



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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THE ATHLETIC

2018-19 NHL Awards: Finalists, projected winners and snubs

By Jonathan Willis

The NHL offseason is ridiculous. For two to three weeks after the Stanley Cup is awarded, teams scramble madly. They buy out old contracts, draft their next wave of prospects, sign free agents and make most of their big offseason trades.

Sandwiched awkwardly in the middle of all this chaos are the NHL awards, mostly recognizing the accomplishments of a regular season now two months in the past.

This year the awards fall on Wednesday, June 19, a mere two days before the draft. Still, they deserve attention: as much as hockey is a sport that values the team over the individual in all things, the personal legacies of the game's greatest players are formed to a large extent based on these annual honors.

In this piece, we'll look at each of the three finalists for select awards, mention a deserving candidate who didn't crack the top three and project an expected winner.

Frank J. Selke Trophy (Best defensive forward)

Last year's winner: Anze Kopitar, Kings. The truth is that there isn't a neat and tidy line between offense and defense in the NHL. A player that's good at one end of the spectrum can't help but generate results on the other. Kopitar was a good example of that, though with 92 points one might ask just how much emphasis the voters placed on scoring.

These days, only centers win this award. Most recently the trophy has bounced back and forth between Stanley Cup winners Kopitar and Patrice Bergeron, seemingly dependent on which of the two has the better plus/minus in a given year.

The finalists: Kopitar was minus-20 for the Kings, leaving only one possible candidate, but we're obliged to look at all three finalists anyway ...

- Patrice Bergeron, Bruins. In all seriousness, Bergeron had yet another dominant two-way season and remains a stellar hockey player, but it is a little bit odd that he's up for the Selke. Boston was a defensive juggernaut this year, and Bergeron's line actually had the highest goals-against rate on the club (even as they outscored the opposition handily thanks to putting pucks in at an outrageous 3.7 goals-per-hour clip when Bergeron was on the ice). It was a great season, but not one that particularly fits an award at least theoretically predicated on preventing goals.
- Ryan O'Reilly, Blues. O'Reilly gets Selke votes every year, and for good reason. This year his circumstances – a career-best offensive season, awesome plus/minus, winning team – give him a legitimate shot at securing his first ever win. We touched on how ludicrous his on-ice goal metrics were, and that came despite brutal usage which sets him apart from the field. Not only did he face more of the league's toughest opponents than the other

finalists, but he started more of his shifts in the defensive zone than the rest.

- Mark Stone, Golden Knights. Stone spent most of the year in Ottawa, and what he did against the backdrop of that shambling wreck of a franchise is extraordinary. His matchup minutes were a little bit soft compared to other elite defensive players and that has to be taken into consideration, but so does the fact that he was playing in front of the Senators' defensive group and dramatically improved the team's goals-against rates.

Honorable mention: It should be hoped that Penguins captain Sidney Crosby draws some votes this year. Pittsburgh was a negative team by both shot and goal differential at 5-on-5 with Crosby off the ice and massively in the black (+8.0 shots per hour, +1.87 goals per hour) with him out there, despite being matched in a power-vs.-power role. People are justifiably down on the Pens but this was a vintage year from Crosby.

Predicted winner: O'Reilly. Both Stone and O'Reilly are highly deserving candidates, but position alone dictates that the voters will likely give the nod to O'Reilly. No winger has won the award since Jere Lehtinen did back in 2003.

Lady Byng Memorial Trophy (Most sportsmanlike player)

Last year's winner: William Karlsson, Golden Knights. Karlsson had an outstanding season, and it was nice to see a player in the conversation for a lot of different awards earn a major piece of hardware. Officially, the award goes to "the player adjudged to have exhibited the best type of sportsmanship and gentlemanly conduct combined with a high standard of playing ability," which fit with the season Karlsson had.

He also met the other unofficial criteria, be a) a forward b) with lots of points and c) with not many penalty minutes.

Points and penalty minutes are reasonable criteria, but it remains a minor injustice that defencemen don't get more consideration given the difficulty of playing that position cleanly. Jared Spurgeon, he of 37 points, an average of 24:33 per game and just eight penalty minutes was the highest-ranked defenceman in the voting, finishing fifth.

The finalists: Speaking of de facto criteria, there were three forwards in the NHL this year with 12-or-fewer penalty minutes and 70-or-more points. Unsurprisingly, those three are the official finalists for the Lady Byng this year.

- Aleksander Barkov, Panthers. Ninety-six points, eight penalty minutes, positive on-ice goal and shot differentials.
- Sean Monahan, Flames. Eighty-two points, 12 penalty minutes, positive on-ice shot and goal differentials.



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- Ryan O'Reilly, Blues. Seventy-seven points, 12 penalty minutes, the best on-ice shot (54.0 SF%) and goal (62.2 GF%) numbers in the group.

Honorable mention: It's one of my lower-key missions in life to help make it possible for defencemen – who face a much tougher challenge in avoiding penalties – to seriously compete for this award. This year's best option is John Klingberg of the Stars, who posted 45 points and just 12 penalty minutes in 64 games this year. Dallas was 35-24-5 when he played this year and just 8-8-2 without him.

Predicted winner: Barkov. On the basis of the simplest possible stats, he's unassailable. A lot of times the approach to this award warrants disdain, but in Barkov (as in Karlsson last season) at least there is a highly deserving recipient: a quality two-way center who played outrageous minutes and delivered in a major way. He might be an obvious choice, but he's a good one.

Vezina Trophy (Best goaltender)

Last year's winner: Pekka Rinne, Predators. Rinne was an obvious front-runner last season, combining 42 wins with a .927 save percentage.

This is a tricky award to vote for because as much as analytics has taken off in a lot of places, puck movement has a huge relationship to save difficulty and it's not something that (and I stand ready to be corrected by angry emails) I've seen comprehensively dealt with publicly, though the arrival of puck tracking should change that posthaste. Most current models rate shot location and shooter competency, which is a big step forward, but there's more to be done.

Having said that, this is an NHL GM award, rather than a PHWA one, and it's possible that some teams have a whiz-bang assessment method that they keep in-house that incorporates all the stuff we'd all love to see incorporated.

The finalists: If teams have access to all manner of secret information, they're either not using it for this award, or it outputs something which looks remarkably like a list of save percentage leaders with 40-plus starts.

- Ben Bishop, Stars. Here's something interesting: Bishop played 46 games and had a .938 save percentage at 5-on-5, while teammate Anton Khudobin played 41 games and had a .932 save percentage 5-on-5. I'm not definitely saying that those numbers are more a product of two quality, well-rested goalies playing behind good team structure rather than sheer individual greatness, but one wonders.
- Robin Lehner, Islanders. Here's something interesting, part two: Lehner played 46 games and had a .935 save percentage at 5-on-5, while teammate Thomas Greiss played 43 games and put up a .939 save percentage at 5-on-5. I'm not definitely saying that those numbers are more a product of two quality, well-rested goalies playing behind good team structure rather than sheer individual greatness, but one wonders.

- Andrei Vasilevskiy, Lightning. Vasilevskiy faces a ton of rush chances, which I can tell you from looking at a spreadsheet or anyone could tell you from watching the Lightning play. He's one of just five goalies in the NHL with more than 50 games played and a .925-or-better even-strength save percentage and he actually leads all starters with a .911 save percentage on the penalty kill.

Honorable mention: Workload counts, and in terms of shots faced at 5-on-5 the Maple Leafs' Frederik Andersen ranks first in the NHL. He's also in the top-five in terms of rush chances against. His overall save percentage total (0.929 at 5-on-5) is a little weak compared to the competition on this list, but among high-minute and high-shot volume goalies he's outstanding.

Predicted winner: Vasilevskiy. It's really tempting to go with save percentage leader Bishop here, but I think a slightly heavier workload, the greater amount of daylight between Vasilevskiy and his backup and the style of game Tampa favors will ultimately mean Vasilevskiy gets the nod.

James Norris Memorial Trophy (Best defenseman)

Last year's winner: Victor Hedman, Lightning. The really crazy thing about Hedman winning the Norris last year is that his regular defense partner from 2017-18 has spent a significant chunk of this year in the minors. I don't think anyone had Jake Dotchin down as the driver on that pairing, but it puts in perspective the quality of Hedman's work.

Beyond his actual quality, Hedman cleared a bunch of bars that a Norris-winning defenceman needs to clear. Voters expect some scoring, heavy minutes, a good on-ice goal differential and it helps to have an established reputation, plus play for a good team.

The finalists: Two high-scoring defencemen and the reigning winner make the grade as finalists.

- Brent Burns, Sharks. Burns was the highest-scoring defenceman in the NHL. By the underlying numbers, Burns didn't have a dominant season, but it's easy to overstate this: not only was he paired with 26-year-old rookie Radim Simek for most of the year, but he also played on the same team as Erik Karlsson, whose on-ice numbers have eclipsed many a teammate before now.
- Mark Giordano, Flames. Giordano was the best 5-on-5 scoring defenceman in the NHL. He nearly doubled his even-strength point totals from a year ago and cleared his previous career-high by a massive margin, but it isn't just or even mostly about points. He also had easily the most dominant year of his career by on-ice goal share. That kind of season from an already-great defenceman is hard to look past.
- Victor Hedman, Lightning. After Burns and Giordano, voters skipped down to give the NHL's No. 11 defensive scorer a nod. He deserves it. After winning with Dotchin as a regular partner last season, Hedman put up elite numbers while matched with Dan Girardi this season, despite the fact that his



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team fared better on the shot clock and in the goal column when Hedman played with higher-end partners.

Honorable mention: The two obvious ones are John Carlson of the Capitals and Morgan Rielly of the Maple Leafs. It isn't just scoring, though both had massive seasons in that regard. More importantly both also helped their teams outscore their opponents by big amounts when on the ice. I feel like Rielly, in particular, gets undervalued; he played with Ron Hainsey almost all year but when he finally got Jake Muzzin he blew up, with the Leafs posting a 57.4 percent Corsi and 11-6 goal differential when they were on the ice together at 5-on-5.

Predicted winner: Giordano. He combines the high scoring of Burns with the strong underlying metrics of Hedman. It's a great story, and in a league constantly skewing ever-younger, a 35-year-old winning his first Norris is a nice throwback.

Jack Adams Award (Best head coach)

Last year's winner: Gerard Gallant, Golden Knights. Gallant was the deserving winner last season after a stunning debut by Vegas, and given the way a newly formed team gelled immediately, he easily met the official criterion of having "contributed the most to his team's success."

Judging coaching contributions can be hard and typically this award goes to the team that most overachieves. Diehards like me will often argue for the team that achieves the most, with the notion that outstanding success is too often taken for granted. It's not often that someone like Gallant comes along who qualifies by both standards.

The finalists: This is one of the few awards where it's completely appropriate to ignore teams which didn't come close to the postseason, and even with that as a criterion there were a lot of deserving candidates. All three finalists have strong arguments in their favor.

- Craig Berube, Blues. Berube was already a success before the playoffs began, taking over a last-place team and putting together a stunning second half. The Blues underachieved badly under Mike Yeo to start the year and it's debatable whether their resurgence was more or less surprising than their collapse out of the gate, but Berube was the guy who put the pieces back together.
- Jon Cooper, Lightning. Cooper's team had a (regular) season for the ages and he's groomed many of those players since their AHL days. Perhaps no single person deserves more overall credit for Tampa Bay's 62 wins than Cooper.
- Barry Trotz, Islanders. The Tavares effect is a big one, but the Isles were one of the teams most primed for coaching improvement regardless of who landed behind the bench. On average they've been a minus-5 team the last three years and they finished the season plus-32. It's a big step up and Trotz – one of the greats – deserves a lot of the credit.

Honorable mention: I'm going to pick just one, though it could have been five: Bill Peters of the Flames. Over the last three

years, Calgary has been, on average, a minus-17 team. With much the same roster and even with some shaky goaltending, they are plus-62 this season. Most years, Peters would deserve the win; in this one he doesn't even land in the final three.

Predicted winner: Trotz. This is a tough one to handicap. Voters always seem to love the overachievers here, which likely means Cooper finishes third. The other two choices are both good ones and post-playoffs Berube the obvious answer. But in the aftermath of the regular season, Trotz's turnaround of the Islanders probably gets the nod.

Calder Memorial Trophy (Best rookie)

Last year's winner: Mathew Barzal, Islanders. Last year was a slam dunk, which makes it a lot like this year. The player with the best qualifications didn't run into any problems because of position (defencemen sometimes get overlooked for this award) or injury (which isn't written into the "most proficient in his first year of competition" criteria).

Neither will this year's winner.

The finalists: We have three names to consider here so we won't just say "Elias Pettersson" and move on but instead give some attention to the whole field.

- Jordan Binnington, Blues. I can't help but look a little bit sideways at Binnington's stunning season. At 25 his .927 save percentage as an NHL rookie meets or exceeds what he managed in five previous minor-league campaigns. Nevertheless, he's been the driving force behind the Blues' rise from the Western Conference basement and in a Pettersson-less season would have a strong argument for the top spot even with only 32 games played.
- Rasmus Dahlin, Sabres. The 18-year-old has been everything that could be expected. Buffalo's coaching staff has tried to buy him a little bit of cover (mostly at the expense of the Rasmus Ristolainen-led top pair) but he's still playing more than 21 minutes per game and delivering splendidly.
- Elias Pettersson, Canucks. Pettersson is easily the top offensive weapon in this year's rookie class, with his 66 points 21 more than his next-closest rival. He's also already Vancouver's most potent forward. He is the heir to a proud Canucks tradition of Swedish scoring stars, inheriting the mantle from the Sedin twins after they inherited it from Markus Naslund.

Honorable mention: Nineteen-year-old Miro Heiskanen is always a joy to behold on the Stars' blue line, though his results have varied dramatically by teammate. His 44 percent Corsi and 47 percent goal share when paired with Roman Polak contrasts sharply with the 62 and 69 percent numbers he managed with John Klingberg. He averaged more than 23 minutes per game for Dallas.

Predicted winner: Pettersson. Binnington will get knocked for games played and voters didn't know he'd also win the Stanley Cup. As good as Dahlin was this year, he's probably closer to Heiskanen in terms of total results than he is to a



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first-place finish. Pettersson was the best scorer by a wide margin and that will earn him the nod here.

Hart Memorial Trophy (Most Valuable Player)

Last year's winner: Taylor Hall, Devils. Last year's Hart race was quite close and hotly debated, but one of the things that set Hall apart was the way in which he was quite clearly the leading light on the Devils.

His 93 points, as well as his 53 percent shot share and 59 percentage goal share at 5-on-5 were all splendid totals in isolation. In a context which included New Jersey having just one other 50-point player, they were good enough for him to edge out a crowded field.

Usually the race isn't quite so close and usually, it correlates more strongly with the Art Ross race.

The finalists: This year at least, the Hart and the Art Ross are marching in near-lockstep, with two of the NHL's three leading scorers finalists as players most valuable to their respective teams.

- Sidney Crosby, Penguins. Crosby, with 100 points, tied for fifth in NHL scoring and is the exception to the rule. It's a well-chosen exception; as we saw in the Selke section, Crosby had a superb two-way season on an underachieving Pittsburgh team.
- Nikita Kucherov, Lightning. With 128 points, Kucherov ran up a 12-point lead on second-place Connor McDavid in the league scoring race. Unlike last year, where it was tough to pick just one Bolt as a leading offensive light, Kucherov put up 30 points more than any of his teammates on the league's most dominant regular season team.
- Connor McDavid, Oilers. McDavid improved by eight points on last season's 108-point performance – which led the NHL in scoring but wasn't enough to make him a Hart finalist. Yet this year wasn't a step forward for him; on balance he was better last season, both against the backdrop of a lower-scoring league and in terms of his two-way play. His big problem in 2017-18 was Edmonton missing the playoffs, and that hasn't changed.

Honorable mention: Mark Stone of the Golden Knights. Scoring stars will get most of the attention here, and many of them had brilliant seasons. Stone's 77 points don't stand out against that company. What does is his two-way play. No other player in the league had a bigger impact on his team's expected 5-on-5 goal share, with Stone dramatically improving offensive and defensive outcomes the moment he stepped on the ice.

Predicted winner: Kucherov. Kucherov had 28 points more than Crosby (who wasn't a Lindsay finalist) and McDavid's team didn't make the playoffs. Unlike last year, this season's Hart race doesn't carry much suspense.

Ted Lindsay Award (Most Outstanding Player)

Last year's winner: Connor McDavid, Oilers. Freed from the real or imagined need to vote for a player in the postseason — as per the "most valuable to his team" section of the Hart

criteria — the membership of the NHLPA was able to simply pick the league's most outstanding player and settled on McDavid, the league's most dominant force.

The finalists: The scoring race is always going to matter in these awards, and while the Hart finalists lined up well with the Art Ross race, the players managed to get even closer, voting the league's three leading scorers as its three most outstanding players.

