



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • June 22, 2020

THE NEWS & OBSERVER

Another year, another chance for Hockey Hall of Fame to finally call Rod Brind'Amour

BY LUKE DECOCK

The Hockey Hall of Fame's selection committee will meet Wednesday, virtually for the first time. What has not changed: This is the year Rod Brind'Amour should get in. That was true last year. That was true in 2015. That was true when he became eligible in 2013.

For whatever reason, the current Carolina Hurricanes coach and former Hurricanes captain's status as the best defensive forward of his generation hasn't resonated with voters, even with a pair of Selke Trophies to verify that. Nor his leadership. Nor his raw numbers, which certainly clear wherever bar has been set for the Hall of Fame, and not the lowest one set by the induction of both Bernie Federko and Clark Gillies in 2002.

Just for funsies, the Carolina Hurricanes' analytics department dug through some of the raw numbers. They do not reflect well on the committee's work over the past seven years.

There are 36 players in NHL history who had 15 seasons with 49 or more points. Thirty-five of them are in the Hall of Fame. Want to guess who's not?

Thirty-seven players had more than 1,100 points and won a Stanley Cup. Thirty-five are enshrined in Toronto. Vincent Damphousse is one of the two. The other lives here.

Brind'Amour is the all-time leader in faceoff percentage since those stats have been kept. He's the oldest player to win the Selke Trophy. Seventeen players have played more than his 1,484 games. All 17 are in the Hall of Fame.

Every eligible player with more than 700 points and a Selke Trophy is in the Hall of Fame. Except one. Pavel Datsyuk, Anze Kopitar, Patrice Bergeron and Jonathan Toews are all still playing, and three of them are locks. Guy Carbonneau had 663 points.

If Carbonneau's third Selke Trophy makes up for him having half as many points as Brind'Amour, then Brind'Amour's two

Selke Trophies compared to nearly every other player in the Hall of Fame ought to get him in on their own. Carbonneau is beloved in Montreal and Dallas? Brind'Amour is beloved in Philadelphia and Raleigh, and two more different and disparate hockey markets you will not find.

This happens to be a wide-open class, with Jarome Iginla really the only consensus choice. There are some nice players out there who will be lauded for their two-way game (Marian Hossa) and leadership (Daniel Alfredsson). Brind'Amour was better than either in both categories. You think Alexander Mogilny's 473 goals should get him in? Brind'Amour scored 452 goals and spent a bit more time in his own end while doing it. And captained a team to the Stanley Cup. And played for Canada in the Olympics. However you want to measure Hall of Fame players, Brind'Amour measures up.

Unfortunately, odds are none of this matters. This isn't baseball, where public opinion can sway the vote for Larry Walker. The decisions are made by only 18 people, and only those 18 people can place a name in nomination for a vote. From the outside, it feels more like fraternity rush than a selection committee. Who you know appears as important as what you actually did.

The selection committee has some very smart people on it, and a difficult job to do, but in search of consensus it tends to arrive at unfortunate, mediocre, cronyist choices over unexpected ones — which is how Peter Karmanos got in the Hall of Fame before the player who did more to get him a Stanley Cup ring than anyone.

The owner and the general manager from 2006 are both in the Hall of Fame. Not the captain.

So we'll probably be back here at this time next year, making the same arguments, raising the same objections, pushing the same case. Maybe someone will listen then.

Maybe someone will listen now.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • June 22, 2020

THE ATHLETIC

Coaches' panel: Brind'Amour, Cooper, DeBoer on millennials, discipline and more

By Joe Smith Jun 18, 2020

The three coaches couldn't be from more varied backgrounds.

There was Carolina's Rod Brind'Amour, the second-year coach who had a Hall of Fame-caliber career that included a Stanley Cup and two Selke Trophies.

There was the Lightning's Jon Cooper, whose playing career ended in Juvenile-AA, but established himself as one of the best — and now longest-tenured coach.

And Pete DeBoer, who took the Vegas job midseason after several campaigns with the rival Sharks, and is now behind the bench on his fourth NHL team.

But the three head coaches provided some interesting insight in a Zoom panel last week for the NHL Coaches' Association Global Coaches' Clinic. It was an hour-long chat, moderated by Sportsnet's Elliotte Friedman, where they tackled some important issues for young coaches such as working with millennials, enforcing discipline, creating ownership in the dressing room and dealing with criticism. Below are some highlights from their panel discussion.

On your first meeting with a team

Brind'Amour: That first meeting, I think it's a time to really get your message across and, coming out of this, it will add more meaning. I think whenever we get back to playing hockey, that first message you bring does hold a whole lot of meaning, a lot more than maybe any other camp because of the circumstances that brought us back together. We have a lot of time to think about it. Every time you get in front of a group, it matters. This one puts more meaning to it.

DeBoer: I've got more experience in first messages than the other guys because I've been fired four times, so I've gone to four different teams and had to address them. I've got a couple of quick stories on the first messages. One was this year going to Vegas in January as a first-time coach with a group that really we had gone to war with the last three years, there was a lot of hatred. Not a lot of love lost. Now I'm walking into that dressing room with those guys and addressing them for the first time.

I put some thought into that message. I had a 48-hour window when I got the job and had to be behind the bench in Ottawa. I talked with Paul Maurice who had taken over a few teams. It was a combination of a bit of humor to try to take the edge off the situation and a strong message. The main gist of it was — some good people lost their jobs, Gerard Gallant, Mike Kelly and that staff. We all had to look in the mirror and get it fixed going forward.

The other (story) was my first year coaching in the NHL, I came out of junior to the Florida Panthers replacing Jacques Martin. He told me we needed a tough message in training camp. I ran the hardest training camp I ever ran in my life. And I'm lucky the guys didn't walk out and strike two days into it. I'm surprised I actually survived it. We got through the year and Bryan McCabe was our captain, we got to our exit meetings and he said, 'Listen, I'm excited about next year but you've got to take your foot off the gas in training camp next year.' He was pretty clear as a veteran guy, 'We let you get away with it once, but you better not try to do that again, because you'll be playing with fire.' You have to find that happy medium.

Cooper: For me, it's a little different because I've been with this group for a while. When I first got the job, it was my first time in the NHL, I didn't play in the NHL. I remember I had flown in from Syracuse, and Guy Boucher had lost his job, and that's something I think we pointed out, the success, they built the program to a certain point and he had taken the team to the conference final just a few years earlier.

I made sure when I got in there I acknowledged that. One thing for me, walking in that room, it's like that old deodorant commercial, 'Don't let them see you sweat.' That's my belief, you go in there with confidence. I just wanted to make sure I showed confidence and whatever the message is, the guys will remember it. You have to make sure it's not just a fluff piece.

Flash forward to now, we're in a different situation. My message to our guys for certain will be, 'No matter what happens here, when we take the ice again, we're not going to get everything back in one game.' This is the season where it's a little bit different. Regularly it's a marathon, not a sprint, but this one might end up being a sprint. But we have to not try to make up for things that have gone wrong in the past in one game.

On dealing with the millennial players of this generation

Cooper: The players are different and the league has gotten younger. The old souls you used to see have gone away now, and you look no further than when you go back on the plane and you see less and less guys playing cards and more and more playing video games. You learn from your own kids in how they think, why are you playing this video game. Tell me your feelings and (enjoy the) camaraderie with your buddies. That's the kind of approach I've taken. You could be a lot more stern with players years ago, where today I think you need to put your arm around some guys a little bit more. Players before never used to ask, 'Why?' They just did it. And today's younger players coming in, they want to know why? 'Why are we doing this?' It can be challenging.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • June 22, 2020

You go back to the lawyer days. 'Never ask a question you don't know the answer to.' When you talk to players, you better know the answer, because there's a really good chance they're going to challenge you.

Brind'Amour: Having kids of your own helps, and I have college-aged kids. They want to know why. Back in the day, when I played, you never questioned the coach. You did what he told you to do. They want to know why and you better be able to show them. You have to know each player, they're all a little different. Even though you may have the same philosophies and the same rules, each guy takes that a little differently. Getting to know them doesn't hurt.

DeBoer: There's an old quote that, 'They don't care what you know until they know how much you care.' That's never more important in today's coaching and teaching. The era we grew up in, it was a dictatorship. When I coached in junior hockey, a lot of times it was a dictatorship and I wasn't looking for conversations or in-depth analysis of what was going on, it was just, 'This is how we're doing it.' But as a coach, you have to change. I agree with both guys, my kids helped me with that. You talk to them at the dinner table, you ask them who their favorite teacher is, it's always people you connect with.

On whether you can show players more than 10 minutes of video at one time

DeBoer: No. That's probably the limit. But if this was a call-in show, I might have 100 players call in and say, 'He's full of crap, he kept us in there for 20 minutes.' I think there's definitely a line there you've really got to get your message across quickly. We try to keep it to less than 10.

Cooper: When I first came into the league, I did primarily all the meetings. I still do a lot of them, but not as many — I hand a lot over to the assistants. When I find I'm drifting before the 10-minute mark, I know they are. It's remarkable to me how in other sports, I talk to guys in football and the amount of video they watch, I don't know how much they watch. It must be repetitive. I don't know if it's in our culture and how we're wired but you can get a lot across in a short time. The tough part for coaches is that there's so much you want to get in, but sometimes it's better that less is more. Let them get the message, you make it short and to the point and get them out instead of clouding their mind and everyone walking out, 'Gosh that was way too much.'

DeBoer: I'm going to jump in on that. If that's one thing I could tell coaches, if they can work on that skill, that's the skill to get. To be able to look at your game and get the fix down to one thing, one message, one thing that they need to get done for the next game and concentrate on that. So many young coaches — and I was guilty of that — it's like a splatter gun — you try to fix everything. The really good coaches get it down to the one most important thing and get it back on the rails for the next game.

On if they go into the dressing room after the game and talk to the team

Brind'Amour: I don't like going in after games but I started it my first year, I went in after a win, because that's what the previous guy did and I followed what they did. Our strength coach asked me, 'Why only come in after we win? That's not right.' I'm like, 'You're exactly right.' I started this and now I've got to keep it going. I do think your emotions can get to you. I rely on my staff and have a good feel, they make a couple of points to hammer home. But in retrospect, if I look back, it'd take a lot of stress off me if I didn't go in every game. But I started it and now that's what guys expect. So I try to be short and sweet. I hate that the cameras are in there, and that's a whole other issue about selling our game, we've got to do that a little bit more down here. I don't like it because I know the camera is in there and I have to watch what I say. But I understand that.

But if I had to do that again, I probably wouldn't go in every game because it adds a lot of stress. I think every time you talk to your team, you don't want it to be fluff. It has to mean something. That's a lot of extra meetings I'm throwing on my plate.

Cooper: I bet you in my career I've gone in 96 percent of the time. I didn't know any better, I just came into the ranks from junior B to midget to junior and we always did it. When I got to the American (Hockey) League, for me it was a learning tool to address the team after. I know a lot of coaches don't do it. I think I'm leaning towards Rod. At times, I wish I didn't do it. But to be perfectly frank, one big thing is you could curb what guys say to the media. I can't tell you how many times what the message I said after the game, I would read in the paper the next day on what the players said. Instead of, it's a tough loss, bad things happened, you could curb it in a couple of minutes before you go out. I've used that as a tool. It doesn't happen that often, fortunately, we've had a few more wins than losses, so it hasn't been as bad.

DeBoer: If Jon is 96 percent, I'm the four percent that don't go in. I used to, but I don't anymore. I go in maybe 3-4-5 times a year, if I felt I really needed to send a message about something. I'll tell you why I don't go in anymore. I've found my postgame evaluation the next day after I rewatch the game is so much different than my perspective when I walk off the bench, about the individual players, about what I felt on the bench, was wrong compared to what I saw the next day.

My messaging was all over the map. If we won 70 games a year like Coop, I might be walking into the room every night slapping everyone on the back and telling them how great everything is. I used to speak too much out of emotion and too much from an unrealistic perspective on what I saw that night. By going the next day and rewatching the game, I realize how off I was both on individual and our team game a lot of nights. That's why I don't go in.

Cooper: The big thing for me and I don't know if I'm right in this, as much as your emotions, the players are way more. They were just out on the battlefield. We were on the bench. You could tell by the way the tape is being ripped off the shinpads and skates how things have gone in a game. And that's where I don't know if I do mine by habit and curb some things.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • June 22, 2020

Brind'Amour: I love what Coop said about putting a bow on it and moving on. You don't want to be in long, they want to get the hell out of there. Say, 'This is what I saw,' win or lose, you could be no good that night and win the game, but let them know it wasn't good enough. Same thing if you lose the game and you could have played a great game. Hearing from you it wasn't so bad, and that's the way we do things, puts them in a better frame of mind going home.

