating the league has chosen Vegas to be a hub may and probably will ultimately end up true, it's very premature and not yet the case.

A lot has changed in the world and with the league's thinking since The Athletic analyzed the potential hubs in April. Back then, the league was looking to go to four hub cities, not two, so that dynamic alone has eliminated some markets.

What can we surmise from doing a lot of digging lately?

Scenario 1: If the Canadian government relaxes or eliminates the country's mandatory 14-day quarantine for each NHL team's 50-person traveling party and league staff, the likeliest hub scenario would be Las Vegas along with Toronto or Vancouver.

Scenario 2: If the Canadian government doesn't alter its rule, the likeliest hub scenario would be Las Vegas along with Los Angeles or Chicago.

Some cities that were once near the top of the list last month fell out of serious contention due to the pandemic, social events or, after further review, the inability to really create a tight bubble. But the backup choices could be called upon if things go haywire with the current frontrunners.

Potential hubs and selection criteria

Finalists named by NHL in May: Chicago, Columbus, Dallas, Edmonton, Las Vegas, Los Angeles, Minneapolis/St. Paul, Pittsburgh, Toronto and Vancouver.

Hotels/Bubble life: A big reason why the NHL wants large, luxury hotel properties is not only because of logistics, but it's worried about the psyche of the players. Depending on how far teams go, these guys could be in a hub city for more than two months, likely without their families.

They will be in a very protected bubble throughout the tournament and that will likely not end even if society around them gets back to normal.

So just imagine a player six weeks into the playoffs looking out his hotel window and seeing thousands of people strolling along the Vegas strip, partying at a pool or hanging in a casino.

Players won't be able to partake in that because the league wants them protected and healthy throughout. So the NHL is trying to give them accommodations with nice, comfortable living conditions and multiple entertainment options, from excursions to golf courses and movie theaters to restaurants.

There is also a chance some members of hotel and arena staffs would have to live inside the bubble. The league isn't so much worried about staff members wearing protected masks and gloves if they're, say,



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serving food or cleaning rooms; but if there's hotel or arena staff that will have continuous contact with players for extended periods (bartenders, bus drivers, etc.), they may have to live in the bubble.

There will also likely be a number of people who are tested regularly but not in the bubble (NHL communications staff, arena workers, broadcasters and broadcast techs, and maybe other media).

Restaurants: The league is looking at hotels that have multiple food and restaurant options, but in each potential hub city, the league plans to effectively "own and operate" top-quality restaurants outside of the hotels for the entire length of the tournament for players to dine at.

Facilities: The league needs an arena with multiple NHL-quality dressing rooms because there could be three games a day. While games will be gapped so proper cleaning and sanitizing can be done and the next game can be prepped, if a game goes into an extended overtime, there will inevitably be delays. So teams in the next game could be sitting around like high school or college teams often do in a tournament setting or tennis players do when sharing the main stadium during a Grand Slam tournament. NHL-quality practice rinks are a must.

Locations: It really would be surprising if Canada doesn't eliminate the 14-day quarantine for the NHL. Would an elected official really turn down the return of hockey? And, you can bet your bottom dollar, if Canada announces that it is relaxing its restrictions for the NHL, the NHL's absolutely going there. The league's not about to work this hard trying to convince a nation to alter such a rule and then say they aren't coming there. Canada makes serious sense as a hub because the Canadian dollar spent is worth 74 cents U.S. right now. But if Canada says no, the NHL is making alternative plans in the U.S.

COVID-19 levels: COVID-19 levels in a market at the time of the resumption of play theoretically isn't as big a worry as it once was. First, by early August, there should be solid treatment plans, doctors say. Second, if players pre-quarantine well, are tested frequently throughout play and are protected inside their bubble, it really doesn't matter what's going on outside of the bubble.

Caveats: There's not one hub city that doesn't have any cons. There's no perfect place. While the league would prefer not allowing a host city's team to play at home because of the perception of home-ice advantage, and the advantage of using the bells and whistles of its own practice facilities, the league also will choose the two best hub cities even if it means the host city team is in its hub. But, theoretically, if the league chose Vegas and Toronto, it could avoid host cities being in its hub by putting the Western Conference in Toronto and the Eastern Conference in Vegas. If Canada says no to the NHL, the league could put the West in L.A. (the Kings and Ducks are not returning to play regardless) and the East in Vegas.

Frontrunners

Las Vegas: You can bet, no pun intended, that there's a very good reason why MGM Resorts has yet to open up properties like Park MGM and high-end, non-gaming hotels like Vdara and Delano.

Park MGM is a stone's throw from T-Mobile Arena, has lots of restaurants and ample hotel space (2,992 rooms, 259 luxury suites). The league could operate all the surrounding restaurants along the arena's corridor between Park MGM and potentially NewYork NewYork, and it would be easy to cordon off the area from the general public with guard gates and security. If the league chooses Park MGM, it could create as true a bubble as any hotel in any potential hub city.

Players will surely prefer the nearby Vdara in City Center and Delano at Mandalay Bay. Both hotels feature large, luxury suites with terrific amenities, and if the league plans to operate restaurants outside of the hotel anyway, it really doesn't matter if players stay right next to the arena or not.

The biggest hurdle with Vegas, besides the 100-plus-degree weather, would be practice ice.

Last Vegas has six sheets of ice, including T-Mobile Arena. But besides T-Mobile, City National Arena's two sheets are by far the best.

However, The Athletic's Jesse Granger reported last month that NHL-sized ice can be installed at MGM Grand Garden Arena and Orleans Arena, and sources confirm that indeed was part of MGM's proposal to the NHL about making Las Vegas a hub.

Toronto: This may be the frontrunner of Canadian cities because it would give the NHL another time zone that's not in the Pacific, and you could put the West there to assure a host city's team isn't playing inside its market.

The city has a proven history of hosting large events like the World Cup of Hockey. There are plenty of luxury-brand hotels there like the Delta, Westin Harbor Castle, the Ritz and Royal York. Maple Leafs players stay at the Delta when there's a trade, and most visiting teams stay at the Westin or the Ritz. There are a number of top-notch restaurants the league could operate.

Within 30 minutes of Scotiabank Arena, you've got Coca-Cola Coliseum (where the Toronto Marlies play) and the Leafs' practice facility. During the 2004 and 2016 World Cups, the city had no problem accommodating all the different countries' teams.

Los Angeles: While L.A. Live's Marriott and Ritz-Carlton properties are technically open and reservations can be made by anybody for later this summer, it's believed if the NHL goes to Los Angeles, these would be the two hotels and guests who have booked rooms during the time period of the tournament would be moved to other Marriott properties. Both hotels would give the NHL more than 1,000 rooms.

L.A. Live is appealing to the NHL because they would likely own and operate all of L.A. Live, an outdoor entertainment district in downtown L.A. right across from Staples Center that features major hotels, restaurants, a bowling alley and a movie theater.

One big drawback though with Los Angeles is the insane traffic to drive through to get players to practice at the Toyota Performance Center in El Segundo or Great Park Ice in Irvine.

When The Athletic went through this hub city exercise in April, the NHL never even considered it an option. That changed when the league realized how important it is psychologically for the players to not feel completely trapped in a small hotel room for potentially more than two months.

Vancouver: This is where the hotels come into play, giving Vancouver the edge over Edmonton. The JW Marriott in Edmonton has 346 rooms, not nearly enough to fit for 12 teams of 50 people each, plus NHL staff. With all due respect, the nearby Delta and Westin are nice hotels, but not up to the quality of the JW. So how do you decide which teams go where?

Conversely, Vancouver is jam-packed with tremendous hotels and restaurants. The JW Marriott and Douglas Hotel, which is another Marriott property, are attached and right around the corner from Rogers Arena. They have 529 rooms, so the league would need another hotel to start. The Fairmont Pacific Rim, where many teams stay, has 377 rooms. Interestingly, the JW and Douglas are closed right now and there's plenty of restaurants, a state-of-the-art gym and several banquet halls that could be turned into dining rooms and hospitality suites for teams. This is where the NHL held its GM's meeting during the NHL Draft last summer.

Chicago: Many people were surprised last month when commissioner Gary Bettman listed Chicago as a finalist. At first, we even thought it was on the list as a backup plan because the league knows United Center well from many big events and could drop in there on a dime to set up if things fell apart elsewhere.

But Chicago may be a very viable option in large part because of the very large luxury hotels and the NHL's belief it can create a tight bubble around a chain of hotels and restaurants.

Backup options



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Columbus: The market has a practice facility attached to Nationwide Arena, not to mention strong facilities at nearby Ohio State University. There's also an arena district surrounding it that – in theory – could be shut down or run by the league for use by players and staff. But there are not as many great options hotel-wise that are close to the arena, other than the 532-room Hilton, which is less than a mile walk from the arena.

It feels like after analysis, the NHL is worried how hard it would be to keep the bubble tight. In other words, players would go nuts not being able to leave the Hilton or another hotel except for practices, games and bus trips to restaurants.

Pittsburgh: Solid backup option because, like the original thought on Chicago, the NHL has visited Pittsburgh many times for big events like drafts and multiple Stanley Cup Finals.

PPG Paints Arena is one of the best venues in the league and there are sufficient practice rinks in the area, although they're all a bit of a drive from downtown. The Penguins are also affiliated with the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center, a healthcare giant in western Pennsylvania. Their UPMC practice facility in Cranberry (25 minutes away) also includes an operational medical facility.

There are a couple of hotels that are a short walk away, but let's put it this way: If players would go nuts being trapped in a Columbus hotel, there's no chance they'll want to spend two months inside a couple of the very close Pittsburgh hotels. The nicest Pittsburgh hotel many teams stay at is the Fairmont, which is closer to the baseball and football stadiums.

Fallen from frontrunner status

Minnesota: Once a strong candidate because of the state-of-the-art Xcel Energy Center and countless practice rink venues in the Twin Cities, the recent unrest since the murder of George Floyd by a police officer and the threat of defunding the Minneapolis police department (although that's much further down the road) will be a big influence in the league's decision. The Mall of America and Minneapolis have great hotels and restaurants, but the capital of St. Paul, where the arena is, really lacks the hotel space needed beyond the St. Paul Hotel, which most teams stay at during the season.

Dallas: There are several hotel options in the central location surrounding American Airlines Center, but the practice rinks aren't near downtown. There are ice sheets available, and this is a viable backup city, but likely not a frontrunner. The fact that the COVID cases are setting records for several days in a row isn't a deal-breaker but certainly doesn't help.

Edmonton: As mentioned above, Edmonton was once a top candidate because of the incredible Rogers Place, attached practice rink and JW Marriott (attached by a skyway). But once the league went from four hub cities to two hub cities with 12 teams apiece, the hotel space at the JW is no longer sufficient.

Conclusion

It looks like Las Vegas is a top contender in the U.S., with Los Angeles and Chicago being other intriguing options. Columbus is still in the mix, although behind the top cities. Toronto would be the favorite among Canadian cities, with Vancouver right there as well.

Of course, as we've already seen, things can change very quickly. Markets that looked to be shoo-ins or layoffs a month ago are no longer the case. So, conceivably, the same thing can happen in a week. But with the league needing a month lead time to figure out logistics, we'll likely find out very soon where the Stanley Cup Playoffs will be completed.

The Athletic / Duhatschek Notebook: An ode to the Masterton, assessing the candidates and more

By Eric Duhatschek Jun 12, 2020

I love the Masterton Trophy.

It's an annual award, administered by the Professional Hockey Writers' Association, designed to honor three qualities – perseverance, dedication and sportsmanship – that may not exactly be unique to hockey but are deeply embedded in the sport's DNA.

The Masterton has been a fixture on the awards calendar since 1968 when it was created by what was then known as the NHL Writers' Association to commemorate the life and achievements of Bill Masterton.

For those unfamiliar with the history, Masterton – playing for the expansion Minnesota North Stars – died within 24 hours of a January 1968 NHL game, when his unprotected head hit the ice in a tangled collision with two Oakland Seals defenders.

Masterton had a unique back story, which would be almost unprecedented today. After a distinguished college career at the University of Denver, Masterton had played professionally for the American Hockey League's Cleveland Barons but stopped following the 1962-63 season. This was the six-team era, and long before salary escalation came to the NHL, so the jobs at the highest level of hockey were few and far between, and most didn't pay all that well. Masterton took a year off the sport completely and then played three years semi-professionally – until NHL expansion gave him a second chance.

Masterton scored the first goal in North Stars' history and was playing as a regular in coach Wren Blair's lineup when the collision that ultimately led to his death occurred. Eleven years after Masterton died, the NHL finally made helmets mandatory equipment. Masterton was, by all accounts, the quintessential teammate, someone who made it to the NHL because of an unremitting commitment to the sport. It's why the Masterton has always felt like an everyman's award – hockey's equivalent to citizen-of-the-year citations that honor unsung heroes in a community for largely anonymous good deeds.

Claude Provost of the Montreal Canadiens was the original winner of the Masterton in 1968. And while the Masterton has occasionally gone to a star player – Jean Ratelle in 1971, Serge Savard in 1979, Lanny McDonald in 1983 – for the most part, it tends to single out players that may be well-appreciated by hockey fans in their own markets, but are largely unknown outside them.

And just about every winner – and really every candidate – has an inspiring back story.

Procedurally, the Masterton differs from other NHL awards because the local chapters of the PHWA nominate one deserving candidate per season; which produces 31 finalists. Members then vote for their top three candidates.

Last year's winner was Robin Lehner, then of the New York Islanders.

If you turn your attention back to the moment when Lehner stepped to the podium to accept the award about a year ago now, his brilliant and impassioned speech on behalf of the mental health challenges that he endured likely stayed with you far longer than anything else that was said on a night that celebrated splashier statistical achievements.

At its best, sport is about striving to be better. Ultimately – at the professional level – it is about striving to be the very best.

The challenges that athletes need to overcome to do so – physical injuries, taming the mind, struggles with addiction (or simply the pure limitations of one's physical frame) – is what makes the Masterton one of the most satisfying awards to ponder. It may also be the most difficult in which to choose the most deserving candidate.

Let's consider some of this year's nominees, starting with Nathan Gerbe of the Columbus Blue Jackets (profiled here by Aaron Portzline).



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Officially listed as 5-foot-4, Gerbe's NHL career dates back to the 10 games he played with the 2008-09 Buffalo Sabres, who'd controversially made him the 142nd pick of the 2005 NHL Draft.

Gerbe's talent wasn't in question. He'd led Boston College in scoring the previous year, and won the NCAA tournament MVP. But even as the NHL evolved away from bigger-is-better, 5-foot-4 was still 5-foot-4 and so Gerbe kicked around the league for most of seven years before leaving to play for Genève-Servette of the Swiss League in 2016-17. But he came back to North America for the end of the 2017-18 season and spent parts of three seasons playing for the Blue Jackets' AHL affiliate in Cleveland. Eventually, the Blue Jackets' unconscionable run of injuries to forwards gave him an opportunity to get back to the NHL. It didn't take long for Gerbe to become a fan favorite.

Gerbe will turn 33 in July. If you want to talk about perseverance, dedication and sportsmanship, Gerbe's unwillingness to give up on his NHL aspirations a pretty great place to start.

But wait. That's just the beginning — one candidate out of 31.

Does anyone outside of Arizona know much about Conor Garland? No? Probably not? At 5-foot-8, Garland positively towers over Gerbe (but not many others). On a Coyotes team that includes Taylor Hall, Phil Kessel, Nick Schmaltz and other more familiar names, Garland led the team in goal scoring this year with 22. A player selected 123rd in the 2015 draft looks as if he will be an NHL fixture now.

Did anyone outside of Florida (or maybe Boston) notice what Noel Acciari achieved this season? A comparative physical monster compared to Gerbe and Garland at 5-foot-10, Acciari was an undrafted free agent who signed with Boston in 2015. This year, his first with the Panthers, Acciari had the best campaign of his professional career, notching 20 goals before the NHL paused play. Ten goals represented his previous career-high. He also led the Panthers in hits.