- Patrick Kane, Blackhawks. Kane is a fascinating choice. The Blackhawks got out-shot badly and gave up a ton of goals when his line was on the ice this year, but he was able to outscore his problems in a brilliant offensive showing. Whether the defensive issues were really Kane-centric or a product of circumstances – like playing a career-high 22:29 per game on an awful team – is open to interpretation.
- Nikita Kucherov, Lightning. Tampa Bay scored a whopping 4.0 goals per hour at 5-on-5 when Kucherov was on the ice this year. For perspective, Nashville's 5-on-4 power play scored 4.1. Obviously, it wasn't all Kucherov, but he led the Lightning across the board in offensive categories and picked up a point on 84 percent of the goals scored when he was on the ice.
- Connor McDavid, Oilers. McDavid is interesting for much the same reason as Kane. Edmonton got out-shot when he was on the ice and gave up a ton of goals, but his line outscored its problems in a brilliant offensive showing. Whether the defensive issues were really McDavid-centric or a product of circumstances – like playing a career-high 22:50 per game on an awful team – is open to interpretation.

Honorable mention: Most of the obvious choices for this show up in the Selke or Byng discussions or have already been mentioned in some 'best player' capacity. One player who has so far been overlooked is Avalanche forward Nathan MacKinnon. Last year's Hart runner-up had another outstanding season – among other things, Colorado was plus-21 at 5-on-5 when he (and his usually excellent linemates) were on the ice and minus-18 without him.

Predicted winner: Kucherov. As with the Hart race, there isn't much suspense here.

General Manager of the Year

Last year's winner: George McPhee, Golden Knights. McPhee was an easy choice last year, given how brilliantly the Golden Knights performed in their NHL debut. There is no lone standout of that type on the ballot this year, and because McPhee's circumstances were so unique, his win doesn't shed a lot of light on the thinking behind the award.

The league's GMs always honor success, but the circumstances of that success vary. Managers with big advantages are honored, but the inaugural award went to Don Maloney in 2010 in recognition of the struggles that came with running a barebones Coyotes operation. Long-term planners are honored, but Jim Rutherford won in 2016 in just his second year with the Penguins.



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More than any other, the trick to this award is balancing the short- and the long-term, always a tricky proposition.

The finalists:

- Doug Armstrong, Blues. Armstrong, the 2012 winner, is an interesting finalist because of the rollercoaster the Blues took to eventual success. Mostly he deserves credit for building a team with good fundamentals and making the right mid-season adjustments, but it's hard to imagine he would have got any votes if the award were given at Christmas.
- Don Sweeney, Bruins. Boston is a fascinating team, and despite some high-profile misses, the Bruins under Sweeney have done something that not a lot of teams manage, adding tons of young talent to a still-vital older core. The result was a second consecutive 100-plus point season and a ride to Game 7 of the Stanley Cup finals.
- Don Waddell, Hurricanes. Carolina didn't quite run on a budget comprised entirely of spare change

salvaged from Tom Dundon's couch, but no other team in the league got better bang for its buck, with the Canes spending a lower percentage of their cap space than any comparably successful team in recent memory. Waddell also traded Victor Rask for Nino Niederreiter, which deserves a special mention all by itself.

Honorable mention: Three of the four conference finalists show up here, and the fourth – Doug Wilson of the Sharks – belongs in the same company. One big offseason deal brought in Erik Karlsson after a bid for John Tavares fell short, while another deal involving the Senators and Panthers somehow transmogrified Mikkel Boedker's cap hit into a pile of draft picks. Not everything he does works, but few GMs are as consistently good on the trade side as Wilson.

Predicted winner: Waddell. Nobody in hockey appreciates the difficulties of thriving in a cap situation more than the managers tasked with doing that on a day-to-day basis, and all of them can surely imagine how tough it would be to win on a much lower budget.



Carolina's free agent questions

By Adam Gold

Hey, fellow Caniacs! It's been a minute. I know you missed me and my views of the team we care most about, especially as we get closer to draft time. Who am I kidding? I know you haven't missed me at all. You do, however, miss the Hurricanes and the euphoria of the run to the Eastern Conference Finals is still lingering. So, as we approach this week's draft, I thought we'd get reacquainted with the team, and break it up into three parts. By the time we get to draft day, we'll try some roster projections. In the meantime, we'll discuss some potential trades and the prospect depth at Charlotte.

Today, we begin with the current crop of Carolina free agents. This is NOT in order of preference or importance, keep in mind. We'll handle the unrestricted free agents first, then go about sorting through those still under team control — as, honestly, those are the more complicated situations.

Unrestricted free agents

Justin Williams, RW (23 goals, 53 points in 82 games played)

"We're talking right now, but it's just as friends."

In a recent podcast with Carolina's captain that's how he characterized conversations between the soon-to-be 38-year old winger and the organization. So, if you're looking for a sign that an announcement on Williams hockey future is coming down the pike, sorry to disappoint you. This season took a lot out of the Hurricanes' legend. At times, he was their best player. And, that is not meant to be a slight on Sebastian Aho, or Jaccob Slavin, or anyone else on the Carolina roster. That's just how good Williams was for extended stretches this year.

His 53 points were the most since the 2011-12 season in Los Angeles. He was at his best in the second half of the season, posting 33 of those points (16g, 17a) in the final 44 games. He led the team in power play goals with nine and scored 11 of his 23 markers in the third period. He also scored a goal with his face and his, well, junk (his term, not mine) this year. His season, one that his head coach insisted was the best of his career, was far more than his irreplaceable leadership. Justin Williams was productive.

Now what?

Well, that will be determined by Williams, who will turn 38 years old on October 4. If he wants to play, he'll play here. Is it possible he could play for another organization? I guess anything is possible. But, in that podcast he points out that he didn't build a house here to up and leave. Justin doesn't do anything without full commitment. As long as he's ready for that Tom Dundon and Don Waddell will fit him into the mix. Until then, the team will approach the off-season as if Williams is NOT going to return and then add him into the group should he opt back in.

Don't be alarmed. I fully expect him to be at the center locker in the Hurricanes dressing room when training camp begins in mid-September. His cap hit was \$4.5 million a year ago. Assuming his return, I would expect his 2019-20 number to be relatively close to that. In the range of \$3.5-\$4.5 million.

Greg McKeeg, C (6 goals, 11 points in 41 games played)

Greg McKeeg showed up on January 4, in a game against the Columbus Blue Jackets and turned PNC Arena on it's ear. A goal and an assist in his Hurricanes debut helped Carolina to



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a big win. Two games later, he did it again in the regular season's only win against the Islanders and McKegg quickly achieved cult hero status. In the end, he became an invaluable piece of the second half surge (pun intended) playing for his fifth NHL team. He won 51% of his face offs and scored a pair of post season goals, including one in Boston that gave the Hurricanes the lead in Game 1 of the Eastern Conference Finals.

However, with Lucas Wallmark slated to be either the third or fourth center and the Hurricanes need to significantly upgrade the position, it remains to be seen if McKegg can get more of a guarantee from another organization. They'd love to have Greg back, but with the performances of Clark Bishop and Nicolas Roy (especially, Roy's post season dominance) in Charlotte, McKegg's situation might be one that waits a few weeks while the rest of the roster figures itself out. Either way, he's a minimum-salary guy if he's on a one-way contract.

Michael Ferland, LW (17 goals, 40 points in 71 games played)

This was the tale of two seasons. The first half of his Carolina Hurricanes career was spectacular. He scored big goals, delivered big hits and electrified the fans to the point that people started speculating about a big contract before Thanksgiving rolled around. In truth, the team and Ferland's representatives did exchange contract parameters. But, the demands were far beyond what the Hurricanes were prepared to meet and they opted to let the season play out before they made any decisions on Ferland's Carolina future.

Ferland scored 11 goals in his first 21 games with the Hurricanes, five of them on the power play and three game winners. He scored just six goals in his next 50 games, one on the power play, and only one AFTER the Hurricanes opted to keep Ferland for a playoff push rather than move him for a draft pick at the trade deadline. It's fair to say that the acquisition of Nino Niederreiter took away from Ferland's productivity. When at his best, Michael was playing with Aho and Teuvo Teravainen on a top line. However, due to injuries and a drop in performance, his ice time diminished, and his production all but vanished.

Ferland's willingness to be physical plus his knack for scoring will convince some team to pony up \$4-\$5 million annually on a multi year deal. I just don't think that team will call Raleigh, North Carolina home.

Petr Mrazek, G (23-14-3, 2.39 GAA/.914 SV%)

One of the indelible marks of the 2018-19 season will be the many enthusiastic outbursts from Petr Mrazek during the season. Maybe it will be his reaction after the overtime win at Florida, when he made a series of game-saving stops followed by an Aho overtime winner that will stay with us. Maybe it will be his post game interview after the post season clinching win over New Jersey. Doesn't matter. Mrazek's energy and, yes, his performance were hallmarks of the post season run.

In Mrazek's last 15 regular season starts, he was 12-3-0 with a .941 save percentage, three shutouts and seven other games in which he allowed 2 or fewer goals. That play remained, for the most part, in the post season. After the opening two losses against the Capitals, Mrazek was 5-1-0 in seven starts with a pair of shutouts and a .928 save percentage. And, that includes the 6-0 pasting his team

absorbed in Washington in Game 5. Unfortunately, he didn't regain his level of play after the groin injury he suffered against the Islanders and he was replaced by Curtis McElhinney after losses in Games 1 and 2 vs Boston.

But, is Mrazek a number one goaltender capable of playing 55-60 games? That is the question, because that is the contract he's seeking. Edmonton's Mikko Koskinen received a 3-year/\$13.5 million contract with vastly inferior numbers, and it's totally understandable that this is what Mrazek is seeking. But, Carolina is not going to put out that kind of money for a 1-a goalie. And, there isn't a body of work in Petr's past that says he's a 55-start player.

As part of a tandem? Two years and between \$2.5-\$3.5 million seems about right. As a bonafide number one? Hard to imagine that happening.

Curtis McElhinney, G (20-11-2, 2.58 GAA/.912 SV% in 33 starts)

You could argue that Curtis McElhinney saved the Hurricanes season before it even started. Snapped off the waiver wire a few days before Opening Night after Scott Darling suffered a hamstring injury with the full intent of being returned there as soon as Scott was determined healthy enough to return. Only it never turned out that way. Curtis was outstanding, and ultimately turned in arguably his best season ever, even as he turned 36 years old during the playoffs.

In his first 26 starts, he compiled a 17-7-2 mark with a .926 save percentage. He was among the best goalies in the entire league and worked incredibly well as a tandem with Mrazek. His overall numbers were diminished a bit, in part, by an 8-goal Winnipeg onslaught in March, an effort that was a team-issue way more than a McElhinney problem. Still, Curtis' steady play and even-keeled demeanor was a tremendous balancer with Mrazek's excitable personality. His 33 starts were the most ever in his long NHL career, and he won for the first time ever as a playoff starter, going 3-2-0 with a 2.01 GAA/.930 SV% in five appearances. But, ultimately, McElhinney is what he is, a solid number two goaltender.

In the best laid plans of the Hurricanes, McElhinney gets a 1-year deal in the \$1-\$1.5 million range.

Restricted free agents

Sebastian Aho, C (30 goals, 83 points in 82 games)

Sebastian Aho is an All Star, but...

What do you mean "but", Adam?

Well, there are a lot of All Stars, but fewer superstars. There is a distinction between the two. Superstars don't go the final 14 regular season games without a goal. Superstars don't fade into the background during the playoffs. Both of those things happened to Aho last season.

Admittedly, there is context to be provided to those facts. It's widely known that Aho was dealing with some type of injury, maybe as part of a collision with teammate Nino Niederreiter during a game in March. And, that might not have been the only one, as for a time late in the year and into the post season, Aho even stopped taking face offs. It is also a fact that Aho set career highs in goals and points BEFORE going goal-less in his last 14 games.



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There's a lot going on here and every single bit of it complicates matters when it comes to locking Aho up on a long term contract. "It is our goal", General Manager Don Waddell told 99.9 the Fan last week, "to sign him to an 8-year contract."

I'm sure that is also the goal of the Aho camp. But, at what price? Is Aho in line for a Jack Eichel contract (8 years/\$80 million)? Is it closer to the contract to which Washington and Evgeny Kuznetsov agreed (8 years/\$62.4 million)? The rules are such that the teams have the leverage over restricted free agents. In fact, it is within their rights to offer Aho just the qualifying offer, which would pay him roughly \$1 million in 2019-20. But, no one thinks it's a good idea to create that kind of animosity between the sides.

Sebastian Aho needs to be a Hurricane for a long, long time. The tricky part is in figuring out what Aho really is and paying him accordingly. In the end, I think it settles at 8 years and \$64 million, but I think the longer this drags on, the more danger there is of a really messy situation.

Brock McGinn, LW (10 goals, 26 points in 82 games played)

It might not go any further than Brock McGinn sent the Capitals home with a goal in double overtime in Game 7 on the road. That just might be all the legacy McGinn needs to stamp his return to the Hurricanes on what should ultimately be a very reasonable deal.

McGinn is a classic fourth line winger who can play up for stretches because of his physical play and pretty good skill level. His best asset, though is as a penalty killer and defensive-minded forward who has established himself as a reliable player. You know what you're going to get every night from McGinn. And, as a 25-year old player, there is still time for him to refine his offensive ability, put more pucks on net and even put himself into a 15-goal annual category. How different is McGinn from Jordan Martinook? The difference is between restricted and unrestricted.

Guess here is a 2-year/\$2.5 million deal.

Saku Maenalanan, LW (4 goals, 8 points in 34 games played)

Big, strong, physical, fearless and a very good skater. Those are great things to have in your toolbox. How much can he provide offensively will likely determine his overall future in the NHL. There were games, including one at Madison Square Garden, in which he flashed a scoring touch that probably made everyone in the organization smile. My only real wonder regarding Saku is that with Warren Foegele, McGinn

and Martinook there is a lot of redundancy. How many defensive-minded wingers can you carry?

It's worth around a million dollars to see another year of Maenalanan, however.

Clark Bishop, C (1 goal, 3 points in 20 games played)

Bishop is a good skater, tenacious on the forecheck and has a nose for the puck. He was called up at one point during the post season, but didn't crack the line up and was returned to Charlotte. He's never been much of an offensive player and seems like a player best-suited right now as "organizational depth" on a 2-way deal.

Haydn Fleury, D (0 goals, 1 point in 20 games played)

Haydn Fleury was the 7th overall pick in the 2014 draft. It's safe to say that it hasn't quiet happened for Fleury yet. That doesn't mean it won't, or that he'll never score an NHL goal, but it has certainly been a struggle to stay in the rotation with the Hurricanes. There are times when Fleury plays with confidence and poise and you can see the ability. It's just been hard for him to do it consistently with the Canes' blue line depth.

If he's not included as part of a trade, injuries to Trevor van Riemsdyk and Calvin de Haan could open up another chance for Fleury — who's simply one of the best teammates in the entire organization — but, probably on a minimum contract.

Alex Nedeljkovic, G (1-0-0, 2.00 GAA/.923 SV%)

Alex Nedeljkovic is the reigning goaltender of the year in the American Hockey League. He's gone 65-26-3 for the Charlotte Checkers over the last two seasons and has improved his secondary numbers (goals against average and save percentage) each year. His lone NHL start in Vancouver was impressive, as was his emergency duty in relief of Cam Ward in Columbus a few years back.

There isn't anything else for Nedeljkovic to prove in the minors and he just might be Carolina's primary back up, depending on how things shake out with Mrazek and McElhinney. At the very least, the team hopes to have Ned as part of the mix and he'll come to training camp with a chance to make the club. What his deal looks like will likely be determined by who the brass have in the number one slot. But, I'd expect him to shuttle between Charlotte and Raleigh next year.

Next, we'll look at the prospects, especially those who might make things interesting come the fall.



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Draft Preview: Canes Bring League-High 10 Picks to Vancouver

Canes hold four draft picks in the top 59

by Michael Smith

The Carolina Hurricanes are in a rather unique position heading into the 2019 NHL Draft.

The Hurricanes were one of the final four teams left standing in the Stanley Cup Playoffs, and because of that, they're slated to pick 28th overall in the first round.

That's not the unique aspect, though it is the deepest first-round selection the Hurricanes have owned in 10 years.

What is unique is that the pick is the first of a league-high 10 selections the Hurricanes currently own. Four other teams - the Devils, Kings, Red Wings and Canadiens - also bring 10 picks into this weekend, but none qualified for the playoffs.

"Usually when the big club goes as far as we did and has the success we had, you're usually trading picks at the deadline to acquire players," Director of Player Personnel Darren Yorke said. "We were able to accumulate a lot of draft picks and have a lot of success, which I think bodes well for the future."

Three of the Hurricanes' 10 picks fall in the second round, including the 36th and 37th overall selections, acquired through trades with Buffalo and the Rangers, respectively. In fact, 40 percent of the Canes' selections will be made in the top 27 percent of the draft (59 picks).