On how you discipline players: Hall of Famer Scotty Bowman said in his book that 'the one thing I have is ice time'

DeBoer: I have a quick story on that. Last year, Game 7 against Vegas, we were in San Jose and Barclay Goodrow, who plays for Coop now, he turned a puck over, missed an assignment in the middle of the second period and it cost us a goal. I sat him for probably a period. I put him back out late in the third and overtime, he scored the (overtime) winner in Game 7 for us to advance. The message there is, yes, you have to discipline your players at different points for different things. But they have to know they're going to get another chance to fix it. They also have to know if you're doing it, if you're sitting them for the entire game, an assistant has to sit down with them and go through video and show them how to fix the reason they're out of the game. They have to know there's an answer there, and then give them the opportunity to fix it.

Cooper: I've heard that term a lot with Steve Yzerman, so it has been passed down from Bowman to Yzerman and to me that ice time is the hammer. I'm a big believer that you treat everyone fairly, but you don't treat everyone equally. It's just the way it is. Everything comes down to expectations. If you set expectations for the player and you're on the same page in how that's going to go, then the taking of ice time, it becomes warranted at some point. Showing them, 'This isn't a punishment of hey, I don't like you, or I don't like your game. We have certain expectations for you and how we're doing things, and you're not meeting them.'

In the dictatorship, that wouldn't even come to the forefront. But in today's game, you've got to lay out expectations for the player and in the end, it's the ice time. These guys all want to play, and by no means, nobody is in this game trying to embarrass anybody. But at times when you're missing shifts, it's going to happen. You need a reason why. And having expectations laid out is a big part of it.

On creating ownership among players to where, basically, they run themselves by the end of the season

Cooper: I've gone through that experience, and it's harder and harder every year with the new players coming up and the accountability aspect to players running the room. These players that are coming up are so talented, have so much individual skill, they've got coaches here on every level. The one aspect I think is lacking is the leadership aspect of players. They've been told what to do for so long coming up, it almost becomes a little bit robotic. And then when they get to you, they're still looking to you for what to do.

In teams I've had success with and won championships, I go back to Norfolk (AHL Calder Cup title) in 2012, if I didn't show up for three weeks at the end of the year, they wouldn't have noticed. That's when you know you have a special group. I've had teams like that in Tampa and we haven't ended up winning the Stanley Cup that, by the end, they end up coaching themselves. But it takes a lot of buy-in from players and an extremely strong leadership group. There is part of training where you can help train your leaders, but in the end, some of the players have to have it in them, that'll take ownership in the room.

DeBoer: It's a great point for young coaches. Your work is done during the year, and the two times I've been to the Cup Finals, you've got to fight the urge at that point. You've done your coaching and the players have taken it over. They know your expectations. They know what's what and now the coach almost steps back. When you go on those types of runs, the room takes over.

My leadership story on Joe Thornton. Game 7 against Vegas last year, we're down 3-0 and we get a five-minute power play. We go out and score four goals on the power play and win in (overtime). I remember the first unit – and Joe Thornton wasn't on our first unit – the Hall of Famer, maybe the best setup man of all time other than Wayne Gretzky as far as distributing the puck and making other guys better, making a living on the power play. However, our first unit kept scoring, and we got to the four-minute mark, we tied it up 3-3 and I decided the first unit was tired, they scored three, let's give the second unit some ice time. I remember Joe looked at me and said, 'No, leave them out there. They're hot. Leave them.'

I look back at that now, you've got a Hall of Fame player that made his entire career on playing in those moments, of being the difference, hopping over the boards and getting the winning goal on the power play, and he deferred. He had enough presence and leadership and security in himself. And sure enough, the first unit scored again even though they were dead-ass tired. That's something I'll never forget. As a former player, how do you convince players to take that leadership and that control that naturally came to you

Brind'Amour: I didn't. That's why I'm lucky. Our sport is the greatest team sport in the world for a reason. You better have good leaders. I was lucky walking into a room where I knew all the players. I knew what everyone was capable of. I had that great relationship with the guys that were the leaders — Justin Williams. I don't really have to say too much, you're in sync. He knew what I was all about, he buys in and it just filters downhill. It was zero worry or issue about the buy-in and you have to have a huge buy-in as a team. In most sports, that weak link will come up and get you. We were fortunate enough to have leadership in place and Coop is right when he says kids nowadays, there's a lack of leadership. I'll be honest with you. That's why it's important to have Justin Williams or Jordan Staal in the locker room where they can watch and see what it's all about and learn from them.

I played a lot of years in the NHL and I never remember blaming the coach for a loss or patting the coach on the



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • June 22, 2020

back, 'You got us that win tonight.' It never entered my mind. You prepare them, get them ready to go and at the end, 'Boys, it's your show.'

DeBoer: Last year, I remember in Game 1 of the Cup final, we win in St. Louis with a hand pass. I'm sure you guys remember that. And how (Blues coach) Craig Berube handled that. It's clear the hand pass should have never been a goal, everyone knew it shouldn't be a goal, and they lost Game 1 of the conference finals because of that. I remember reading quotes from players the day after, the composure and messaging he did after that game with his team and they came back and maybe played their best game of the series in Game 2 and went on to win the Cup. That for me was one of those coaching moments where it could have gone one of two ways. If he goes into the room and goes off the deep end on how they got screwed, maybe this team loses composure. Instead, he was the voice of reason and they collect themselves and go win a Stanley Cup. I give him a lot of credit for that.

Cooper: Craig nailed it. But you still need people that when Craig leaves the room, saying, 'He's right.' And let that trickle down. Because that could have spiraled the other way. It's a testament to the coach and the team and their leadership with how that played out. On how they handle criticism, whether it's on social media or not, and advice to young coaches on making sure you're confident in yourself

Brind'Amour: It's making sure you have trust in some people, whether it's your parents, your friends that you can throw something off of that's bothering you. The easy answer is 'Don't read that stuff.' But they all do. Or you hear about it. How do you handle that?

For me, it doesn't do any good when you keep it inside. That's why you need a circle of people, maybe it's one or two, someone you can trust to talk things through. I have one of my best friends in the world, he's not a hockey player, but he's my right-hand man. And I don't know where I'd be without him, being able to talk things through. It's important that you have that.

DeBoer: There isn't a right answer. It's the age we live in, people can hide behind comments, they can be ruthless, they can be mean. There's no accountability for it. This generation has to have a thick skin. We get paid to accept that type of criticism. The toughest part is on the families, your kids read it, your wife reads it, your mother and father read it. They take it a lot more personally than we do. We have the maturity and we know what we're dealing with. I think it's just the support and always having those lines of communication open.

Cooper: You have to sift through the embarrassment. That's the hardest part. You've got to get kids to open up. I try to do that with my kids. You do need a circle of trust and people that you can lean on for whatever happens. Criticism is a part of life and unfortunately, social media has brought it to the forefront.

When I was coming up through the ranks and got to the NHL, I was reading the press clippings. You see your name in the paper, 'Wow this is really cool.' But now I don't read any of it. To me, it's just counterproductive. I talk to my kids about it and if they're still a little bit young, with the players, it's turning criticism into a positive outcome.

The Gifted: Hurricanes prospect Patrik Puustola controls the puck and the play

By Scott Wheeler

In hockey, as in life, there are archetypes built on hyperbole and buzzwords that are designed to fit every player into a predefined box. Scouts and evaluators often fall prey to lazily characterizing young prospects in this way: the power forward, the two-way center, the one-dimensional scorer, the stay-at-home defenseman. But sometimes, just sometimes, there's a player who is so different from everyone else in approach or ability that he is able to distinguish himself through his uniqueness. These players have turned one skill into the body of their game and highlight all of the different ways hockey can be played at the highest levels. "The Gifted" is a 10-part series that examines, through video, the NHL's most fascinating prospects and the unique skill sets that define them. By popular demand, "The Gifted" is back for a fourth year at The Athletic.

The Gifted (2017 series): Part 1: Carl Grundstrom | Part 2: Jordan Kyrou | Part 3: Vitaly Abramov | Part 4: Juuso Valimaki | Part 5: Vili Saarijarvi | Part 6: Filip Chlapik | Part 7: Travis Sanheim | Part 8: Timo Meier | Part 9: Kirill Kaprizov | Part 10: Elias Pettersson

The Gifted (2018 series): Part 1: Miro Heiskanen | Part 2: Casey Mittelstadt | Part 3: Dylan Strome | Part 4: Oliver Wahlstrom | Part 5: Gabe Vilardi | Part 6: Adam Boqvist | Part 7: Evan Bouchard | Part 8: Kristian Vesalainen | Part 9: Jonathan Dahlen | Part 10: Morgan Frost

The Gifted (2019 series): Part 1: Cale Makar | Part 2: Nick Robertson | Part 3: Jason Robertson | Part 4: AleksI Heponiemi | Part 5: Adam Fox | Part 6: Dante Fabbro | Part 7: Emil Bemstrom | Part 8: Cody Glass | Part 9: Martin Necas | Part 10: Bode Wilde



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • June 22, 2020

The Gifted (2020 series): Part 1: Jonatan Berggren | Part 2: Philip Tomasino | Part 3: Mikhail Abramov | Part 4: Thomas Harley | Part 5: Robin Salo | Part 6: Raphael Lavoie | Part 7: Alex Newhook | Part 8: Bobby Brink | Part 9: Samuel Poulin | Part 10: Patrik Puistola

Part of what makes hockey such a fascinating – and challenging – sport to evaluate is its complexities and dynamism. There’s no one way to build a successful NHL team. There’s no one way to effectively coach an NHL team. And the players who play on those teams come in innumerable shapes, sizes and skillsets. Trying to make sense of the latter is what this series is all about.

Some players use physicality, strength and size to overpower their opponents, win battles and control play on the cycle or in front of the net. Some players have mastered the art of simplifying their game in an effort to be calculated and efficient. Some players excel at playing without the puck, by getting into open space when they don’t have it and play a chip-and-chase or give-and-go style when they do.

Other players need the puck on their stick to be at their best. They need touches to stay involved in the game and have a consistent impact. And those players tend to be higher risk, higher reward players. Many of them are the game’s best players. But many of them flail out, or struggle to earn the trust of their coaches, or attract labels like “inconsistent” and “one-dimensional.”

Hurricanes prospect Patrik Puistola is one of the players in the second group. A year ago, it made him a bit of a hot button topic ahead of the 2020 NHL Draft. He was a dominant player at Finland’s top junior level. He racked up 11 points (including nine goals) in nine international games split between under-18 worlds and the Hlinka Gretzky Cup. And then he added 18 goals and 33 points in just 30 games in Mestis, Finland’s second-tier pro league. However, at the Liiga level, he struggled to produce with his club team and never gained the trust of the Tappara coaching staff.

By the time the draft arrived, that lacklustre play at Finland’s top pro level contributed to some souring regarding his style of play, and questions were raised about his true upside. Though he landed at No. 22 on my final draft board, he fell to the Hurricanes in the third round.

This season, after that failure to earn trust – and minutes – with a strong Tappara team spilled into a second consecutive season, Puistola bounced around Finland’s pro levels, playing for four different teams while mixing in another outstanding performance as a go-to player for Team Finland (especially after the Finns lost top forwards Rasmus Kupari and Anton Lundell to injury), this time at the world juniors.

Here, through video analysis of his game across this season, I’ll try to make sense of his up-and-down play at the pro level, while making a case for his puck-reliant game and the upside that comes with it.

Before diving into the tape, it’s important to contextualize what that season looked like on the whole — and relative to

his peers. Internationally, Puistola was excellent, but his game never really managed to settle into the same kind of rhythm at the pro level. Given he only turned 19 in January, that shouldn’t come as a huge surprise to anyone. But his year definitely didn’t go as planned.

Here’s what his season at the pro level looked like across all competitions:

There’s a lot to chew on there. The first thing is that his numbers with Tappara (eight assists in 31 games split between the regular season and the Champions Hockey League season) dwindle in comparison to those with both Jukurit and KooKoo, as well as in Mestis (which is to be expected given his dominance there a year ago but still noteworthy for a player of his age). As I hinted at earlier, part of that failure in Tappara was about trust and coaching. He hardly played. His numbers elsewhere (six goals and 10 points in 21 games split between KooKoo and Jukurit) were more in line with what you would have hoped for out of Puistola this season, and his ice-time with both of those teams reflected that.

Worth noting are Puistola’s plus-minus columns. For a prospect who carries some unfriendly labels, those are pretty positive results. On the whole, Puistola’s teams outscored the opposition 21-11 with him on the ice at even-strength this year (an impressive 66 percent share of the goals). By the end of the year, when he’d landed with a strong KooKoo team and was playing the most significant minutes of his Liiga career to date, Puistola was scored against just twice in 14 games.

Is there a reason for some of that limited usage on a strong Tappara team? Sure. There are several. But when you consider his entire season, it doesn’t look as disjointed as you might expect, given the bouncing around that happened. Puistola’s 12 points in 45 regular-season games in Liiga still ranked third among the 38 under-19 players who skated in the league this season, behind only Lundell (a potential top-10 pick in 2020) and Roni Hirvonen (a potential first-rounder in 2020).