Flying under the radar is impossible in hockey-mad Toronto, but let's also give a nod to Zach Hyman, a key foot soldier on a Maple Leaf team of stars. Florida, the team that drafted Hyman, had 13 picks in the 2010 draft, including three players selected in the first round (Erik Gudbranson, Nick Bjugstad, Quinton Howden). If every NHL GM was asked under oath which one of these four players they would choose for their teams — right here, right now — a hefty number would probably select Hyman, even if he began his career as an NHL afterthought.

Can we talk about Colorado's Ryan Graves? When you think of Avalanche defencemen, your mind immediately turns to Cale Makar, Samuel Girard, Erik Johnson — even the versatile Ian Cole, a former Stanley Cup champion, may enter your thoughts. But Graves, who'd muddled along for most of four years in the minors, finally got a chance to play in the NHL for 26 games last season and this season was his first as a full-time NHL player. When play was suspended, Graves led the league with a plus-40 rating. I don't care how much or how little some people appreciate plus-minus as a stat. If you are a plus-40 in the NHL, you are doing something right.

Maybe the longest journey from zero to 100 was undertaken by Calgary Flames' defenceman Mark Giordano. An undrafted free agent, Giordano originally signed a three-way professional contract, which had different financial components depending upon if he played in NHL, the AHL or the ECHL. Giordano started out as the longest of long shots; and even left to play in the KHL with Moscow Dynamo for a season before slowly, gradually, working himself up the ranks of NHL players. Last June, he won the Norris Trophy in landslide fashion as the NHL's top defenceman. Giordano is the personification of a rags-to-riches success story.

If you were to isolate a single Masterton moment this past season, it probably belonged to the Ottawa Senators' Bobby Ryan. On the night Ryan returned to the team's lineup after months in the NHL/NHLPA players assistance program, he scored a hat trick in a 5-2 win over Vancouver. Ryan was in tears on the bench, the crowd standing to acknowledge his triumphant return. It was an achingly beautiful human moment that transcended sport.

But we're not finished yet.

The Dallas Stars' Stephen Johns returned to the lineup after a 22-month absence, recovering from headaches and post-concussion syndrome. Everyone in hockey hopes that Oskar Lindblom will eventually make his way back to the Philadelphia Flyers after being diagnosed with Ewing sarcoma. Lindblom was having a breakout season — a team-leading 11 goals at the time of the diagnosis. The St. Louis Blues' consummate veteran, Jay Bouwmeester, may not ever play again, but thanks to the quick action of first responders, the revered veteran, who won a Stanley Cup last spring at the age of 36, survived a cardiac incident during a February game against Ducks in Anaheim. Bouwmeester has been an underappreciated member of multiple Canadian Olympic and World Cup teams — quiet, humble and throughout his career, has put his head down and got the job done.

In all, goalies have won the Masterton five times in the past decade: Lehner, Devan Dubnyk, Josh Harding, Craig Anderson and Jose Theodore. This year, seven netminders have been nominated: Ryan Miller (Anaheim), James Reimer (Carolina), Corey Crawford (Chicago), Alex Stalock (Minnesota), Henrik Lundqvist (Rangers), Jonathan Quick (Los Angeles) and Jacob Markstrom (Vancouver).

While three of those tenders are potential future Hall of Famers, the majority were late-round, hope-and-a-prayer longshots who had to prove their NHL worthiness, amid organizational skepticism. Miller is one of my favorite people in the game, just so thoughtful about the game and life in general. Conversations with him are not just limited to his craft, but veer off in surprising directions. But when speaking about his craft, he can be brilliant and insightful.

There is a part of me that cannot believe the estimable Shea Weber, now 34, may never win a major NHL trophy in his career. Weber was twice the first runner-up in Norris Trophy balloting, finishing behind Nicklas Lidstrom in 2011 and Erik Karlsson in 2012. Talk about perseverance. Weber was limited to 26 games in the 2017-18 by a broken ankle and then a complicated knee surgery. This past year, he sprained his ankle in February, which led to speculation that his career might be in jeopardy. Instead, Weber returned to the Habs' lineup and was playing regularly right up until the league suspended play, even though Montreal was out of the playoff hunt. Weber has been a warrior throughout his NHL career and he doesn't need a Masterton win to validate his off-the-charts determination — but it would be a wholly deserving honor.

San Jose's Joe Thornton and Edmonton's Connor McDavid may be at the opposite ends of what will surely be Hall of Fame careers, but they underwent similar challenges relating to knee injuries to play this year. Thornton, at 40, has an unquenchable love for the game and has paid a physical price to battle through and play with a series of knee injuries because — 22 years in — he still dreams of winning a Stanley Cup. McDavid is 17 years Thornton's junior but suffered a massively complicated posterior cruciate knee ligament injury on the final day of the 2018-19 season, raising questions about when and if he could ever return to the same high level of play. So much of McDavid's game is predicated on speed and knee injuries can often undermine a players' skating ability.

But McDavid came back to the Oilers' lineup and thrived. He probably would have won — or at least contended for the scoring title — if he hadn't missed seven games to injury and illness during the season. McDavid's recovery was detailed in a video feature that aired on Sportsnet earlier this year. If you ever wanted to get inside what the grind of rehab really looks like, you need to watch this. It's hard and requires unimaginable dedication — even if you're Superman.

It's why I love Masterton trophy. Because the one quality that all the nominees share — from Gerbe to McDavid — is their commitment to the sport. There are so many inspiring stories and so many good options to choose from.

In fact, that's the only thing I don't love about the Masterton: The nearly impossible task of narrowing the list down to the final three. Of all the voting we do, it might be the single most difficult ballot to cast.



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The votes are (almost) in

Speaking of voting, the NHL distributed ballots for the 2020 awards race on Monday and this year, voters have an entire week to make their selections.

Usually, the turnaround time is much shorter because ballots need to be filed in the approximately 96-hour window between the end of the regular season and the start of the playoffs. This year is obviously different. Votes have to be in by Monday and the NHL has yet to decide how and when they will unveil the list of finalists and winners.

The PHWA casts ballots for five awards: Hart, Norris, Calder, Selke and Lady Byng, the broadcasters vote for the Jack Adams and NHL GMs get to select the Vezina.

In addition, the writers are also asked to select first and second All-Star teams and choose the All-Rookie team.

Generally, the focus tends to be more on awards and less on All-Star teams, though they matter a great deal as well – and there's a peculiar inconsistency between the way we vote for the All-Stars and the way we vote for the All-Rookie team that's worth exploring.

All-Star voting is done by position – center, left wing, right wing, defence and goal – and that has created controversy over time because sometimes, forwards plays two positions.

This year is a good example: At times, the Oilers' Leon Draisaitl plays center, and at times, he plays left wing on a line with McDavid.

Similarly, the Calgary Flames experimented with Elias Lindholm as a center (which is how he came through the ranks), but more frequently, he plays right wing on the line with Sean Monahan and Johnny Gaudreau.

Nowadays, the PHWA sends a note of clarification after consulting with writers in their individual markets and recommends which position certain players should be considered. This year, Draisaitl is officially recommended as a center, while Lindholm is officially a right wing. Other position clarifications include: Carolina's Teuvo Teravainen (RW), Minnesota's Kevin Fiala (RW), the Rangers' Artemi Panarin (LW) and three from Toronto: Mitch Marner (RW), William Nylander (RW) and Hyman (LW). The confusion is sometimes attributable to the way the NHL lists players. For example, in the daily game release individual statistical reports, Fiala is listed as a left wing.

Of course, the easiest way to end the problem is by shifting the All-Star voting protocols to the way in which voting is done for the All-Rookie team. For the rookie team, voters are permitted to select three forwards, regardless of position, which is helpful in years, such as 2015-16, when the three forwards on the All-Rookie team were McDavid, Jack Eichel and Panarin – two centers and a winger. Some seasons, such as 2014-15, you get three wingers: Mark Stone, Johnny Gaudreau and Filip Forsberg.

The beauty of voting for three forward positions is there's a better chance of getting the most deserving candidates, rather than having to shoehorn players in by specific position.

And there is an inconsistency here, because you are not obliged to make the same distinction on defence. Voters are not asked specifically to select left and right defenceman — you just pick the two worthiest candidates. Erik Karlsson and Brent Burns are now teammates in San Jose and both play the right side. But in 2016-17, they were the two defencemen voted to the first All-Star team, even though they played the same position. No one had any issue with it either.

So why not change the protocols for forwards? Years ago, when I asked someone at the league that question, the answer was that they didn't want to tamper with the historical record. The NHL first started choosing All-Star teams in the 1930-31 season, back when the forward positions were far more clearly defined than they are today and when the on-ice game was largely played in north-south lanes, rather than the east-west improvisation that's part of the modern NHL. It's going on 90 years that it's been done the same way and there's a part of me that is OK with

maintaining it as a tradition, even if the current state of the game has evolved away from the way the game used to be played.

Voting for the All-Rookie team started in 1982-83. Just because of the way they framed that – choosing the three most deserving forwards – you'd have to assume they understood by then it was just a fairer way of doing things. If you could choose three forwards, then you'd never have to worry again about a year like 2012-13, when Alex Ovechkin has named to the first All-Star team as a right wing – and the second All-Star team as a left wing.

The possibility of something similar unfolding with Draisaitl this year is real – although the specific guidance from the PHWA hopefully will mitigate against that happening. In the end, I don't really see a change coming in the All-Star voting protocols.

Tradition matters in hockey – and while change is sometimes necessary, that's a tradition the NHL seems unwilling to tamper with.

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The Athletic / 'There is racism still very alive and well': The Indigenous experience in hockey

Pierre LeBrun Jun 12, 2020

Editor's note: The original headline to this story contained a term that was insensitive. It has been changed and we apologize for the error.

We are living history these days.

George Floyd's death has sparked the kind of civil protest and social awakening we haven't seen in decades.

Black Lives Matter.

Floyd's death and that phrase have evoked the kind of soul-searching conversations among privileged white people that was needed long ago.

And in that context, the Instagram message posted by Chicago Blackhawks captain Jonathon Toews on June 1 supporting Black Lives Matter was moving. Including this passage: "What have Native American people dealt with in both Canada and US? What is it really like to grow up in their world? Where am I ignorant about the privileges that I may have that others don't?"

That hit home with many.

"I saw Jonathan's statement and I showed it to my dad, that he acknowledged us. He felt proud," said 2005 Boston Bruins draft pick Wacey Rabbit, a member of the Blackfoot nation from the Blood Reserve in Alberta.

"We're not taking away anything from the Black Lives Matter movement," Rabbit, 33, added. "But what I felt was that we're all going through this together. And I think for Canada to acknowledge that; there is racism still very alive and well."

As Canadians, it is impossible to have serious discourse on systemic racial discrimination in our society and not examine the Indigenous people of this country.

"It's a good time for us as Canadians to broaden everything that's going on," agreed Buffalo Sabres defenceman Brandon Montour, who lived part of his youth in the Six Nations Reserve near Brantford, Ont.

Black people continue to face discrimination in Canada. It's not just an "America" problem. There is a problem north of the border, too, and within our great sport.

It's why the creation Monday of the Hockey Diversity Alliance led by Evander Kane and Akim Aliu is so important.

But in Canada, we also have to talk about Indigenous Canadians and their struggles.

"Yes, totally," said Jordin Tootoo, the first Inuk player to play in the NHL. "This has been a systemic problem for many decades."

"It's way, way overdue," said 1997 Jack Adams Award winner Ted Nolan this week.

Nolan, who grew up on the Garden River First Nation near Sault Ste. Marie, Ont., played 11 pro seasons between the NHL and AHL, and then returned to coach with the Buffalo Sabres (twice) and New York Islanders. His journey in a sport he loved so much as a kid became more about survival.

But he did survive because he knew he was making a difference for other First Nations people looking up to him. Even if all the name-calling and

abuse over the years has caused him to forget large portions of his career, which he thinks is the trauma locking things away in his mind.

"For every player like myself who managed to play through it, there's thousands and thousands of kids that don't because of racism," Nolan said.

"I heard 'stinking Indian' and 'prairie n——' so much of my life in hockey. Did I cry about it? I never told anybody. I'm telling you now. I've never told anybody about this before. But with what's going on ... I think we're losing so many kids (from the game)."

Tootoo, now 37, left Nunavut at 13 to play AAA Bantam in Spruce Grove, Alta. Tootoo said he didn't even know what racism was growing up, as everyone in his Nunavut community treated each other equally.

What an eye-opener when he left home.

"I was the only Indigenous kid on the team in Spruce Grove, probably in the league at that time," Tootoo said. "The type of player that I was, I was an agitator, I got under people's skin, that was my role. So, looking back at opposing teams, players would do anything to get me off my game. Then comes in racial slurs. And a lot of the racial slurs that were directed at me, I didn't quite understand it. Until coaches raise awareness. Next thing you know, I had parents yelling over the glass and whatnot, and then I started educating myself. And quite frankly, I started second-guessing my culture, my cultural background, my traditions, because being the different person amongst your average Canadians, I felt like I was an outsider looking in growing up my whole teenage years."

Jonathan Cheechoo left his Cree First Nation home in Moose Factory, Ont., at 14 to play on a AAA Bantam team in Timmins. He had a good support network as many Indigenous youths left their communities where they didn't have high schools to continue their schooling in Timmins. But it was still hard.

"Going to Timmins was probably the toughest, it was a such a big cultural change," said Cheechoo, who turns 40 next month.

"We faced quite a bit of racism," he said. "People weren't too happy with all the Native kids who went there to go to high school."

On the hockey side, Cheechoo had a good tryout with the AAA bantam team but ...

"One coach questioned whether being Native I was going to 'drink the firewater' as he said," Cheechoo said. "Or if I was going to quit and go home. So I thought it was weird that I got pigeonholed that way even though they didn't know me as a person."

That assistant coach actually ended up quitting halfway through the season, Cheechoo recalled.

Rabbit, a former Saskatoon Blades captain in the WHL, got a taste of it early in his life. His family had moved off the reserve to nearby Lethbridge, Alta., so he could play hockey.

"My first incident with racism with hockey was when I was 10," Rabbit said. "We were playing in a double-A hockey tournament. And one of the kids told me to go back to my reserve. That's the first time I had ever been told that. I didn't understand why he would say that. I actually told the ref but the ref didn't know what to do, he didn't know how to handle the racism. Both coaches didn't know how to handle the racism."

"The league took about six months to actually address it."

Rabbit paused.

"I've been talking about this with my parents more lately, how I think about how they had to explain to their 10-year-old child why someone would say something like this," said Rabbit, now playing for ECHL Jacksonville. "The kid was 10, obviously same age, he was obviously taught that, it didn't come out of nowhere."

Cheechoo's reaction when hearing Rabbit's story?



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"Yeah, it's nuts. I faced it all the way up probably until pro hockey," Cheechoo said. "I didn't have an incident once I got to pro hockey."

When he was 15, Cheechoo was playing for a team in Kapuskasing in northern Ontario.

"I had a (opposing) coach once that year who said, 'Take that dirty Indian out,'" Cheechoo said. "I ended up missing 10 games because one of his players did take me out."

He had fans and opposing coaches yelling at him, too.

"Sometimes I didn't handle it the best way," said Cheechoo. "You get fed up. One time an opposing coach kept calling me names and I just punched one of his players and I got kicked out. That wasn't the way to handle it. But I was fed up. He was doing it the whole game. Every time I went by their bench or lined up for a faceoff, it was crazy."

Tootoo said he experienced it at all levels of hockey.

"As time went on, in my major junior days, yeah I experienced probably the most racism throughout my whole hockey career when I played in the Western Hockey League in Brandon," Tootoo said. "I was angry. Because I was not realizing they were taking personal attacks toward my heritage, toward my background."

It continued in the NHL.