The Hurricanes then own at least one pick in each of the remaining five rounds, including a pair of late picks in the sixth round.

"We like a lot of players that may be there in the middle to late rounds," Yorke said.

Ten picks and a wealth of options for how to use them. The Hurricanes could spend all 10 on draft picks, which would be the most picks the team has made since 1998, when the draft spanned nine rounds. The Canes could package one or a few in a trade, whether it's to move up or down the draft board or acquire a more NHL-ready asset.

"Last year we had the No. 2 pick, so we knew we were going to get a top player," President and General Manager Don Waddell said. "We're going to look to see what's in the draft, but we're also not opposed to, if there's a player for our team right now, making a trade. We're still trying to improve our team. If we can do that via trades using draft picks or whatever assets we have, we're going to look at all those options."

The Hurricanes' scouting staff, then, has to be nimble and prepared for the unexpected.

"The management staff, Tom and Don, will be talking to the NHL GMs and seeing if there may be [trade] appetite ahead of time. For the scouting staff, the exercises we did as a group were to determine which players, if they start slipping, would be guys we would want to trade up for and vice versa," Yorke said. "You've got to be prepared for any different scenario and make sure you're set and prepared in knowing which players may or may not be there."

That preparation is years in the making. When the Hurricanes' amateur scouting staff convened at PNC Arena in mid-June, they assembled their master draft list, a ranking of eligible players that will continue to be tweaked in the days and hours leading up to the first round and then reassessed in the time between the end of the first round and the beginning of a rapid-fire day two.

"You know when you're selecting second overall, if you're staying at that pick, there's only one other guy who will get selected. When we're selecting 28th overall, there's more variance of the names," Yorke said. "You have to make sure all your bases are covered, especially when you have as many picks as we do and the option of trading up or down is even more apparent."

Mock drafts agreed upon who the Hurricanes were selecting second overall in 2018. Prognostications this year cast a much wider net.

Will the Hurricanes have their pick from a talented forward group that could include Bobby Brink, Nils Hoglander, Connor McMichael or Jakob Pelletier? Perhaps they'll consider the best available defenseman, like Ryan Johnson, Matthew Robertson or Alex Vlasic. Or, maybe Spencer Knight, the consensus No. 1 goalie in the draft, will still be on the board at 28.

"At the top end of the draft, you're looking for NHL assets. You're looking for skillsets that lead to development," Yorke said. "The player at 28 is going to have x, y and z in terms of NHL dimensions, but maybe one of them just needs a little bit more time to improve upon. From there, the development staff can work with them and get them to become an NHL player."

However the Hurricanes put the 28th pick and their other nine selections to use in Vancouver, it's sure to be an active weekend at the team's draft table.

"I think I've got a little bit of a finger on all of what's happening in the draft, what kind of players we want to draft," head coach Rod Brind'Amour said. "I did a little bit of research on some of these players so you get your opinions in and sit back and just let the guys do their jobs. At the end of the day, we're trying to figure out how to get better."



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Hurricanes not optimistic about signing Mrazek, McElhinney, says GM

Goalies can become unrestricted free agents July 1

by Tom Gulitti

LAS VEGAS -- Petr Mrazek and Curtis McElhinney will likely become unrestricted free agents on July 1 after the Carolina Hurricanes have been unsuccessful in their attempts to sign the goalies to new contracts.

"We're trying to sign them, but it doesn't look like we're going to get either signed," Hurricanes general manager Don Waddell said Tuesday. "So, if not, we'll go to the market and see what's out there for July 1."

A finalist for general manager of the year at the 2019 NHL Awards presented by Bridgestone on Wednesday (8 p.m. ET; NBCSN, SN), Waddell reiterated at the NHL Awards Media Day on Tuesday that he'd like to keep Mrazek and McElhinney after each helped Carolina qualify for the Stanley Cup Playoffs for the first time since 2009 and reach the Eastern Conference Final.

But with the unrestricted free agent interview period opening on Sunday, Waddell isn't optimistic.

Waddell didn't rule out one of the goalies circling back to the Hurricanes after talking to other teams.

"Sometimes guys test the market and then you find where we're at," Waddell said. "We'd like to have both guys back. I've publicly said that. But right now, we don't have deals done with them."

Mrazek agreed to a one-year, \$1.5 million contract with Carolina as an unrestricted free agent last July 1. He went 23-14-3 with a 2.39 goals-against average, a .914 save percentage and four shutouts in 40 regular season games and 5-5 with a 2.73 GAA, .894 save percentage and two shutouts in 11 playoff games.

McElhinney was claimed off waivers from the Toronto Maple Leafs on Oct. 2 after Scott Darling was injured in the preseason. He went 20-11-2 with a 2.58 GAA, a .912 save

percentage and two shutouts in 33 regular-season games and 3-2 with a 2.01 save percentage and .930 save percentage in five playoff games.

With Mrazek and McElhinney expected to leave, Waddell said prospect Alex Nedeljkovic will get a chance to earn one of the goalie jobs in training camp. The 23-year-old won the Aldege "Baz" Bastien Memorial Award as the American Hockey League's outstanding goalie and helped Charlotte win the Calder Cup this season.

Carolina's second-round pick (No. 37) in the 2014 NHL Draft, Nedeljkovic went 34-14-1 with a 2.26 GAA, .916 save percentage and four shutouts this season with Charlotte and made his first NHL start against the Vancouver Canucks on Jan. 23, making 24 saves in a 5-2 victory.

Waddell hopes to be active before the 2019 NHL Draft at Rogers Arena in Vancouver on Friday and Saturday. Waddell would like to add scoring help at forward and said he'd be willing to deal from the Hurricanes depth on defense in the right trade.

"It's one of the things that if it's the right type of forward, we might look at it," Waddell said of trading a defenseman. "If not, if we don't do anything in the next week, then maybe it's through free agency."

Waddell also plans to meet with center Sebastian Aho's agent, Gerry Johansson, in Vancouver to continue negotiations on a new contract. Aho led the Hurricanes with an NHL career-high 30 goals and 83 points this season. The 21-year-old can become a restricted free agent on July 1.

"We've made a proposal and they've countered, so at least we're in discussions and we're all hopeful we'll get something done," Waddell said.

The Hurricanes are being patient with captain Justin Williams, who has yet to decide if he'll return for a 19th NHL season. The forward, 37, said he is not rushing his decision on whether he will keep playing.



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Williams unsure if he'll retire, return to Hurricanes, or play elsewhere

Carolina captain, who can become free agent, doesn't expect quick decision

by Tom Gulitti

LAS VEGAS -- Justin Williams is unsure if he will continue his NHL career, the Carolina Hurricanes captain said Tuesday.

"Not yet, and I don't see a decision in the near future at all," Williams said of returning for a 19th NHL season.

The 37-year-old, who can become an unrestricted free agent July 1, played the past two seasons for Carolina, who this season reached the Eastern Conference Final, where it was swept by the Boston Bruins.

"I'm going to take my time and make sure I make the right [decision], right?" Williams said. "Because if I'm all in, I'm going to be all in. If I'm not quite all there, then I have to reassess the situation. I'm not going to be good if I'm 85 percent all in. I've got to be all in. That's the only that's fair to me, fair to the teammates, fair to everybody."

Williams did not rule out playing for someone other than the Hurricanes, but also said he had built a house and did not want to move his family again. He has played for the Los Angeles Kings, Washington Capitals and Hurricanes in the past five seasons and has missed three games in that time.

"I told [the Hurricanes] I needed time and they said, 'Sure. Please let us know whenever you can, though. Please [don't wait] until September,'" Williams said.

Williams is a finalist for the Mark Messier NHL Leadership Award, which will be handed out at the 2019 NHL Awards presented by Bridgestone on Wednesday (8 p.m. ET; NBCSN, SN), after helping the Hurricanes reach the Stanley Cup Playoffs for the first time since 2009.

"I've slowly come to the realization that I can say it was a good year," Williams said. "I can't say it was a great year. But I can say it was a good year. It's hard to do (say it's great). If you don't win, everyone is like, 'Yeah, great year,' and it's like, 'How is this a great year?' So, the more time I have on it, we did some really good things. We raised the bar, which is what we wanted to do, but now we need to keep raising it and keep becoming relevant and respected. It was a good step for us."

A three-time Stanley Cup champion who turns 38 on Oct. 4, Williams had 53 points (23 goals, 30 assists) in 82 regular-season games and seven points (three goals, four assists) in 15 playoff games this season. He has 786 points (312 goals, 474 assists) in 1,244 NHL games with the Philadelphia Flyers, Kings, Capitals and Hurricanes, and has been nicknamed Mr. Game 7 for his 8-1 record in those games, including this season against the Capitals in the Eastern Conference First Round.

"Listen, anything can happen," Williams said. "I've known that in this world, certainly the hockey world, you don't really make plans. You just live it."



About Last Season: Justin Williams Performance Review and Grade

In his first season holding the captaincy, Justin Williams played a vital offensive role and led the team's deep playoff run.

By Andrew Ahr

Justin Williams: 2018-19 By the Numbers

- Age: 37
- NHL Seasons: 18
- Games Played: 82
- Scoring: 23 goals, 30 assists, 53 points
- Average Ice Time: 17:27 ES, 0:01 SH, 2:43 PP
- 5-on5: 57.89 CF%, 53.19% GF, 61.16% xGF
- Contract Status: UFA

Justin Williams is a natural leader. That much is obvious as we reflect on his first season of captaincy in which the team drastically defied expectations.

It was an injustice that Justin Williams wasn't immediately elected a member of the leadership group two summers ago when he signed a two-year deal in Raleigh and proclaimed that the team was "done losing."

The team wasn't successful in the following season, but it was no fault of his. Justin Williams doesn't have a losing bone in his body. He's succeeded everywhere he's been, playing in 155 playoff games and logging 101 clutch points and earning the title of "Mr. Game 7" in the process.

At the age of 37, Williams had a career year. He scored 23 goals and tallied 30 assists for 53 points — his highest points tally since the 2011-12 season in Los Angeles.

He was relied on more heavily this season than in years past, logging an average of 17:27 time on ice per game. That's almost a full minute more per game than last season, and is over two minutes more than what he was averaging in his final season in Washington.

Williams looked solid in his elevated role this season, and it was clear that he put everything he had into the regular



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season turnaround and playoff run. Without a contract, his return to the league next season is still in question.

Should he return, we can't expect for Williams to play 17-plus minutes per night. He will be 38 at the start of next season, and he will need to be used in a more limited role. That being said, his veteran leadership is indispensable and his secondary scoring was critical to the team's success down the stretch. He's certainly got gas left in the tank.

There's been some criticism of the time he spent in the box down the stretch and into the playoffs this season. It's warranted. The only player who took more minor penalties than him in the regular season was rookie Andrei Svechnikov. Williams committed nine minor penalties in the playoffs, three

more than anyone else on the team. That hurts a lot when the Boston power play was scoring at will.

That being said, I don't have as much of a problem with it in retrospect. Williams was mixing it up during the Eastern Conference Final because nothing else was working. He was angry, and it showed. If it would have turned the momentum of the series, we would have been singing his praises.

Justin Williams is an incredible captain and a solid two-way winger at the age of 37. This season doesn't happen without his leadership. He has cemented his legacy as one of the most important and universally loved hockey players to pass through Raleigh. His future remains uncertain, and should he choose to hang them up, he will leave big shoes to fill.

About Last Season: Curtis McElhinney Performance Review and Grade

An under-the-radar waiver claim in October turns into pure gold for the Hurricanes.

By Jake Lerch

Curtis McElhinney: 2018-2019 By The Numbers

- Age: 35
- NHL Seasons: 11
- Games Played: 33
- Record: 20-11-2
- Key Statistics: 2.58 GAA, .912 save percentage, two shutouts

Making The Grade

Waiver claims are not typically worth revisiting in season recaps. Yet, for the 2018-2019 Carolina Hurricanes, the season really started with the acquisition of Curtis McElhinney.

Scott Darling, the presumed starting goaltender for the Canes, was injured in a preseason game about two weeks before the start of the season. It was assumed at the time that McElhinney, an 11-year veteran, would serve as a reliable stand-in until Darling could resume his place at the top of the depth chart.

Instead, McElhinney earned his spot on the roster and ended the Darling era in Raleigh. He got off to a hot start, winning his first three games, and seven of his first nine. By the end of November, Darling had been placed on waivers.

Mac - along with his teammates - hit a rough patch in December. He lost three straight starts and missed a couple weeks with an injury. However, he returned on New Year's Eve. That game proved to be a turning point for both McElhinney and the Canes. He went 10-2 over his next 12 starts and posted two shutouts.

His mediocre 3-4-1 finish, along with Petr Mrazek's hot play, meant that there was little controversy when Mrazek got the net for the Canes' first nine playoff games. However, when Mrazek went down in the middle of Game 2 against the Islanders, McElhinney showed what he could do. The 17 save "shutout" sent the Canes back to Raleigh with a 2-0 series lead. It was Mac's first-ever playoff victory and set the record for the oldest goaltender to record his first playoff win. He then went on to clinch the remaining two wins as the Canes completed the series sweep.

McElhinney posted career highs in games played (33), wins (20), and quality starts (17). He'll enter the summer as an unrestricted free agent. Don Waddell has made it clear that he would like to re-sign both Mrazek and McElhinney. Yet, one has to wonder if that will happen. Mrazek is ten years younger than Mac and will presumably be the priority signing. Alex Nedeljkovic just won AHL goaltender of the year and led the Charlotte Checkers to a Calder Cup.

Whatever happens in free agency, the 2018-2019 season was a special one for Curtis McElhinney. A pro on and off the ice, he was asked to do a job on short notice and exceeded all expectations. In the final analysis, that October decision will go down as one of - if not the best ever - waiver claims in Canes' history.



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About Last Season: Trevor van Riemsdyk Performance Review and Grade

A rocky regular season saw van Riemsdyk's game teeter, but his postseason was one to remember.

By Brett Finger

Trevor van Riemsdyk: 2018-19 By the Numbers

- Age: 28 on July 24
- NHL Seasons: 5
- Games Played: 78
- Scoring: 3 goals, 11 assists, 14 points
- Average Ice Time: 13:58 ES, 1:02 SH, 0:03 PP
- 5-on-5 (score/venue adjusted): 53.98 CF% (-0.98 relative), 43.98 GF%, 57.14 xGF% (+0.96 relative)
- Contract Status: Entering final season of two-year, \$2.3 million AAV deal

Making the Grade

For my money, Trevor van Riemsdyk was the most consistent defenseman on Carolina's roster during the 2017-18 season, his first as a Hurricane. While almost every other blueliner saw serious fluctuation in their game from start to finish in that season, TvR was very reliable.

The 2018-19 regular season told a different story, though, for one of Carolina's oldest defensemen.

With a revolving door of d-partners, van Riemsdyk was never truly able to gain that level of consistency he had in '17-18. His mistakes in the defensive zone were more noticeable and impactful and he never could find a rhythm.

That's not to say he was bad, though. His possession numbers were right around par for the course compared to his teammates, and his expected metrics were quite good. It was the actual results that hurt him, though. Perhaps part of that was just bad luck, but at least a significant portion of the

problem was that his level of play simply tailed off at times throughout the year.

Down the stretch, TvR found himself with a permanent partner in Calvin de Haan. Together, they were a de facto "shutdown" pairing for Rod Brind'Amour and Dean Chynoweth. That's where things started to really improve for him, as he and de Haan had downright excellent possession numbers at even strength and posted a high-danger shot attempt share well north of 60%. That's really strong.

His most memorable spurts of play certainly came down the stretch, including a huge game-tying goal late in the third period against the Montreal Canadiens on March 24 that set the table for Andrei Svechnikov's overtime game-winner.

That goal played a big role in pushing the Canes into the playoffs, where van Riemsdyk was truly excellent. On a young team with very little playoff experience, he was an ultra-reliable player in his own zone. As the Hurricanes rotated five defenseman with de Haan out with a shoulder injury (and even after de Haan's return), he played some of his best hockey as a Hurricane when it really mattered, and that earns a lot of respect, at least from myself.

Unfortunately, his postseason ended early thanks to a big hit from Cal Clutterbuck. He underwent shoulder surgery after that incident in the second round and is expected to be ready to return to the ice around training camp or the start of the season.

It was an up-and-down year for van Riemsdyk, but the way he came to play late in the year and in the playoffs was awfully impressive. With Carolina's current logjam on the blue line, it'll be interesting to see what happens with him as he enters the final year of his contract. When healthy, he is a capable third pairing defenseman who can kick it up a notch in spurts.

To boot, he's an important presence in the locker room and in the community as the team's representative for "Hockey is For Everyone". He's been spectacular in his message during that campaign and is truly one of the "good guys" in the sport.