Note: Puistola wears No. 21 with KooKoo and Tappara, No. 20 with Jukurit and No. 15 with KOOVEE.

The tape

An analysis of Puistola’s game always reveals the same things. He needs to get a little faster. He occasionally tries to do too much. And he’s much more effective offensively when he has the puck than he is when he doesn’t.

He’s also got dangerous, dynamic qualities to his game that many of his high-end peers lack — skill that excites and differentiates.

Chief among those is his ability to carry and handle the puck. Puistola is at his best when he’s hanging onto the puck and looking to manufacture offence.

That’s true off the rush, where he can drive a line in transition as the primary transporter of the puck. Puistola does an



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • June 22, 2020

excellent job weaving past pressure and using his hands and core control to adjust his feet and body when faced with an obstacle. He's also a superb east-to-west passer. Here, those two things blend together as he creates and exit and entry (both with control) before helping to set up a goal with a cross-ice pass to F3:

But it's also true in the offensive zone, where Puistola can create off the cycle with his ability to shield and control the puck. In that way, he's one of the best teenaged puck handlers on the planet. He's particularly adept at maintaining control of possession with one hand on his stick, which allows him to free up his other arm to keep defenders off of him.

Watch the way he takes this defender 1-on-1 and then controls the puck on his backhand so that he can leverage his body to help get to the slot and set up another goal below. Puistola isn't a particularly big, or strong prospect (one of the things he's going to have to do to get the most out of his game at the next level is add muscle) but still possesses the necessary ability to use his body effectively.

And here, when he engages with contact first instead of waiting for the opposing player to initiate it. He then uses that initiative to win the battle, reverts back to his puck carrier impulses and executes a bump pass to the middle that creates a goal:

And here's another sequence where Puistola, all 176 pounds of him, gets knocked over but still finds a way to come out of the cycle and take the puck to the net for a scoring chance. Note, the reason for this is skill, not pure luck:

Even though two of the three assists above are secondary, Puistola is the play driver on all three.

He doesn't often settle for the low percentage play or the tough angle shot, either. When he has the puck, he's looking to take the play to the other team, rather than waiting to see how it develops. For some players, that can be a bad thing. It results in forced plays and a failure to slow down when need be. That's not the case for Puistola though because he has the skill to execute the tougher plays that many of those other players lack.

Instead of putting the puck deep or driving down the wall, watch Puistola cut into four defenders below, before using that puck protection skill to lean off of his trailing foot's inside edge to cut to the inside lane for a scoring chance:

If that cut is available, he's going to try to take it every time. As a left-handed shot, sometimes that means using space out wide in order to beat the defender with the puck on his left. This prevents the opposition from reaching in, which allows Puistola to drive the net, as he does here:

But as I hinted at earlier, there are also several dimensions to his game as a carrier/handler. Though both of the plays above are created off of his natural wing, Puistola also has the stickhandling skill and creativity needed to make something happen on his cuts to the net from the right wing.

Here, when that lane to the crease isn't initially available, watch how Puistola shows the puck to the defender before dragging it through his legs.

There, once again, as soon as he's past the defender, he's leaning on his edges to carve to the crease for a more dangerous chance in tight.

When you isolate that play frame-by-frame, you really get a good sense of the effect that split-second fake has when Puistola shows the puck to the defender on his forehand.

Look at how committed Puistola is with his stick and eyes to show the defender that he's looking for a pass that isn't even there. In doing so, he forces the defender to open up his feet, and draws the defender's stick away from the lane to the net.

That way, when Puistola does pull the puck through his legs and begin the cut, the defender's stick gets caught behind him, and can't prevent the cut. Look at where the defender's blade ends up below. He has to lift his stick up and over Puistola to make a play on the puck. By then, it's too late.

This ability to just flat out beat defenders 1-on-1 is one of – if not the – best elements of Puistola's game.

When you think he's going one way, and you overcommit to him, he'll push off his edges and take the puck another way:

And if the defender doesn't bite right away, he's comfortable enough with the puck on his stick at top speed and in quick sequences to wait just long enough until they do.

Watch him show shot to the defender and the goaltender just long enough to draw them in before throwing the pass across his body here (nice job defensively to intercept and steal the puck at the top of the zone there too):

This isn't to say he's always waiting to make his play either, or that he's overly hesitant, or that he makes decisions too slowly. It's precisely the opposite.

He can play the give-and-go game if he's flatfooted, instead of trying to play the puck through the defender, as he does in the neutral zone before getting open for a chance here:

Though many of his plays start with a carry, he's not always going to force the envelope if there's an open play available, as he did on this drop pass that led to an assist:

He's got a dangerous goal scorer's shot (especially his wrister, his one-timer is average), which means he doesn't have to rely on getting to the net to score all of his goals.

Here's that wrister in motion on a nifty little short-side goal:

Here's that wrister blended with those puck skills on a curl and drag (one of his go-to tools) to create an angle on net for himself around the defender's stick:

He can snap through his release in transition too. Watch him cleanly beat the goalie and ring this near perfectly placed shot off of the post:

He should be encouraged to use his ability as a carrier to get to his spots in different ways than his peers, as he does with



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • June 22, 2020

another inside-out move here before cutting from below the goal line to the slot for a chance off of his backhand:

You want him going to the middle of the ice with the puck, or trying to beat his man 1-on-1, instead of dumping the puck.

Because even if that approach doesn't always produce a scoring chance, he's talented enough even when he fails to avoid turning the puck over:

Puistola is always going to be at his best if he's encouraged to hang onto the puck, play at his pace and play with linemates who can exist without the puck, instead of the other way around.

Watch the way that patience helps him avoid rushing into a play. By hanging onto it, even with opposing players around him, Puistola is able to wait for their pressure to ease, start the rush with an outlet pass and then use that net-driven mentality to go to the crease and score:

Even when he doesn't have the puck, you can often find him fighting for it around the net and then using his hands to create quick chances in front (love the little stick lift he uses to steal it here too):

That "get to the slot, get to the net" thought process is evident in his shot selection, too. Watch him use that curl and drag to try to take the puck to the middle here:

If he can take the puck off the wall and to the middle of the ice, he will:

Always:

In many cases, creating at hockey's highest level is as much about approach and choices as it is about skill.

One of the things my review of Puistola's game revealed is that his tendency to hang onto the puck also makes him a dangerous player off of faceoffs. When most wingers collapse in on a draw and retrieve a scummed puck in the offensive zone, their instinct is to make a quick play to the open point. When Puistola collapses in on a draw and finds a loose puck, his instinct is to carry.

That creates chances like this wraparound:

It also helps him draw attention and eyeballs so that his linemates can get open, as he did on this assist:

His comfort level with the puck also makes him more than just a shot threat on the power play.

The low-to-high pass here is more impressive than the actual goal:

He also did a good job running the point when he was with Koovee, and this high-to-low shot-pass is a good example of that:

Is Puistola going to need to play in a specific role, with a specific set of linemates, in order to be at his best at the next level? Yes.

But every team needs different kinds of players and he has the puck skill and the approach to become a player type that truly impacts a game — the kind that drives a line, transports the puck and has the overall talent needed to create 1-on-1 or cut to the net.

And players like that are harder to find than the ones who play with them.

Where have the Hurricanes gone and what will training look like back in Raleigh?

Sara Civian

When the NHL's return to play plan transitioned into Phase 2 (small group workouts allowed at team facilities) June 8, the Hurricanes opted to delay their transition. They knew at least two things: Training camp wouldn't start for at least a month and most Hurricanes players weren't in Raleigh.

While you'd probably assume this makes things more difficult for Hurricanes head strength and conditioning coach Bill Burniston, he said the worst of his job as it relates to playoff preparation is either already behind him or revolves around uncontrollable unknowns. Burniston told The Athletic that the hardest part of training during the NHL pause was figuring out how to work with what little equipment players had access to in the beginning. After that, he was able to individualize workout plans and, then, eventually some players had access to local gyms and rinks.

"At first we treated it like the offseason — if players had any (specific bang-ups) we targeted those, just tried to get those guys back in sync with their bodies. Now we're building from there," Burniston said. "We keep stepping it up (in terms of

intensity). We're looking at it backwards from the July 10 training camp start date, we've broken it up into three phases so guys will come in as if they're reporting to normal training camp. We're trying to get them not exactly at their peak but in a position to peak when we need them to peak."

That's hard enough as it is, now factor in a few things: the trainers don't have access to their usual technology, the Hurricanes are going from "training camp" straight to the playoffs, and oh — there's no promise that any of this is even going to happen. What if the staff pushes players too hard into "playoff mode," players get overworked, the playoffs don't even end up happening, then next season is right around the corner?

There's no perfect answer to any of these hypotheticals. Burniston and head athletic trainer Doug Bennett have been navigating as many as they can as the Hurricanes prepare for the agreed-upon July 10 training camp start date (complicated implications detailed here).



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • June 22, 2020

"In an odd way I'm working harder than I ever would just figuring out the many different rules that come with opening for Phase 2 and training camp," Bennett said. "Obviously keeping their health and safety at the forefront is concern No. 1 for me. Anything little we can do to keep their health and safety at the forefront I'm trying to do."

The biggest on-ice concern is the increased injury risk that comes with ramping up workout intensity so suddenly.

"I do think there's an increased risk for injury when you return so quickly," Bennett said. "Typically when you look at spikes in injury, it's when you go from not doing a lot to doing a lot. A perfect example is the weekend warrior: They don't do anything all week then go out on the weekend and play as hard as they can in whatever they're doing. They're keeping orthopedic surgeons in business. So during a normal time, Bill Burniston and I look at a number called acute to chronic workload ratio. That gives us a look at how much work they've done recently to how much work they've done over, maybe, a month. We send out a daily wellness survey to our players that gauges their mood, nutrition, sleep quality, just get a general sense of where they're at, when they're overworked. You just make sure (the number) is not going up or down by more than 10 percent."

But this isn't a normal time — for starters, they barely have access to a specific date to prepare players to peak. Though the NHL and the NHLPA have agreed on a July 10 training camp start date, the date is still subject to change if talks about next steps stall. Not to mention, players haven't actually agreed to return to play yet — they've just agreed on the format.

"The toughest part of this pandemic is that it's been a moving target of dates. When we're getting ready for the season we have a set date and we know what we're shooting for — we know when we want to be the freshest and when we want to peak for the playoffs," Bennett said. "With this, it's really tough. It's kind of like throwing a dart at a moving dartboard. Now we're ramping guys up with what we're sending them to get ready for July 10. We're just trying to keep them at a level that we know is consistent and healthy — we don't want to taper off or peak too soon, and we definitely don't want any drastic spikes. The other thing to consider, too, is what if this thing gets canceled, right? You don't want to burn a guy out for next season when you know it could be starting early."

On top of that, Burniston and Bennett don't have access to the technology that gives them their magic ratios.

"I don't know if you've ever noticed, there's a computer that sits out at the bench after practice that calculates things like heart rate," Bennett said. "When they first get back that'll be the first thing we do. I'd say (a) majority of NHL teams are using some form of (this technology), whether it be through heart rate monitoring, or for example, some NFL teams have this system called Catapult. It's like a GPS. If they hand the ball to a running back at practice they know how fast he ran, how far he ran, there's all sorts of data teams are collecting

on their athletes to monitor how hard they're working and how fast they're working."

In that sense, at least, all 24 NHL teams returning to play are on an even playing field. And yes, Burniston is concerned about unknowns like what specific equipment will be available in the Hurricanes' designated hub city. But he'd argue the Canes have a huge advantage in what he considers the most important element in this season's quest for the Stanley Cup: attitude.

"There's no doubt in my mind the boys are ready to go," Burniston said. "To be a Carolina Hurricane is to have an expectation — you're going to be in shape (when you arrive to camp) but you always have room to grow. I've had so many individual conversations (that boil down to) 'Let's go in ready to win the whole thing. If we're coming back, we're going to win the whole thing. Period.' There's just no room for negativity."

As Burniston and Bennett ramp up workouts in preparation for camp, they both keep close communication with the players. Bennett has been able to work with Dougie Hamilton daily (more on that later) and joked that Hamilton is one of "the lucky ones," since his injury permitted early access to ice and trainers. Burniston uses an app to tweak workouts on an individual basis. But as the Suceses reminded us, professional athletes can lose a sense of purpose with lack of competition and working out shouldn't be completely miserable.

The Hurricanes made sure to keep the competitive spirit alive in a few ways. They've been doing group Zoom workouts every Thursday morning, in which a different player runs each workout. Burniston said, unsurprisingly, Jordan Martinook has been the best leader, and he's all about the quads. Ryan Dzingel also led a solid one and Justin Williams is the go-to guy if you want to build your glutes.

They've also been doing some heated Peloton competitions, as Andrei Svechnikov previously mentioned.

The Hurricanes have also had special alumni guests like Cam Ward join in on these competitions. For the record, Burniston said he's invited Tripp Tracy but he has never shown up.

Where Burniston sees attitude as an advantage for the Hurricanes, Bennett sees the other side of the same coin — Rod Brind'Amour.