"I had opposing players in the NHL comment on my heritage," Tootoo said. "Probably the first eight years of my career I know I was an angry individual. Substance abuse. Any time a racial slur was directed at me, I didn't give a shit about hurting anybody, you want to talk smack about my people, I'll just beat the shit out of you."

Tootoo said through his recovery, he's been sober nine years now, he learned to be "comfortable and content in his own skin."

"Oftentimes I would just look that player in the eye and say, 'Are you OK? What's going on that you need to go that low to make yourself feel better about who you are, directing racial slurs at me?'" Tootoo said. "I could see it in the players' eyes right away they wanted to apologize, but with the emotions that run in a game, I was like, 'You know what? I don't need to deal with you.'"

These stories are decades old but it was just two years ago that a team of First Nations all-star players were subjected to racist taunts, called "savages" by fans at a bantam tournament in Quebec City.

The players were 13 and 14 years old.

"For those kids that experienced that, for myself, I'll probably never meet them, but I cried the same tears when I was 10 that they cried," Rabbit said. "I just want them to know that hockey is supposed to bring everyone together."

Added Cheechoo: "It's crazy in this day and age that it's still happening."

Nolan, meanwhile, left home at 16 to go play for the Kenora Thistles in northwestern Ontario.

That's when it started for him.

"I went to Kenora by myself and I've never seen anything like it in my life," recalled Nolan. "I cried myself to sleep many a night. First day of training camp, I think I had two fights. I was just trying out for the team. Some guy stuck me and said, 'What are you doing here you stinking Wahoo. Get back to the reservation.'"

The nightmare continued.

"I fought at practice, I fought in scrimmage, I fought at school," said Nolan. "Then I stopped going to school because one day I got jumped by 2-3 guys in the parking lot after school. It was just horrendous."

Nolan sighed for a moment. The pain over the phone line is palpable.

"I went to Kenora and I thought I was going to be the next Bobby Orr," said Nolan. "All of the sudden reality smashes you in the head. I was just crying and I was miserable. I went from loving the game at the point to just trying to survive in the game. I just tried to survive."

But when his two older brothers came to Kenora to bring him home, Nolan resisted.

"I said, 'They're not going to chase me away. I'm not going to quit.' So I persevered and I had a career."

But there were many years he didn't want to go back and play. He credits his wife, Sandra, for convincing him each time, pushing him to go back.

"I barely remember my first year in Kansas City (in the old Central Hockey League)," Nolan said. "I think I was still traumatized. The next season came and I didn't want to go. Sandra talked me into going."

Flash forward to 1985-86, his last year as a player in pro hockey.

"My last year with the Pittsburgh Penguins, I got hurt and my career was over," he said. "That was probably the happiest day of my life. I didn't have to go through it again."

Rabbit makes a point of saying he was treated well by the Blades. But he does recall a story when he asked out the daughter of one his Blades teammate's billets in Saskatoon.

"I found out later that her parents said no to her, 'He's Indian. You're not to have anything to do with him,'" Rabbit said. "My teammate stuck up for me."

"The Blades actually never billeted with those people again so we didn't have to worry about that again."

Montour said he didn't have it too bad in hockey growing up, but in making himself available to help other First Nations kids, he's heard a few things.

"I've had people reach out to me with their kids. I've talked to a few kids and their experiences. Things like, 'Go back to your land,'" Montour, 26, said.

"You just kind of tell them 'do what you love to do' and that it's all white noise, it may hurt now, those kids who want to hurt you, you want to be the bigger person," added Montour, whose father is from the Six Nations Reserve and whose mother is white. "My parents always put that in me, be the bigger person. Really in sports, show them on the scoreboard. But there's definitely some kids I've talked to that are upset about it and want to quit and move back. It shouldn't be like that."

Nolan would have to live through prejudice a second time around as a coach. He was stung by some of the innuendo that followed his exit out of Buffalo.

"I won coach of the year in the National Hockey League and then I'm out for 10 years," Nolan said.

"I got sour at the game for a bit. I said, 'That's it, no more.'"

But he came back to coach the Moncton Wildcats in 2005-06.

"To this day, it's probably the best job I ever had," he said.

Nolan returned to the NHL to coach the Islanders and Sabres before going behind the bench for Latvia at the 2014 Sochi Olympics (and giving powerhouse Canada quite the scare in a 2-1 quarterfinal game).

But overall, there's the frustration of what could have been in his coaching career, the sense that he didn't get a fair shake because of who he was.

Role models

Ted Nolan's career both on the ice and behind the bench has impacted Indigenous people for years.



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Imagine First Nations youth 14 years ago seeing Cheechoo score 56 goals for the San Jose Sharks to win the Rocket Richard Trophy.

Or a young Indigenous defenceman now seeing Montour patrol the Sabres' blue line.

Or seeing Rabbit wear the 'C' in Saskatoon.

"That was such a huge honour for me, being recognized as a leader," Rabbit said. "And then going around town in Saskatoon and running into different people that are Native, they would say how proud they were, younger kids that would come to the game."

Because role models matter.

"My very first favourite hockey player when going to watch Lethbridge Hurricane games was Shane Peacock," said Rabbit. "He was the captain in Lethbridge. I was 5 years old. My parents told me he was First Nations as well. So for me at 5 years old, just to grasp that he was the same as me, it gave me confidence. He went on to have a great career in Europe. I've seen him a couple of times but I've actually never told him he was my very first favourite player."

Rabbit hopes he's done the same for some Indigenous youth.

"I never got to play in the NHL, but I always figured getting to the Western Hockey League, that if I could do that for one kid; that if they saw me and said, 'Hey this little Native kid from the reserve got to play in Saskatoon and the WHL, maybe I can do it.'"

Between his playing and coaching career, Nolan has been an inspiration for many and he has given back by visiting more than 400 of Canada's Indigenous bands over the years, running hockey schools and speaking to Native youth.

"He's been a trailblazer for us, for sure," Cheechoo said of Nolan. "He went through a lot more than we did."

Cheechoo, in fact, remembered attending a Ted Nolan hockey school in Moose Factory when he was 12, which helped inspire him.

"He helped out in my career choices," Cheechoo said. "He basically said I couldn't stay home. I had to leave to be seen. I left two years later at 14."

Now Cheechoo has helped run a hockey camp in Moose Factory the last two years, giving on-ice instruction to more than 100 kids.

"It's been great, it's fun, I enjoy teaching the kids," said Cheechoo, whose father last year was elected chief of their Moose Cree band. "Going up there is great. Because I remember when Ted came up. Not only the hockey part of it, but the talking part, too. If you wanted to talk to him, he was open. So for me, I go up there and I talk, I go to the schools and have a chat with them there. And at my hockey school, too, anyone who wants to talk outside of that, they're welcome to come and sit in the coach's room."

"Parents come, too, because they're the ones guiding their kids' career and their kids' dreams. I tell parents all the time how important they are."

Nolan ran hockey schools for years in the '90s and now they're back thanks to his sons. Since 2013, Nolan and sons Brandon and Jordan (who still plays in the Blues organization), have been running the Three Nolans First Nation Hockey School.

Ted Nolan runs the Three Nolans hockey school with his sons. (Courtesy Ted Nolan)

"We've been going to a lot of remote First Nations communities, we do hockey school, we do presentations, we talk about mental health, substance abuse and how to overcome prejudice and racism when you leave," Nolan said. "We talk to our kids about how to prepare themselves."

There's emotion in Nolan's voice over the phone as he talked about going into some Indigenous communities where some kids arrived at his hockey school without sticks.

"The kids first in line go through the drill and they can't get back to the line quick enough to give that kid who doesn't have a stick his stick," Nolan said.

But as a role model, one story, in particular, brings Nolan to tears. It's the memory of a 10-year-old First Nations girl years ago running up to him at an airport during his 10-year wait between coaching jobs.

"She touches my face and says, 'I know why you're not coaching, it's because you're too brown.' This ... is a 10-year-old girl," Nolan struggled to say.

He stopped for a moment during our conversation to collect himself.

"What do you say? It was such a powerful moment. I mean, how many other kids feel that?"

Years later when Nolan was coaching the Islanders, he ran into the same person, now a young woman.

"She touches my face and says, 'I know why you're not coaching.' I said, 'You're the same girl!'" Nolan said.

"We're very closely connected as a people; as far as we are from each other. If one First Nations player plays, everybody knows."

Montour, meanwhile, has visited some First Nations communities during his last few offseasons.

"The big experience for me is really now, I've spent a few years since being in the NHL travelling around Canada and experiencing different reserves. That's where it hit home for me," said Montour.

Last summer he visited two reserves in the Yukon.

"They were two hours from an arena," Montour said. "They had a little area for ice, it was small, like the size of the blue line to the goal line. There's like 50 kids out there, for those kids to still enjoy it ... a lot of those kids don't come from much. So anytime they get a chance to play on a team, you can't take that for granted. I experienced that talking to those kids."

It's why sport is such an important tool and can be an escape for some Indigenous kids born into poverty.

"For me, their only escape was a lacrosse stick or a hockey stick," said Montour, who also played lacrosse as a kid. "I was lucky enough to have everything I needed as a kid. These kids are begging to find a way to find an arena within an hour and a half."

Jonathan Cheechoo tries to be a role model for Indigenous youth. (Courtesy Jonathan Cheechoo)

The role model part matters greatly to Cheechoo when it comes to giving hope to Indigenous youth who are struggling.

"We want to show them there's a better life," he said from San Jose where he retired along with wife Ashley and 8-year-old son Jack (another hockey player in the making). "You don't have to just stay on the reserve if there's something you dream to be or aspire to become. It doesn't have to be a hockey player. It can be anything. You want them to know that you can go if you stick it out and put in the work. You're going to face obstacles, there are people that are going to try to hold you down. There are people who are going to try to make you quit."

"It's just what we face. I faced it all the way up."

Tootoo said just sharing his experience, unvarnished, with Indigenous youth is important.

"I'm able to share my story with a lot of these kids in a lot of these communities that I visit and they can relate, right?" said Tootoo. "I don't bullshit anything."



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The economics and the future

The poverty that afflicts some Canadian First Nations endangers their ability to put kids into hockey. The game has never been more expensive to play, which is a growing issue for people of many different backgrounds but certainly Indigenous Canadians.

"If I started now, I would have never played. Not a chance," Nolan said. "The money to play the game, it's almost become an elitist sport. Because you have to have money to play nowadays."

When Cheechoo was 16, his community in Moose Factory raised money for him so he could further his training in Toronto that summer.

"When I was younger, I wasn't the best skater in the world, I could get where I needed to go," Cheechoo said. "But my coach in Kapuskasing told me I had to really improve my skating. So the community got together, and I think it's because of the choices I made growing up, I was a good kid and I worked hard and they knew I was in it to try and make it; they got together and raised \$10,000 so I could go to all these hockey skills camps and skating. I stayed in Toronto the whole summer working on my game and my skating."

That was in the '90s. Imagine the cost today?

Rabbit, who hopes to get into coaching after his playing career is over, echoed that concern that hockey economics were leaving some kids behind.

"It's becoming an elitist sport, the ones that can afford it can play it," said Rabbit. "I feel like that's getting in the way that hockey is for everybody. Hopefully big programs will come so that everybody can play, especially low-income families still having access for their kids to be able to join programs."

Hockey is for everyone, until it isn't.

"I think it's the biggest crock ever," Nolan said of the NHL's slogan.

So there's much to be done. On racism. On economics. On education.

And that education cuts two ways.

There's something that crossed Nolan's mind last year during one of this First Nations hockey camps.

"Last year was the first year it struck me that I'm preparing our kids (at hockey school) in order to go out into society and what to expect," Nolan said. "I tell them not to give up. That they will cry themselves to sleep some nights. But don't give up. Just keep trying and trying. It finally struck me, we're not the ones who need to be educated. I mean, society has to be educated."

Which is so true, agreed Cheechoo.

"The systemic racism is ingrained in you, right?," Cheechoo said. "Kids' idols are their parents. So if they see it, that's how they're going to act. So I think a lot comes from parents taking a look at it and really educating themselves on it and passing it down to their kids that way. I think that's the way you're going to see real change."

"Obviously, it's changed a lot since when Ted played to when I played and from when I played to now. But it's not all gone away. It's still there. It's just less. But you should want to get rid of it entirely."

The hope is to get more Indigenous kids a chance at sport. A chance at hockey.

"I want Aboriginal kids to know that they belong in hockey," said Rabbit.

"I'd like to see, in the hockey system, maybe educate your coaches, maybe have them go through a sensitivity program," said Cheechoo. "Maybe have your leaders, the people running these things, go through it. So they can pass it along to other people and maybe get it out of hockey. So that we're not treated as, 'Oh, it's just that Indian who is maybe going to quit or have a drinking problem.' Maybe we can be treated as equals."

'Look, this guy is a good player, we need him on our team, he's going to help us win.'

"Help people know what racism is," added Cheechoo. "Because a lot of people don't know what it is. They think it's gone. It's subtle but racism means a lot of things. People need to be informed on it. What better way than from the top down."

It's worth fighting for. It's worth hoping. Because despite the hardships, the game can still be so beneficial.

"The power of the game can switch so much and inspire so much," said Nolan. "If they only get the racism and the prejudice out of the game."

If only.

The Athletic LOADED: 06.13.2020

Sportsnet.ca / Vegas will be NHL hub city for Stanley Cup Playoffs when play resumes

Chris Johnston | June 12, 2020, 9:10 PM

A quick Friday night update because we live in a world where we're desperate for any tiny morsel of quasi-information.

The Las Vegas Review-Journal has put out a story saying Vegas will be confirmed as a hub city for the Stanley Cup Playoffs by June 22, but the truth is we should expect the official announcement before then.

Gary Bettman said as much on May 26 when he indicated it would be three weeks until the hub cities were finalized.

Vegas will be one of them. The other depends on how the Canadian government chooses to enforce the 14-day quarantine for those entering the country. We await an announcement there.

With training camps set to open July 10, teams need to know where this is going as soon as possible.

Ideally, the NHL would like to have a Canadian city serve as a hub alongside Vegas, but that won't be finalized until the federal government makes a ruling. Toronto is the preferred destination, assuming the quarantine issue can be managed.

Sportsnet.ca LOADED: 06.13.2020

Sportsnet.ca / 31 Thoughts: Hockey, NHL pushing forward on multiple fronts

Elliotte Friedman June 11, 2020, 3:05 PM

"I have three stories for you," begins Xavier Gutierrez, Arizona's newly hired President and CEO — the first Latino named to that position in NHL history. "My personal experience: I'm a kid, who is born in Mexico, grows up in San Jose, and goes to his first hockey game November of his freshman year at Harvard (in 1991). And I was hooked. The game was fast, the players were skilled, the passion of the fans was palpable. I know what it's like to not necessarily be exposed as a fan, and yet you go.... I've shared this story: I've got my Harvard hockey jersey (at home); my wife wants me to throw it away, but no way. So I can personally relate to the experience that your first hockey game — live, in-person — can be transformative."

"That's number one."



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"Number two: I have three nephews who are Spanish-fluent, but they're English-dominant, U.S.-born. And their first love, their first sport playing, was hockey. And why was that? Because they grew up in Hacienda Heights, suburb of Los Angeles, and the Kings and the Ducks decided to invest in their community. Well, who does the youth in their community include? It includes Latinos. So all of a sudden, you have these three kids — now they're Coyotes fans, right? — but, growing up, they're Kings fans, and that was their first sport. It wasn't basketball, wasn't baseball, and they don't necessarily look like the youth that is permeating the NHL today. But that is the future. That is the realm of possibility when you have franchises in these markets — franchises that understand you can embrace that market, bring in that youth and make them fans for life.

"The third is my hometown of San Jose, where I grew up. When I left for college, the Sharks came to town. Right here, right now, San Jose is a hockey town. There's no doubt about it. San Jose is a hockey town so much that my high school has an ice hockey team. The oldest high school in California has an ice hockey team. Now tell me that isn't transformative.