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Martin Necas and Tomas Jurco combine to move closer to individual goals

by Nicholas Niedzielski

One was a highly-touted first-round pick navigating his first pro season in a new country while trying to climb his way to the NHL. One was a high-end talent coming off a near career-ending injury and looking to reinvigorate his career.

Together, Martin Necas and Tomas Jurco may have helped each other reach those goals.

Selected 12th overall in 2017, Necas had a ton of hype surrounding his jump to North America. The young forward even made the Hurricanes out of training camp and began the season in their lineup, logging seven games and picking up his first NHL goal and assist along the way. But by mid-October, the decision was made to send the then 19-year-old to the AHL, where he would spend the rest of his rookie season in a Checkers sweater.

"Of course I was disappointed," said Necas. "My expectation before the season was to play in the NHL. I tried to play my best to get into the NHL but I didn't get another chance to get back there."

Going to the AHL is often initially a tough pill for young prospects to swallow, especially after beginning the year in the NHL, but that's not necessarily a bad characteristic to have.

"It's always a disappointment, but honestly that's what you want, you don't want someone who settles," said head coach Mike Vellucci. "He knows he wants to play in the NHL, that's his goal."

Necas' talent was readily apparent in the AHL, but he wasn't immune to the challenges that come with any teenager joining the grind of this league.

It was nothing that could sway Necas' positive disposition, though.

"He had his ups and downs, he went to World Juniors and that team didn't do as well as he had hoped so another little letdown there, but he always had a smile on his face," said Vellucci. "He always wanted to get better. He was very coachable. We did a lot of video together and talked a lot about good things and bad things."

His relationship with Vellucci proved to help ease some of the pressures that come with being a high draft pick, and Necas' production ramped up as the traits that made him such a valuable prospect moved to the forefront, as did his growing maturity on the ice.

"Later on I left him alone just to have fun and play hockey and be a kid," said Vellucci. "I think he appreciated that. He had learned so much and showed so much growth, when you're at that age you can figure it out whether you're making mistakes or not. Sometimes he'd come to the bench and he'd look at me and I'd look at him and he'd just nod his head, I'd nod my head and I knew that he knows what he did and he won't do it again."

Necas quickly developed a strong chemistry both on and off the ice with Janne Kuokkanen, with the two helping to fuel each other's offense.

"Janne was one of my best friends here," said Necas. "He's a great guy and a great player."

Kuokkanen suffered a season-ending injury midway through the campaign, however, leaving a sizeable hole in Charlotte's corps of forwards that ultimately played a part in the team's acquisition of Jurco.

After undergoing another back surgery – one that he wasn't sure his career would survive (<https://twitter.com/pwilliamsNHL/status/1137574295687827456>) – Jurco inked an AHL deal with the Springfield Thunderbirds in January. The forward logged 10 points in 14 games for the struggling squad before he was acquired by the Checkers on a loan, with the team hoping his veteran experience and offensive firepower would help aid a deep playoff run and the player hoping the move would give him a better chance at kickstarting his comeback.

"I wanted to show that I'm a player that can work hard, score goals and make plays and that I'm healthy again," said Jurco. "This was a really important step for me to get back to the NHL."

It would be easy to picture a player of Jurco's stature in his situation coming in to a team so late in the season and only looking out for his personal future, but that couldn't be further from the case. From day one Jurco was visibly invested in the team's success, and his passion to win proved to be contagious.

"I did expect him to buy in," said Vellucci. "I had done my homework, I called a lot of guys who had him and a lot of them said that he loves to win and a big reason Grand Rapids won the Cup that year was because of him."

"I always try to be a good teammate," said Jurco. "These guys made it easy for me."



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Jurco bonded in particular with Necas. Hailing from the neighboring countries of Slovakia and the Czech Republic, respectively, the two immediately showed a connection. "When Jurcs came here we spoke the same language and that always helps," said Necas. "It was a pleasure to play with him."

Off the ice, Jurco's pedigree as a high-end prospect proved helpful as Necas continued down the grind of his first year.

"They speak the same language and Jurcs has been through it," said Vellucci. "He was a high draft pick, junior star, elite talent when he came in the league, been through the ups and downs and matured. He can communicate that with Marty when things aren't going well. Guys are sometimes disappointed when they're not in the NHL or when they're not called up. He was a great sounding board for Marty off the ice."

On the ice the two became mainstays on a line together and helped bolster Charlotte's shockingly strong depth scoring. In fact, the duo became two of the Checkers' most dangerous offensive weapons for those 19 games down the stretch, with Jurco netting 17 points and Necas chipping in 21.

"Their skill complemented each other so well," said Vellucci. "They had a great sense of where the other was going to be on the ice."

"It was fun to play with him and I think he would say the same thing," said Jurco. "We enjoyed our time together and

hopefully he learned some things from me. He's going to be a really good player."

While neither player envisioned this is where they would be finishing this season, both are undoubtedly closer to their goals than they were just a few short months ago.

For Necas, the hope is that this introduction to the North American game has gotten the young talent ready to take a spot on Carolina's opening night roster – and keep it.

"We had a great season in Charlotte" said Necas. "Hopefully I played good enough here to show that I can play there next year. This summer I'm going to work hard, try to get quicker on the ice and stronger in the gym and be ready for next season."

For Jurco, the hope is that this dominant stretch on a championship team is enough to catch the eyes of an NHL team and nab the forward a crack at making it back to the show. If nothing else, he's cemented himself as a two-time Calder Cup winner and earned a glowing recommendation for whoever comes knocking.

"I think he's an NHL player," said Vellucci. "I'm his biggest supporter and if anybody asks me I will tell them he is an NHL player and he can play any role they want him to play."

"Mike brought me here and helped me," said Jurco. "This could be the season I turn things around and he's a huge part of that. I'm really thankful for him."

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1147346 Carolina Hurricanes

Canes made the biggest trade during the 2018 NHL Draft. What about this year?

BY CHIP ALEXANDER

JUNE 18, 2019 01:37 PM

For NHL teams, it's that time of the year.

The St. Louis Blues have claimed their first Stanley Cup, officially ending the 2018-19 season and unofficially kicking off the silly season of trade speculation, draft gossip and free agent scuttlebutt. Hockey fans love it. Social media thrives on it.

The Carolina Hurricanes aren't immune, of course. With the 2019 NHL Draft just days away, the Canes already are immersed in some of the trade talk, some of it self-induced.

The Canes, after picking second in the 2018 draft and taking forward Andrei Svechnikov, have the 28th pick in the first round this year, which isn't a problem given it's an indication of how a team finished in the league's pecking order -- in Carolina's case, in the final four after reaching the Eastern Conference finals in the playoffs.

The Canes will go into the draft, which begins Friday in Vancouver, with three of the top 37 selections and 10 picks in all. Three are in the second round, the Canes adding one pick in the August 2018 trade that sent forward Jeff Skinner to the Buffalo Sabres and another in the April 30 trade that sent defensive prospect Adam Fox to the New York Rangers.

"Last year we knew 100 percent what player we would take in the first round," general manager Don Waddell said. "This year is different. We're looking at all our options. There are good players on the (draft) board. But we still want to make our team better and if there's a deal that can make us better there may be no reason not to trade some of our picks."

Canes coach Rod Brind'Amour has said he'd like to keep his team as intact as possible from last season, possibly with a tweak here and there. "We don't want to lose guys," he said.

But with the uncertainty about team captain Justin Williams -- will he retire, will he return? -- and forward Micheal Ferland likely to leave in free agency and the contract negotiations with goalies Petr Mrazek and Curtis McElhinney ongoing, some changes soon could be in the works.

Mrazek and McElhinney are due to become unrestricted free agents on July 1 if not re-signed. Waddell continues to say he'd like to have both back but that's becoming more problematic with the start of NHL free agency fast approaching and neither signed.

The Canes pulled off the biggest, splashiest trade during the 2018 draft in Dallas, obtaining Ferland and defenseman Dougie Hamilton from the Calgary Flames for forward Elias Lindholm and defenseman Noah Hanifin. The Canes also received Fox, a college star at Harvard, as part of the deal.

And this year's priority? "We need a top-nine forward who can score," Waddell said.

Could that be someone like, say, Nikolaj Ehlers of the Winnipeg Jets? TSN's Frank Seravalli reported Tuesday that the Jets are believed to have offered Ehlers to the Canes for a right-handed shooting defenseman.

Ehlers, 23, has had 20 or more goals three times in four NHL seasons and was the ninth overall pick by the Jets in the 2014 draft. The winger has six years left on his contract paying \$6 million a season.

The Jets already have made a major move, trading defenseman Jacob Trouba, another former first-round pick, on Monday to the Rangers. The Jets in return received defenseman Neal Pionk and the Rangers' first-round pick (20th) this year.

The Rangers, coming off a disappointing season, now have added Trouba and Fox, who could be in their lineup next season. Another Metropolitan Division team, the New Jersey Devils, won the 2019 draft lottery and appear set to make American forward Jack Hughes the No. 1 pick.

Look for speculation to intensify as NHL folks first gather in Las Vegas for the NHL Awards on Wednesday. Waddell is a finalist for the General Manager of the Year award, and Williams a finalist for the Mark Messier Leadership Award.

Everyone then heads to Vancouver, where many player agents will be waiting to speak to many general managers. That will include Sebastian Aho's agent, Gerry Johansson, as the Canes and Aho try to hammer out a long-term contract that both sides want, but at what price?

Waddell has said he would prefer an agreement "sooner rather than later" and not let negotiations drag into August and September.

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The Athletic / 2018-19 NHL Awards: Finalists, projected winners and snubs

By Jonathan Willis



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The NHL offseason is ridiculous. For two to three weeks after the Stanley Cup is awarded, teams scramble madly. They buy out old contracts, draft their next wave of prospects, sign free agents and make most of their big offseason trades.

Sandwiched awkwardly in the middle of all this chaos are the NHL awards, mostly recognizing the accomplishments of a regular season now two months in the past.

This year the awards fall on Wednesday, June 19, a mere two days before the draft. Still, they deserve attention: as much as hockey is a sport that values the team over the individual in all things, the personal legacies of the game's greatest players are formed to a large extent based on these annual honors.

In this piece, we'll look at each of the three finalists for select awards, mention a deserving candidate who didn't crack the top three and project an expected winner.

Frank J. Selke Trophy (Best defensive forward)

Last year's winner: Anze Kopitar, Kings. The truth is that there isn't a neat and tidy line between offense and defense in the NHL. A player that's good at one end of the spectrum can't help but generate results on the other. Kopitar was a good example of that, though with 92 points one might ask just how much emphasis the voters placed on scoring.

These days, only centers win this award. Most recently the trophy has bounced back and forth between Stanley Cup winners Kopitar and Patrice Bergeron, seemingly dependent on which of the two has the better plus/minus in a given year.

The finalists: Kopitar was minus-20 for the Kings, leaving only one possible candidate, but we're obliged to look at all three finalists anyway ...

Patrice Bergeron, Bruins. In all seriousness, Bergeron had yet another dominant two-way season and remains a stellar hockey player, but it is a little bit odd that he's up for the Selke. Boston was a defensive juggernaut this year, and Bergeron's line actually had the highest goals-against rate on the club (even as they outscored the opposition handily thanks to putting pucks in at an outrageous 3.7 goals-per-hour clip when Bergeron was on the ice). It was a great season, but not one that particularly fits an award at least theoretically predicated on preventing goals.

Ryan O'Reilly, Blues. O'Reilly gets Selke votes every year, and for good reason. This year his circumstances – a career-best offensive season, awesome plus/minus, winning team – give him a legitimate shot at securing his first ever win. We touched on how ludicrous his on-ice goal metrics were, and that came despite brutal usage which sets him apart from the field. Not only did he face more of the league's toughest opponents than the other finalists, but he started more of his shifts in the defensive zone than the rest.

Mark Stone, Golden Knights. Stone spent most of the year in Ottawa, and what he did against the backdrop of that shambling wreck of a franchise is extraordinary. His matchup minutes were a little bit soft compared to other elite defensive players and that has to be taken into consideration, but so does the fact that he was playing in front of the Senators' defensive group and dramatically improved the team's goals-against rates.

Honorable mention: It should be hoped that Penguins captain Sidney Crosby draws some votes this year. Pittsburgh was a negative team by both shot and goal differential at 5-on-5 with

Crosby off the ice and massively in the black (+8.0 shots per hour, +1.87 goals per hour) with him out there, despite being matched in a power-vs.-power role. People are justifiably down on the Pens but this was a vintage year from Crosby.

Predicted winner: O'Reilly. Both Stone and O'Reilly are highly deserving candidates, but position alone dictates that the voters will likely give the nod to O'Reilly. No winger has won the award since Jere Lehtinen did back in 2003.

Lady Byng Memorial Trophy (Most sportsmanlike player)

Last year's winner: William Karlsson, Golden Knights. Karlsson had an outstanding season, and it was nice to see a player in the conversation for a lot of different awards earn a major piece of hardware. Officially, the award goes to "the player adjudged to have exhibited the best type of sportsmanship and gentlemanly conduct combined with a high standard of playing ability," which fit with the season Karlsson had.

He also met the other unofficial criteria, be a) a forward b) with lots of points and c) with not many penalty minutes.

Points and penalty minutes are reasonable criteria, but it remains a minor injustice that defencemen don't get more consideration given the difficulty of playing that position cleanly. Jared Spurgeon, he of 37 points, an average of 24:33 per game and just eight penalty minutes was the highest-ranked defenceman in the voting, finishing fifth.

The finalists: Speaking of de facto criteria, there were three forwards in the NHL this year with 12-or-fewer penalty minutes and 70-or-more points. Unsurprisingly, those three are the official finalists for the Lady Byng this year.

Aleksander Barkov, Panthers. Ninety-six points, eight penalty minutes, positive on-ice goal and shot differentials.

Sean Monahan, Flames. Eighty-two points, 12 penalty minutes, positive on-ice shot and goal differentials.

Ryan O'Reilly, Blues. Seventy-seven points, 12 penalty minutes, the best on-ice shot (54.0 SF%) and goal (62.2 GF%!) numbers in the group.

Honorable mention: It's one of my lower-key missions in life to help make it possible for defencemen – who face a much tougher challenge in avoiding penalties – to seriously compete for this award. This year's best option is John Klingberg of the Stars, who posted 45 points and just 12 penalty minutes in 64 games this year. Dallas was 35-24-5 when he played this year and just 8-8-2 without him.

Predicted winner: Barkov. On the basis of the simplest possible stats, he's unassailable. A lot of times the approach to this award warrants disdain, but in Barkov (as in Karlsson last season) at least there is a highly deserving recipient: a quality two-way center who played outrageous minutes and delivered in a major way. He might be an obvious choice, but he's a good one.

Vezina Trophy (Best goaltender)

Last year's winner: Pekka Rinne, Predators. Rinne was an obvious front-runner last season, combining 42 wins with a .927 save percentage.

This is a tricky award to vote for because as much as analytics has taken off in a lot of places, puck movement has a huge relationship to save difficulty and it's not something that (and I stand ready to be corrected by angry emails) I've seen comprehensively dealt with publicly, though the arrival of puck tracking should change that posthaste. Most current models rate shot location and shooter



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competency, which is a big step forward, but there's more to be done.

Having said that, this is an NHL GM award, rather than a PHWA one, and it's possible that some teams have a whiz-bang assessment method that they keep in-house that incorporates all the stuff we'd all love to see incorporated.

The finalists: If teams have access to all manner of secret information, they're either not using it for this award, or it outputs something which looks remarkably like a list of save percentage leaders with 40-plus starts.

Ben Bishop, Stars. Here's something interesting: Bishop played 46 games and had a .938 save percentage at 5-on-5, while teammate Anton Khudobin played 41 games and had a .932 save percentage 5-on-5. I'm not definitely saying that those numbers are more a product of two quality, well-rested goalies playing behind good team structure rather than sheer individual greatness, but one wonders.

Robin Lehner, Islanders. Here's something interesting, part two: Lehner played 46 games and had a .935 save percentage at 5-on-5, while teammate Thomas Greiss played 43 games and put up a .939 save percentage at 5-on-5. I'm not definitely saying that those numbers are more a product of two quality, well-rested goalies playing behind good team structure rather than sheer individual greatness, but one wonders.

Andrei Vasilevskiy, Lightning. Vasilevskiy faces a ton of rush chances, which I can tell you from looking at a spreadsheet or anyone could tell you from watching the Lightning play. He's one of just five goalies in the NHL with more than 50 games played and a .925-or-better even-strength save percentage and he actually leads all starters with a .911 save percentage on the penalty kill.

Honorable mention: Workload counts, and in terms of shots faced at 5-on-5 the Maple Leafs' Frederik Andersen ranks first in the NHL. He's also in the top-five in terms of rush chances against. His overall save percentage total (0.929 at 5-on-5) is a little weak compared to the competition on this list, but among high-minute and high-shot volume goalies he's outstanding.