"Rod has always been phenomenal when it comes to (listening to the training staff)," Bennett said. "He takes what Bill has to say and listens. He just gets it — he understands where we're coming from and he doesn't over- or under-analyze anything. I would say that's probably something that will be important when we come back — those communication lines with Rod to figure out when we need to push and when we don't."

With less than a month until training camp, players are starting to trickle back into Raleigh — or at least linking up in



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • June 22, 2020

Canada to prepare for the trek back. Many of you have simply asked where all the Hurricanes are: Who stayed in Raleigh and/or who left to quarantine at home? Shout out to Hurricanes vice president of communications and team services Mike Sundheim for providing us with a spreadsheet organized in alphabetical order.

Sebastian Aho: Finland, has been skating with his former Liiga team Karpat.

Ryan Dzingel: Traveled a bit (Texas, Florida) but is now back in Raleigh. He and his fiancé Elise Lobb are planning to get married in Raleigh.

Joel Edmundson: Manitoba/Kelowna (now apparently living it up with Jordan Martinook in Kelowna according to Instagram).

Haydn Fleury: Alberta.

Warren Foegele: Toronto.

Jake Gardiner: Minnesota.

Dougie Hamilton: Raleigh.

"Injured players as per the NHL, were allowed to stay and use the facility with us, so we've got some rules and regulations set up for how Dougie has been coming in," Bennett said. "But he's, I guess been the lucky one in that regard — unlucky but lucky. We're able to monitor Dougie

because he's in our care and we're working with him every day to get him up to speed."

Jordan Martinook: Edmonton then Kelowna with Edmundson.

Brock McGinn: Was in Canada "a tad," now back in Raleigh.

Petr Mrazek: Czech Republic.

Martin Necas: Czech Republic.

Nino Niederreiter: Switzerland.

Brett Pesce: New York.

James Reimer: British Columbia.

Brady Skjei: New York City.

Jacob Slavin: Raleigh.

Jordan Staal: Raleigh.

Andrei Svechnikov: Raleigh.

Teuvo Teravainen: Finland.

Vincent Trocheck: Raleigh.

Trevor van Riemsdyk: Stayed in Raleigh for a while, now in Boston.

Sami Vatanen: New Jersey/now in Finland.

Justin Williams: Raleigh.

Keeping up with the Canes: 10 questions with Stormy the Ice Hog

Sara Civian

After a brief hiatus, the weekly Keeping up with the Canes series is back. Each week until hockey returns, The Athletic will ask 10 rapid-fire questions to and receive 10 rapid-fire answers from folks all around the Hurricanes organization. We've checked in on color commentator Tripp Tracy, in-game host Abby Labar and Hurricanes.com Senior Editor Michael Smith.

Next up is the one-and-only Stormy.

1. How are you, Stormy?

I'm Swine ;). Hope you are doing well!

2. Are you the first Ice Hog TikTok star yet?

To my knowledge, yes! I encourage all ice hogs to sign up.

3. What kind of shenanigans did Stormy get up to in quarantine?

I have been TikToking it up! I've also been dropping into Zoom/Google Meet calls and spreading love throughout the

area. Lots of neighborhood parades and ding dong SURPRISE visits! And since I miss messing with opposing fans, I may or may not prank call Slapshot every few days.

4. What do you miss the most about hockey?

I miss the fans, I miss the game day energy in PNC Arena, honestly I miss everything!

5. If you had to pick one Hurricanes player to quarantine with, who would it be?

I'm pretty sure anyone who knows me knows I would pick Dougie. All the guys are great but Dougie and I would have the most fun. I'm sure we would get a daily best friend picture and learn new TikTok dances.

6. What's your favorite memory from the 2019-20 regular season?

This is a tough one! There are so many great memories from this year, but anytime I get to dance with the Storm Squad during an intermission is my favorite.

7. Who is your favorite mascot of all time?



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • June 22, 2020

I probably shouldn't say myself, right? So I'm going to go with my boys Sir Purr (Carolina Panthers) and Hugo the Hornet (Charlotte Hornets). You can't make me pick just one!

8. First thing you want to do when hockey is back?

Be in a Storm Surge!

9. Are you friends with Gritty?

Next question.

Just kidding! I'm friends with all of the guys ... just not when our teams are playing each other.

10. If Stormy had a goal song what would it be?

I know you're expecting a fun answer, here. Truthfully, I'd go with "Raise Up."



5 questions for Hurricanes in Stanley Cup Qualifiers

The Carolina Hurricanes were 38-25-5 (.596 points percentage) and will enter the Stanley Cup Qualifiers as the No. 6 seed in the Eastern Conference. They will play the No. 11 seed, the New York Rangers (37-28-5, .564 points percentage), in one of eight best-of-5 series. The start date and hub city have not been determined.

Here are 5 key questions facing the Hurricanes:

1. WILL DOUGIE HAMILTON GET UP TO SPEED QUICK ENOUGH?

Hamilton hasn't played since Jan. 16, when he fractured his left fibula in a 3-2 loss to the Columbus Blue Jackets. The defenseman missed Carolina's last 21 games before the NHL season was paused March 12 due to concerns surrounding the coronavirus and wasn't expected to be ready in time for the scheduled start of the Stanley Cup Playoffs. But he's had ample time to rehab and skate during the pause. Hamilton was having a season worthy of Norris Trophy consideration in voting for the top defenseman in the NHL before getting injured, with 40 points (14 goals, 26 assists) in 47 games.

2. WHO WILL BE THEIR STARTING GOALIE?

Petr Mrazek should enter training camp -- which can begin July 10 as part of Phase 3 of the NHL Return to Play Plan -- as the favorite ahead of James Reimer, but that only gives him the advantage on Day One. A lot of who starts in Game 1 against the Rangers depends on which of the two goalies comes back in better shape and who performs better in training camp. There is no clear No. 1 even though Mrazek has played more than Reimer, who is healthy after missing the final seven games with a lower-body injury. Mrazek was 21-16-2 with a 2.69 goals-against average and .905 save percentage in 40 games (38 starts). Reimer was 14-6-2 with a 2.66 GAA and .914 save percentage in 25 games (24 starts).

3. WHAT WILL THE DEFENSE PAIRS LOOK LIKE?

This could be a work in progress because the Hurricanes are deeper at defenseman entering this series than they were at the pause, when Hamilton, Sami Vatanen (lower body) and Brett Pesce (shoulder) were on the injured list. Vatanen is healthy and will be ready to practice with the Hurricanes for the first time. He was acquired in a trade with the New Jersey Devils on Feb. 24 but was injured and didn't recover in time to get on the ice with his new teammates before the pause. Pesce is rehabbing from surgery March 5 and it's



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • June 22, 2020

unlikely he'll play against the Rangers, but his return is not being ruled out. Even without Pesce, Carolina has eight NHL defensemen for six spots, with Hamilton, Vatanen, [Jaccob Slavin](#), [Brady Skjei](#), [Joel Edmundson](#), [Jake Gardiner](#), [Trevor van Riemsdyk](#) and [Haydn Fleury](#).

4. WILL PAST FAILURES AGAINST THE RANGERS MATTER?

The Hurricanes would like to believe it's a thing of the past and won't matter when the series begins. But they lost all four games against the Rangers this season and they're 8-25-7 against them in the past 10 seasons. However, the Hurricanes can argue that they were beaten by bad luck and good goaltending this season, and those are mostly out of their control. They outshot the Rangers 161-104 in the season series but were outscored 17-9. Rangers goalie [Henrik Lundqvist](#) started the first three games and

allowed seven goals on 132 shots (.947 save percentage), making at least 39 saves in each game.

5. WHAT KIND OF IMPACT WILL [VINCENT TROCHECK](#) MAKE?

Trocheck, who was acquired in a trade with the Florida Panthers on Feb. 24, played seven games and scored two points (one goal, one assist) with 12 shots on goal and was minus-5 with the Hurricanes. Training camp will allow Trocheck to get up to speed with his linemates, potentially [Nino Niederreiter](#) and [Martin Necas](#), and the Hurricanes' systems. He otherwise wouldn't have had that opportunity being thrown into the mix in the middle of a playoff race, which should help him in this series.



Canes Begin Customizing Space at New Practice Facility

By Michael Smith

As the new state-of-the-art, twin-rink ice skating venue at Wake Competition Center comes together, so too does the Carolina Hurricanes' dedicated space at what will serve as the team's new practice facility.

Construction at the [new building in Morrisville has continued unimpeded](#) with a target open date for this summer.

With that in mind, final layout and design details for the Canes' 12,000 square-feet of space are being hammered out with input from Majority Owner Tom Dundon, President and General Manager Don Waddell, the coaching staff, the training staff, the equipment staff and, of course, the players themselves.

A handful of players currently in town - [Dougie Hamilton](#), [Jaccob Slavin](#), [Andrei Svechnikov](#), [Vincent Trocheck](#) and [Justin Williams](#) - recently took a walking tour of the facility.

"I think it's awesome. It's somewhere you look forward to coming to each day," Hamilton said. "You come to practice, and you want to be somewhere you enjoy being. It's obviously very nice. A lot of natural light in here. It will be fun for us to spend a lot of time here."

"It's sweet. We were hearing about this facility a couple years ago, even when I got here when the Canes drafted me," Svechnikov said. "It's so fun to see this. It's exciting, and I

can't wait to see the whole building. It's going to be pretty fun. Everything new."

Together with Waddell and developer Jeff Ammons, who spearheaded the \$30 million multi-sport complex, the players pored over the blueprints for the team's dedicated space and offered input on the design and features.

In a separate site visit, Dundon, Waddell and the hockey staff did the same, and the blueprints were tweaked on the fly - a few walls will be moved, some rooms and offices will be expanded, a door here, a door there, all in an effort to ensure the team is best utilizing the space.

One request from Svechnikov: An off-ice shooting gallery, similar to the one found outside the team's locker room on the south end of PNC Arena, where he can [commonly be found after practices and games](#).

Trocheck seconded Svechnikov's request, and the group proceeded to map out an area for a suitable set up.

"Oh, yeah," Svechnikov said. "Very important."

There are questions like how many tables and chairs should be in the players' lounge, how big should the meeting room be, should there be a television in the tub room (yes) and where should the ping-pong table (at least one) go? And then there are the small details, like bathroom tile size, logos



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • June 22, 2020

on the walls and colors for carpeting, skate-safe rubber flooring and turf.

The Canes have input in it all.

"It's cool that they're talking to us and getting our opinions on stuff," Hamilton said. "If we can try to help them a little bit with a player's perspective, it's beneficial."

As work continues in the coming weeks, the facility will begin to show more signs of life as the Canes' new practice home.

"This is like your house in a way. You're spending a lot of time here," Hamilton said. "You want it to be somewhere nice that you enjoy coming. I think it will be fun for everyone to be here."

Ayres Wins NHL Fan Choice Award for Best Feel-Good Moment

By Michael Smith

The legend of David Ayres is now award-winning.

After more than 2 million votes were cast in the [2020 NHL Fan Choice Awards](#), Ayres' emergency goaltending performance for the Carolina Hurricanes was crowned Best Feel-Good Moment. Ayres' EBUG triumph garnered nearly 45 percent of the vote in the category, one of the top-performing overall winners and the second most popular winner in the on-ice categories. This marks the second year in a row the Canes have taken home a Fan Choice Award, after the [Storm Surge won Best Celly in 2019](#).

The date was Feb. 22, 2020, and the stage could not have been much bigger. It was Hockey Night in Canada in Toronto, and the Canes, in the midst of a tight playoff race, were on the road for the tail end of a back-to-back.

[James Reimer](#) and [Petr Mrazek](#) both left the game with injuries - and there was still a period and a half left to play.

What now?

Enter Ayres, who sported a No. 90 white Canes sweater, which clashed against his blue and white gear.

RELATED: THE LEGEND OF DAVE AYRES

Though the first two shots Ayres saw - one off the stick of John Tavares and another that bounced around in front of the net - beat him, the 42-year-old buildings operation manager (and, yes, former Zamboni driver) settled in. He denied Auston Matthews, who ranked second in the league in goals at the time, on a point-blank scoring chance late in the second period to preserve the Canes' 4-3 lead heading into the second intermission.

The Canes got some breathing room early in the second period when [Warren Foegele](#) scored his second of the game, and from there, the team suffocated any attack the Maple Leafs might have had. Toronto managed just seven shots on goal in the third, and Ayres stopped them all en route to recording the win in net and being named first star of the game.

After a national television interview, during which he draped the iconic Hockey Night in Canada towel around his neck, Ayres walked into the Canes locker room, which burst into celebratory mayhem.

"Right now, it's kind of hard to put into words," a smiling Ayres [said after the game](#).

That's a feel-good moment if there ever was one, and the memories will last forever.