"The cost, the barriers to entry, they're very high. So we have to address those. But the issue of fans like Latino fans, female fans, multicultural fans — it's going to be too hard to get them? I don't know why that's the case. There's three stories right there where I believe that's the future."

Gutierrez is far from alone in this vision for the future of hockey.

"We have more kids of colour playing the game, more players of colour in the NHL," says Winnipeg-born Paul Jerrard, now in his 23rd year of coaching. "Those guys are great role models. They will inspire some young kids to believe in themselves, (to believe) that they can have that option, too."

At a pivotal point in North American history, we can all feel the ground shifting beneath our feet. The hockey world is no different. As Jerrard says, we see more and more players from minority backgrounds, although that shift has rarely moved beyond the playing surface. The onus will be on the sport to change in the boardroom, in the front offices, behind the benches, in media — you name it.

"We have a lot of players, and a lot of potential coaches out there, of colour, in the Greater Toronto Hockey League, in minor hockey, in college, looking to make that jump," says Jason Payne, an assistant coach at ECHL Cincinnati who also owns Precision Skating, in Toronto. "It's up to people like myself — all these different coaches, not just black coaches, but minorities — to pave the way... to show that we can bring great things to the table as well as anybody."

I didn't realize (until I saw an Anthony Stewart tweet) that there were three black assistant coaches in the ECHL this season: Payne, Kalamazoo's Joel Martin and Greenville's Kahlil Thomas. Thomas is the father of Akil Thomas, the promising Los Angeles prospect.

The challenge is getting that big break, finding someone who will be your champion. As with many other businesses, there is always the question: Is who you know more valuable than what you know?

Jerrard, 55, was drafted 173rd overall by the Rangers in 1983. He played five NHL games with the Minnesota North Stars, but played professionally for 10 years. His career ended on a high — a 1997 Calder Cup championship with the Hershey Bears. His approach won over longtime executive Les Jackson and head coach Bob Hartley. (Hartley was the coach of that Calder Cup winner.)

Later, four-time Stanley Cup champion Lorne Henning would recommend him to Travis Green for an assistant job at AHL Utica. Currently at NCAA Nebraska-Omaha, Jerrard's had three NHL stops — Colorado, Dallas and Calgary.

Asked about advice, Jerrard mentioned work ethic — and networking.

"You need that willingness to network, to get to know people. I would never be afraid to go up and introduce myself, start small talk with

someone, let them know I was around. Even if you just pop by after a game, I went out of my way to say hi to people."

That's not easy for everyone. Jerrard chuckled a little.

"Yes, there were people you could be terrified of going up to, but my mother (Merline) always talked about being comfortable in your own skin."

Payne's road to Cincinnati came through current Cyclones coach Matt Thomas, an old minor hockey teammate. The 44-year-old was with his family at the Aquarium in downtown Toronto in the summer of 2018.

"I was deep in the bowels," Payne said on the 31 Thoughts podcast, "and we're watching all the sharks and everything swim around. Then I got a text message on my phone... and it's from Matt. And he goes, 'How would you be interested in coaching down in Cincy?' And I said, 'Pardon me?' Because I didn't know he even got the job.

"He goes, 'Give me a call.'"

The hiring had to be approved by Buffalo, the Cyclones' NHL parent. It was, and Payne is very complimentary of the local ownership, too. But there will need to be more of these stories.

In 2003, the NFL created the "Rooney Rule," named for former Pittsburgh owner Dan Rooney. It requires that ethnic minorities be interviewed for all senior football positions. While the idea seemed honourable, there have been plenty of criticisms that it hasn't worked, that these candidates are given polite interviews without a real chance at the job.

Jerrard is blunt about his dislike for the idea.

"I don't want to be hired because I'm black. I want to be hired because I'm qualified to do the job," he says.

"You'd like to say that, yeah, (it could work)," Payne says. But he adds such a rule can't protect against the person doing the hiring knowing another candidate better than they know you.

"You want to bring in somebody you can trust — that's going to have your back, that's going to work as hard as you work, that's going to help you as much as you help them."

"I don't have an answer (for a specific Rooney rule), but what we have to do is make everyone feel comfortable that they want to apply," said Trevor Daley, who has played 1,058 NHL games. (We will hear more from him later in the blog.)

"I'm not a big supporter of the Rooney rule," adds Kim Davis, NHL Executive Vice President of Social Impact, Growth Initiatives & Legislative Affairs. "As you know, it's not working for them. I'm a big supporter of going into communities. I'm a big supporter of understanding there are different places that you source different kinds of talent and that we have to build relationships with those places. I'm a big supporter of creating internship programs and pipelines. This is not something that happened overnight and this is not going to be solved overnight. We have to have a multi-faceted, multi-pronged approach to this and we have to understand we (are) in it for the long haul. If we're looking for short-term answers... we're going to be disappointed. This is a long game. We have to be in it and committed to it for the long haul."

Davis is inspired by her own family's experience, as her son briefly played at an all-male private school in Connecticut.

"He didn't feel very welcome. We had the option of saying, 'This is not the sport for you,' and moving on to something else. They missed a very talented young man and an opportunity for a family that had the capacity to be a really, really strong fan. I often think about that.

"We have to go to the people that we want to embrace."

Jerrard said he'd been contacted by Davis's office before emotions ignited over the last couple of weeks.



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"There is way more good in this game than there is bad, and I look forward to the opportunity to help it grow," he said. "The conversations have spiked and we will keep them going."

"There's always that saying, the player of colour or person of colour has to work twice as hard to get recognition or get noticed," Payne said. "It's hard to overcome, but if we all work together we can hopefully overcome it a lot sooner than later."

In Arizona, owner Alex Meruelo, a trailblazer himself, promised that "increasing minority hiring in our franchise will definitely be a top priority for us. Xavier and I are committed to ensuring that minority candidates will receive equal opportunity. Diversity, inclusion and equality will all be key values in our hiring process."

"How do we bring people from different backgrounds to the table?" Gutierrez asks. "Perhaps you have people who come from corporate America or the investment-management business — from the creative side, from the digital media side. That, I think, is the beginning of this broader discussion of 'How do you bring better diverse talent — diverse in the bigger sense, not just racial, ethnic or gender diversity — into the fold?' If you think about it from that perspective, that is what will lead to a much more welcoming approach."

"I want to make the best business decision, and there's no way you are going to make the best business decision if you don't have diverse perspectives at the table. Sports has a powerful voice and an incredible platform to be a leader in the community, to be impactful, to say, 'I am part of this community, I can engage to make it better.'"

Jeff Marek and Elliott Friedman talk to a lot of people around the hockey world, and then they tell listeners all about what they've heard and what they think about it.

31 THOUGHTS

1. I don't believe the NHL is looking to remove Ottawa owner Eugene Melnyk, or anything like that. But I do believe he needs to address allegations that the The Organ Project — which he created in 2016 — donated just 0.5 per cent of its 2018 revenues towards the cause. You can't let that go unanswered.

2. New Jersey is continuing conversations around its GM position. (It's also possible the position is called "Chief Operating Officer.") Incumbent Tom Fitzgerald remains a candidate. According to a couple of sources, one of the interviewees was NBC/Blackhawks broadcaster Ed Olczyk. Asked via text if he'd spoken to the Devils, Olczyk replied, "I speak to a lot of people in the NHL."

3. The NHL and NHLPA announced Thursday that formal training camps (Phase 3 of return to play) will begin July 10, "provided that medical and safety conditions allow and the parties have reached an overall agreement." There was anxiety around a target date, something everyone could point to — especially once the NBA came out with a detailed calendar.

The next 10 to 14 days are going to be critical. We know the NHL/NHLPA are inching closer on selecting hub cities. They are grinding away on protocols for Phase 3 and Phase 4 (games). They are grinding away on a CBA. They may not get the latter done, but can they agree on a framework that gives the players enough of a guarantee on a) the economic benefits of coming back to play (capped escrow), and b) health care in case anybody is infected. There's no point in holding a player vote without that information. Training camp could be two weeks in your own city and six days in the "hub," where you play your exhibition games.

Adjustments are always possible, but there's a ton of work to be done. July 10 is less than a month away.

4. That said, I've never been so excited about the possibility of seeing a hockey puck.

Senior Writer Ryan Dixon and NHL Editor Rory Boylen always give it 110%, but never rely on clichés when it comes to podcasting. Instead,

they use a mix of facts, fun and a varied group of hockey voices to cover Canada's most beloved game.

5. Over the last week or so, the NHL has asked its teams to submit the names of AHLers/prospects that could be added to their rosters for the proposed Phase 3 (training camps) and Phase 4 (games). There isn't total certainty, as the NHL and NHLPA sort out whether teams can add newly signed players for 2019–20. Unless that is allowed, defending Stanley Cup champion St. Louis and Vegas won't have many surprises.

Other considerations, Western Conference:

- Dallas will add Jason Robertson up front and Jake Oettinger in goal. Their last two first-rounders — Ty Dellandrea and Thomas Harley — are on the radar if permitted.

- Edmonton is undecided on its last couple of spots.

- Nashville is considering Eeli Tolvanen.

- Vancouver included Sven Baertschi.

- I don't think there will be any surprises in Calgary.

- Winnipeg is waiting on Bryan Little's recovery. I'd totally forgotten how the Jets had 16 forwards and 10 defencemen when play was paused.

- Minnesota will include several players who had strong years at AHL Iowa — league scoring leader Sam Anas, goals leader Gerry Mayhew and Goalie of the Year Kaapo Kahkonen.

- Arizona is adding 2019 first-rounder Victor Soderstrom.

- Chicago is waiting on some of its injured players (Calvin de Haan, Brent Seabrook, Andrew Shaw and Zack Smith) to see if any of them can play. The only player invited to Phase 2 who wasn't with the Blackhawks or AHL Rockford was OHL London's Alex Regula. They'd like to include Ian Mitchell from NCAA Denver, but it depends the NHL/NCAA negotiation.

6. Eastern Conference:

- Boston and Tampa are still working things out, but don't expect surprises.

- Washington will have defenceman Martin Fehervary, and, if permitted, 2019 first rounder Connor McMichael — although that would be for development, not play.

- Philadelphia would love to reward Oskar Lindblom after his courageous battle with Ewing Sarcoma, but that may not be possible. Morgan Frost is on their list.

- Carolina is considering three of its top prospects: forward Dominik Bokk (acquired in the Justin Faulk trade), Jake Bean (the AHL's Outstanding Defenceman this year) and fellow blueliner Joey Keane (AHL All-Rookie Team).

- Toronto publicly declared Nick Robertson will attend.

- Columbus has Liam Foudy. Florida's got Owen Tippett. (As it stands, 2018 first rounder Grigori Denisenko, signed in May, can't play.)

- The Rangers are looking at both 2018 first rounder Vitali Kravtsov and Lias Andersson, who went back to Sweden last season. Andersson is in the conversation because he played well there, and both sides are working hard to make sure the lines of communication are strong.

7. NBA Commissioner Adam Silver told TNT last week certain coaches may not be allowed to coach from the bench "in order to protect them." (One prominent agent pushed back against that directive.) NHL Coaches Association Executive Director Michael Hirshfeld said, in his conversations with the league, it will be left up to the individual to make their own decisions.

8. One NHL player indicated that one of the things he and his teammates brought up was whether or not three or four restaurants at each hub could be "bought" for the duration so that only players and their families



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could go there. No general public, just them. The idea was to have somewhere else to go besides the rinks and the hotel.

9. In case you missed it, Montreal owner Geoff Molson threw cold water on rumours he was thinking about hiring a president of hockey operations.

"I have no intentions of (that)," he told local reporters on a conference call. "There are very few teams that do it and there are many reasons for that."

10. Teams that are out of the playoffs can make trades with each other. Another idea being discussed is whether or not those clubs will be able to buy out players or give qualifying offers later this month. That would be the normal window, but this world is anything but normal right now.

11. Earlier this week, Akim Aliu, Trevor Daley, Matt Dumba, Evander Kane, Wayne Simmonds, Chris Stewart and the recently retired Joel Ward announced the formation of the Hockey Diversity Alliance.

"This has been in the works four-five months," Daley said earlier this week. "How can we make a difference? How can we help? What can we do? The things that happened to us, how can we make sure they do not happen to next generation? The time is now. This is what we're doing it for. We're all equal. It doesn't matter who you are, or what you are. My mother was white, my father is black.... I didn't understand why people didn't accept that. 'That's my mom, that's my dad — they are great people.' I want my kids to grow up where that's understood."

12. Aliu called Daley back in 2005, when he fought back against hazing in Windsor. Two years earlier, Daley was the victim of a racial epithet in Sault Ste. Marie.

"Part of the conversation is our own personal situations. It's good for us to sit down and listen to what Matt Dumba is saying. Chris Stewart — honestly, I don't talk to these guys enough."

The Alliance will grow (it indicated it has reached out to NWHL player Saroya Tinker) and will be independent of the NHL, although it intends to work with the league.

"I'm so grateful for the sport," Daley says. "It's given me everything. Are there flaws? I'm still fielding those calls, so, yes, we can hold people more accountable. I just feel if people are held accountable at the NHL level, it will trickle down everywhere else."

13. What was it like on the Zoom call when Colin Kaepernick popped up on the screen?

"I was taken aback. It was pretty surreal," Daley said. "To hear his story and what he's gone through — this is what he was saying. He was taking a knee for these reasons. Now the whole world world sees it."

What did you learn from him?

"Just his dedication to his mindset and what he feels is right. That's what stuck with me the most. He knows he's doing the right thing for a great cause. I lay my head down at night, thinking about making the world better for my kids and others. Why not be a part of it? That's what Kaep has done. It's pretty powerful when you think about it."

14. Daley's contract is up in Detroit. Seventeen years as a pro, more than 1,000 games. Stanley Cup champion, excellent reputation. He can't play until next season.

Could this be it for a terrific career?

"I will work to keep myself in shape, make myself ready... but it does have to be the right situation."

He wants to be available for his children, Trevor (12) and Emery (8).

Is his future in hockey?

"I'd love to go into player development. I love working with young guys."

15. One recent entry-level deal that got plenty of attention: Arthur Kaliyev in Los Angeles. The 33rd-overall pick in 2019 signed for a \$925,000 cap hit — a big number for a second-round selection. When Kaliyev was taken, more than one exec thought he could be a steal for the Kings. He had 98 points in 57 games for OHL Hamilton, validating L.A.'s belief in him. There are no performance bonuses for the first two seasons of his contract, but a \$212,500 goals bonus in Year 3. That changes if he doesn't stick in the NHL next year, but Kaliyev's going to have a legit shot to stick.

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16. A couple of weeks ago, NCAA Wisconsin head coach Tony Granato indicated Philadelphia prospect Wyatt Kalynuk was leaving school to go pro. Taken 196th overall in 2017, the Manitoba-born defenceman has really improved. What teams are waiting for is to see if he signs with the Flyers or declares his intention to become a free agent after a 30-day waiting period. Because he was 20 when drafted, he has that option.

17. I think there's real interest in Mike Stothers, recently let go as coach in AHL Ontario.

18. Speaking of the AHL, five NHL GMs (Kyle Dubas, Ken Holland, David Poile, Don Sweeney and Steve Yzerman) will be part of group working together to plan the AHL's process for the 2020–21 season.

19. One thing you learn in a 37-minute conversation with Xavier Gutierrez: He's enthusiastic, and I'm a firm believer that enthusiasm is contagious. He talked up the team on the ice, off the ice — was unrelentingly positive about the Coyotes. One of the things I asked him was how many fans and media will say, "We've heard all of this before."

"There's been a number of people who've said that," he answered. "I say, 'Hey, I completely agree with you, but I don't know any of those people and I've never been part of those conversations.' I've always had a trajectory in which I'm not as focused on what hasn't worked, as much as I am thinking, 'Where are we today, and what do we do going forward?'"

"Phoenix today, the market today, is much different than it was five years ago, much different than it was 10 years ago, and that really comes from my business experience. You have to be informed by what has been tried, but you shouldn't be dictated by what has been tried."