Predicted winner: Vasilevskiy. It's really tempting to go with save percentage leader Bishop here, but I think a slightly heavier workload, the greater amount of daylight between Vasilevskiy and his backup and the style of game Tampa favors will ultimately mean Vasilevskiy gets the nod.

James Norris Memorial Trophy (Best defenseman)

Last year's winner: Victor Hedman, Lightning. The really crazy thing about Hedman winning the Norris last year is that his regular defense partner from 2017-18 has spent a significant chunk of this year in the minors. I don't think anyone had Jake Dotchin down as the driver on that pairing, but it puts in perspective the quality of Hedman's work.

Beyond his actual quality, Hedman cleared a bunch of bars that a Norris-winning defenceman needs to clear. Voters expect some scoring, heavy minutes, a good on-ice goal differential and it helps to have an established reputation, plus play for a good team.

The finalists: Two high-scoring defencemen and the reigning winner make the grade as finalists.

Brent Burns, Sharks. Burns was the highest-scoring defenceman in the NHL. By the underlying numbers, Burns didn't have a dominant season, but it's easy to overstate this: not only was he paired with 26-year-old rookie Radim Simek for most of the year, but he also

played on the same team as Erik Karlsson, whose on-ice numbers have eclipsed many a teammate before now.

Mark Giordano, Flames. Giordano was the best 5-on-5 scoring defenceman in the NHL. He nearly doubled his even-strength point totals from a year ago and cleared his previous career-high by a massive margin, but it isn't just or even mostly about points. He also had easily the most dominant year of his career by on-ice goal share. That kind of season from an already-great defenceman is hard to look past.

Victor Hedman, Lightning. After Burns and Giordano, voters skipped down to give the NHL's No. 11 defensive scorer a nod. He deserves it. After winning with Dotchin as a regular partner last season, Hedman put up elite numbers while matched with Dan Girardi this season, despite the fact that his team fared better on the shot clock and in the goal column when Hedman played with higher-end partners.

Honorable mention: The two obvious ones are John Carlson of the Capitals and Morgan Rielly of the Maple Leafs. It isn't just scoring, though both had massive seasons in that regard. More importantly both also helped their teams outscore their opponents by big amounts when on the ice. I feel like Rielly, in particular, gets undervalued; he played with Ron Hainsey almost all year but when he finally got Jake Muzzin he blew up, with the Leafs posting a 57.4 percent Corsi and 11-6 goal differential when they were on the ice together at 5-on-5.

Predicted winner: Giordano. He combines the high scoring of Burns with the strong underlying metrics of Hedman. It's a great story, and in a league constantly skewing ever-younger, a 35-year-old winning his first Norris is a nice throwback.

Jack Adams Award (Best head coach)

Last year's winner: Gerard Gallant, Golden Knights. Gallant was the deserving winner last season after a stunning debut by Vegas, and given the way a newly formed team gelled immediately, he easily met the official criterion of having "contributed the most to his team's success."

Judging coaching contributions can be hard and typically this award goes to the team that most overachieves. Diehards like me will often argue for the team that achieves the most, with the notion that outstanding success is too often taken for granted. It's not often that someone like Gallant comes along who qualifies by both standards.

The finalists: This is one of the few awards where it's completely appropriate to ignore teams which didn't come close to the postseason, and even with that as a criterion there were a lot of deserving candidates. All three finalists have strong arguments in their favor.

Craig Berube, Blues. Berube was already a success before the playoffs began, taking over a last-place team and putting together a stunning second half. The Blues underachieved badly under Mike Yeo to start the year and it's debatable whether their resurgence was more or less surprising than their collapse out of the gate, but Berube was the guy who put the pieces back together.

Jon Cooper, Lightning. Cooper's team had a (regular) season for the ages and he's groomed many of those players since their AHL days. Perhaps no single person deserves more overall credit for Tampa Bay's 62 wins than Cooper.

Barry Trotz, Islanders. The Tavares effect is a big one, but the Isles were one of the teams most primed for coaching improvement regardless of who landed behind the bench. On average they've been a minus-5 team the last three years and they finished the



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season plus-32. It's a big step up and Trotz – one of the greats – deserves a lot of the credit.

Honorable mention: I'm going to pick just one, though it could have been five: Bill Peters of the Flames. Over the last three years, Calgary has been, on average, a minus-17 team. With much the same roster and even with some shaky goaltending, they are plus-62 this season. Most years, Peters would deserve the win; in this one he doesn't even land in the final three.

Predicted winner: Trotz. This is a tough one to handicap. Voters always seem to love the overachievers here, which likely means Cooper finishes third. The other two choices are both good ones and post-playoffs Berube the obvious answer. But in the aftermath of the regular season, Trotz's turnaround of the Islanders probably gets the nod.

Calder Memorial Trophy (Best rookie)

Neither will this year's winner.

The finalists: We have three names to consider here so we won't just say "Elias Pettersson" and move on but instead give some attention to the whole field.

Jordan Binnington, Blues. I can't help but look a little bit sideways at Binnington's stunning season. At 25 his .927 save percentage as an NHL rookie meets or exceeds what he managed in five previous minor-league campaigns. Nevertheless, he's been the driving force behind the Blues' rise from the Western Conference basement and in a Pettersson-less season would have a strong argument for the top spot even with only 32 games played.

Rasmus Dahlin, Sabres. The 18-year-old has been everything that could be expected. Buffalo's coaching staff has tried to buy him a little bit of cover (mostly at the expense of the Rasmus Ristolainen-led top pair) but he's still playing more than 21 minutes per game and delivering splendidly.

Elias Pettersson, Canucks. Pettersson is easily the top offensive weapon in this year's rookie class, with his 66 points 21 more than his next-closest rival. He's also already Vancouver's most potent forward. He is the heir to a proud Canucks tradition of Swedish scoring stars, inheriting the mantle from the Sedin twins after they inherited it from Markus Naslund.

Honorable mention: Nineteen-year-old Miro Heiskanen is always a joy to behold on the Stars' blue line, though his results have varied dramatically by teammate. His 44 percent Corsi and 47 percent goal share when paired with Roman Polak contrasts sharply with the 62 and 69 percent numbers he managed with John Klingberg. He averaged more than 23 minutes per game for Dallas.

Predicted winner: Pettersson. Binnington will get knocked for games played and voters didn't know he'd also win the Stanley Cup. As good as Dahlin was this year, he's probably closer to Heiskanen in terms of total results than he is to a first-place finish. Pettersson was the best scorer by a wide margin and that will earn him the nod here.

Hart Memorial Trophy (Most Valuable Player)

Last year's winner: Taylor Hall, Devils. Last year's Hart race was quite close and hotly debated, but one of the things that set Hall apart was the way in which he was quite clearly the leading light on the Devils.

His 93 points, as well as his 53 percent shot share and 59 percentage goal share at 5-on-5 were all splendid totals in isolation. In a context which included New Jersey having just one other 50-point player, they were good enough for him to edge out a crowded field.

Usually the race isn't quite so close and usually, it correlates more strongly with the Art Ross race.

The finalists: This year at least, the Hart and the Art Ross are marching in near-lockstep, with two of the NHL's three leading scorers finalists as players most valuable to their respective teams.

Sidney Crosby, Penguins. Crosby, with 100 points, tied for fifth in NHL scoring and is the exception to the rule. It's a well-chosen exception; as we saw in the Selke section, Crosby had a superb two-way season on an underachieving Pittsburgh team.

Nikita Kucherov, Lightning. With 128 points, Kucherov ran up a 12-point lead on second-place Connor McDavid in the league scoring race. Unlike last year, where it was tough to pick just one Bolt as a leading offensive light, Kucherov put up 30 points more than any of his teammates on the league's most dominant regular season team.

Connor McDavid, Oilers. McDavid improved by eight points on last season's 108-point performance – which led the NHL in scoring but wasn't enough to make him a Hart finalist. Yet this year wasn't a step forward for him; on balance he was better last season, both against the backdrop of a lower-scoring league and in terms of his two-way play. His big problem in 2017-18 was Edmonton missing the playoffs, and that hasn't changed.

Honorable mention: Mark Stone of the Golden Knights. Scoring stars will get most of the attention here, and many of them had brilliant seasons. Stone's 77 points don't stand out against that company. What does is his two-way play. No other player in the league had a bigger impact on his team's expected 5-on-5 goal share, with Stone dramatically improving offensive and defensive outcomes the moment he stepped on the ice.

Predicted winner: Kucherov. Kucherov had 28 points more than Crosby (who wasn't a Lindsay finalist) and McDavid's team didn't make the playoffs. Unlike last year, this season's Hart race doesn't carry much suspense.

Ted Lindsay Award (Most Outstanding Player)

Last year's winner: Connor McDavid, Oilers. Freed from the real or imagined need to vote for a player in the postseason — as per the "most valuable to his team" section of the Hart criteria — the membership of the NHLPA was able to simply pick the league's most outstanding player and settled on McDavid, the league's most dominant force.

The finalists: The scoring race is always going to matter in these awards, and while the Hart finalists lined up well with the Art Ross race, the players managed to get even closer, voting the league's three leading scorers as its three most outstanding players.

Patrick Kane, Blackhawks. Kane is a fascinating choice. The Blackhawks got out-shot badly and gave up a ton of goals when his line was on the ice this year, but he was able to outscore his problems in a brilliant offensive showing. Whether the defensive issues were really Kane-centric or a product of circumstances – like playing a career-high 22:29 per game on an awful team – is open to interpretation.

Nikita Kucherov, Lightning. Tampa Bay scored a whopping 4.0 goals per hour at 5-on-5 when Kucherov was on the ice this year. For perspective, Nashville's 5-on-4 power play scored 4.1. Obviously, it wasn't all Kucherov, but he led the Lightning across the board in offensive categories and picked up a point on 84 percent of the goals scored when he was on the ice.

Connor McDavid, Oilers. McDavid is interesting for much the same reason as Kane. Edmonton got out-shot when he was on the ice and



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gave up a ton of goals, but his line outscored its problems in a brilliant offensive showing. Whether the defensive issues were really McDavid-centric or a product of circumstances – like playing a career-high 22:50 per game on an awful team – is open to interpretation.

Honorable mention: Most of the obvious choices for this show up in the Selke or Byng discussions or have already been mentioned in some ‘best player’ capacity. One player who has so far been overlooked is Avalanche forward Nathan MacKinnon. Last year’s Hart runner-up had another outstanding season – among other things, Colorado was plus-21 at 5-on-5 when he (and his usually excellent linemates) were on the ice and minus-18 without him.

Predicted winner: Kucherov. As with the Hart race, there isn’t much suspense here.

General Manager of the Year

Last year’s winner: George McPhee, Golden Knights. McPhee was an easy choice last year, given how brilliantly the Golden Knights performed in their NHL debut. There is no lone standout of that type on the ballot this year, and because McPhee’s circumstances were so unique, his win doesn’t shed a lot of light on the thinking behind the award.

The league’s GMs always honor success, but the circumstances of that success vary. Managers with big advantages are honored, but the inaugural award went to Don Maloney in 2010 in recognition of the struggles that came with running a barebones Coyotes operation. Long-term planners are honored, but Jim Rutherford won in 2016 in just his second year with the Penguins.

More than any other, the trick to this award is balancing the short- and the long-term, always a tricky proposition.

The finalists:

Doug Armstrong, Blues. Armstrong, the 2012 winner, is an interesting finalist because of the rollercoaster the Blues took to eventual success. Mostly he deserves credit for building a team with good fundamentals and making the right mid-season adjustments, but it’s hard to imagine he would have got any votes if the award were given at Christmas.

Don Sweeney, Bruins. Boston is a fascinating team, and despite some high-profile misses, the Bruins under Sweeney have done something that not a lot of teams manage, adding tons of young talent to a still-vital older core. The result was a second consecutive 100-plus point season and a ride to Game 7 of the Stanley Cup finals.

Don Waddell, Hurricanes. Carolina didn’t quite run on a budget comprised entirely of spare change salvaged from Tom Dundon’s couch, but no other team in the league got better bang for its buck, with the Canes spending a lower percentage of their cap space than any comparably successful team in recent memory. Waddell also traded Victor Rask for Nino Niederreiter, which deserves a special mention all by itself.

Honorable mention: Three of the four conference finalists show up here, and the fourth – Doug Wilson of the Sharks – belongs in the same company. One big offseason deal brought in Erik Karlsson after a bid for John Tavares fell short, while another deal involving the Senators and Panthers somehow transmogrified Mikkel Boedker’s cap hit into a pile of draft picks. Not everything he does works, but few GMs are as consistently good on the trade side as Wilson.

Predicted winner: Waddell. Nobody in hockey appreciates the difficulties of thriving in a cap situation more than the managers tasked with doing that on a day-to-day basis, and all of them can surely imagine how tough it would be to win on a much lower budget.

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The Athletic / How agents experience the journey to the NHL draft from early recruiting to the first contract

By Sean Gordon

Jun 18, 2019

At some point on Friday evening, a blocky, besuited teenager is going to bro hug an older, more snappily dressed gentleman on live national television — or possibly a woman, but they’re almost all men — to signify the culmination of a journey.

The ritual affirmation will take place in an arena full of the teen’s peers, and with basically every stellar body in the hockey firmament in attendance. Everyone who matters makes a point of getting to the draft, it’s one of the best networking opportunities in sports.

In some cases, the hug-ee might not be the person who expected to share the moment with the player four or eight or 12 months ago, but generally speaking the NHL draft is a “we finally made it” moment, with all the attendant emotions that go along with a shared sense of accomplishment and satisfaction.

Spectators will see the end result, but not the process preceding it. Therefore, when you see your favorite team’s crop of 2019 draft choices, spare a thought not just for how hard the kid worked to get there, but also for the people whose job it is to shepherd them through it, in some cases from the age of 14 or 15 onwards.

The agents.

The Athletic interviewed a broad cross-section of hockey agents to find out what draft week is like from their perspective. While some work in small, boutique companies, others ply their trade for sprawling multinational outfits. In all cases they agreed to exchange frankness for anonymity. Athlete representation is not known as a genteel business; there is a competitive disadvantage in baring one’s inner thoughts in public.

A celebration, then. But depending on one’s station in life, draft week can also be a bit nervous and weird.

“No one will own up to it, but there’s a lot of checking out who’s standing next to who,” one agent said. “It’s pretty simple for a guy to go to another agency, and if you’re a smaller (industry) player, you feel it. I certainly did when I started out.”

That’s because the standard agreement that ties players to one of the NHLPA’s 195 or so certified agents is crafted to the player’s advantage. Once in a blue moon, it results in a life imitates art type of scenario.



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A second agent recounted how a colleague had a promising client bail on him a few weeks before the draft in favour of a big name agency; the player in question went on to a long and immensely lucrative career as a top-six NHL forward. His former rep is now working in a different business.

"It's not the sort of thing you recover from," the agent said.

These sorts of episodes aren't commonplace, at least not until later on in the journey. Careers are short, the opportunities to cash in are few, and players are understandably loath to pass one up.

"I've found the snakes usually come out in a contract year, that's when the phone starts to ring and promises get made, 'hey listen, this is your one chance to look after your family and I'm the best guy to help you with that'," the agent continued.

Though draft week is busy in itself, what with dinners, media obligations and the care and feeding of prospects, their friends and their families, the build-up is where the real work happens. And it is painstaking. Usually, draft day is three or four years in the making.

Top prospects tend to begin revealing themselves at the age of 14 or 15, which is when some of them sign their first agency contracts.

To wit, the putative top pick on Friday, Jack Hughes, has been A Shiny Hockey Thing basically from the moment he started annihilating the competition in PeeWee. It helps he played in the Greater Toronto Hockey League, which bills itself as the world's largest minor hockey association. Hughes is represented by industry colossus CAA and super-agent Pat Brisson; Hughes's dad Jim, an alum of the Maple Leafs' front office and a former minor league and college coach, was named co-director of CAA's player development operation in 2016.

Others may have to wait until they break into Major Junior, or the college ranks, before signing on; regardless of the age at which they join, one agent suggested north of 95 percent of the players who are selected on draft day will have a representative. In the vast majority cases, that agent has been intimately involved in the player's development, counseling him on his game, propping him up in the low moments, agitating on his behalf where needed.

A growing number of agencies provide a wide range of training and other services to their clients: nutrition, strength and conditioning, skills coaches, power skating, sports psychology, concierge services. It's an emergent industry trend, a point of differentiation for the firms that can afford the outlay.

"The smaller groups don't have the resources, but I like to think of it as an investment that you amortize over time," another agent said. "The goal for most of the bigger agencies is to get at least six or eight players per year through the draft and eventually into pro."

Maintaining a steady flow in the pipeline is paramount for all but the largest, most established agencies. As the rep put it: "The day you stop recruiting is the day you admit you're getting out of the agent business."