RELATED: AYRES SPREADS MESSAGE OF HOPE

"That's pretty special. I told the guys after the game, I thanked them because that just gave me an incredible memory," Rod Brind'Amour said after the game. "Just the way that game unfolded, how hard we were playing and then to have that happen. You kind of think, oh well. How is this going to end up? We just dug in and said we're not going to lose this game. For him, what a moment he'll have for the rest of his life. That's incredible. That's why you do this."

SportScan

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



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • June 22, 2020

The Athletic / 'Guys are not happy': How the NHL's positive tests will impact return to play

By Michael Russo and James Mirtle

Jun 20, 2020

The NHL received a significant wake-up call this week.

Eleven players tested positive for COVID-19, leading to the shutdown of multiple training groups both inside and outside of team facilities. The known hot spots, at this point, are localized in Arizona and Florida, where the virus caseload has risen among the general public in recent weeks.

The 11 players who tested positive were out of a group of more than 200 players tested, many of whom were taking part in Phase 2 of the NHL's planned return to play. Phase 3 – the start of training camps – is scheduled to begin on July 10, less than three weeks from today.

According to an NHL source on Saturday, the league is not considering pushing back that start date at this point. However, given many players are not taking part in Phase 2 and not yet in their NHL cities, and the players have not yet voted to agree to return to play, it would seem to make that Phase 3 date more difficult to hit.

The names of the NHL players infected have not been released. The Athletic's policy is to not identify athletes by name unless the team or player agrees to do so.

One prominent Western Conference player said Friday that the positive tests were further confirmation that the league was moving too fast with its timeline.

"This just makes no sense to me," the veteran player said. "Right from the return-to-play format announcement and this Phase 2 thing that none of us have to be in, they've put the cart before the horse. We're in the middle of a pandemic, and they're shocked there's an outbreak? And it's a long ways off to July 10, so you can't tell me more and more guys won't be testing positive as more and more guys start to get back to town.

"Guys are not happy. This is why we better have a full player vote and not just an executive board vote. But I'm not convinced (NHLPA executive director) Don (Fehr) is going to allow that because he knows there's so many of us on the fence. That's why I think the league was trying to be hush-hush on these positive tests.

"In my opinion, no way we play."

Several NHL player agents surveyed by The Athletic this week indicated that more and more of their players are troubled by the idea of returning to play in a hub city environment. One prominent agent estimated that 35 to 40 percent of players were on the fence. Another suggested it was even higher than that.

Among those players who have already expressed reservations publicly are Florida Panthers defenseman Anton Stralman, Dallas Stars defenseman Roman Polak and Minnesota Wild netminder Devan Dubnyk. Their concern goes beyond finances and their individual health.

"You look at our staff, our coaches, they're older, so it's just deeper than just the players," said another veteran player. "It's everyone that's involved in it, too. The staff and the coaches are probably more at risk of getting something serious than we are as players, and we do have to think about that."

Other factors include time away from family, uncertainty over the length of the various phases, as well as health and safety concerns. But the other, less discussed issue is there may not be a lot to gain financially given players have already collected most of their paychecks for the season and playoff games without fans in attendance will not be big revenue generators.

While returning to play could save them an additional 7 or 8 percent of their salaries by way of escrow deductions thanks to making television and sponsorship agreements whole, the net impact for players on the low end of the salary scale could be trading two or three months in a bubble environment for \$20,000 or \$30,000.

"For some guys, it's not even a full paycheck," one agent explained of how the playoff pay scale works.

Yet another concern players are expressing is how the NHL will deal with positive tests during play. If a team is in the middle of a heated playoff series and multiple players test positive for COVID-19, will they be pulled from games?

How would that impact the integrity of the tournament, given star players might be asymptomatic but still unable to participate in pivotal elimination games? And would there be an advantage to the players or teams who have already had the virus, as they would be less likely to contract it again during, say, the Stanley Cup Final?

Part of the issue the NHL is dealing with right now with these positive tests is their inability to control where players are and how strict they are with their isolation while in Phase 2. Teams won't be able to fully track players' whereabouts until at least Phase 3, when there will be a mass migration back from Europe and players' offseason homes to their NHL cities.

The league may be able to greater limit players' contact with the outside world at that point. To get there, however, they'll need a green light from players.

It's difficult to know how such a vote would go, especially considering the current plan is to include the framework of a medium-term CBA extension in the return-to-play agreement. If the players decide not to finish this season, they also lose serious leverage in CBA negotiations. So can the league give players enough incentives in such a deal to mitigate their unwillingness to take part in this unusual 24-team postseason?

The concern on the league's side right now is that, without a return-to-play mandate in the next two or three weeks, the NHL calendar could go dark for months – potentially while other leagues play games for large, captive TV audiences.

The long-term effects of the NHL not playing could be significant, especially with a new U.S. television deal needed after next season.

That's why some players remain hopeful a deal can get done that will allow them to play meaningful games by early August.

"Both sides are working extremely hard to try to get something done both for this year and CBA wise," said Dubnyk, the Wild's NHLPA player rep. "It takes some time to get everything together, present it to the players, get votes as far as the CBA and even as the protocols go, it takes a while to gather, to get all the information to guys and then take a vote.

"What they were saying is, if we were to sign the CBA (extension) on July 9, we could start training camp on July 10. But if we wait and guys don't come in a short enough amount of time to get the quarantine rules out of the way, we could sign it but then it's another two weeks on top of that. I think everybody agrees that if we're going to do this, we might as well get going. And the sooner the better. So they're hanging on to that July 10 date. That would be ideal, but I don't know if it's realistic."

Originally a skeptic, Dubnyk said he is coming around to the idea of playing, explaining that the hub city arrangements have improved since the early stages of negotiations. Players will not be expected to be on full lockdown in their hotel rooms, for example, and will have activities they can do outside of games and practices.

"It feels like (we're going to play) now," Dubnyk said. "I think we're going to find out over the next few weeks a lot more how things are going to go with these and more positive tests popping up, how people react to them, all that kind of thing. Before I didn't feel like we would. Now I'm leaning more towards it feels like we're going to."



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • June 22, 2020

Florida Panthers center Brian Boyle agreed.

"With all the testing we all have to go through all the time (in Phase 2), it's nice to know if we've been exposed, but it will provide more positives," Boyle said. "Whether they're false positives or not. I'm just hoping nobody has to deal with aggressive symptoms and (we) understand we are not through this yet and need to act accordingly.

"Prepare for the worst and hope for the best, right? Assuming you and everyone else has it is a good way to hopefully make this virus submit. And hopefully a vaccine is coming soon. My thinking hasn't changed. I'm still very optimistic."

How much company Dubnyk and Boyle have on that front remains to be seen. Friday wasn't a good news day for the NHL, and the full fallout from these positive tests won't be realized until players are forced to vote on a comprehensive return-to-play plan. For undecided players, this doesn't help the cause.

This text from one prominent player seemed to sum up the mood of many players: "I don't really know what to think right now."

Whether NHL teams avoid coronavirus could trump players' skill if playoffs are held | Sam Carchidi

by Sam Carchidi

Should the NHL play its 24-game tournament or bag the season because it is subjecting players and team personnel to the coronavirus?

Would players and staff members have just as much of a chance catching the virus if they stayed home as they would quarantined in a hotel and arena that are following strict health guidelines?

Is it worth playing games to give fans something to watch on their flat screens and fill the NHL coffers with TV revenue, or should the league just cancel the games and stop the impression that money trumps health concerns?

Those are just some of the questions that confront the NHL, whose Stanley Cup champion would have been crowned already if the virus hadn't gotten in the way.

The league still has plans to restart the season, probably in early August, with a five-round tournament that isn't expected to end until October — at around the time the 2020-21 season was supposed to start.

Is it crazy to try to finish? Admirable? Somewhere in between?

During the last few months, there's been a familiar question: If this season ever resumes, will there be an asterisk added to the champion's name because of the unusual circumstances — the regular season ending early, the playoff format adjusted — caused by the pandemic?

My answer has always been that an asterisk should not be added, but I'm beginning to have second thoughts because this nasty virus could drastically affect playoff lineups. That is, if we even have the playoffs.

Before Friday's news that 11 NHL players practicing in small-group sessions, including three from powerful Tampa Bay and Toronto superstar Auston Matthews, were stricken with the coronavirus, it was easy to assume the Stanley Cup champ would win the crown on merit.

Toronto's Auston Matthews (right), fights for the puck off the draw against Flyers captain Claude Giroux earlier in the season. Matthews was one of 11 NHL players to contract the coronavirus, the NHL said.

Toronto's Auston Matthews (right), fights for the puck off the draw against Flyers captain Claude Giroux earlier in the season. Matthews was one of 11 NHL players to contract the coronavirus, the NHL said.

The champ would have to win at least four best-of-seven series to hoist the Cup, and if the eventual winner was in the play-in round, it would have won an unprecedented 19 games and five series.

Based on that, no asterisk would be needed. The champ would prove it deserved the crown.

With the latest developments, however, I'm not so sure.

In light of what we learned Friday, winning the Cup may be based on luck just as much as skill. The team that is fortunate enough not to have any of its key players stricken by the virus could be the decisive factor.

It's enough to at least start this conversation: Why not just bag the season and start the next campaign after a vaccine has been developed?

The NHL would lose lots of TV revenue — estimates are around \$500 million — but it would gain respect for putting lives ahead of dollars.

Yes, the diehard fans would fume, but isn't it best to be cautious when you are dealing with a potential killer of a disease?

Those who want the season to restart say the chances of dying from the virus are minuscule.

Those who want the plug pulled on season say sports aren't essential and putting the players and their staffs at risk, no matter how small, is shortsighted.

As of now, provided the league and the players association can agree on safety and health issues, training camps are supposed to open July 10. After three weeks of camp, how many teams will lose important players to the virus?

Fans are starting to become more skeptical about the season restarting. In a poll I ran on Twitter right after the season was paused on March 12, 55% of the nearly 5,000 responders said the NHL was wrong for even stopping the games.

Fast-forward to a poll I conducted that ended Saturday and had 3,223 responders. The results: 47% said the league should continue with its playoff plan, 28% said the season should be canceled, and 25% said the NHL should use a wait-and-see approach.

I'm in the "wait-and-see" camp, but if the virus cases start to balloon when (if) training camps start, it's time to pull the plug and hope you can start the 2020-21 season in October — though that would probably be wishful thinking because the pandemic is tougher than Dave Schultz in his prime.

Pegulas are in the crosshairs as the league reacts to Sabres' firings

By Mike Harrington

Published Sun, Jun 21, 2020

It has been this corner's view for many years that the hockey world's feeling on Terry and Kim Pegula is simple: It's always good for deep-pocketed owners passionate about the sport to be in the league, even if they keep struggling to figure out how to run a professional sports franchise.

At the NHL and Board of Governors level, the Pegulas are well-respected. Less than a decade after owning the team for a spell during the bankruptcy days, Commissioner Gary Bettman was thrilled to have



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • June 22, 2020

an owner come into Buffalo willing to spend big money and ostensibly build a winning franchise on a perennial basis.

Bettman consistently lauds Kim Pegula's diversity initiatives and loves her participation on league committees. And no one can argue the benefits of LECOM Harborcenter, Kim Pegula's legacy project, as both a regional and international destination for hockey at all levels.

But deeper inside the NHL, at the GM and on-ice level, the Pegulas have been openly laughed at. And the laughter has never been louder.

Many Sabres fans have spent a long time defending the Pegulas and attacking anyone in the media (hand raised) who dared to cast a wary eye upon them. But the fans' patience is officially gone after this disaster of a season.

The fans feel hoodwinked, and they should. In the wake of one of the largest plunderings of an organization from within in modern NHL history, the Pegulas are getting savaged across North America.

TSN scouting director Craig Button called the Pegulas "masters of creating an environment of disarray" during an appearance on the network. Button, a former GM in Calgary, doubled down Thursday during an interview on TSN1040 Radio in Vancouver.

"I think it's BS when the player gets blamed for being in a losing situation," Button said. "You know what Jack Eichel and Rasmus Ristolainen should come out and say? 'We can't win with these owners.' That's what they should be saying."

Said Sportsnet analyst Elliotte Friedman in describing the Sabres on the Fan 590 in Toronto: "The word you would probably use is rudderless. ... The fans there have no patience for any messaging from that team right now."

And here's a tweet from veteran Toronto Sun columnist Steve Simmons, who has covered the NHL since the 1980s: "You look up the word 'Pegula' in the dictionary and you'll get 'hockey incompetence.' "

Jason Botterill did a poor job as Sabres GM in many areas. His firing could be justified. But not so easily after the team president said three weeks earlier he was coming back for a fourth season. And Botterill joins Tim Murray as the second consecutive GM to get only three years here.

I would not have fired Murray in 2017 after his third season, but Kim Pegula, in particular, had tired of his gruff approach. On merit, Botterill's firing was more deserved, but it's still rough optics in the hockey world.

"What kind of owners think a GM can turn around their team in three years – when the first thing the guy has to do is try to fix all the owners' previous mistakes?" texted one longtime Western Conference broadcaster.