Gutierrez made the point that everything is changing because of the pandemic, so prior factors may be irrelevant.

"I am bullish on the Phoenix business community. It reminds of me a lot of Silicon Valley, having grown up there."

20. Gutierrez knew Alex Meruelo's brother Richard, and met the Coyotes' owner himself at a 2010 lunch meeting.

"There are two things you know for certain if you book a meal with Alex: He will be late and it will be a very long meal."

Both were true — the meeting lasted almost four hours. They worked together for seven and a half years after that meeting, before Gutierrez left to join Clearlake Capital. (The parting was amicable — he remained a shareholder and director on Meruelo's Commercial Bank of California.)

Gutierrez bought a house in Arizona and is moving his family there, although they went back this week for a special family event — his son's elementary school graduation.

"I do take heart in the absence of sports that it has actually shown the importance of sports. You talk to people who say, 'I wish I could just watch something on TV, go to a game.' Here is my vision: How do we position this organization to be a prosperous long-term enterprise here in the market? I have an audacious goal of being the most beloved franchise in the market. I have an audacious goal of being the most-respected business organization, period. Not just sports, but period. I want to be a partner of choice for our business partners, our corporate



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sponsors. I want to bring value to them. I want to be part of their success. Those are the types of goals we have when we talk about winning off the ice."

He believes the success of Tampa Bay and Vegas should encourage the Coyotes (and their fans) to think it is possible.

"I believe in technology as a driving factor for business. A tech-enabled approach to connecting with the fans and our partners is absolutely something we are going to do."

What does that mean?

"I believe, and I'm not the only one who believes it, this incredible groundswell that's only going to keep growing for e-gaming is absolutely the flip side of the coin for online gambling. You have young people who are truly engaged in e-gaming, as they then get exposed to potential gambling components that are digitally based, that are on apps, that are accessible, that are tech-enabled... (that eventually include) a component of augmented reality, virtual reality. I think all is in the works and we want to be part of that."

21. Then there's the arena.

"I thought priority one through five was figuring out the arena," Gutierrez laughed. "Alex told me it's priority one through 10."

COVID-19 has loosened control on the timeline, but getting an arena in a more convenient location for the team's fans is a big deal for the Coyotes. Meruelo's hope is an announcement by the end of 2020.

22. I'm tearing down my golf game and starting all over. This is the driving range at Eagle's Nest Golf Club, a fun and challenging course:

I was there a few weeks ago to fit some new irons at the Titleist National Fitting Centre, which is based there.

That's a Shell station at the back. Ryan Goodridge, who showed great patience working with me, told a great story about NHL linesman Garrett Rank, who reached number 25 on the World Amateur Golf rankings last summer, hit that gas station with a three-wood. That's 300 yards. (Note: I couldn't hit it with a three-wood.)

23. Wednesday, I wrote about "Agape" (pronounced "ah-gah-pay"), the tribute song written by Oilers prospect Cooper Marody for the late Colby Cave. (It will be released at 12:00 a.m. Friday.) Marody is pleasantly surprised by how many players have been "super supportive" of his musical career.

"(Michigan teammates) Quinn Hughes and Josh Norris are some of my biggest fans," he said. "Leon (Draisaitl) came up to me, said he heard the song and it sounded awesome. I'm thankful for that support. It sends a message that there might be a lot of people scared to try something different, especially younger kids, but if you enjoy it, don't be afraid what others think. Pursue what you enjoy, because good people will support you."

24. When he goes to Nashville in the summer, Marody skates with a few people in the music industry who like hockey. The list includes singer/songwriter Chris DeStefano and Warner Chappell Music VP of A&R BJ Hill. DeStefano is a goalie. Marody laughed when I asked if he strategically went easy on him.

"Maybe I would have had a whole album produced by him if I shot the puck at his pads. He's pretty good, though."

25. Two stories that stuck with me in the last two weeks. Jason Payne played 22 years of pro hockey, and, like Johnny Cash, he was everywhere, man. This is a guy who clearly loves the game. In 1999–2000, he played 26 games for the ECHL's Dayton Bombers, accumulating 211 penalty minutes. One night in Roanoke stood out, for all the wrong reasons. The game went into a shootout, where an opponent totally butchered his attempt.

"So all our players (are saying), 'Nice shot, nice shot, nice dump-and-chase,'" Payne said. "So after the shot, he's skating back... looks at me,

and I hadn't even said anything. He looked directly at me, and he called me the N-word three times in a row. I laughed because I was like, 'Did he just say that for real?' And the linesman was standing right there, 'I got that — I saw it, I saw it.' And I sat there and I was kind of laughing, like, 'Did he say that for real? Does he know I will jump on the ice and tear his neck off?' It was funny in my mind that he had the audacity to say it when I hadn't said anything to him. As soon as it finished, my teammates poured on the ice before I even got on the ice. It was an all-out war trying to get to this guy. They stood up for me like it was no man's business."

Daniel Berthiaume, a goalie who played 215 NHL games, grabbed Payne.

"He's grabbing me, 'Payner, sorry, man. Please don't worry about this. He's an idiot, he's an idiot.' It took a lot of them at that point because my rage started to build up. It took a lot of people to try and get me off the ice."

26. Story II, from Jarome Iginla: Iginla said he was fortunate not to be the victim of many racial slurs when he was growing up.

"There were some incidents where something was going on in the stands, where one of our parents would go over and talk. After the game, you'd hear somebody said something inappropriate or ignorant, and one of my teammates' dads went over and talked to them. Those meant a lot to me to have that support.... It wouldn't have been the same if my grandpa had to go over there and talk to them. Imagine, my grandpa — older guy there — goes over and he's yelling. Of course, he's supposed to — I know he's got my back. But it was way different, felt way better and wasn't as harmful to me, I believe, as a young guy, when my buddy's dad went over and just laid down the law.... I'm very thankful I didn't have more and that I had people to back me up."

There've been times where I've spoken up, and times where I regret not doing more.

The 9

Eric Duhatschek shares his thoughts on Jarome Iginla's career and the NHL's Hall of Fame

June 10 2020

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27. Iginla was excellent on the podcast. A couple of highlights: He admitted "I didn't like hitting growing up. I wasn't scared of it. (But) I wanted to score goals, get points, help win the games, do those types of things.... Even in the NHL, I didn't like open-ice hitting. I would feel it (as hard as) the other guy (did)."

He credited WHL coach Don Hay for changing that mindset and joked that he never had a problem with fighting. His grandpa started him in boxing at the Panther Club in Edmonton.

28. Iginla's greatest successes were two Olympic Gold Medal games. Two goals in 2002, the Golden Assist in 2010. He told a funny story about buying a few Team Canada jerseys in 2002 for personal use.

"You can get the team to sign them, so I ordered all these jerseys, and they weren't cheap. But I thought, 'This is going to be awesome. People are going to want these — some family, friends.' And (then) we were getting blown out by Sweden in our first game.... It was pretty dismal, and I remember thinking on the bench just for a second, 'Nobody's going to want any of those jerseys.'"

Betting that wasn't a problem after the tournament was over.

29. Iginla's junior teammate Shane Doan was also a recent podcast guest. We asked Iginla if he was disappointed Doan made the 1995–96 Winnipeg Jets instead of returning to WHL Kamloops for a shot at a Memorial Cup three-peat.

Well, I was catching up with an old friend, TSN's Ryan Rishaug, seeing how he's doing. And I remembered he played for that '95-96 Kamloops team as well (seven goals in 53 regular-season/playoff games). With that



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prompting, Rishaug told a great story of how the Blazers sent Doan a video before Jets training camp, wishing him all the best in making the NHL. Rishaug said he jumped in front of the camera and said, "Shane, you have to make that team, because I'm getting cut if you don't." We had a good laugh at that one.

30. No problem here with Nashville and Washington campaigning hard for Roman Josi and John Carlson in the Norris race. If I were a candidate, I'd want to know my organization supported me.

31. I don't have the words for this other than to give my support to Jake, Dan and John Quesnel Jr. The gofundme to support these three children after an unspeakable tragedy surpassed its goal, proving one again that, even in difficult times, there are plenty of fantastic people in the world.

Sportsnet.ca / Where NHL goes from here after setting Phase 3 date

Chris Johnston June 11, 2020, 4:09 PM

These locked-in dates are crucial to salvaging the NHL season.

Establishing July 10 as the target to open mandatory training camps allows players to start making decisions about when to travel back to their playing cities, at least for those not waiting for more clarity on quarantine restrictions. It arms the teams with a key piece of information to start putting the wheels in motion on return-to-play planning that is shifting from theoretical to very real.

And, for the industry as a whole, Thursday's announcement was the most encouraging sign yet that we're going to see the Stanley Cup playoffs staged this summer — assuming the health and safety conditions allow for it.

The 9

Brian Burke gives his take on NHL's Phase 2, potential hub cities, and non-playoff teams

June 11 2020

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An agreement between the NHL and NHL Players' Association on the start date for Phase 3 basically amounts to a statement of intent since it establishes a deadline for those parties to work through the remaining issues.

They've basically left themselves until the end of June to finalize a return-to-play agreement to vote on. To this point the owners and players have only ratified the 24-team format that will be used if the season resumes. They will still have a say in whether that

actually ends up happening.

Before any voting happens, the to-do list looks like this:

- Get clarity from the Canadian government on whether a 14-day quarantine will continue to apply to NHL players entering the country, which directly affects whether Toronto, Edmonton or Vancouver can be chosen as a hub city and whether Canadian-based teams might choose to move their training camps to the U.S.
- Finalize the two hub cities where games will be played.
- Reach agreement on the collective bargaining issues pertaining to a return to play, which include critical dates, the 2020-21 salary cap, a potential cap on escrow and other contractual matters.
- Establish protocols that govern Phases 3 and 4, which include testing, rules governing those who produce a positive result, living conditions in the hub cities, family visits and roughly a thousand other considerations, both big and small.

Jeff Marek and Elliott Friedman talk to a lot of people around the hockey world, and then they tell listeners all about what they've heard and what they think about it.

That's all expected to be bundled into a big package for approval by the end of June. Once we get there, it will be the first in a line of moments of truth because it will officially signify whether the league and its players are going ahead with training camps, exhibition games and progressing towards resuming a season that's been on pause since March 12.

By comparison, Thursday's announcement about camps opening July 10 was more of a symbolic step forward in that it finally established a timeline for all of these things to happen.

"That's kind of what we've been waiting for," said Toronto Maple Leafs defenceman Morgan Rielly. "I think if you ask most players what was the hardest part about [this pause] it was the uncertainty."

A notable subtext to the return-to-play decisions is that negotiations on a CBA extension have started as well. The sides are looking at a potential four- or five-year extension to an agreement currently set to expire in September 2022 and don't necessarily have to hammer out all of the details before the puck drops again.

Perhaps we'll see them reach a memorandum of understanding on key issues, though.

After weeks where seemingly no progress was made towards a return, it's been a big few days. Players began returning to team facilities for small-group workouts on Monday and no doubt will be joined by greater numbers of teammates in the days ahead as those currently in Europe and other parts of North America make their way back to playing cities.

The quarantine issue is a major point of emphasis for the Canadian-based teams, particularly since they'd originally been hoping to receive clarity from the federal government by the end of last week. There is optimism that restrictions could be eased so that a NHL facility would be considered part of a player's safe zone under quarantine — which would both open the door to players on the six returning teams to get back and participate in Phase 2 while also keeping open the possibility of a playing hub being based here.

Senior Writer Ryan Dixon and NHL Editor Rory Boylen always give it 110%, but never rely on clichés when it comes to podcasting. Instead, they use a mix of facts, fun and a varied group of hockey voices to cover Canada's most beloved game.

Contingency plans are already in place if that doesn't happen.

Calgary Flames general manager Brad Treliving told Sportsnet's Eric Francis this week that he's willing to consider a U.S.-based training camp. Vancouver, Edmonton and Montreal have investigated the possibility as well.

At least they all now have a date to inform those decisions and more reason than ever to believe the planning won't go for naught. The NHL is inching towards a resumption. It gets closer and closer with each hurdle cleared.

"I do believe that we will play," said Rielly. "I've kind of always had that train of thought, it's just kind of a matter of when. ... I've tried to keep the attitude that we're coming back and playing and try to be positive.

"Hopefully that can keep going here between now and July 10 and then on from there."

The Athletic / LeBrun: Training camp date set, CBA talks continue and paycheque decision delayed

By Pierre LeBrun

Jun 11, 2020



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While negotiations are still needed to finalize plans for resuming the NHL season, barring any setbacks, at least we know when training camps will start.

The NHL and NHL Players' Association announced on Thursday that training camps would commence on July 10 in the 24 NHL markets involved in the proposed Return to Play format:

"The National Hockey League Players' Association (NHLPA) and the National Hockey League (NHL) announced today that formal training camps (Phase 3) for the 24 teams resuming play will open on Friday, July 10, provided that medical and safety conditions allow and the parties have reached an overall agreement on resuming play. The length of training camp and, therefore, the start date for the formal resumption of play (Phase 4) will be determined at a future date," the NHL-NHLPA jointly announced.

However, that training camp start date is still subject to change if talks stall during Phase 3/4 negotiations. And while a source confirmed on Thursday that discussions for an overall agreement have commenced, the talks are still in the early stages. I think it's safe to say both sides need at least 2-3 weeks to get through the Phase 3/4 protocol agreement — a timeline that also accounts for an NHLPA Executive Board (31 player reps) vote.

It's important to remember that the players haven't yet agreed to play again this season; they've only agreed to what the format would look like if they indeed decide to play.

But my understanding is that both sides felt it was important to announce a training camp start date because of all the speculation that was out there, including some reports of a potential Aug. 1 camp start date.

In fact, it is more likely that the first games begin on Aug. 1 (or sometime close to that date). Again, this is all subject to negotiation. If the five-round tournament begins around Aug. 1, that would mean the Stanley Cup Final would take place in early October.

Unlike Phase 2, which is voluntary for players, Phase 3 training camps will be mandatory for the players on the 24 teams still eligible. By announcing the July 10 start date for training camps now, it affords the players, especially those still in Europe, enough time to make travel plans for a return to their NHL city.

While the NHL and NHLPA go back and forth on Phase 3/4 talks, both sides are also involved in CBA negotiations.

There are some involved who hope, that if all goes well, a memorandum of understanding could be in place by the time training camps open in July. That might be a little aggressive but it's encouraging that the negotiations continue.

The current CBA runs through the 2021-22 season. Sources indicate both sides are talking about either a four- or five-year extension which would be tacked on to the current pact. An agreement on either of those extensions would mean the CBA wouldn't expire until the 2025-26 season or the 2026-27 season.

I've been told that whatever rule amendments to escrow or contracts or the salary cap are agreed to as part of the new CBA would be applied right away, which makes sense considering the need for transition rules due to the pandemic.

Again, it's extremely important for both the players and owners to get financial clarity and a better understanding of what the NHL landscape will look like over the next few years as the business attempts to find a path through difficult times.

For the players, a CBA extension could mean limiting the escrow pain in the short term. For the owners, a CBA extension could mean more favourable ways to construct player contracts (perhaps flatten out contracts and eliminate front- or back-loaded deals? It's just one of many ideas.)

Whatever it ends up being, it's a crazy, busy time for NHL and NHLPA senior staff as they double-barrel both Return to Play and CBA negotiations.

And finally, you may remember that we told you last month that the NHLPA's Executive Board had deferred until the end of May a decision on what to do with the final paycheck of the season for players. That paycheck was paid out by owners on April 15 but the players haven't collected on it. The debate of course is whether to start paying down on the escrow money owed as the players kept getting paid after the season went on pause, while the owners stopped collecting revenues. Therefore, that 50-50 split of HRR for this season is clearly tilted towards the players right now.

A source on Thursday said that the decision on the final paycheck, worth about \$120 million in total to the system, has been further deferred. Essentially, I think the players want to see where CBA talks go before making a call on it, which is a sound decision. My guess is the players won't collect that paycheck in order to start paying off what's owed to the system, but the NHLPA also has assurances from the NHL that if they do ultimately decide to cash in that final paycheck, they still can.