Not everyone opts to play the full-service game, because the up-front costs can be significant, think in the tens of thousands. Agents don't earn much on entry-level contracts, most charge a three percent commission (the NHLPA does not mandate a cap on the percentage of fees, unlike its NBA counterpart, so your mileage may vary.) For a player making \$1 million on a first contract, that's \$30,000. And most players don't make \$1 million on their ELC. The real money only rolls in once a player gets through to his second contract and then on to arbitration eligibility. Not every prospect makes it that far.

"You're recruiting players at 14 or 15, but not many will play in the NHL at 18, maybe a handful," a veteran agent said. "So add another year before they sign, and in most cases two. Then, it's the ELC so you're not making anything. You're looking at eight years in the best-case scenario. That, to me, is where the system is broken. If you went to a bank and said to them, 'I have a great business idea, but it's not going to make money for eight to nine years', what do you think they'd say? I get that people want to do that, it's what players and parents expect now — in a lot of cases they look for inducements — to which I say good luck."

Oh, and the NHLPA's standard player-agent contract (SPAC) specifically forbids recouping those costs.

Here's the legalese, if that's your thing: "All expenses incurred by the Agent in the performance of this Agreement shall be solely the Agent's responsibility and shall not be reimbursable by the Player. In the event that Schedule "A" (which lays out fees) provides for reimbursement of expenses it shall be limited to expenses actually incurred by the Agent in the performance of this Agreement and further provide that any expense in addition to reasonable charges for photocopying, facsimile, long distance telephone and courier charges must be approved of in advance by the Player to be reimbursable. All reimbursable expenses must be documented by the Agent and the Player agrees to pay such expenses within thirty (30) days of receipt of a detailed itemized statement."

Nor is a SPAC especially binding if a player hasn't yet signed a pro contract — apropos of which, a healthy proportion of the people who will be drafted this weekend won't ever earn one, and only a lucky few will ink an NHL deal. All that's required for a player to break it is written notice; then he can register another SPAC with a different agent.

It's not a frequent occurrence, but it does happen. The fact it isn't more common may be a function of the sport's culture; as one agent said: "I'd say it's the nature of hockey players in general, in other sports it's more prevalent. A hockey player might accept to live through a bad situation for a full season, but you talk to agents for NBA or NFL players and their guy is on the phone within a month."

It's an aggressive business, and one agent said of the newer crop of industry entrants, "they're desperate, a lot of them will do pretty much anything to attract a client."

Add in the fact that agents aren't generally allowed to bill their clients until after they've been paid (hello signing bonus!) and it's not hard to see how the minnows tend to fear the bigger fish. Hence, a great deal of attention is paid to nurturing relationships. And the weeks leading up to the draft help cement those relations.

Technology has helped both client and agent stay in closer touch. FaceTime and its variants are ubiquitous in the pro sports world; it's commonplace outside dressing rooms in hockey arenas around the world to see players chatting at the phone they're holding up in front of them. That doesn't mean agents don't still log hundreds of thousands of frequent flier miles. Or that players (and their parents and extended families) don't notice the absence of the personal touch.

"It's funny how a kid having a bad draft year can suddenly become my fault," one agent said with a laugh. "The basic thing is you have to put in the work. Everyone in this business says they're committed to looking after their guys, but some people do it better than others."

Say you're an agent who's managed to shepherd one or five or 10 prospects through their age 17-18 season, advising them on how to handle adversity, the relationship with their coaches and their families.



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Next comes the early June combine in Buffalo, to which the 109 top-ranked players were invited this year (a total of 217 players will be drafted this coming weekend). From there, it's time to prepare for draft week. That typically includes some media training; the demands on the top guys are more considerable than those on unheralded prospects, but for many, it's the first time they'll be exposed to national and international media and to an NHL arena full of fans. It can be daunting.

"If it's a higher-profile player, you need to be in touch with the organization or organizations that you think they might go to, there could be appearances to be scheduled or promotional campaigns to discuss," said an agent who has represented top picks. "For everyone, there's going to be travel plans to iron out, most teams nowadays hold their development camp immediately after the draft. It can be a pretty nerve-wracking time, these players are young and if you expect to go in a certain position and don't, it can be a pretty negative experience. So you deal with that too."

And when a player slides, it's not entirely unheard of for him to eventually get a call or a text message along the lines of "if you were with me, I'm sure I could have helped get you on the World Junior team ..."

If the player is expected to be drafted in the early rounds, he'll be on hand with mom and dad; the agent will handle the logistical arrangements and generally picks up the tab for travel and lodging. Several agencies have opted to rent houses in Vancouver. The higher-end prospects will start filtering into town early in the week, the lesser-heralded will arrive closer to D-Day.

There will be an agency dinner, a pre-party of sorts that reunites prospects and parents (socializing with one's peers is a key part of draft week). There will be open houses and league-sponsored events. There will be much glad-handing with other prospects and the 200 hockey men of myth and legend, there will be whispered hallway conversations and even more waiting around for stuff to happen.

"Honestly, once you get to the week itself, everything is done, everyone is pretty much locked in, there's an idea of which way the teams are leaning," said an agent. "It's more a sense of excitement than anything."

And then the big day rolls around. Criticize the NHL all you want, this is a league that knows how a thing or two about ceremonial grandeur. Tickets are highly sought-after, the proceedings on Friday will unfold before a packed house.

For 31 youngsters, their turn on stage will come on Friday. For 186 more, it's a question of sitting in their new suit through Saturday; the wait gets more agonizing as the day advances. By the end of the seventh round, some teams have run out of jerseys. One former NHL player likes to tell the tale that when he was picked, in the sixth round, there was panic at the draft table as staffers looked for a team cap to hand him for the photo. They ferreted one out in the end. He even got to keep it.

Some players won't get picked at all despite having made the trip ("the absolute worst," said an agent). The good news is they won't have to suffer alone.

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The Athletic / 'Never seen anything like that': A prospect's draft-day dream is realized, then dashed and finally achieved

By Scott Cruickshank

Jun 18, 2019

The NHL Draft is about elite prospects and their ability to influence the course of a team's fortunes. It's powerful stuff — soon-to-be household names being fawned over, being snapped up, being counted on — at least on the surface. Because beyond the hype of the opening rounds and into the murky depths of the exercise, there are teenagers still clinging to hopes. They and their families wait nervously to learn their fates. It can be heart-breaking stuff, but at least it's cut and dried. You get picked or you don't. Usually.

Everything is in place for Andy Chiodo. Mom and Dad are there. His best friend is sitting nearby. His agent, too.

Together in the stands — centre ice, last row of the lower bowl — they have the perfect vantage point for the perfect moment.

The lifelong dream is about to unfold.

What could possibly go wrong?

Chiodo, reflecting nearly 20 years later, laughs. Then laughs some more.

"It was unique," he said of the 2001 NHL Draft at the National Car Rental Center in Sunrise, Fla. "I don't think it had ever happened before. At this point, it's a story I can share when reminiscing. It's something that certainly comes up.

"It happened. I have no resentment at all."

And, at least officially, nothing untoward appears to have occurred. Scan the fine print, round by round, from that year and there is little out of place. Some misses (such as Igor Knyazev 15th overall), some hits (such as Jussi Jokinen, 192nd) — in other words, the usual array of draft choices.

But, behind the scenes, do the proceedings go according to form? Hardly. It is something that agent Darren Ferris had not experienced — or even heard of — before or since.

"Never," Ferris said. "Never in 25, 26 years have I seen anything like that."

The weekend starts hiccup-free — Ilya Kovalchuk goes first overall to the Atlanta Thrashers and Chiodo's close pal, Jason Spezza, is nabbed by the Ottawa Senators.

Chiodo, soon, gets a tingle.

That season, he and Peter Budaj excelled, evenly sharing the net of the OHL Toronto St. Michael's Majors. Central Scouting sees it the same way — ranking Chiodo seventh of North American goalies, Budaj eighth. "So a part of me thought, 'Anything can happen,'" said Chiodo.

Understandably then, when the Colorado Avalanche prefaces a pick, the last selection of the second round, with, "From the St. Michael's Majors —" Chiodo freezes in giddy anticipation.

"For a second, my heart dropped," he recalled. "I thought, 'Wouldn't this be something? Completely unexpected.' And they took Peter. He was a great goaltender and he deserved to go really high. You just never know what can happen."



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Saturday's hollers, three rounds' worth, come and go without a hint of his name.

Which means returning to the rink Sunday morning with his entourage — parents Andy Sr. and Maria, Spezza, Ferris. The fourth round — with teams now making their selections from the draft floor instead of the stage — opens with the Nashville Predators taking Jordin Tootoo. Next, Ray Emery goes to Ottawa. This portion of the draft flies by, typically only a few minutes per pick.

At the top of the fifth round, Dusan Salficky is grabbed by the New York Islanders. Then Jussi Markkanen by the Edmonton Oilers. Then Kyle Wellwood by the Toronto Maple Leafs.

At No. 135, it is Atlanta's turn.

The Thrashers, at their table, are ready. Dan Marr, director of amateur scouting, instructs one of the staffers to enter into the computer the name Colin Stuart, a left winger from Colorado College. Pending NHL approval, he will be the team's selection.

"So our pick is in," said Marr. "But Don Waddell, our GM, he's in my ear."

Waddell is itching to go circulate. But aware that the Thrashers still possess four late-round choices (one sixth, two sevenths, one eighth), the boss wants to know which way Marr is leaning.

"So I say, 'Well, there's a couple goalies left and this is a good range before they disappear. So we should consider some goalies,'" said Marr. "And he goes, 'Who are you thinking of?' And I say, 'Andy Chiodo from St. Mike's.'"

Right at that moment, Jim Gregory, the league's no-nonsense master of ceremonies, from the stage intones, "OK, Atlanta."

"I had Andy Chiodo's name in my head," said Marr, "and that's what came out of my mouth."

At the table, Bob Owen, the Thrashers' director of player development, begins to bark, "No, no, no!" Realizing his error, Marr tries to issue an on-the-fly correction. No matter. Damage done.

"As it happens, Colin Stuart's not at the draft," said Marr. "Andy is — and they heard his name."

Elated, Chiodo hugs his parents, shakes hands with Spezza and Ferris, begins to make his way to the draft floor. However, before the teenager can reach his destination, he is intercepted by Marr and Waddell.

"They explain to me that there's been a terrible mistake," said Chiodo. "I'm like, 'What do you mean, guys? Where's my jersey?' I've been waiting for a jersey my whole life. They said, 'Look, Andy, we've made a terrible mistake. There was a miscommunication at the table. We were discussing our next pick ... the person who announced it announced your name. And the other person typed Colin Stuart into the register. So we actually drafted Colin Stuart and you're not drafted.'"

"So I said, 'Well, what do I do? What happens here?' They said, 'We're really sorry. You have to go back to your seat.' So I turned around and walked up the stairs to where my parents were. Obviously, they were concerned and didn't know what was going on."

Marr can see that everyone is upset. Chiodo's mom is crying. Later, Maria would tell reporters: "You go from a wonderful feeling of high, of seeing your son's dream fulfilled, and then you see him coming back up the stairs. I knew something was wrong when I saw him standing in the corner without a sweater."

As for the kid — who knows what's going through his mind?

"I was obviously trying to manage emotions," said Chiodo.

Marr, meanwhile, is buttonholed by Ferris. The agent, understandably, wants to know one thing: "What the hell is going on?" Marr wears it. "I said, 'This is on me. I made a mistake.'"

Wheels, on various fronts, are suddenly in motion.

The Thrashers are frantically trying to acquire a fifth-round selection so they can do right by the kid.

"We were moving," said Marr. "Don was working the phone. He was trying to trade to move up in the draft to get a pick, so we could take Andy right away."

(All these years later, Atlanta's earnest effort to make amends comes as news to Chiodo. "They did? I didn't know that. That's great.")

Then, though, the kid is simply trying to keep it together in the stands.

"Yeah, it was tough," Chiodo said. "All sorts of thoughts go through your brain, 'I might not get drafted at all.' What an unfortunate situation."

Remembering something else, he chuckles.

"My parents were trying to talk to me. You know when, if someone talks to you, you might cry? It was, 'If you guys share your emotion, it might make me emotional. So just leave me alone.' My parents didn't know what to think."

Ferris' biggest worry? That 29 other clubs, after hearing Chiodo's name called out, have crossed the youngster off their lists. And, at that stage of draft, picks are blinking by. (Five goalies, including Mike Smith, are snapped up after the Thrashers' faux-pas.)

"My thought — 'Oh my god. I've got to call Jimmy Gregory to stop this draft and announce that Andy is now back in the draft because it was an error,'" said Ferris. "I got a hold of him" — he doesn't recall how — "and Jimmy literally stopped everything and announced that there was this error and that Andy was back in the draft."

Like that, a snap of Igor Knyazev fingers, the Islanders grab Chiodo with the first pick of the sixth round.

Finally — his big moment.

Isles goalie coach Mike Palmateer correctly announces the identity of the draft's 166th selection. (The Thrashers, with their own sixth-rounder, 23 slots lower, opt for netminder Pasi Nurminen.)

"I was pretty easy-going about it," said Chiodo. "I went down to the floor. It felt like they wanted me. I felt good about it. I was happy. It was a good day from there."

Word of his challenging day makes its way through the media risers. Reporters encircle the Toronto native in the mix zone, wanting to hear his side of the foul-up.

"That was a story — I did a lot of interviews," said Chiodo. "I got a little bit more attention. People made me feel good about what happened. It still turned into a really good day. It turned out to be a great day."

"I got a lot of press for a sixth-round pick. Some of the (next morning's) headlines were, 'Goalie endures waiting game,' and, 'Drafted dot-dot-dot not.' So it was quite the memory, that's for sure." (Other headlines include: 'Best, worst feeling' in draftee's life doesn't last long ... On second thought: A draft-day nightmare ... Thrashers'



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announcement sets off false alarm ... 'Best feeling' turns into worst; It's great to be wanted.)

For Marr, though, fallout continues.

He is blasted by Ferris. He is blasted on the phone by Bobby Orr, head of the agency. St. Mike's staffers express their disappointment in no uncertain terms.

"I had to own that one," said Marr. "I felt so bad — so bad. It was completely my fault."

The following day, Toronto radio station FAN 590 singles out Marr for his draft gaffe, declaring him on-air to be the Dink of the Day.

Marr can chuckle about it now. Ferris does, too.

"The uniqueness of being drafted twice in the same day," said Ferris. "It's a good trivia question. Who was the player drafted twice in the same day?"

But teams are not done shouting out Chiodo's name.

Because unable to come to contractual terms with Isles boss Mike Milbury, he becomes eligible for the 2003 draft. And he's picked yet again.

This time in the seventh round.

This time by the Pittsburgh Penguins.

But he is not in Nashville for the occasion. Instead, on the mend after his final season of junior (in which he earns OHL goaltender of the year), he's in an MRI machine when his name is called for the third time at the NHL draft.

Surely, unprecedented.

"Three times," said Chiodo, laughing. "Impressive. That's hard to do. I was in demand — for a late-round pick."

That ability to handle the unexpected would serve him well.

In his first season in the Pens' employ, 2003-04, he is exposed to the gamut of pro hockey. He is the first-stringer for AHL Wilkes-Barre/Scranton, although coach Michel Therrien, at one point, shoves him down to the ECHL Wheeling for a weekend of games. Later, the Mother Ship summons him and he starts eight NHL dates before returning to the minors.

Then? For the AHL playoffs — with Sebastien Caron (after the Pens are eliminated from postseason contention) and Marc-Andre Fleury (after QMJHL Cape Breton is eliminated) crowding the crease — Chiodo is suddenly thrust into the stands.

But he wins back the net and the Baby Pens ride him all the way to the Calder Cup final, ultimately falling to the Milwaukee Admirals.

Chiodo, who never does get back to the NHL, endures a far-flung career, with stops in the Ottawa Senators system, in Russia and Finland and Austria, too, before retiring in 2017.

But he's not disappeared.

The 36-year-old, who is getting love for his summertime guidance of Jordan Binnington, currently works as a goalie coach in the Pens organization.

To the role, as you'd expect, he brings a pile of perspective.

"If you line up 10 goaltenders in a row, they're all going to have a story that's similar," said Chiodo. "Every goaltender will have experienced adversity at some point. Every goaltender will have experienced an amazing run. Every goaltender experiences being

benched, being disappointed. These are all things that nobody is unique in their experiences.

"When you understand you're not alone as a goaltender ... you accept it and you just keep working, keep playing, keep focusing on getting better. Because there's always a market for a durable, consistent, high-performing goalie — there's always a market for that guy.

"Be that guy and the rest takes care of itself."

With the Pens, Chiodo attended last year's draft in Dallas. He'll travel to Vancouver for this year's event.

He understands that there are no sure things when evaluating teen puck-stoppers. No matter where you've been plucked — or how many times.