Another text came in from a longtime Eastern Conference observer: "The difference between the Pegulas and [Eugene] Melnyk in Ottawa is the Pegulas thought they could just throw money at everything and win and everybody in Buffalo believed them. People in Ottawa knew what they were dealing with. People in Buffalo are finally figuring things out. The Pegulas can't win this way, no matter how much they want to."

Wrote TSN's Pierre LeBrun in the Athletic: "In a league that's impossible to predict, I can make the following prediction: If Terry and Kim Pegula keep hiring and firing GMs every three years, the Sabres will never win a damn thing."

During an interview on Sportsnet 650 in Vancouver, longtime former NHL executive Brian Burke also railed on the Botterill firing as well as the promotion of Kevyn Adams.

"Three years isn't long enough. I don't think he got a fair deal there," Burke said of Botterill. "I watched the press conference and I hear Kevyn Adams is a good guy. I know guys that played with him said he's smart and a good guy. Went to Miami University. Worked for them. And I kept waiting to hear where's the expertise and what I heard was, 'We know

this guy. He's worked for us for nine years. We know him. We like him. We trust him.'

"I'm like, 'OK, I might know him and like him and trust him. I'm not going to give him an astronaut's job.' You got to have some training for the job you're doing. Where's the preparation for this? I don't get this."

Burke agreed with the assertion of hosts James Cybulski and Perry Solkowski that Adams was simply hired to be a "yes man" for the Pegulas. And the fact that Adams immediately fired most of the 22 people sent packing by the Sabres after the Pegulas talked to the media proved his point.

"That's your first day on the job," Burke said incredulously. "You can have the job, but you've got to ruin 22 lives the first day. I could walk right past that offer."

Who's gone? Sabres' purge totals 22

I was talking a couple of weeks ago with Button about culture and it was mostly about Botterill. His main point was the players can tell if the GM is helping them or not. The Pegulas help the players plenty. They pay them well and facilities in KeyBank Center are among the best in the league. Harborcenter is first class.

But players know when the owners are struggling to figure things out, too. And during his radio interview, Button didn't hold back on the revolving door in Buffalo and how it's impacted players like Ristolainen the last seven years.

"If you end up having success, here's what I will say: It is completely accidental because your process is completely wrong," Button said. "All [Ristolainen] has been part of is dysfunction, disarray and losing. If you want to go and put a player in that and then you're not winning, you're going to blame it on the player?"

"If I was Rasmus Ristolainen, I'd be saying, 'This ain't on me. This is on you, Terry and Kim Pegula. This is on you, Tim Murray. This is on you, Jason Botterill. None of you have done anything to help our team be better. But you're gonna blame me?' Sorry."

Button wasn't finished, either.

Said Button: "You come to work every day and you're watching people around you that aren't very good and now you're watching people that are responsible for putting people in place that aren't very good. And you're trying your very best and you're going, 'Jeez, as best as I try, I'm having a tough time doing this.'"

"So what ends up happening to your motivation? What happens to your own focus and your own intensity. I can tell you that in 99% of the cases, it wanes. And again, that's not on Eichel. That's not on Ristolainen. It starts right at the top. And that's the only place you need to look."

Firing sprees may spread

One outgrowth of the Sabres' firing spree that's sent shudders through the league is it could give an idea to other owners struggling with lack of revenues during the pandemic. The draft, after all, isn't until October, but every team had its work done in case it was held in June.

Burke said he expects "real contraction" of staffs around the league and said the salary cap could take a huge hit, too.

"It's not a lunar landscape because men have walked on the moon. It's a Martian landscape," cracked Burke. "We have never been over this territory before and it's going to have devastating consequences at the owner and player level. Players aren't going to be the only ones that bear the pain of these hard times. There have been layoffs."

"The Buffalo one is the most public. I call it the 'Red Wedding.' I think it was ridiculous to fire that many people, especially after a vote of confidence. Good luck finding a job in hockey right now. All these guys have families. But I will tell you this: There have been very little publicized layoffs by a lot of teams. A lot of teams have cut their staffs back already and those cuts will continue."



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • June 22, 2020

The Sabres had 15 amateur scouts and fired 11. They'll hire replacements, but definitely won't have as many as in austere times for ownership.

How many do they need? Most NHL teams have 10-12 amateur scouts and the Sabres had been considered heavyweights in that area for the last several years. They listed a whopping 20 in 2013-14, at the start of Darcy Regier's last year as GM. By Tim Murray's last year (2016-17), that number was 11 and that was partly because the GM liked to pile into his pickup truck to head across the border and do a lot of the scouting himself.

The scouting world seems particularly vulnerable now.

"Buffalo's was done very poorly and very publicly and I think way too much meat was cut, not just fat," Burke said. "I think those people all provide value, but I think owners are going to turn to (their GMs) now and say, 'OK, I'll agree those people are valuable, but you keep the eight you want to keep out of the 14 because we're contracting.' You're going to see more of this on the team side."

Four undeserved Sabres firings

- Scouting director Ryan Jankowski and assistant Jeff Crisp: Notables from the last two drafts include Rasmus Dahlin, Dylan Cozens, Mattias Samuelsson, Ryan Johson, Erik Portillo and Matej Pekar. We'll see how that plays out, of course, but that looks pretty decent on paper for a two-year window.
- Amerks coach Chris Taylor: He won games, the players loved him and the kids improved. This was really unfair. There's scuttlebutt he played veterans a little too much at times. It reminded me of when Marc Bombard won 87 games and a division title for the Bisons in 1992 but got fired by the Pittsburgh Pirates for "philosophical differences," the same words the Pegulas used to sack Botterill. Why was Bombard axed? Played too many veteran players to try to push winning games. Taylor could be at least an NHL assistant right now. He'll have a job next season.
- Director of rehab and development Dennis Miller: His workouts with injured players became the stuff of legend in the dressing room in recent years. Injured players raved about the work they would do back home with Miller in an empty KeyBank Center while the team was on the road. The trust factor in him was massively high. That will be tough to replicate.

A big week ahead

In normal times, we would have been preparing to head for Montreal for the draft on Friday and Saturday. That's not happening, of course, but this still figures to be a huge week for NHL news.

Hub cities for the upcoming playoffs are expected to be announced, likely Monday or Tuesday. Las Vegas remains a front-runner and the loosening of quarantine rules in Canada helps Toronto's case to be the second city, although Chicago is said to be making a good run as well.

On Wednesday, the newest class of the Hockey Hall of Fame will be announced as a result of the selection committee's first virtual vote. It will be the 11th kick at the can for former Sabres winger Alexander Mogilny, whose 76-goal season in Buffalo in 1992-93 and 473-goal career have yet to be honored. Botterill's sister, Jennifer, is also a prime candidate after a star-studded career at Harvard and with the Canadian Olympic team. Longtime former Calgary winger Jarome Iginla is expected to be the marquee candidate voted in. Marian Hossa and Daniel Alfredsson also should get lots of support.

Then comes Adams' first big event as GM on Friday night as the Draft Lottery will be held, with the Sabres looking to move from No. 7 into the top 3. The league is still yet to issue official information on the proceedings, although they are expected to be held at 8 p.m. and televised on both sides of the border.

Contact sports face special challenges to restart in the COVID-19 era

By Randy Johnson Star Tribune JUNE 21, 2020 — 11:15PM

Football players ram into each other to begin a play and usually end it with a collision that brings a ball carrier to the ground.

Hockey players pin each other against the boards with body checks and use any physical means necessary to separate an opponent from the puck.

Wrestlers square off inches apart, then almost immediately grab arms, bump heads and exert themselves in face-to-face contact, often breathing the same air for six minutes or more.

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, public health officials have stressed social distancing to combat the deadly virus, which is largely spread through infected droplets from coughing, sneezing and talking. But for contact sports, social distancing isn't a workable option.

As football, hockey and wrestling move ahead toward restarting, those involved are working to keep coronavirus cases to a minimum, hoping to avoid a pause in play or another shutdown. And the margins are razor-thin for these sports, given how close the competitors are when they square off.

"With it being an airborne illness, there's effort and exertion, and spit and droplets will be projected through that," said Troy Hoehn, a supervisor athletic trainer for the Mayo Clinic Health System and past president of the Minnesota Athletic Trainers' Association. "That's where the difficulty comes in those sports where you've got people that are really close together for an extended period of time."

Last week, Dr. Anthony Fauci, director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, cast doubt on football returning in 2020 without having all teams report to one solitary location.

"Unless players are essentially in a bubble — insulated from the community and they are tested every day — it would be very hard to see how football is able to be played this fall," Fauci told CNN. "If there is a second wave, which is certainly a possibility and which could be complicated by the predictable flu season, football may not happen this year."

In Minnesota for youth and adult sports, the state health department has labeled football, hockey and wrestling among the "higher-risk" sports. Baseball, basketball and soccer are among the "moderate-risk" sports. "Lower-risk" sports include running, golf and singles tennis.

On Friday, the Minnesota Department of Health announced outdoor sports can begin games and scrimmages on Wednesday, while indoor sports can return to full team practices on Wednesday and games on July 1.

"A lot of parents, a lot of coaches, a lot of kids are waiting. 'What does our new normal look like?'" said Hoehn, who works extensively with prep and youth sports. "We all know it's going to be different."

Following football's lead

College football, the driving revenue force for most athletic departments, already has seen setbacks as players return for voluntary workouts. Sports Illustrated reported that 30 of Louisiana State's 115 players have been quarantined because they either tested positive for COVID-19 or had contact with those who tested positive. At Clemson, 23 football players have tested positive.

Fauci told NBCSports.com in May that football is the "perfect setup" to spread COVID-19 because of the close contact between players.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • June 22, 2020

Dr. Patrick Smith, who spent more than three decades as Gophers football team physician, sees returning to play as challenging but necessary.

"In college football, the rosters are 85-plus, and you've got issues," Smith said. "Testing is essential, and screening is essential. It's got to be very efficient, meaning you'd like it to come back within 24 to 48 hours at a minimum and certainly with testing that has very few false negatives. ... Those are the ones you can't miss."

Gophers football players began returning to campus earlier in June for voluntary workouts, but first came an extensive coronavirus testing and screening plan.

"It's time to decide how we're going to live with this virus," said Smith, who retired this year. "... Keeping yourself locked up in a cocoon is not wise. It's not science."

St. Thomas football coach Glenn Caruso expects the Tommies' preseason camp to start in the second week of August as usual but acknowledged there likely will be changes in how teams operate in hopes of practicing social distancing.

"We have to be able to maybe have less numbers at practice, maybe different spacing at practice," he said. "And it's not just practice — it's treatment, the training room, the locker room. The one thing I'm positive of is things are going to be different."

Caruso is encouraged by the planning that's happened over the past three months.

"What keeps me sleeping at night and having a little peace in my heart is having the confidence and knowing the powers that be are not taking any precaution lightly," Caruso said.

NHL inching closer

The NHL is moving toward resuming its season, with the start of training camps set to begin July 10 if medical and safety conditions allow. The playoffs, involving 24 teams, would start in early August at two hub cities.

Wild General Manager Bill Guerin, whose club is slated to face the Vancouver Canucks in a best-of-five preliminary round, puts confidence in the league's protocols, which includes daily coronavirus testing.

"What the league and us as individual teams have been extremely diligent on is making sure we have the right procedures where we can keep everybody involved safe," Guerin said. "We would only do this if we could do that. We're not going to do this just for the sake of doing it and put people in harm's way."

The NHL announced Friday that 11 players have tested positive. Three players and additional staff members of the Tampa Bay Lightning were among the positive tests, and the team shut down its training facilities.

It will be interesting to see how the NHL handles the on-ice social distancing aspect of the sport. Playoff hockey, charged with intensity, often includes scrums with plenty of face-to-face conflicts. In one extreme episode two years ago, the Boston Bruins' Brad Marchand licked Tampa Bay's Ryan Callahan under his nose, behavior that in 2020 could lead to a COVID-19 infection.

Dr. Shmuel Shoham, an infectious disease expert at Johns Hopkins University, is encouraged by the NHL's plan for two hub cities and emphasis on frequent testing. He said for any sport, staying disciplined is the key.

"Monitor for symptoms all the time," he said, "and if anyone turns positive, pounce on that."

Wrestling with reality

Ask if social distancing can happen during a wrestling match, and Jim Moulsoff has a quick one-liner.

"No, that's stalling," Augsburg's co-head coach said of the passive, clock-draining tactic that can lead to wrestlers being penalized.

Wrestling, it could be argued, involves the closest contact of any sport. The U.S. Olympic and Paralympic Committee in April included wrestling among sports with a "high risk" of disease transmission in its return-to-competition guidelines, pointing to "close, sustained contact between participants, lack of significant protective barriers, and high probability that respiratory particles will be transmitted between participants."

According to the Wall Street Journal, USA Wrestling criticized that designation, arguing that data didn't support that distinction. This led to some changes in labeling, with "Level I" replacing "high risk."

Events such as the USA Wrestling Junior Nationals, which drew more than 5,000 competitors to Fargo last July, have been canceled.