The Athletic / Steve Valiquette on the NHL's latest trends and why GMs should take note

By Arthur Staple

Jun 11, 2020

Steve Valiquette played 15 pro seasons as a goalie, mostly in the Islanders and Rangers organizations. He's known now as a studio analyst for MSG Network on Rangers games, but his main project is Clear Sight Hockey, the data company he formed in 2015. He and his partners provide exclusive data on scoring chances for a handful of NHL teams, as he outlined in a Q&A with The Athletic in November 2018.

Valiquette was a guest on the No Sleep Til Belmont podcast this week and offered up more insight into his work and what it's shown about the way goals are scored in today's NHL, as well as where he thinks data will take the league in the coming years. We compiled a few of his answers here in Q&A form.

On how he learned the mental side of the game as a goalie:

Everything changed for me in the '04-05 season. We had that lockout. I was very fortunate to have Benoit Allaire stay with me and Jason LaBarbera. We were partners in Hartford and we had a goalie coach there full-time for the first time at the AHL level. Now, as you know, all 31 teams employ two, three, sometimes four goalie coaches so there's coverage. But back in those days, there was maybe one guy who came in periodically for the NHL goalies.

It was basically a perfect storm for me in a few ways. I hired a sports psychologist. My friend Steve Montador — the late, great Steve Montador — I remember in the summer time, he said, "Vally, if you want to play in the NHL you have to hire this sports psychologist I work with. She's changed my life." Her name is Giselle Bourgeois. She was in Lenox, Mass., about an hour and 15 minutes away from where I was in Hartford. So I was able to get there twice a week. I wasn't just working on the ice with the best goalie coach in the world, I was able to work with a sports psychologist.

The way that changed everything I looked at was understanding where I had shortcomings. I was a career .909 save percentage in the AHL, I was 27 years old and I was pegged to back up Jason LaBarbera at the time and I had to realize I had different issues with what the data community would call score effects.



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Goalies react very differently depending on the score of the game. These are things we only know anecdotally. We don't know them in fact until we categorize scoring chances over and over again and then come up with historical averages, and then you're able to look at, "Wow, this goalie really doesn't stop the puck when his team's up by a goal. Any scoring chance seems to go in on this guy." And there are goalies in the NHL who are plagued with that mental barrier; they're not able to give themselves permission to believe in themselves in game conditions.

They play really well and make saves when their team is down by two, but not when it really matters. And the psychology of a team, it hinges on the mental strength of your goaltender. This is what I'm really fascinated with right now. I can remember getting rattled playing against the Albany River Rats in the AHL before I started working with my sports psychologist, feeling the pressure playing in a game we had to win. They're in last place, we're in first place and I get scored on twice in the first period against a team that, full disclosure, I think I'm too good for them. I'm too good to be playing against them. And that's not a good thing. Any time you let your guard down because you think you're better than somebody, you end up taking that bite in the butt. That's everything in life, isn't it?

So I had to come up with strategies, with the help of my sports psychologist, to play the puck. Next puck. Not the opponent, I compete against the puck. The puck tells me where to go, when to go, how fast to go, I have to keep squareness on it at all times. That keeps me in the moment. During that year, leading the league in save percentage with my partner, it gave me the belief that I could play in the NHL in a supporting role. I was already too old, because it took me so long to gather the courage to get a sports psychologist.

On how he got into the world of hockey data:

Before I even started categorizing things, I was really in tune to the fact that not all shots are created equal. In the summer of 2014, hockey had an analytics revolution and that was right in line with the time I was retiring from playing. After 15 years pro and five years junior, I'd played on 20 different teams. I thought to myself, if each coaching staff I ever played for looked at scoring chances differently, then how the heck can we look at what scoring chances would be like for every team and every game played during the season?

Then, and only then, would you get historical averages for each shot type. To say that a breakaway goes in 31 percent of the time — you would not be able to say that unless you've categorized all 2,300 breakaways that season. So that was my "coming to Jesus" moment with the sport, I just couldn't believe we'd gotten this far in hockey and there was no measure for what a scoring chance is across the league.

The only way I thought that could get done was if I came up with an expected goals model. An expected goals model is built using historical averages for every chance in the NHL during a season. You need a database to hold that — we've got 350,000 NHL chances in our database, categorized by shot type — and then you have to manually track all of these shots to then get true context for every event.

And then you can deliver these things the morning after games for teams and you can have the structure for a business. That's what I thought was going to be possible. I didn't realize this thought would be such a gut-wrenching experience, because it's that hard to do. And I'm not even worried about anyone copying it because it's that hard to do.

On where goals are being scored on the ice in 2019-20:

Goals this season and last, there is one shot sequence that goes in more than any other sequence and it's what we would call a low slot-line pass. If there's a line that divides the ice in two and it goes from the middle of the net and stops at the top of the circles — imagine just splitting the ice in two equal parts — any pass that begins above the hash mark and is received below the hash mark from one side of the ice to the other, that shot accounted for more goals than any other shot type. 736 goals on 2,023 shots.

It's a telling sign to me: "OK, what did this shot show me as a goalie?" It's the hardest thing to stop. I'm on one side of the ice, I'm fixed in my stance, the shooter's approaching me, he's a threat. And now the pass goes across the ice. Physically, it's the first time I have to open my legs. I've got to be able to move my head, get full rotation, then get down to my far post. It's a very difficult technical save — physical, cognitive — it's very difficult. Of course, I felt that as a goalie, but at the same time I would have said at the end of my playing career that breakaways went in the most often. I would have thought those would have been the scoring chances that went in the most.

The next two top scoring sequences in the NHL are actually two different types of broken plays — what we'd categorize as a mid-percentage broken play and then a high-percentage broken play. You can imagine how difficult these things are to put into context when you're training people to watch the game the way you do.

The simple way of saying it is that a mid-percentage broken play would be a shot that comes, delivered to the net from the point, in the air. The player in front is waving at it, trying to deflect it and it inadvertently hits someone's elbow or shin pad and ends up in the net. That's a mid-percentage broken play because the intent was a mid-percentage shot, an in-the-air deflection, no screen.

A high-percentage broken play is a slot-line pass that's intended for the receiving player. It doesn't go through and it goes off their skate or their stick. Those went in 434 times last year. It's neat because when you look at how the puck ends up in the net at the end of the season, the slot line is directly impacted in two of the top three sequences. If you can move the puck from one side of the ice to the other and force the other team to defend, you're going to get more broken play goals.

On what the data says about successful teams:

If you're new to the data, you can always look at who won last year. Who was the most recent Stanley Cup winner? It's the St. Louis Blues and, with a robust database, you can look at how they create grade-A chances. How often do they create grade-A chances? Are they even important?

What I thought was interesting with St. Louis this season was, they are one of the top-six teams in high-percentage chances for and against in OZP (offensive zone play). Only Carolina and Vegas are also in both of those top six. Those are three pretty good teams ... Carolina is top five in just about everything except for goaltending. They're a good team. If anything unravels Carolina, it's goaltending.

St. Louis is No. 2, tied with Boston, for slot-line plays created in OZP. St. Louis is No. 7 in slot-line plays that have led to goals, tied with Washington. They're good at finishing their scoring chances. They've got a better-than-average shooting percentage, but it's not outstanding.

Then I would look to expected goals — it's a rate stat, per 60 minutes. At five-on-five, with the game tied, St. Louis ranks No. 4 at creating high-percentage chances. At five-on-five up by a goal, St. Louis ranks 30th at high-percentage chances and fifth at high-percentage chances against.

Now, when I looked at that, I'm saying to myself, "Pretty neat. They don't really go for it up a goal, they pack it in and they play defensively. They're good at closing teams out. They don't give up a lot. They don't create a lot." Then I was looking at Jordan Binnington. What I've always looked at with data is how a goaltender can elevate a weaker team or unravel a very good team. It's a different sport. It's an individual playing hockey. I never considered myself a hockey player; I was a goalie.

At five-on-five, with the game tied, Binnington ranked No. 3 in expected goals differential — how many difficult shots he faced, how many goals he allowed, he ranked third. You can have a great technical goalie with a great physical frame, but if he doesn't have the mindset to be able to play in those different game conditions ... you can still help these people, you don't have to trade them.

Another interesting thing with Binnington. At six-on-five, with the other goalie pulled, he was No. 4 in expected goals differential. Five-on-five, up



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one goal. St. Louis is good at clamping down, not giving up many quality scoring opportunities. And why is that important? Because Binnington is one of the league's best at stopping the shots he should stop in those conditions.

He's at the top of the NHL in not allowing low-percentage chances against. He only allowed one low-percentage goal on 129 shots this season. That's neat because now they've got a good team in St. Louis that's leaning on their goaltender they once didn't have. Now they have a guy in there who's able to close it down.

David Rittich was last in that category — 10 goals on 126 low-percentage shots. Binnington shuts the door when the team is up by a goal, doesn't get rattled and doesn't give up the bad goal where Rittich does. And that's why I think it's so important to look at score effects, because if you don't know who's performing when the game is tied, up by a goal or down by a goal, do you really know what you have and what you can count on in the postseason?

On the battle to convince GMs and coaches of what the data says:

Every team now employs an analytics team and a coaching staff and those two departments have to then relay up to the GM that everybody's doing their job, and there can be conflict there. Now, there's another layer of conflict.

The reason why I was first hired by an NHL team three years ago was because I was coming in as the third party that was going to mediate the scoring chances the day after a game was played. Because the analytics group wouldn't be in line with what the coaches believed they saw. Depending on the game, one day you'd have the goalie coach doing the chances, one day the defense coach doing it. And a chance that goes towards the other team's net is not qualified the same as one you receive, so there's a lot of internal struggle there.

One of our shot types has been getting lower and lower every year — clear-sighted shots, ones where the goalie has more than half a second of clear sight on the puck before it comes off the stick from the slot. When you look at most of the public data, that shot from the slot area — home plate, the house, however you refer to it — that would be qualified as a high-danger shot for most companies out there.

That doesn't qualify as a high-danger shot for us because we've looked at roughly 5,000 chances a year on clear-sighted shots that come from the slot. So a player skates into the slot area, unobstructed, has a bit of time and space, shoots and tries to beat a goalie clean. Now, the unfortunate role I have is that I have to go and explain to a team that this year, that shot only went in 7.1 percent of the time.

It's a shot that goes in less than nine percent of the time. What it leads to is, "OK, Steve, send me the list of shots, wise guy." So, I'll send you everything we have. Here's the video.

I'll share a couple of the conversations I've had. Auston Matthews, he had 41 clear-sighted shots from the slot area in the NHL. Led the league. How many goals would you guess he'd have from there?

I was like, "11?" He's the best shooter in the game, isn't he? He had four. Four goals on 41 shots, and this is the guy I rave about on MSG about his release. But I watched those 41 shots just to be sure, and I see the goals he does score. He actually scores when he's shooting through a defender's triangle, he's got a really good drag and pull, a release that comes off quickly and surprises goalies when he uses the defender as a screen. So that's a tactic he uses very well.

But does he beat goalies clean when they have that all-important half second of clear sight? No. There were only three or four guys who stood out this year in that shot type. Jack Eichel had 29 shots from there and scored seven goals — that's 24 percent and he led the league. He's one of those elite snipers who can look at a goalie and beat him clean.

John Tavares had a good year this year — had 21 chances in that category, not a ton, but four goals. So that's 19 percent. (Evgeni) Malkin,

four goals on 19 shots. (Leon) Draisaitl, three goals on 19. So that's 21 and 15 percent.

But overall, I'm looking at this list and it's a tough one to explain to people in hockey if you don't have the video to back it up.

On understanding game conditions, or score effects, and how important they are:

I think this is important because if you don't look at how your players are performing in certain game conditions, I don't think you really have a good grasp of the psychology of your team.

Two years ago the Rangers gave up a bunch of leads at the end of a bunch of games, and now you're categorizing your team as mentally soft. Two years ago, you're giving up a number of games late. But when you leave the game level and look at your team, then drill down and look at your players, it's amazing how many times it's the same guy. Some people just can't perform under certain game conditions. There's an anxiety, there's a past experience, there's something there.

They don't expect to win. It's almost like they're going to relive something they've failed at in the past and they're going to do it again. It's amazing when I see teams losing, what their percentage of losing is when the goalie gives up a low-percentage goal. It's like the entire bench sinks.

I watch the Rangers so closely so I can speak to them. They had a really good season in net with all three guys that played. But I noticed in my notes that game-over-game, they lost games when their goalie allowed a low-percentage goal. Is their margin for error that small that their goalies can't give up one low-percentage goal? That sinks the entire game?

They lost 70 percent of the games when the goalie allowed one low-percentage goal against. It made me think a little harder, I wanted to look at what happens if the Rangers score one low-percentage goal and they give up two — they lost 82 percent of those games. The Devils lost 90 percent of the time, 18 games.

If I'm the Devils, how much do you look at what the goalies were doing early in the season? You weren't giving up that many chances, you weren't that bad offensively, but you weren't getting goaltending.

We went through a stretch with eight coaches fired in a seven-week stretch. Take a look at the goaltending they got and where they were. Within our database, every coach got fired because they didn't get goaltending. I could go team by team. There's some teams firing good coaches.

On expected goal differential and what it says about goalies:

One of the lists I like to look at is expected goals. And then look at the differential — the guys in the minus all miss the playoffs. There isn't a good team that had poor goaltending this year. But there are some good teams that had great goaltending and now the perception is they have a great team, their coach is great. But it's not always the case.

I was looking at the expected goals for goalies this year. I used a filter of 950 chances against, which weeds out the backups. You get 22 goalies who qualify. Just quick snapshots:

Connor Hellebuyck, best goalie in the game, should be your Vezina Trophy winner. Jacob Markstrom deserves a big payday. (Tuukka) Rask and (Corey) Crawford, still elite goalies in their 30s. Robin Lehner, he should start over (Marc-Andre) Fleury. Juuse Saros should start over (Pekka) Rinne. (Mackenzie) Blackwood in New Jersey is a legit goalie at 23 years old. (Sergei) Bobrovsky and (John) Gibson, their games fell off a cliff this season.

It's neat to see how a guy performs based on what he's facing because we've never had the opportunity to see things that way. You could always say the reason Marty Brodeur was so great was because he only had to face 18 shots a night, but you still have to qualify that he had two two-on-ones and a breakaway.

And we can use those same filters for our shooters and our defensemen.



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On combining data with psychology to get the most out of players:

Wouldn't you say that every team should employ a sports psychologist and have the right person to look at this data? Exactly that. I lived this.

What if you have a guy you're developing? Let's say it's Ilya Sorokin. He comes over and he's playing for the Islanders next year. And he's not playing well against the lower teams, but he plays big against the big teams. You've got a young guy who's impressionable, he's finding his way in the league, he's going to find his way the same way (Igor) Shesterkin has, but he needs a little more help.

Now you have somebody on him. This is the data. Let's look at the game conditions, watch the video — he has a letdown here. It's the hardest part about scouting. It's the reason there's so many mistakes in the draft. It's because when we get to the point of developing these players, we don't know how to psychologically work with them. Then we deem them a bust because we couldn't get through to them. But you didn't even know what the root of the problem was.

This is the next frontier of data, to help us get into the mental game. If we're talking about a developing player or even a superstar who doesn't score when you need a goal. Maybe that would help a Buffalo, a Jeff Skinner, and seeing when he scores. Not to say Jeff Skinner isn't going to be able to score five-on-five when the game's tied, but maybe we can help him. We can help his mindset and have the confidence to perform in those big-time situations. Or your team doesn't make the playoffs. So on the player level, if you can't help anybody, how's your team going to do?

The Athletic / J.T. Brown on NHL race conversation: 'Better late than never'

By Joe Smith and Michael Russo

Jun 11, 2020

J.T. Brown received his share of messages of support from friends, family and former teammates following the tragic death of George Floyd on May 25.