"You have to remember that it's not an exact science," said Chiodo. "Teams drafting you, they're doing their homework, they're doing their best to project you and your positive attributes. Whether you're a seventh-round pick like Henrik Lundqvist or a first-round pick like Carey Price, it's who's got the vision and who's going to do whatever it takes to maximize their potential and bring that to reality. That's what it's all about."

Marr can vouch for the slippery business of identifying goalies. Take, for instance, the 2008 draft.

Once again, he and Waddell are chatting on the floor, going over the Thrashers' wishes for the middle rounds. Marr says there is a goalie with No. 1 potential — "so we've got to take him now."

Waddell points out that choosing immediately ahead of them in the fourth round is Washington. But, Marr figures, since the Capitals two years earlier had selected quality netminding prospects Semyon Varlamov and Michal Neuvirth, there is no reason to panic. Matter settled, their conversation tapers off.

"Then Don hits me, 'Didn't Washington just call your guy?'" said Marr. "Sure as shit, right in front of us, they drafted Braden Holtby."

The Thrashers end up settling for a winger named Vinny Saponari, who never suits up for a single NHL match. And Holtby? Well, you know who he is.

"That's how it goes on draft day," said Marr, who these days is director of Central Scouting. "You have the right list, you have the right players — you just don't have the right pick."

There are circumstances that cannot be helped. Then there is something like the Chiodo ordeal, an unforgettable boo-boo that produced one hard lesson.

"You can't multi-task when there's a microphone," said Marr, before adding a cackling afterthought.

"Yeah, yeah — Dink of the Day."

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Sportsnet.ca / Three reasons why the NHL salary cap could get tighter



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Elliott Friedman

June 18, 2019, 12:12 PM

I have a theory.

And, after the Rangers/Winnipeg trade involving Jacob Trouba, I've decided to lay it out. That deal was a surprise because the Jets were asking for more, and, on paper, Trouba is worth a greater return.

So, why didn't it happen?

I think teams believe the NHL and NHLPA, to maintain labour peace, are going to tighten the cap for two years until a new U.S. television deal is announced. Here are the factors:

CHANGING PLAYER ATTITUDES

The days of the hometown discount are ending. There will always be exceptions — Tampa Bay having an excellent team and terrific taxation situation is the obvious one at this time — but more and more players are flexing their financial muscle. The younger generation in particular is indicating it will not be satisfied taking a salary backseat.

In a hard cap system, the punishment for drafting and developing well is that you have to make choices. The Jets are a perfect example, but everyone is feeling it.

CBA NEGOTIATIONS

Both the league and union have the opportunity to re-open the CBA in September. They are working to avoid it. The players don't want a stoppage, but they want escrow to be eased. Last season's number was 11.6 per cent, and if I had that much of my paycheque being withheld every two weeks, I'd be annoyed, too. The league is prepared to work with them on this, and I believe both sides are investigating long-term solutions. (More on this in a minute.)

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

THE U.S. TV DEAL

The current NBC contract is up after the 2020-21 season. Recently, there was a report the NHL is working on a new deal, with NBC keeping the majority. Another entity (likely ESPN, but possibly FOX) would have a smaller package. With Seattle entering the league, there's a quiet confidence this will be a win.

So, here's what I think the NHL and NHLPA are looking at as a potential solution: Both sides are working on models that show what the cap would look like with zero per cent escrow, and other models that show what it would look like with five or six per cent escrow.

The nuclear option (which I don't think will happen) is the cap stays at \$79.5 million for two more seasons. What is more likely is the NHL and NHLPA agree to a cap for the next two seasons (2019-20 and 2020-21), with a \$2-\$2.5-million raise per year from the current \$79.5. That puts next year's number between \$81.5-\$82 million, and 2020-21 between \$83.5-\$84.5.

Then, if everything works out with the American television deal, there's a consistent rise for 2021-22 and beyond. It means a tight two seasons, but is the best hope for labour peace.

So, that's my theory and a window into the Trouba deal. (Jets owner Mark Chipman, by the way, is on the NHL's Executive Committee.) Could be right, could be wrong. But I think there's something to it.

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Sportsnet.ca / Senators GM Pierre Dorion poised to make a splash at NHL draft

Wayne Scanlan

June 18, 2019, 9:58 AM

In a perfect world, the Ottawa Senators would be using their lottery pick at this week's NHL Draft as a cornerstone to a rebuild.

In reality, the Senators are still turning the corner from a late 2017 push that had them trade away that pick to acquire centre Matt Duchene from the Colorado Avalanche. At the 2019 trade deadline, with the Senators now deep in sell mode, Duchene was traded to Columbus, with Ottawa recouping a first-round pick for this draft, albeit the 19th overall selection that belonged to the Blue Jackets. Colorado owns Ottawa's fourth-overall pick.

That begs the question: Do the Senators try to move up in Friday's draft from 19th? They do have future assets at their disposal — namely seven selections in the first three rounds of the 2020 draft, including three second-round picks in 2020 and three more second rounders in 2021 (the last pick coming via the Erik Karlsson signing with San Jose). For finishing 31st, the Senators also have the first pick of the second round in 2019, a No. 32 overall selection that other teams covet, GM Pierre Dorion said.

Over the next three drafts, Ottawa has an astounding 28 picks, including four first-round selections and eight in the second round.

Dorion said his phone has been lighting up for two reasons: Ottawa's cap space and its draft assets.

"There have been multiple discussions, more about moving up than moving down, because we have pick 32 and 44," Dorion said before leaving for the Vancouver draft, noting the two selections in the top half of the second round.

If Ottawa does hang on to its 19th overall selection, Dorion told Sportsnet.ca he would likely target a "top six or seven forward," or a top four defenceman with that pick. Given the Senators goaltending depth, they won't be looking at a high goalie pick.

"I know it's a boring line, selecting the best player available, but we will pick the best player to help our team," Dorion said. "Not necessarily to play this season — in an ideal world he can play for us maybe next year or definitely two years from now."

According to Dorion, a former scout who took over as GM from Bryan Murray in 2016, he has never been involved in so many GM discussions prior to a draft, which he expects to be "volatile" with movement.

Dorion said he gets excited at the prospect of having six second-round picks in the next two drafts after Vancouver. Amateur scouts like to know their long year of work can bear fruit with draft picks. But as a GM, Dorion also has to consider the possibility of moving picks and assets for good players.



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Cap space + draft assets + prospects = flexibility.

"It gives us the opportunity to do a lot of good things for this organization," Dorion said.

Down the road, the Sens have to prove they can pay the players they acquire.

With a projected cap hit under \$50 million, the Senators have the kind of space a rival GM might envy, or exploit. In fact, Ottawa might have to take on a bad contract to reach the projected salary floor of about \$61 million.

Dorion said he's not opposed to taking on a veteran in the late stages of a big deal, but would only do so if he feels that player can help the Senators.

Either through trade or free agency, Dorion would like to add a couple of veterans to complement young stars like Brady Tkachuk, Thomas Chabot and Colin White.

"We want to make sure we grow and develop as a team," Dorion said. "We want to make sure any player we would acquire would help us grow as a team, whether it's a veteran guy who might be on the last two or three years of his contract . . . or a 28 year old who can still help us for another three years if he's under contract. I think you've got to look at all situations and scenarios."

Dorion said he's looking for "character" people who can still play.

What would be the perfect draft for the Senators? To pick up a quality centre and a defenceman capable of stepping into this roster over the next two seasons. If that means moving up in the draft with a trade to secure a player, or moving existing prospects or a future pick, amen.

Dorion said his scouts have a list of about 18 players the team views as ideal for Ottawa. He's certain Ottawa will get one of the 18, either because they move up or because other teams go off the board with picks.

All in all, the Senators are a team that could make a splash on the West Coast, before, during and after the draft.

"These next 13 to 20 days are very crucial for our growth and at the same time showing commitment to our fans that we're heading in the right direction," Dorion said.

Duclair signs one-year deal: One of the more intriguing late-season additions for Ottawa was speedy winger Anthony Duclair, acquired from the Columbus Blue Jackets in the Ryan Dzingel trade. A former 50-goal scorer for the Quebec Remparts of the Quebec Major Junior Hockey League, Duclair spent much of last season in John Tortorella's dog house for lax defensive play, picking up 11 goals and eight assists in 53 games with Columbus. With the Senators, Duclair scored eight times and produced 14 points in 21 games. That earned him at least one more chance for a longer look. In a low-risk move, the Senators signed the 23-year-old pending RFA to a one-year contract worth \$1.65 million. Dorion hinted Duclair will be a project for new head coach D.J. Smith.

Ceci next?: Talks between Dorion and other pending RFAs, Cody Ceci and Colin White, are progressing. Dorion has decided not to offer a contract for pending UFA Magnus Paajarvi. He hasn't made his mind up on two other UFAs, forwards Oscar Lindberg and Brian Gibbons.

Two more coaches coming: Smith will be interviewing potential assistant coaches in Vancouver and Dorion said the staff should be complete by July 1. With Jack Capuano already hired as associate coach in charge of defence and the penalty kill, two additional hires

are expected: One to look after the forwards and power play, plus an 'eye-in-the-sky' coach.

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Sportsnet.ca / Analyzing both sides of the Rangers-Jets Jacob Trouba trade

Andrew Berkshire

June 18, 2019, 1:25 PM

Everyone knew Jacob Trouba's future was going to be the first shoe to drop for the Winnipeg Jets this off-season. And while there was a lot of expectation he would be traded, that wasn't a sure thing until the Jets made the move and sent him to the New York Rangers in exchange for a first round pick — their own that they sent to the Rangers for Kevin Hayes in February — and Neal Pionk.

When I looked at the questions facing the Jets this off-season, the conclusion I came to was that Trouba was a top-pairing blueliner, but ideally a team's No. 2 to maximize his talent. He rated as a first pairing defenceman offensively and defensively while playing tough minutes, but closer to an average second-pair defenceman in transition play.

This season represented a significant step forward for Trouba. The 25-year-old played first pairing minutes with Josh Morrissey as the Jets' prime matchup duo all season long, and his underlying numbers took a step in the right direction as well.

While the Jets as a whole performed less impressively than last season, Trouba and Morrissey were the backbone that held the team together. They still earned home ice in the playoffs, but fell just short of a second-straight 100-point season.

Comparing how the Jets performed with Trouba on the ice to when he was off, the impact on high danger chances was massive, and the impact on shots and shot attempts was strong as well.

The one area where Trouba didn't have a positive impact was on pass to the slot differential, but it's important to go into detail there because it's a bit of a tricky statistic.

For one, the Jets' most dominant area as a team is controlling dangerous passes at 5-on-5. While Trouba was on the ice they controlled 53.1 per cent of those passes, and yet he was still a "negative" impact player there. But there's a reason for that.

As I've mentioned before, this is a statistic where quality of competition is a big factor. It's fairly common for defencemen who play tough matchups to be on the slightly negative side here despite strong performance, because high-end players generate far more dangerous passes than lower-end players.

This is one reason why some highly talented lines can outscore their expected goals based on the shot locations they generate on a consistent basis, like the Mark Scheifele and Blake Wheeler combo, to keep things related to the Jets.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • June 19, 2019

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

So all this said, yes Trouba was slightly in the negatives in pass to the slot differential last season, but the context of that is very important. He remains a top-pairing defenceman in both offensive and defensive impact.

The one question I have with him on the Rangers is how well will he adjust to life without Morrissey? Morrissey's development as a top-pairing defensive defenceman has been stellar, and the chemistry those two had was excellent.

There's lots of time before rosters are set, but as currently constructed, the Rangers don't have a player in Morrissey's mould, no matter what people may think of Marc Staal. Can Trouba carry a top-pair on his own and float a lesser defenceman? That remains to be seen.

Then of course there's the other side of the deal. The Jets got a mid-range first-round pick back, which is always nice, but what does Pionk add to their roster?

If you didn't watch the Rangers a lot last season, you probably only know of Pionk from this one highlight reel goal.

When a player does something like that, the assumption is they're probably a high-end offensive player, but among the Rangers' six defencemen who played 800 or more minutes last season, Pionk was just the fifth-most involved in generating offence for his team.

He fares a bit better in transition — only Tony DeAngelo completed more transition plays per 20 minutes played than Pionk's 18.7 last season — but those completed plays came with their fair share of failed ones, including leading the Rangers in icings with nearly one every 20 minutes played, and a whopping four defensive zone turnovers every 20 as well.

Overall, when you look at his impact on the Rangers' differentials, it doesn't look great.

Obviously with a first-round pick in the trade and without the eventual salary increase Trouba will be taking up, it would be incredibly unfair to expect Pionk to replace Trouba in terms of impact, but in a lot of ways he looks like the opposite of Trouba.

Pionk played relatively easy minutes for the Rangers and still saw his team get dominated much more significantly while he was on the ice than off of it, which is never a great sign.

It's always a little tough to judge players on bad teams, but Pionk doesn't seem to be much more than a marginal third-pairing defenceman.

Pionk's raw skating skill and puck moving ability could be something the Jets coax into a player, but at 23 years old and turning 24 in late July, usually what you see is what you get with defencemen this age.

Overall, it's a pretty underwhelming return on Trouba, and it's tough to believe there wasn't a better deal out there somewhere, especially considering Trouba is still a restricted free agent, so teams aren't completely stuck with their backs against the wall to get a deal done right away.

Trouba's own request to go to the United States to benefit the medical career of his fiancée cut six teams out of the trade market, but probably not by much.

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Sportsnet.ca / Trade chatter should dominate Maple Leafs' draft weekend

Luke Fox | @lukefoxjukebox

June 18, 2019, 12:15 PM

Two hockey teams pushed the Boston Bruins to seven games this spring. One of them won the Stanley Cup. The other is the Toronto Maple Leafs.

Watching their roommate Raptors quench the city's 26-year major championship drought (we see you, TFC) — and choke the parade route with so many happy people that the double-decker buses carrying the sports heroes needed three extra hours to trudge through all the love — must've sparked the notion of what might be if the hockey team were to make the type of bold moves that pushed MLSE's basketball side over the top.

So close yet so far (three consecutive Round 1 exits) away from their ultimate goal, this weekend's NHL Draft marks the first one of the Dubas-Babcock Maple Leafs that must be more about the present than the future.

For the first June since 2010, the Maple Leafs do not have a selection in the first round, a fair casualty of the January trade for defenceman Jake Muzzin.

But that doesn't mean Dubas will be sitting on his hands Friday night in Vancouver.

The 33-year-old exec is busy puzzling one of the league's most complicated salary-cap crunches, exploring his limited trade scenarios for Patrick Marleau and Nikita Zaitsev while trying to lock up superstar Mitch Marner and beef up a thinning blue line via free agency and/or hockey deals.

On the heels of re-signing Erik Karlsson Monday and making Toronto's Jake Gardiner the best impending UFA defenceman, the Sharks' Doug Wilson dropped this nugget on his conference call: "There's been more conversation and communication between GMs in the last month than maybe ever since I've been a GM."

Dubas must be involved in much of this chatter, while preparing his employees to uncover gold deep in Saturday's edition of the draft.

Unless he trades up — and he certainly has the candidates to do so — Dubas won't pick until 53rd overall.

The prospects prognosticators have slotted in that range feature plenty of defencemen (Daniil Misyul, Antti Tuomisto, Artemi Kniazev, Mattias Norlinder) and a few intriguing forwards (Samuel Fagemo, Robert Mastro Simone, John Farinacci).

The Leafs' recent second-round bull's eyes include a couple 2015 picks that now look like NHLers, Travis Dermott (34th overall) and Jeremy Bracco (61st).

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



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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Dubas is counting on his advisors to uncover a couple gems deep, with a pick in the third, two in the fourth (St. Louis), the fifth, and two in the seventh round (Dallas).

"Our scouting staff is going to become even more important than our development staff," Dubas said. "These are all important drafts for us, and for a long time.

"I've often said to our scouts this year that the drafting part when we were picking at 1, 4, 8, in those are the picks, those are the picks you have to [get right]. There's no room for error there.

"But the way we can sustain this and keep this moving forward is by when we don't have a first and we're picking in the second or picking late in the first, is to make hay."

The haymaking of the Maple Leafs' 2019 draft class will require patience and years in the pipeline. The headline-making at Rogers Arena, however, could arrive swift and loud.

Top-four defenders Gardiner and Ron Hainsey can start interviewing with competing clubs Sunday. RFAs Marner, Andreas Johnsson and Kasper Kapanen are permitted to field offer-sheet overtures as early as next Wednesday.

"Without an answer on Mitch, we're going to be in a stalemate. It is a top priority because we're not going to jump around and chew up our cap space we are going to need for Mitch or with fringe signings either. It's important. We just have to get right on it and get it done," Dubas said.

That was eight weeks ago.

Deadlines spur action. So do face-to-face meetings, and all of Dubas's 30 potential trade partners are only a short walk and a handshake away.

The process of shaping a 2019-20 Maple Leafs roster that can defend and contend must take a significant step forward on this weekend's draft floor.