Moulsoff, who has led Augsburg to three NCAA Division III titles, emphasized that wrestlers are prepared to deal with coronavirus protocols because they are constantly monitoring their weight and guarding against skin infections.

"Adding one more thing really isn't going to faze them," he said. "They're always willing to adapt, whatever it takes, so they can get on the mat."

Hoehn, the athletic trainer with Mayo Health Systems, said "it's naive to think [sports] won't start back up."

"But we also have to be prepared for the fact that if we start to see a significant amount of issues or a significant amount of teams or groups that come down with COVID, we're going to see things close to shut back down," he said. "There's really no way to know that."

A coronavirus mess in Russian soccer raises nightmarish questions for American sports

Henry Bushnell

The NBA's nightmare scenario unfolded 6,000 miles away from Disney World last week, in two seaside cities in southwestern Russia.

On Wednesday, 48 hours before a Russian Premier League soccer match, six players from FC Rostov tested positive for the coronavirus.

On Friday, when Rostov's game at PFC Sochi kicked off, those six players and all of their teammates were self-isolating at home.

Over the next two hours, a patchwork squad of teenage replacements lost 10-1. Rostov's push for a Champions League berth froze. And a frightening question facing every major sport met a frightening answer.

The RPL resumed, amid a pandemic its nation has failed to corral, with strict coronavirus protocols, just like American leagues will over the coming weeks. And it learned, just like American leagues will, that the 100-plus-page documents and intensive plans are the easy part.

"Like most war plans," says Vanderbilt infectious disease specialist Bill Schaffner, "they're great until the war starts."

The hard part is what happens when the virus tears them to shreds.

The NBA's protocols aren't the RPL's, and U.S. sports should be better protected. But what happens when Rostov-lite hits Disney? When a few NBA stars test positive the day before the conference semifinals? Or when a starting quarterback is forced into quarantine on the eve of a rivalry game? What then?

The headaches of handling positive tests



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • June 22, 2020

Whether COVID-19 will infiltrate sports bubbles remains to be seen. The German Bundesliga and other top Western European soccer leagues have so far evaded it. But American leagues are concerned. The virus is spreading through Florida, where the NBA, WNBA and MLS will encamp next month. Bubble building "is a reasonable task," says Jared Baeten, an epidemiology professor at the University of Washington. "But it has to go hand-in-hand with good public health measures in the communities surrounding it."

And that's where European and American environments diverge. The UK, Spain, Italy and Germany reported a combined 2,476 cases on Saturday. Florida alone reported 4,049. Whereas those European nations have suppressed the virus, it's once again rising in the U.S. Florida is more analogous to Russia than Germany. Which is why the Rostov situation, coupled with outbreaks in MLB and college football, and with positive tests in the NWSL, MLS and NFL, sparks worry.

And not just individual health worry. That's paramount, or at least should be, but sports seem willing to forge ahead despite it. The other worry is whether they can forge ahead uninterrupted, with an uncorrupted product. Rostov, technically, played on despite the positive tests. But Friday's game was a farce.

European soccer's coronavirus navigation exposes the lack of painless solutions for positive tests. In Russia, they required a team-wide quarantine. The RPL suggested postponing games, but only if both teams could agree to a new date. Rostov's opponent, Sochi, refused. So Rostov called a youth team back from vacation to play against pros. The kids hadn't trained in three months. They got smashed.

The postponement alternative, however, brings alternative headaches. Russia will try it after three Dynamo Moscow players tested positive on Saturday. Germany tried it when two players from Dynamo Dresden, a second-division club, tested positive for COVID-19 last month. The entire team quarantined to "break an infection chain," as their doctor put it. Games were rescheduled. But that meant eight matches in 22 days for Dresden, a draining stretch run that left the club relegated and players in tears.

"The [German league] doesn't care," one said in an emotional postgame interview. "We're the ones paying the f***ing price."

Sports leagues have crammed rigid schedules into finite time periods. The NBA has set start dates for each round of its playoffs. Flexibility is limited. A bevy of postponements is unfeasible. Extended, full-team isolation is the safest response to a positive test, experts say. It's essentially what the CDC recommends to the general public. But, as Schaffner says, it "throws the whole schedule out of whack."

Which is why the NBA appears prepared to try a different strategy.

How would the NBA handle a coronavirus outbreak?

The NBA's plan to test players "regularly," and in some cases daily, should prevent a Rostov-like outbreak, experts say. Six positive tests, in theory, shouldn't show up in one batch. The "up-front investment" in frequent testing, says Emory University epidemiologist Zachary Binney, should limit player-to-player spread. And the NBA's 113-page "Health and Safety Protocols" document distributed last week makes clear that one positive test won't shut down the league.

It could, however, still wreak havoc.

"It seems almost impossible to imagine the virus won't get inside the bubble," Baeten says. So let's imagine that it does in early September. Imagine that the day between Games 3 and 4 of the Eastern Conference semis, Player X – a starter for Team A – tests positive. Then consider this:

Player X will be quarantined and won't play again for at least 14 days, leaving Team A shorthanded.

Even if Player X tested negative 24 hours earlier, there's a chance, experts say, that he could have infected any player he shared the floor

with during Game 3, or anybody else he came into close contact with throughout the day.

Anybody infected by Player X at Game 3 and tested the following day will almost surely return a false negative. And they likely will again the following day. And the day after that. The virus takes time to incubate. Officials won't know how many peers Player X has infected until at least a few days after Player X's positive test.

Any players he has infected, meanwhile, could spread the virus to others before testing positive themselves.

Testing is useful but fallible. This is why isolation of all "close contacts" of a COVID-positive individual has become common practice, in society and sports leagues alike. But in the NBA, isolation of "close contacts" would require postponements or forfeits. One or two might be stomachable. Any significant number isn't.

So let's say the league postpones Game 4, and reschedules it for the following day, with plans to forge ahead. ...

What if, knowing that Player X's teammates – Players Y and Z – could be infectious, several opponents refuse to play?

What if Team A wins Game 4 and sweeps the series – and then, a day later, Players Y and Z test positive? Do the conference finals go ahead with Team A missing three of its best players? Do other teammates have to isolate because they remained in "close contact" with Players Y and Z? Does this whole dang thing have a big fat asterisk next to it?

There are really only two scenarios that don't lead to a competitively corrupted mess. The first is that the bubble proves impermeable. The second is that it isn't, but that every potential outbreak is nipped in the bud, protocols preempt positive tests from multiplying, and are lenient enough to allow the season to continue apace.

The first scenario, experts say, is unlikely.

The second, in short, will require constant vigilance, on-the-fly adjustments and significant luck. Three months of it.

Every professional sports league will face some versions of these questions in 2020. For now, while everything remains theoretical, they can be brushed off. When the virus interrupts, they'll come knocking, inescapably, without good answers. Only more questions.

Leagues and schools want money, and society wants normalcy, but do sports represent it when they're extremely abnormal? When a mediocre college football team wins its conference via forfeits? When a 5-seed wins an NBA title because the coronavirus cleared its path? What then? What was the point? Were all the ludicrous contingency plans and health risks and trepidation and potentially damaged lungs worthwhile?

Lightning close facility after COVID-19 positives; sources say more positive tests around NHL

By Joe Smith and Michael Russo Jun 19, 2020

On Thursday, the Lightning told players who were planning to come to Tampa to not come yet due to the fluid situation, according to multiple sources. The team confirmed the positive tests on Friday by releasing a statement from GM Julien BriseBois. The players are self-isolating and their only symptoms are a low-grade fever, according to the statement, and the team's "facilities will remain temporarily shut down until we can ensure a safe environment."

But there have been other new cases elsewhere in the league this week, according to multiple sources league-wide and in Arizona, where players from multiple teams have been skating outside of the Coyotes' practice facility.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • June 22, 2020

The NHL released a statement Friday evening that said "in excess of 200 players have undergone multiple testing (for COVID-19 since training facilities opened on June 8). A total of 11 of these players have tested positive."

The names of the players infected have not been released and The Athletic's policy is to not identify athletes by name unless the team or player confirms the positive test for COVID-19. On Thursday, an NHL source said he was "not in a position to comment at this point." On Friday, the league did not respond to requests for comment.

Sources also confirmed the NHL and NHLPA may for the remainder of Phase 2 simply announce "an NHL player or NHL players" tested positive for COVID-19 in perhaps a weekly report rather than continue to identify the player's team or what market he was skating in, as first reported by TSN's Bob McKenzie. The league announced Friday evening it would release a weekly update that did not identify the players or teams.

There have been 18 players working out at the Tampa facilities, with three groups of six split between Amalie Arena and TGH Sportsplex in Brandon. But the Lightning are not the only ones who have been impacted in the area. On Thursday, it was revealed that one Tampa Bay Buccaneers assistant coach tested positive, with a couple other coaches quarantined. This comes in the first week that NFL coaches were allowed back in team facilities. The Philadelphia Phillies confirmed Friday that five players and three staffers working at the Clearwater, Fla., facility tested positive. All of the club's facilities are closed indefinitely, "until medical authorities are confident the virus is under control and our facilities are disinfected," according to managing partner John Middleton.

The NHL began Phase 2, which opened team training facilities to players to voluntarily participate in workouts with a maximum of six players at one time, on June 8. Phase 2 protocol requires COVID-19 testing where available, temperature checks, masks when not working out and lockers spaced at least six-feet away.

The Phase 2 protocol states that: "Players who participate in Phase 2 are not permitted to work out or skate at any public facility or other location, and may not organize any Player skates or group skates outside of the training sessions organized by the Club."

But Phase 2 is optional and players who choose to not go to a team facility can skate where they want and do not have to follow the guidelines agreed to by the NHL and NHL Players' Association.

The majority of NHLers have not officially entered Phase 2. For instance, in Minnesota, all Wild players and Minnesota-based NHLers are skating at facilities outside of the Wild's practice facility, TRIA Rink. In Arizona, multiple NHL players have been skating on their own at Oceanside Ice Arena, the home of Arizona State's hockey team.

Last week, the NHL and NHLPA announced training camps (Phase 3) would open on July 10, "provided that medical and safety conditions allow and the parties have reached an overall agreement on resuming play."

The protocol for Phases 3 and 4 is being negotiated now, and a vote by the players is still needed to approve a return to play.

Those protocols could include a quarantine period for players who are not now participating in Phase 2 in their NHL city.

The rules for participating in Phase 2 stated that: "Prior to resumption of small group activities, some individuals ... traveling back to their Club's home city may be required to serve a 14-day self-quarantine imposed by the local health authorities, regardless of their mode of travel (private or charter travel). Even if not imposed by the local health authorities, such individuals returning to the Club's home city by public transportation, including commercial air or rail travel, must serve a 14-day self-quarantine period post-travel before engaging in training activities at their Club's facility.

"In addition, Club Medical personnel may impose a 14-day quarantine on Players and Permitted Personnel returning to the Club's home city from a

high-risk environment, even if they are not travelling via public transportation. Guidelines for the designation of highrisk environments will be provided to Clubs by the NHL in consultation with the NHLPA as soon as practicable."

COVID-19 cases on the rise among athletes as leagues prepare to restart

Marty Klinkenberg

As more professional sports get closer to restarting, a number of COVID-19 cases in athletes were confirmed on Friday in everything from baseball to hockey to golf.

Reports indicate that Auston Matthews, the Toronto Maple Leafs star, is among them. The 22-year-old had been training in Arizona with teammate Frederik Andersen and players from the NHL's Coyotes.

In a busy day of COVID-19-related developments, the Toronto Blue Jays closed down their training facility in Dunedin, Fla., after one player tested positive for the novel coronavirus. A few hours earlier, the Philadelphia Phillies shut down their complex in Clearwater after five players and three other staff members tested positive.

Dunedin and Clearwater are fewer than 10 kilometres apart, and Florida reported a record number of 3,822 new cases on Friday. Arizona is also among the states with surging numbers, with a record-high of 3,246 new cases.

The Blue Jays said everyone at their camp has been tested. The club said it was following protocols established by its medical team and Major League Baseball.

In nearby Tampa on Thursday, the Lightning shuttered their facility after three players and additional employees also tested positive.

General manager Julien BriseBois said in a statement that the players are self-isolating and are asymptomatic, "other than a few cases of low-grade fever."

BriseBois said the facility would be closed until a safe environment existed for reopening.

The sudden closing occurred two weeks after NHL players had begun to return for voluntary workouts, skating in groups of six at a time. The league, which suspended play on March 12 because of the spread of the virus, hopes to be able to resume with playoff games at the end of next month or the beginning of August.

Friday's troubling news came as the federal government announced that it was willing to work with the NHL to help create a postseason hub city in Canada. The league has said it would prefer to resume with games played by 24 teams at only two sites.

Arrangements are being made to allow players from American teams to cross the border without having to go into quarantine for 14 days. That removes a potential hurdle to bids being made by Edmonton, Toronto and Vancouver to act as a host city.