But one text really hit home.

Brown, 29, was angered, sickened after watching the nearly nine-minute video of Floyd being killed by a police officer while being arrested in Minneapolis. Just three years ago when playing for the Lightning, Brown became the first NHL player to do a silent protest during the national anthem, raising a closed fist Oct. 7, in an effort to raise awareness about police brutality and racial inequality. And now there was another painful example, right in Brown's hometown, with Floyd yelling "I can't breathe" as the white officer knelt on his neck.

Four days after Floyd's death, Brown was getting his two kids, 3-year-old daughter Lily and 1-year-old son Booker, ready for bath time when he got a message from Tampa police chief Brian Dugan, who had kept in touch since the forward's protests made their lives intertwine in 2017.

"I'm sure you're furious right now," Dugan texted to Brown on May 29. "And you have every right to be. Your anger doesn't make you anti-cop. Stay true to yourself. Stay woke. Staying silent won't change anything. Speaking out can change everything. Let me know if I can help."

Replied Brown: "I appreciate it. That's the same thing we had talks about 3 years ago. And it still rings true today."

Today, the whole country is talking about race. That includes the NHL, with more than 100 black and white players making statements that they would not be silent anymore. But three years ago, when Brown raised his fist, there was barely a ripple. He got support from teammates and behind-the-scenes messages from other NHL players, but it was

subdued. Nobody else followed his lead. Brown knew there would be backlash, but he received anonymous death threats on social media.

"In my heart, I know I did the right thing," he said.

Brown admits he was nervous and emotional that night. He had consulted with family and friends before making his silent protest, gave coach Jon Cooper a heads-up at the team hotel that afternoon, not to mention separate phone calls with owner Jeff Vinik and GM Steve Yzerman. Brown addressed the team as a group. Many of those former teammates have reached out in the past few weeks, put out Twitter statements, including Steven Stamkos, Ryan Callahan and Brian Boyle.

Brown said he'd be lying if he hasn't thought in the past few weeks — This is why I raised my fist. This is why Colin Kaepernick took a knee.

"You'd rather have it late than never," Brown told The Athletic Wednesday. "I think the support has been awesome and that's what truly makes this easier to be optimistic on what could or should be happening going forward, that this is not going to fade and move on. Three or four years ago, when the first protests were happening across the NFL and myself, there wasn't that same support. But it's better late than never."

Brown was one of four guests Wednesday on The Athletic's "Straight from the Source" podcast, which featured a roundtable with Brown's agent Eustace King (one of the first black agents in the NHL), Wild team doctor Joel Boyd (the first black team doctor in the NHL) and Wild defenseman Jared Spurgeon, one of the many white players to show support the last few weeks. It was a complex conversation on race, their interactions with police, hockey culture, and how the league and country can embrace change. During the podcast, Brown brought up how he and Dugan, the white Tampa police chief, remained close over the years, with both of them having learned from each other in their interactions following his protest.

Brown spent a day with Tampa police, including doing a ride-along with officers. He went through some of their drills, role playing as a cop in the department's Citizen's Police Academy. "It just opened my eyes a little bit more to what I guess police go through, and what they're training is," Brown said.

Brown flipped Dugan's perspective, too.

"Back then, my concern was how it could divide our city and our community, more from a selfish standpoint," Dugan told The Athletic Wednesday night. "Now I look back at it as the chief of police, and people hate the police right now. Who in this country would want to be chief of police? Now I see it from a different perspective."

"I look at it how brave (Brown) was to take that stance. He put himself on an island, and that takes some guts."

Dugan admits he has his hands full now, with protests occurring daily across the Tampa Bay region. Many have been peaceful. But there are examples like a Champs Sports store getting burned down, too.

"How did we end up in these riots?" Dugan asked. "It's because when they raised their fist, we called them 'militant.' When they sat on the bench, we said they weren't patriotic. When they took a knee, we criticized that. And they felt their voice wasn't being heard, which is why it's led to rioting."

"I'm not condoning that, I don't want to come across as justifying what they're doing. But I hear their frustration."

Dugan understands where the anger is coming from. He's watched the Floyd video, with his reaction as visceral as many across the country. "If there's a cop out there that's not sickened by that video, they should probably quit," Dugan said. "But I do think that these protests are more than just police brutality. We're a divided country when it comes to politics, economics, social issues and we're very divided. The police aspect is part of it, but it's a much bigger issue, and that kind of gets lost."



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Both Brown and Dugan agree that there's a way for both teams and athletes and law enforcement to work together in a community, becoming leaders and setting a tone. For example, Brown and Wild defenseman Matt Dumba are planning on announcing an initiative soon that'll impact the Twin cities area, which is still healing. Dugan points out that everyone should be outraged about what happened in Minnesota with Floyd and the police, but as Brown says, "You don't have to be anti-cop."

"You can be pro-cop and not tolerate racism at the same time," Dugan said. "You can support good cops and call out the bad ones."

Brown appreciates all the players who have stepped up in support with their words, and actions, understanding why some white players, teammates were initially reticent to go public on such an issue. "It's hard to talk about when it's not something you have to live on a daily basis," Brown said. "You could understand the fear of saying the wrong thing."

Brown sees some signs of progress, including the likes of Columbus coach John Tortorella changing his opinion on players protesting during the anthem. "It's big of somebody like that to listen and change his mind," Brown said.

Years ago, Brown changed Dugan's mind, his thinking. And it's stuck with him as the police chief handles the unrest in his city.

"The guy had some guts, he was the only one in the NHL who took a stance," Dugan said. "I know what it's like to be all alone as the chief of police. I admire him. I don't think it was anti-police, it was anti-police-brutality."

"I think we all should be."

That brings us back to the complicated, sometimes uncomfortable conversation during Michael Russo's podcast Wednesday. It was a fascinating, educational, informative discussion featuring men of different generations.

Here were some of those topics:

Brown: I keep my license and my registration, insurance, I keep it in where your garage door opener goes ... just to limit any inference that I might be reaching for something. I'm just trying to limit my chances of having something bad happen to myself. That's something that you don't want to have to do. But it's a precaution that I take on my own so that I make sure that I come home safe.

King: I played junior hockey in Dubuque, Iowa, and during that time, this is '92. ... There was one time I was pulled over and I put my hands out the window to make sure the cop didn't think I was going to do anything because I was young, I was only, a 19-, 20-year-old kid. And I'd already had known at the backdrop a few years ago, Yusef Hawkins had been killed in '89. The one cop on the right side had his finger on his gun because he was concerned that if I was going to do something or trigger something that he's prepared while I was answering questions with the officer that was at my door. And for me, it was scary because ... I had been taught my whole life, "You need to make sure that you're alert, you speak well, you talk to the officers." But the same token I had to go into my glove box, which is on the other side to try and get my driver's license to be able to display that I did have a legal license and insurance because I was a young man driving a car. And the problem with that whole situation is that I was nervous and scared. And when you're nervous and scared, you do things that you probably wouldn't normally do. If I go running late at night, at the same age, I need to make sure that I am running on the other side of the street so I don't offend someone or ... make sure that someone's not uncomfortable. So there's all these things that are in our DNA that we have systemically grown up with that we've had to do or alter or adjust just to make other people feel comfortable where other people don't even think like that. And I think right now you're hearing all these stories about what others are going through in their history. ... These are the things I've had to do and endure, and I've had to talk to my kids about. ... What's wrong with this system? What's wrong with this mindset? Some of these things that I'm

telling you people say to me, "I can't even believe that you would even have to think that way." But it's the reality that we live in.

Boyd, the Wild's orthopedic surgeon who has been a physician for virtually every professional team in Minnesota, the University of Minnesota football team and USA Hockey, and has two children working for NHL Seattle: It's a true concern and it passes down from generation to generation. My mother taught me if I'm driving and I get pulled over, your hands are 10 and 2, don't move until (the police officer) requests that you move. ... It was always sort of this increased anxiety that happened when you get pulled over, and it's happened in my adult life. Not actually overly long ago where you get pulled over and at the end of the conversation, it's sort of like you're still trying to rationalize exactly why did I get pulled over. And in a couple of them don't even end up in tickets, but they just sort of needed to satisfy some inquiry that they had about the person driving that car. It does still happen, and we still have to educate our children. I educated my children on that fact as well. The common phrase actually in the community is driving while black. And, if you're driving while black, it's completely different than when most people drive. You are always a suspect, and that's how we send our kids out into the world.

King: Everyone here is under anxiety right now. And, whether it's the pandemic that we're dealing with, or if you want to call this another pandemic, which is racial inequalities in the U.S. My wife (Esther) the other day, my son (Kingston) went running and he's 10 ½, almost 11. And she teared up because she couldn't see him and she was like, "He's going up the hill and I'm scared that if something happens, he's only running for a half-mile by himself, but what happens?" And all these things that she never thought about. And I feel that we're in a great community, the community I live in is Valencia, California, and it was rated in the top-10 safest midsize communities in the United States of America. But she was scared because she saw the things happening on the TV and she sees him by himself and as a mother she wants to protect them. ... My wife's a neuropsychologist, I'm an agent. We're both educated people, but (what we're trying to do) is continue to expose our kids to different information. We don't want our kids to watch what happened to George Floyd and actually see this street video, but we also have talked about why there have been protests. My son the other day wanted to go to a protest and then the next morning he woke up and said, "I don't want to go, I talked to my friends, and I'm scared, I don't want to go there because everyone says there's rioting and looting and all these things." And I said, "Well, it's up to you." And then he came back to me and said, "Let's go." And we went, he had his little sign. And the two little guys, Kingston and Santana, they sat there and they supported the cause. But they also learned that, "I don't have to be scared." There's people here that are peaceful, there's people here who are doing it for the right reasons. We're constantly trying to educate, we're trying to expose them through travel, through different cultures. But at the same token, my son is 10 ½ years old. He knows. He's studying Martin Luther King. He's learning in school these things about civil rights in history. And now he's saying, "Wow, I didn't know that what happened 30, 40 years ago is still happening today. And for him, his question is, which is hard for me to answer, "Why?" As a parent, I can't really give them an answer. I don't know why. It's just keeps happening. It's a cycle. The cycle keeps repeating itself.

Eustace King with his client Willie O'Ree, wife Esther Marron King, and sons Kingston and Santana. (Courtesy of Eustace King)

Boyd: I would take my kids to all those events, as many as I could and include them and they loved going so they did have an experience to see other minorities could participate in hockey. And it just fueled their desire to continue to play and be involved in hockey. ... It was extremely prideful to go to an All-Star Game and have an event that was dedicated to the involvement and inclusion of both underprivileged and minority kids, and treat them like NHL players, NHL All-Stars. It was great to see the looks on their faces, the looks in their eyes, just to feel like hey, we can jump in and continue to work and play and aspire to (the NHL).

King: The program, definitely, as a pilot program, did a lot of stuff. If you look at the outcome, the first player, Gerald Coleman, who ended up



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playing in Tampa's system, that played (two NHL games) in Tampa, was from my hometown in Chicago, and Evanston, Illinois. He was the first guy who was in the NHL Diversity Task Force at the time, now Hockey's For Everyone, (that made it) to the NHL. Then you move forward and you see things like ice hockey in Harlem, you see skills' hockey where Wayne Simmonds, Chris Stewart, Joel Ward, Devante Smith-Pelly, these kids all played in this program that was in Toronto and gave birth to who they are now and then we come full circle. Wayne Simmonds has a program that's very similar to the program he played in when Willie O'Ree would come and visit. ... So what you're seeing is that, hey, there's building blocks here. But we've done it knowing at the backdrop that there's been different biases or racism in hockey. And now what we're saying is, "hey, what would happen if there was more opportunity?"

Is Brown, a free agent this upcoming offseason, worried about getting a job next season if he continues to raise this topic?

Brown: In the Tampa situation, I knew there was going to be backlash. It wasn't going to be a very popular opinion. I guess, a lot of people obviously supported it, but there was a lot of negativity towards it as well. Those are things you've got to think about. But at the end of the day, like I said back then, I knew what I needed to do, and I knew it was the right thing to do. And I think even going to now, my focus is less on the sports side but creating a better future for not only my kids, my family's kids, but also kids around the world and trying to make sure that they grow up and that they have a better system and a better way of life than what I had or what my parents had. So, to me, it's bigger than myself.

Spurgeon: For myself, I think it took a little while to think about what myself and my family wanted to do. Seeing what happened in the city that we live in ... definitely breaks your heart. But I talked with Eustace, we didn't want to be one of those people that just put a statement out and then had nothing to show for it or do about it. We want to take action and try and help as much as possible in the ways that we can. And that's why we went through all the charities that we thought we could help with and not just by picking one but by trying to do more than we could and spread them out a bit and then try to call other people to action as well. We didn't want to be one of those people that just wrote some words and then disappeared into the distance.

Brown: Obviously not having a season, it definitely helps. A lot of times our mentality is we're just ready for the next thing. We have a game the next day or we're getting ready to go to practice. There's just so many other things that go on during a season. But right now, there's nothing going on. There's no distraction. It was a nine-minute video during the day and what everybody saw. So I think it's kind of not necessarily turn a blind eye, but it's hard for you not to notice and not to want to say something, especially in this instance where we're not doing anything.

Spurgeon: I think, too, with the platform's of players or social media and being able to get their voices out, and like J.T. said, it's a video that you never want to see, but everyone unfortunately had to see that. And I think now with a lot of players and just the way our game is going that everyone is more comfortable voicing their opinion and especially when you see something that isn't right. ... But for every player to be able to watch a video like that and try to be a help for the cause is what we're all trying to do right now.

How does this conversation continue and become the new normal once games actually start again and players return to their normal team-first, don't step-out-of-the-box personalities?

Brown: I think it just takes everybody to hold themselves accountable and want to keep the conversation going. ... We can be a part of a team but we can talk about things that we're passionate about

Spurgeon: If people are uncomfortable with it, the only way to get over that is to keep talking about it. And hopefully now with people speaking out and more than just one person, like when J.T. was doing it (in 2017), years past when he was all by himself, that there's more people that are speaking out about it and that we can continue to do that and there isn't a backlash ... that you can speak your mind and that everyone's supporting it. I'm not sure if you're scared about what you're saying and

the backlash you're gonna get, but I think you can't be doing that anymore. You have to voice your opinion. And like we all been saying be a part of that change.

Jason Zucker, Jared Spurgeon, Eustace King and J.T. Brown (Courtesy of Eustace King)

How do we get more diversity in hockey, both as players and working for teams and leagues?

King: Doc Boyd, he was a qualified doctor and a surgeon. So I think for a lot of us, we're saying, there are a lot of qualified people who are highly capable that can go into positions of influence in the National Hockey League, and we want to see those people get their opportunities. There's coaches, there's referees, there's different people of color that just for some reason, just haven't been able to move up. ... There's women that are highly successful, really smart. There's some really educated people and skilled people that have accomplished a lot on the ice, in school that should be sitting at the table.

Brown: There's got to be a big emphasis on the youth organizations. I just think of how many kids quit ... quit hockey because they felt uncomfortable or because opposing players were using racial slurs against them. That's a big area where, if we can limit some of that, maybe more players will keep playing, where maybe the next Matt Dumba or the next P.K. Subban doesn't quit and ends up making it. I look back at my situation, I was fortunate enough when situations like that happened in my youth hockey, my coach had my back whether the ref heard it or not. I mean, there were times where we quit the game, we forfeited the game because another player used a racial slur against me. That kind of shapes my youth growing up, knowing that I had a coach and I had a team that completely had my back. That deterred me from wanting to quit and to keep playing the sport. Having more coaches being held accountable on the youth level to keep educating these kids will make it so that the next future wave of NHL players could have more minorities in it.

George Floyd was laid to rest Tuesday. Where do we go from here so the world remains united in taking up this cause?

King: We need just to condemn racism in every fashion, in every corner, eradicate it. I also think we need to be committed to change. We need to bring qualified people of color to sit at the table so there is another voice, an opposite opinion to what we've seen and are used to. And I think if we do that is when we will begin to see we'll change.