No pressure.

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Sportsnet.ca / Maple Leafs top Canadian team on 2020 Stanley Cup odds

OddsShark Staff

June 18, 2019, 9:18 PM

As the NHL looks toward the offseason the Toronto Maple Leafs are the lone Canadian team among the early favourites on the 2020 Stanley Cup odds, pegged at +1000 on those betting futures at sportsbooks monitored by OddsShark.com.

Toronto is coming off a second straight 100-point campaign, but followed up with yet another early playoff exit, bowing out to the Boston Bruins in seven games in the opening round. The Maple Leafs now enter a summer of uncertainty.

General manager Kyle Dubas faces the enormous task of coming to terms on contracts with restricted free agents Mitch Marner, Andreas Johnsson, and Kasper Kapanen. However, with less than \$8.8 million in estimated cap space available, and just 17 players signed, the Maple Leafs boss may be left with hard choices once the NHL free agent market opens for business on July 1.

The Winnipeg Jets sit second to Toronto among Canadian teams at +1600 odds to win the 2020 Stanley Cup, just ahead of the Calgary Flames at +1800 on those NHL odds. The Jets took a step back this season after racking up a franchise record 114 points ahead of their march to the Western Conference final a year ago, bowing out to St. Louis in the first round.

Like Toronto, the Jets could also face a salary cap space squeeze this summer. The club took steps to free up cap space by dealing Jacob Trouba to the New York Rangers on Tuesday, but will soon enter tough contract negotiations with RFAs Patrik Laine and Kyle Connor.

The Flames are coming off their best season since their Stanley Cup victory in 1989. The team finished atop the Western Conference with 107 points, and entered the postseason as +800 second favourites on the NHL futures before being upset by the Colorado Avalanche in the first round.

Calgary is well positioned to come to terms on new deals with RFAs Matthew Tkachuk and Sam Bennett, but currently does not have a starting goaltender under contract for next season, as veteran Mike Smith approaches unrestricted free agency and David Rittich is set to become an RFA on July 1.

The four remaining Canadian squads sit well back on the odds to win the 2020 Stanley Cup, with the Edmonton Oilers joining the Vancouver Canucks at +4000, ahead of the Montreal Canadiens at +5000, while the Ottawa Senators trail as +10000 longshots.

Despite their stunning opening round loss to the Columbus Blue Jackets, the Tampa Bay Lightning have emerged as the early +800 favourites on those NHL futures, just ahead of the Boston Bruins and Vegas Golden Knights at +900, while the champion Blues join the Colorado Avalanche at +1200.

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Sportsnet.ca / Successful Flames draft weekend won't be measured by 26th overall pick

Eric Francis | @EricFrancis

June 18, 2019, 11:10 AM

CALGARY – A perfect draft weekend for the Calgary Flames would open with news Matthew Tkachuk has agreed to a lengthy contract extension.

It would also include landing a player 26th overall who has the size and grit of a Tkachuk and can step into the lineup this fall.

Neither is going to happen, which is why Brad Treliving enters the pick-a-player party with muted expectations.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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"If something happens, great – but we may just go there and draft some players," said the Flames GM, who will arrive at Friday's draft in Vancouver with five picks including first, third, fourth, fifth and seventh-rounders.

Should he indeed return to Calgary with nothing but prospects to show for the star-selecting sleepover, it would be a radical departure for the Flames' fifth-year architect who has spent the past three drafts making significant splashes.

He isn't sure that's possible given the cost uncertainty associated with Tkachuk's pending deal, which could eat up anywhere from \$7 to \$9 million of the \$14.5 million he has remaining of the \$83 million cap.

A buyout of Michael Stone's final year at \$3.5 million could provide some cap relief given the 29-year-old defenceman was seen as the coach's eighth or ninth option this spring when everyone was healthy on his talented blue line peppered with emerging youth like Rasmus Andersson, Juuso Valimaki and Oliver Kyllington.

Perhaps Stone, a serviceable third-pairing veteran, could also be packaged up in a deal that could involve Michael Frolik or T.J. Brodie.

Frolik's frustration with being undervalued by coach Bill Peters was evident in his agent's tweets last winter, which could certainly open the door for a swap with an eye on saving some of Frolik's \$4.3 million salary or trying to land a bigger offensive threat for the two-way Czech.

Calgary's defensive depth could also put Brodie in play due to the huge value the slick-skating puck-mover would have around the league. When his deal for \$4.65 million ends next summer he'll be a luxury the Flames can likely no longer afford given his skillset as a top-pairing defender.

Like the five-man Dougie Hamilton deal at last year's draft that landed the Flames Elias Lindholm and Noah Hanifin, Brodie could be the best bait to land the Flames a top-six forward it has been searching for.

Flames fans can stop dreaming of a James Neal swap as there's no market for an aging seven goal-scorer making \$5.75 million for four more years. He'll need a significant bounce-back season for any future movement to become a possibility.

Goaltending and grit are at the top of Treliving's wish list this summer, with both being in short supply.

Treliving swapped for Mike Smith on draft weekend two years ago, one year after landing Brian Elliott.

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

He may very well be able to find David Rittich's tandem-mate this weekend, but don't expect it to come in the form of top-ranked goalie prospect Spencer Knight from the U.S. national development team.

Treliving admits he too is hesitant to select a goalie in the first round of the draft (only two netminders have been so selected the past six years). He doesn't believe the Boston College-bound goalie will be around by the 26th spot anyways.

Treliving will continue to ponder the merits of bringing Smith back, perhaps opting to trade for someone like Leafs backup Garret Sparks or bid for another UFA like Curtis McElhinney July 1.

Draft rankings and mock drafts suggest the Flames will have plenty of undersized talents to choose from with their 26th shout, which isn't exactly what this club is begging for now.

That said, Treliving is definitely of the school of thought that you draft the best player available, as opposed to trying to address specific organizational needs.

"You always take the best player – if you start trying to fill potential needs it's a fool's game because by the time these players are going to be ready your needs could change," said Treliving.

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He adds that any player the Flames pick this weekend won't be expected to vie for a roster spot in months, but years.

Finishing tops in the western conference can do that to a team's prospects.

"It's an interesting draft," said Treliving of an affair that includes very few consensus picks.

"Teams drafting in the teens could get a player who is number six or seven on their list."

The Flames may not be as lucky.

Those who are expected to be around late in the first round for the Flames could include might-mites like 5-foot-9, 160-pound C/LW Jakob Pelletier, 5-foot-9, 185-pound Swedish winger Nils Hoglander, 5-foot-10, 165-pound RW Bobby Brink, six-foot, 161-pound defenceman Ryan Johnson and six-foot, 170-pound Connor McMichael.

"There are some undersized players in the top 10 too – you're seeing more and more of it," said Treliving of the ongoing movement putting a premium on speed and skill.

Alternatives with some size include 6-foot-4, 198-pound German defenceman Moritz Seider, 6-foot-4, 198-pound C/RW from Calgary, Brett Leason, 6-foot-3, 201-pound Russian LW Egor Afanasyev, 6-foot-4, 201-pound defenceman Matthew Robertson, and 6-foot-3, 203-pound centre Johnny Beecher.

Regardless of who the Flames pick, fans will be watching for the extraneous moves that have become all the rage around these parts – something Treliving cautioned might be stymied by the raft of RFAs out there.

"You can't go out and buy all sorts of cars before you know what the mortgage payment is," he said, alluding to the gap that will see him spend the bulk of his remaining cap space on Tkachuk, while also having to ink RFAs Sam Bennett, Andrew Mangiapane and Rittich.

Then again, it's hard for anyone to believe a swapper as prolific as Treliving won't be active in his quest to shore up the pugnacity present on rosters that advanced much further than his talented club's five-game fling this spring.

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CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • June 19, 2019

USA TODAY / With Justin Braun added in trade, Flyers' defense suddenly crowded

Dave Isaac, NHL writer

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Chuck Fletcher has spent a lot of time on the phone recently and, for the second time in a week, the Flyers' general manager made a deal with a team that's looking for salary-cap relief.

Another move on defense, Tuesday the Flyers traded a 2019 second-round pick and 2020 third-round pick to the San Jose Sharks for 32-year-old Justin Braun. The right-handed veteran blueliner has one year left on his contract with a \$3.8 million salary-cap hit. San Jose was looking to save money after signing Erik Karlsson to a mammoth eight-year deal Monday, reportedly worth \$92 million.

"A little surprised," Braun said of the trade. San Jose drafted him 12 years ago. "I've been with the Sharks for a long time. First time getting traded, so it was a little shocking. Had to make some phone calls to the wife and get everything in order. At the same time, it's exciting. It's something new, something different."

"He has played a large role in our team's success since joining the Sharks roster, including appearing in three conference finals and competing for the Stanley Cup in 2016," Sharks GM Doug Wilson said in a press release. "I want to thank Justin and his wife, Jessie, for their commitment to the Sharks organization and wish them all the best in their future."

Braun averaged 20:18 of ice time per game last season for the Sharks in 78 games playing mostly with Marc-Edouard Vlasic. He finished a career-worst minus-14, a statistic that he said bothered him, and some on the West Coast were thinking he may have lost a step.

That raises an eyebrow for Fletcher's latest trade, because the Flyers' general manager was out to get more experienced on the back end and two top 100 picks (we know this year's pick will be the 41st overall) is a lot to spend to add to the career games-played column for a green Flyers' defense. Matt Niskanen, acquired last week, has more games under his belt than Shayne Gostisbehere, Ivan Provorov, Robert Hägg, Samuel Morin, Travis Sanheim and Phil Myers combined at 881. Braun adds 607, making him the second-most senior defender, and adds 84 playoff games and a trip to the Stanley Cup final in 2016.

"He is a high character, quality defender who will bring a steadying presence to our team," Fletcher added in his own press release.

The question, of course, is where in the lineup that will be.

The Flyers still have to sign their top defenseman, Provorov, who is a pending restricted free agent, and Sanheim, who played with Provorov most of last season. Fletcher sees Niskanen as someone who can play on the second pair. Gostisbehere remains, amid trade rumors, and the undrafted Myers is someone Fletcher sees as being a mainstay on the third pairing, at least to start.

"(Fletcher) said, 'I don't want you to be a mentor. I want you to be a player.' That's important," Braun recalled. "I'm there to play, not just to take care of guys. Whatever I can teach them, whatever I learned from Jumbo (Joe Thornton) and (Joe) Pavelski and (Brent Burns) over the years, how to be a good pro over the years, day in and day out, hopefully I can show them a little bit of that but they've also got

good leadership out there. Giroux has been there forever and he's one of the best in the game. They've got some good guys around, but anything I can try to help them do (I will).

"Between Ghost and Provorov, those are two I probably know the most. I've played against them the last few years. They're dynamic. They create a lot and jump in the play a lot so you gotta have those guys out there pushing the pace because you're not gonna get much offense if you're just taking 3-on-3 rushes. You've got to get that fourth guy on the rush, so hopefully I can help with that but those guys seem to be elite at it. Hopefully that can keep up going forward."

In less than a week Fletcher added Niskanen and Braun while shipping Radko Gudas to Washington and buying out the last year of Andrew MacDonald's contract. He may not be done.

Over the weekend he didn't discount the possibility of adding a top-pair defenseman to play with Provorov, but said they're "not easy to find."

"You're always looking to upgrade if you can, but it would depend on if you could acquire that player and even whether that player's available," Fletcher said.

The former Minnesota Wild GM may have been thinking about a former first-round pick of his, Jared Spurgeon, who has one year left on his contract and current Wild manager Paul Fenton told reporters he wanted to sign to a new deal. That hasn't stopped the rumor mill from wondering about his obtainability. Jacob Trouba certainly was available but was traded from Winnipeg to the New York Rangers Monday night.

If Fletcher keeps making the defense a priority, having eight NHL defensemen in the fold — nine if you include David Schlemko, who was part of a trade last season and played for the AHL's Lehigh Valley Phantoms — the next trade will likely mean one of the homegrown prospects will be on their way out.

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USA TODAY / NHL draft will have American flavor: Five U.S. players could go in top 10

Kevin Allen, USA TODAY

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Last September, before warm-ups for the All-American Prospect Game, NHL Central Scouting director Dan Marr spotted U.S. stars Jack Hughes and Cole Caufield kicking a soccer ball around to loosen up.

With every NHL team scouting the game, Marr decided to offer free advice.

"You know guys, in a game like this, it's all about showing what you are about," Marr told the players. "When you get the chance, you shoot."



CAROLINA HURRICANES

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Hughes looked at Marr with a grin. "Dan, do you really think you have to tell Cole to shoot?"

"Point taken," Marr said.

The 5-foot-7 Caufield would go on to score 72 goals in 64 games for USA Hockey's National Team Development Program to set a program record for goals in a season. Hughes, meanwhile, registered 112 points in 50 games this season to establish a program record of 228 points in a two-season career.

These two players are part of what could be the richest draft of NTDP players the NHL has ever seen. Hughes is projected to be drafted No. 1 by the New Jersey Devils and Caufield and teammate Alex Turcotte, another center, could go in the first five picks.

It's not unthinkable that five to seven players from the program could go in the first 12 picks.

"They are going to set a record for the most in the first round off one team," Marr said, "and another record they will set that will be hard to match will be the number of players off one team in one draft class."

Seventeen members of the team were invited to the scouting combine. Almost everyone off this U.S team is expected to be drafted. The program has never had more than three players taken in the first round. At least seven, and maybe eight or nine, could be taken this season.

"I'd like to think this is the start of a continuing trend," said Pat Kelleher, USA Hockey's executive director.

How did the Americans get to this point?

"It starts with that the game being a national game," Kelleher said. "We have players from everywhere. These guys are all from different parts of the country. It shows that all over the place, people are giving kids great opportunities. The coaching at the youth level is getting better and better. We think the (American Development Model) from the grass-roots level and the NTDP for 20-something years has been the pinnacle of development on the men's side. And this year is a great example."

Matthew Boldy said players knew immediately when they came together they were part of a group with overflowing potential.

"There were those times when Jack, Trevor (Zegras) or basically everyone on our team pulls off a move that everyone oohs and ahhs at," Boldy said. "But I think how we move the puck and how we carried ourselves was the real 'wow' factor."

A look at NTDP players with a chance to go in the first round:

Hughes, 18: He was the No. 1 prospect start to finish. He handled the pressure with relative ease.

"When I saw him last July, on the ice, with some of the top players in the game, including Taylor Hall, (John) Tavares and Connor McDavid," Marr said, "he was very much at their pace in terms of his passes, making plays, executing his shot. It was impressive to see how he could keep up with that group."

Turcotte, 18: The son of former NHL player Alfie Turcotte, the younger Turcotte is a premium two-way center.

"His hockey IQ is off the charts," Marr said. "Just the way he can read plays and adapt quickly. He can make the play while being checked and under pressure. The way he processes the game makes him special."

Caufield, 18: Holding the NTDP single-season scoring record is a noteworthy accomplishment. He took the record from Phil Kessel.

This is a program that has boasted Auston Matthews, Jack Eichel, Dylan Larkin and Patrick Kane among others. Caufield outscored them all.

The NHL is far more accepting of smaller players, but his lack of size will give some teams pause. But Alex DeBrincat's success in Chicago, with 73 goals in his first two seasons, helps Caufield.

"There is a lot of similarity between him and DeBrincat in that they know how to get open and they know how to score," Marr said. "Those are two things hard to teach."

Center Trevor Zegras, 18: Ranked sixth overall by Central Scouting, Zegras is a skilled, heady offensive player.

"He doesn't like to be outdone or beat on a play, so he is relentless whether he's on the forecheck or driving to the net," Marr said. "He has talent and speed. He is 170 pounds, but he gives you 200 pounds worth of game."

Left wing Matthew Boldy, 18: The 6-2, 196-pound Boldy projects to be a prototypical NHL scoring winger. He scored 33 goals in 64 games this season for the NTDP.

"He has a power forward game," Marr said. "He can skate the puck to the net and he has NHL speed. He has the package you need to play at the NHL level."

Defenseman Cam York, 18: He is expected to quarterback an NHL power play some day. He also set a record of 103 points by a defenseman over two seasons.

"It's not out of the realm of possibility that some team could step up and take York in that (top 10) range," Marr said.

Goalie Spencer Knight, 18: He is expected to be the only goalie taken the first round, the only question is where he could land.

The consensus is that he will fall into the 12-20 range, but he could also be grabbed earlier if a team feels strongly that he is their goalie of the future. He was 32-4-1 this season with a 2.36 goals-against average.

Defenseman Alex Vlasic, 18: Central Scouting ranked Vlasic 38th, but Vlasic could land near the bottom of the first round. He's 6-6 and scouts like his imposing potential.

The NTDP has several players ranked in the second round, including center John Beecher, defenseman Drew Helleson, defenseman Henry Thun and goalie Cameron Rowe. One of them could end up rising to the top 31.

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