Boyd: There are things that you can do to educate yourself. I'll leave this little vignette with you. There was a post with a woman (anti-racism activist Jane Elliott), she was a professor speaking to a mostly white crowd, and she posed the question to them: "Would you feel comfortable living as a black person in America? If you would, please stand up." And, of course, no one stood up. And she says, "I don't think you understand the question. If you would feel comfortable living as a black person in this country, just stand up." And no one stood up. She said basically that means two things. One, you recognize the problem. And I think that's true of everyone. I mean, if you really ask them, they recognize ... everyone, every person recognizes the problem. And then the second part of that is if you recognize the problem and you don't want to be treated that way, why would you let anybody else be treated that way? And I think that right there, if you can answer that question for yourself, that's a huge jumping point, a place to take off from.



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The Athletic / How Anson Carter got some of the NHL's biggest names to unite against racism

By Rick Carpiniello

Jun 11, 2020

Anson Carter has heard the versions of “stick to sports.” He’s had fans and friends tell him, “this is a little too heavy for us” and that they watch sports to get away from real life.

But real life is important to the former NHL player and current broadcaster. Especially now. Perhaps more than ever.

“I don’t have that privilege,” Carter, 46, told The Athletic on Wednesday. “I don’t have the ability to hang up my skin color like a pair of shoulder pads and just hang them up at the end of the day and, ‘whew, I can just relax now.’ It’s part of my everyday life. It should be part of everyone’s reality. This is a real life civil liberties issue. This isn’t about politics at all.

“So no, this is something we can talk about because it’s a part of everyday life in the NHL community. You have black fans in the National Hockey League and black players in the National Hockey League. And this is part of the reality, so I think this is something important to talk about.”

Carter has done more than talk about it. With some technical assistance from his two young daughters, he produced a video, titled “In Union There Is Strength” featuring 33 faces and voices, some of the biggest and most prominent in hockey, from multiple continents, representing different genders, and of course, races.

The message was simple: “You don’t have to look like George Floyd ... to understand that what happened to him was wrong.”

Carter has had these conversations for all of his 46 years. He compared the experience to that of training for a marathon.

“The first 10 miles you run, the next day you’re exhausted, need a massage; your body’s aching, you’re sore,” Carter said. “But the more you do it, the more you train, the easier it becomes and that’s what dealing with race is all about. The conversations are tough, but the more we have these conversations, the more we work to try to erase it, the easier these conversations become.”

The video was done virtually from the homes and offices of the participants. It was done that way out of necessity. But it was also done that way to make a point.

“It was just the message I wanted to create,” Carter said. “The main point I wanted to get across was, just because we’re social distancing doesn’t mean the hockey community is socially distanced. And that’s something I really wanted to hit home. I thought about that message a lot, and it’s true. Just because you’re not playing doesn’t mean we can’t say something.”

So he did. In a powerful manner. Carter said he never dealt with any face-to-face racism in his 10-year NHL playing career, never heard the N-word. He felt there were times when he and his agent, Pat Brisson, might have faced resistance when it came to contracts and perhaps color had something to do with that. Carter, after all, had been traded at different times in packages for Adam Oates, Bill Ranford, Rick Tocchet, Bill Guerin and Jaromir Jagr. If GMs thought enough of him to trade big-name players for him, why wouldn’t they offer him bigger money?

Carter said that part of the reason he wasn’t a victim of on-ice racism was that “people understood I didn’t play that game. If you came at me sideways, we were going to have a problem,” he said. He added that he had great teammates – he named, perhaps for emphasis, Janne Niinimaa, a white player from Finland nicknamed “Ghost,” who actually got Carter to accept and even enjoy Metallica while Carter tried to sell Niinimaa on reggae and hip-hop.

But not dealing with direct racism in hockey doesn’t mean Carter hasn’t experienced it in his life. He surely has. He prefers, though, to not look back at what got all of us here, but rather where we go and how we get there to fix it.

“That’s why I’m leaning into what’s happening now. I really want to make sure players coming up after me, white or black, are part of a culture that really embraces everyone. It shouldn’t matter what you look like, whether it’s in the front office or playing the game, fans in the stands. Everyone should be accepted for who they are. If you’re going to boo me on the ice, it’s because I can’t play. It’s not because of the color of my skin.”

When George Floyd was killed in the custody of police, Carter wanted to do something. Lots of people and organizations were putting out statements. Carter hoped to do something different.

“It was a concept that I thought about as I was watching what was unfolding, being a black male here living in the U.S. – American citizen born in Canada, having dual citizenship – and just what was happening wasn’t sitting well with me,” Carter said.

Like the rest of the world, Carter watched the video of Floyd dying under a policeman’s knee. He thought about NFL player Ray Rice, and how the video of him assaulting his fiancée in an elevator had such an impact on the public regarding domestic violence.

“I always thought that video was a powerful tool,” Carter said. “I always thought that cell phone video was the greatest innovation of the last 20 years, I think, because now everybody can capture what we see. It’s not just hearsay anymore and I wanted to put out a video. I didn’t want to put out a text statement or tweet. I wanted people to see my face. I wanted them to hear my voice. I thought that was important.”

So he thought about doing it in a medium of video and audio, and one that would bring together big names and faces ... and voices.

“How cool would it be,” he thought, “to have a lot of different people with diverse backgrounds within the NHL community and the hockey community share their voices also?” It grew quickly.

The first person Carter reached out to was Sidney Crosby, who immediately said, “I’m in.” Another early one was Patrick Kane, whom Carter believes will be the greatest American to have played in the NHL.

“No hesitation whatsoever,” Carter said. No questions about who else would be in it, where it would be posted. Just another all-in.

Carter got NHL commissioner Gary Bettman, NHLPA leader Donald Fehr and his own agent Brisson, and he kept going, diversifying the field as he went – prominent black players like Wayne Simmonds, P.K. Subban, top female players including A.J. Mleczko and Kelsey Koelzer, and those who have broken barriers, like Kim Davis and Blake Bolden have done, along with Willie O’Ree, the first black player in NHL history. Carter and his kids put each participant’s name in their segment, so people can look up who they are and how they got where they are.

“It was important for people to come together and put out a message together because that’s what hockey is all about,” Carter said. “Hockey is the best team sport, I believe, out there and it was important to do this as a team and not single anybody out, have everybody come together as a group. I also thought it might be more comfortable for people to initially take that next step because the hockey community isn’t known as being outspoken about anything. So that first step could be the great first step for people to be comfortable taking that step surrounded by like-minded individuals.”

Leading off the video was longtime Rangers goaltender Henrik Lundqvist.

“The reason I had Hank lead it is he’s a leader in the community, he’s been a star for the New York Rangers since he broke into the league,” Carter said. “I believe he’s a future Hall of Famer. He’s been a pillar for that organization, a face of that organization, so I thought it would be really cool to have him lead off. Plus, he’s in Europe. This is a global thing. This isn’t just North America. That’s why it was important to have



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Leon Draisaitl, who's from Germany, too. He felt strongly about this. These are guys that aren't afraid to get second-guessed.

"The game's 3-3, it's in overtime, who wants to be the guy to hop over the boards? ... You want to be the guy to take responsibility to try to win the game, and even if you don't win the game, you're one of the faces that's going to answer those tough questions after the game, and those are the individuals I wanted. Henrik was definitely one of those guys and I was so proud and so pumped when he said, 'Yeah, without a doubt, Anson. I'm in on this.'"

It wasn't without glitches. After getting all the involved people to record and send their own portion of the message, Carter was fumbling while editing the video with his iMovie app. It was 3 a.m., and his daughters Mikayla, 14, and Malia, 11 – having no school the next day – were up playing "Fortnite" with friends and cousins.

"Dad, give it to me," Mikayla said.

"They literally hammered out the edit within seconds," Carter said. Then they both wanted to be included. Carter hesitated because he doesn't normally share family or personal info on social media. He told them it's for hockey people, and it would look weird to have two kids in the video.

"I thought about it more," Carter said, "and I talk to them about all these social issues all the time. You're never too young to learn. My parents never thought we were (too) young to learn about stuff that was happening in the world. So we were very well prepared and equipped to handle anything that happened, even at a young age.

"So I thought it would be a great message to have them in it because it's important to talk to our youth, because they're our future. Also, on top of that, I thought it was important to include them because I wouldn't ask players who are currently in the league to do anything that I wouldn't ask my own family to do. I think sometimes guys are a little bit hesitant because they might be afraid of any pushback they might get by being out there, being current players in the league today. But I had my daughters in there, so I didn't have any second thoughts asking guys to do it – even though my daughters were the last people to submit their videos."

Sportsnet.ca / Why the NHL should consider getting rid of neutral zone faceoffs

Justin Bourne | @jtbourne

June 11, 2020, 4:42 PM

Each week, Justin Bourne's column will cover three different topics in varying depths. Think of it as a three-course meal with an appetizer, main course, and dessert...

Appetizer: Faceoffs used to be weird, have changed, and there's no reason they couldn't change for the better again

This week I enjoyed a laugh courtesy a tweet from Leafs assistant coach Andrew Brewer, who reminded us of an NHL oddity that seems from light years ago, but was actually just removed from the routine before the 2007-08 season.

I, for one, absolutely remember. Linesmen used to see where the puck was shot from before it went out of play, gesture vaguely to some area of the ice and be like "I'm gonna drop it here fellas." Sometimes they'd point, often they'd spike their heel into a spot on the ice to represent the "dot," but it was always kind of vague. It meant that occasionally they'd drop the puck like four feet inside the offensive zone, so it was just a battle between two centres trying to shoot the puck forward. Regardless of spot, it was a regular source of argument, with constant bickering over the location of the original shot.

It turns out, you're allowed to change the rules when something is causing problems or can be improved. So along that line of thinking, a simple proposal that only seems radical because we haven't already been doing it: kill neutral zone faceoffs (outside the ones at centre that start periods, come after goals, or are rectifying missed calls). They're no good for the game.

In my two seasons doing video work for the Toronto Marlies I became fixated on the concept of "neutral zone swirl." When you're tagging plays by watching game action, you're identifying game state by hitting keys on a computer (sorting for future viewing). You hit corresponding keys for breakouts, zone entries, shots, regroup, and on and on. When you hit "neutral zone forecheck," the other team is generally in a regroup. It's very common that after hitting "NZFC," you follow it up with "regroup" (as you've disrupted their regroup). And the most common after your "regroup" is "NZFC." And ... well you get it. Clean plays are rare when 10 skaters get clustered into the middle of the rink.

Neutral zone hockey results in half a shift of ping pong once that swirl gets started, and that's exactly what neutral zone draws promote. The winning team starts a regroup and hockey is played between the blue lines with no prolonged possession for either team.

So, bring all the draws to the end-zones. For one, it penalizes offside more. Go offside, and we're bringing the puck all the way back to your own end. Guess what that will do? Make players more cautious at the blue line, go offside less, and we'll have fewer whistles.

Not to mention, around 20 per cent of O-zone faceoffs result in a slot shot for. If we kill 20 neutral zone ping pong draws in favour of 20 more O-zone draws, quick math...we'd be looking at promoting offence in the game.

As fun as draws at arbitrary non-dot locations were, they're a reminder that the game still holds some small tweaks that can make it more fun and exciting for fans.

Main Course: When you imply "It doesn't matter who a team's post-season opponent is" you declare yourself legally insane

On Thursday's Lead Off with Scott MacArthur and Mike Zigomanis, Vincent Damphousse told a story about having won a playoff series with the 1993 Canadiens, and the ensuing wait to find out who their conference final opponent was going to be. The New York Islanders and the two-time defending Stanley Cup champion Pittsburgh Penguins were going seven games to see who would move on to meet the Habs. You can imagine who Montreal was rooting for, given the Penguins' recent history.

Damphousse talked about how, after David Volek scored the winner in overtime for the Isles, the Habs were high-fiving, excited at their improved situation given home ice and avoiding the star-laden and battle-tested Penguins.

A segment later I joined two former NHLers (Ziggy and Anthony Stewart) who then proceeded to say completely insane things. I love them both, but it's really wonderful to have been together at SN long enough where I'm comfortable calling them out when they say insane things, because their stance was truly — did I mention this — insane. They were arguing that it doesn't matter who you play in playoffs, at least partially because Michael Jordan used to want to beat the best opponents.

Please remember that when it comes to competition Michael Jordan himself is a competitive madman, and as such, his take on this topic is to be more or less considered null and void.

Still, the argument isn't uncommon in sports fandom, which is why I bring it up. Were the insanity isolated I'd let it go, but you hear it every season, and from players too. We hear people who somehow believe "It doesn't matter who you play, you have to beat everyone" (note: you don't). Or you want to beat everyone (sure), or if you're not good enough to beat everyone you don't deserve the championship (lunacy), or whatever your particular brand of this line of thinking is.



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Of course it matters who you play, you maniacs. It's why the debate of post-season brackets versus seeding is so important. If Boston drew Tampa in Round 2 last year after going seven with the Leafs, would they have made it through Round 2 in six games? Maybe! But their odds of beating Columbus were undeniably better, and I'm guessing not a soul in black and gold felt deprived of the opportunity to "beat the best" or whatever.

But I really don't want to get bogged down in one example, so please, feel as you do about the Boston/Tampa thing, but let's move our focus back to the big picture.

Certain styles match up well against certain opponents. That's a fact and not up for debate. A high-flying offensive team might light up opponents with defensive weaknesses, but struggle against more stingy teams. Is it possible that a high-flying offensive team could draw — by pure chance — two, three, or four teams with defensive shortcomings in a single post-season? Absolutely it's possible. To a flawed team that succeeds one way, who they draw can be the difference between what's seen as a successful season or not. Even just that first round draw — and the difference between a win and a loss based on playing styles — can shape the narratives of individual people and careers.

There are teams that can play it any way you want, and in the big picture, those are the teams that have sustained success. The Cup-winning Bruins and Blackhawks in particular seemed versatile and had success over prolonged periods because of it. But the most recent Cup-winning Penguins team was a little more one-dimensional (an offensive juggernaut that was in the bottom half of the league in goals against) and I think you can make the case that for a group like that, drawing opponents that allowed their strengths to shine was crucial to having success. They squeaked by, but struggled against a Capitals team that could score, and probably caught decent bounces after that by facing an Ottawa team that was 22nd in the league in goals for, and a Nashville team that sat outside the top-10 in that category.

If I ask you about the paths that were taken to winning the Stanley Cup by the 2013 Blackhawks, 2016 Penguins or 2018 Capitals, how many of you could name all four opponents each team faced? How about if we go back to the champions of 2008, or 2006, or earlier? That part of the journey fades away, because we all understand that to beat four teams in best-of-sevens, whoever it was, a team had to play unbelievably well for a long time and would be deserving of the Cup, however they got there. There are very few instances where we care who a team went through to reach the summit (save for examples like Washington finally slaying that Pittsburgh dragon).

This all seems like it's going to be wildly relevant with the NHL's all-new playoff format this season, doesn't it? The top-four seeds are going to get scrambled and teams will get re-seeded as they go. Some teams are going to get dream stylistic matchups, which means others will draw nightmares. With all the moving parts for teams in the coming months, the draw will be as important as any other detail.

In the end, who you beat to win your Cup fades away. You don't get a Cup and a half for drawing the toughest opponents. So with that I say death to "It doesn't matter who you play." It's faux-bravado from a nonsense position. (Still love ya though, Stewy, Ziggy.)

Jeff Marek and Elliotte Friedman talk to a lot of people around the hockey world, and then they tell listeners all about what they've heard and what they think about it.

Dessert: The sweetest of all

Sound the alarms, blow the bugles. If this tweet isn't the sweetest, most delicious Thursday Three Course-capper ever served up, I don't know what is.

Granted, we still need this dessert to actually get served next month, but knowing what's on the menu here, you'd be forgiven if you started salivating a little.