Baseball players had only begun to work out recently as they try to reach a deal with owners over how to start the season amid the pandemic, including health protocols. The sides hoped to begin testing players on Tuesday and then begin a second round of spring training on June 26.

In the NHL, the Coyotes announced last weekend that one staff member had tested positive for the infectious respiratory illness.

An American golfer, Nick Watney, withdrew on Friday from the RBC Heritage in South Carolina ahead of the second round after he tested



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • June 22, 2020

positive for COVID-19. Watney, who travelled privately to Hilton Head Island for the tournament, is the first player on the PGA Tour known to test positive.

The PGA said Watney reported he had symptoms Friday morning and was withdrawn from the event. He played the first round on Thursday in a group with fellow Americans Vaughn Taylor and Luke List.

Two Major League Soccer players also tested positive. One is a member of Inter Miami and the other plays for Atlanta United. Teams are preparing for the July 8 start of the MLS is Back Tournament in the Orlando area.

Matthews scored a team-high 47 goals for the Maple Leafs during the regular season and finished third in the league in that department, only one behind David Pastrnak of Boston and Alex Ovechkin of Washington.

Matthews would become the highest-profile player in hockey to come down with the infectious respiratory illness, and the second highest-profile player in any sport after Ezekiel Elliott of the NFL's Dallas Cowboys. The All-Pro running back was diagnosed earlier in the week.

The Maple Leafs would not confirm if Matthews has been found to have COVID-19, although the NHL did confirm on Friday night in a statement that 11 players have tested positive since clubs opened their facilities on June 8.

"Per the National Hockey League protocol, [we] will not be commenting on reports surrounding testing for any of the club's players or staff," the organization said in a release Friday night. "A person's medical information in this regard is private.

"The club will defer to the NHL's policy on handling the disclosure of positive test results, in that the league will provide updates on a regular basis with aggregate totals of the number of tests conducted and number of positive tests reported without disclosing either the identities of affected clubs or players."

The Athletic / What's it like to do play-by-play of an NHL game from a monitor?

By Joe Smith and Sean Shapiro Jun 19, 2020

You'll be able to hear everything.

Connor McDavid calling for a pass. Jon Cooper barking orders from the bench. Brad Marchand chirping – well – everyone. Referees trying to break up scrums.

You'll be able to see more, too.

Imagine some inside access between periods, views from ice level you've never had access to, like a roving camera on the blue line, one from the scoreboard, another from behind the net.

You'll still have the familiar voice of legendary broadcaster Doc Emrick, who'd be calling games off a monitor from a studio.

But if and when the Stanley Cup Playoffs are resumed this summer, league and network executives are describing it as a "made for TV event." And while there will likely be no fans allowed in the building, viewers will have as interactive and intimate experience as they've ever had.

"We see it as an opportunity to look at the game differently," said Sam Flood, executive producer and president, production for NBC and NBCSN. "We can try new camera positions, more mic's, give people the real sounds of the game, knowing that at times the language would be

colorful. It's a game that has passion on the ice and we think it'll be a great transition to the home audience."

There's nothing set in stone from a broadcast perspective, just as the two hub cities haven't been officially chosen. But Flood said he and his staff have enjoyed their weekly Monday 2 p.m. calls where ideas on their "wish list" have been pitched and discussed. The league has been open, too.

"I talk to (commissioner) Gary Bettman at least once a week, and he's constantly saying, 'Push us,' 'Keep adding elements,'" Flood said. "They're telling us to be aggressive. The league is trying to give the best possible experience to fans as we move forward."

What we do know is this:

The local affiliates will likely get a chance to broadcast their team's games for the play-in/round-robin games and then the first round of the playoffs, which will be great for veteran broadcasters like the Lightning's Rick Peckham who are in their final season.

Emrick said he's expecting to be calling the playoffs, at least the beginning, from a studio, which means broadcasters will have a unique challenge of doing their calls off a TV monitor.

The biggest changes in broadcasts will be the amount of cameras and microphones networks will be able to use. There's a chance you could see a robot camera at center ice, two robotic cameras behind the net, one at each blueline. You can also drop a camera from the scoreboard like the NHL did at the All-Star Game. "Those are the kind of things that give a more intimate view," Flood said.

While there will be the lack of crowd noise, and there's been no indications yet that the league will try to pipe in cheers, the networks plan to take advantage of the game's iconic sounds, like tape to tape passes and collisions. The main difference will be the chance to get more of the players and coaches talking during and, between whistles.

Player tracking software was initially scheduled to be available for the playoffs this year, but it doesn't sound like it'll be part of the production this time.

Flood said the network/league are looking into finding ways for the fans and viewers to have more interactive elements in the broadcast from their laptops, phones.

Finding a solution for television partners is one of the driving financial factors for the NHL when it comes to their return-to-play plan.

It's all about maintaining a multi-million dollar investment on both a national and local level.

That's why it's important that regional sports networks (RSNs) are involved in the early stages, according to Patrick Crakes, a former Fox Sports executive and media consultant.

Across the NHL, regional sports networks have it in their contracts that they get to broadcast the first round of the playoffs locally, it's part of the inventory promised when the networks pay \$20 million or more per season to the teams.

There is already going to be less inventory because of the stoppage, most teams still had 12 or 13 games remaining, so Crakes said it's just good business practice to use the play-in and round-robin rounds to help square things up.

"These two sides are often long-term partners when it comes to RSNs and teams. The RSNs know the teams are dealing with a pandemic, so simply asking for money back to make up for three or four lost games isn't the best business practice," Crakes said. "Instead they'll want to make sure they are getting the best possible solution, and both sides can figure out other financial matters and maybe move larger issues into another season."



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • June 22, 2020

RSNs and television providers have had their squabbles in the past, some are currently ongoing, and for the RSNs having that content is more valuable than trying to fight battle on both sides.

Many RSNs also carry games for their local MLB team, and with a 162-game schedule, baseball is the priciest and often most important right an RSN can secure to fill daily content from April to September.

With baseball's return on a rocky terrain, a pandemic combined with labor issues, RSNs are even more desperate for summer programming in August since replaying classic games only goes so far.

Without fans in the stands finding alternative revenue streams with these broadcasts is going to be important for the NHL according to Lee Berke, a media consultant for LHB Sports, Entertainment, and Media, Inc.

"The NHL is going to take a loss with this without fans, so they'll need to do whatever they can and be creative as possible to make some of it up," Berke said. "We are seeing this across all the leagues, the NHL isn't any different."

Berke said this starts with advertising and he predicts there will be more digital ads placed within the game, potentially along the glass or maybe even along the ice during a replay. This is something that could be done on both the local and national broadcasts and overlaid the universal feed, according to Berke, giving individual teams and RSNs an additional revenue stream from the return-to-play format.

It's likely not going to go the extent of European hockey, where every inch of ice space is available to advertisers, but Berke said he wouldn't be surprised to see ads in areas on the ice that people have never seen before in an NHL game. It also extends to the broadcasters themselves, who may be asked to work more with advertisers than ever before.

Berke said it could sound similar to a baseball radio broadcast where play-by-play broadcasters are also pitchers throughout a game. "Doc Emrick might not like doing this liner, but if it means making money for the league you could see something like, 'This player now crosses the blue line brought to you by Geico,' in a broadcast," Berke said.

An advantage that Berke sees for the NHL is the partnership it already has with MLB Advanced Media. Whether it's a live feed or something supplementary content, the NHL could make that part of a pay-per-view package and sell direct to consumers.

"It's something that will take some negotiation to make sure it doesn't hurt any of the rights holder content or maybe they do it direct with the rights holder," Berke said. "Either way I think the NHL will have to look at ways to allow someone to get more personalized with their viewing since fans won't be there in person."

While the NHL is going to turn this into a made-for-TV event, calling games off monitors is still going to be a challenge and the product is going to sound different than the typical NHL broadcast.

For play-by-play broadcasters, they've lost their independent eyes on the game and have to call what's in front of them on the screen.

"We aren't always looking at what is on the screen, we often look at a larger picture," Stars play-by-play broadcaster Josh Bogorad said. "Like if there is an odd-man rush and a third man coming in, he's so important to the play and we need to share that detail. But that detail might be out of frame, so there are going to be moments like that."

Lightning radio play-by-play man Dave Mishkin has called more than two dozen games off a monitor, including the 2015-16 playoffs, so he could stay at home while his wife, Dulcie, battled breast cancer. He then did 11 more in the fall of 2017 when his wife had surgery.

"I had done all those games in 2016, and a year and a half later, I remember doing the first period against Buffalo and I'm like, 'Damn, this is hard,'" Mishkin said. "It really is a challenge to call a game off the monitor. You manage it. But it's tougher to see everything in two dimensions. You generally want to stay on the puck, but it can be tough

looking at a monitor that's two dimensions where the puck gets lost on the camera. You make due the best you can."

Mishkin said one example was a Lightning game in Colorado during the 2017 season, when Avalanche defenseman Erik Johnson boarded a Tampa Bay player. It was a dangerous hit, followed by a scrum and a TV timeout. All of a sudden, Mishkin was in the dark.

"We're in a commercial and I'm like, 'Is Johnson getting a two-minute (penalty) or a five?'" Mishkin said. "I'm doing the best I can to . But no penalties were announced. The broadcast comes back and the Lightning (are) on a power play. I said, 'Lightning on a power play,' and 30 seconds in, the clock shows up at 4:30, so I'm like, 'That was actually a major penalty. If I were to critique myself I would have ripped myself to shreds if I were at the game. But sometimes they're a little behind and you're flying blind."

The use of a universal feed is also going to create some interesting decisions for broadcasters. If a shot pans to a player on the bench, say Nashville Predators defenseman Roman Josi, the broadcast crew will have to decide whether to use it as a talking point or just keep moving forward.

"If it fits into your call you'll use it, but you also don't know how long it's going to be on that player or stat since it's not your truck or your camera guys you are used to working with," Bogorad said. "That's going to be something we'll figure out on the fly."

Lightning color analyst Brian Engblom said there's so much chemistry involved in local broadcasts where he's talking with producers to set up replays they want to show at the next break, so it'll take a lot of adjusting on the fly when they're limited to the national feed.

"You learn to talk generalities until you see what pops up," Engblom said. "Depending on how tight the camera is, you might miss some stuff. I don't get to do the job the way I like to do it. You don't get as much feel for the game. But it's better than nothing. We'll be glad to be doing it, and we'll make it work."

Nashville Predators color analyst Chris Mason said the monitor setup is going to be more difficult for play-by-play voices.

"I can't imagine doing the play-by-play like that, as an analyst you get to step back and use the replay sometimes anyway," Mason said. "We'll be able to adjust easier and not sound like it's as different as it will be for play-by-play guys."

One part of the broadcast that'll be lost are some of the minor details and facts picked up without typical access at practice or morning skates. While players and coaches will be made available to the media, like through outlets like Zoom or via phone, it's not the same as gathering information in person in the locker room.

"There are things about the game and conversations you have with players about this or that are going to be hard to schedule in a formal call," Mason said. "We'll try to get everything, but I'm going to miss that part of being at the rink."

That's part of what makes Emrick great on the national broadcast. The morning of a game he's in the locker room meeting with players and exchanging stories, finding the anecdotes that enhance a broadcast.

Those conversations might not be happening anytime soon, but Emrick knows he still has a job to do.

"We have a responsibility to deliver a wonderful product to people," Emrick said. "I'm sure there's going to be plenty of creativity. There may not be crowds, but there's going to be a lot of excitement, collisions, saves, close calls. I can't wait."



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • June 22, 2020

Frank Seravalli

The incoming Class of 2020 will be the first elected to the Hockey Hall of Fame without face-to-face debate and deliberation in the cathedral's 77-year history.

Instead, the Hall's 18-member selection committee is scheduled to convene on a virtual conference call on Wednesday and then conduct voting through a secure, secretive online portal.

The 2020 inductees will be announced later Wednesday at 4:30 p.m. ET on TSN.

Yes, every business – even the Hockey Hall of Fame, which has been closed to visitors since March 14 – has been forced to adjust in the era of COVID-19.

"This is a first for us," HHOF president and CEO Jeff Denomme said. "I don't think there's any doubt that these meetings are much better suited for discussion in person, but in no way are we compromising our process. Our selection committee members are knowledgeable and professional and will make sure it's handled really well."

In a normal year, the 18 selection committee members arrive in Toronto on a Monday in June, gather for dinner in the Esso Great Hall at the Hall of Fame, and then begin debating nominees on Tuesday morning.

That is nearly impossible this year, particularly with members Jari Kurri, Anders Hedberg and Igor Larionov located in Europe – not to mention the others spread around the continent and the strict safe distancing protocols in place for large gatherings.

This year, Denomme will be at the Hall of Fame with chairman Lanny McDonald and local Toronto-area voters, while selection committee chairman John Davidson will have to use his skills as a former broadcaster to virtually spur and steer the conversation from afar.

"It's much better in person, there is more spontaneity, no overtalking, but John will get them to talk," Denomme said. "John is very good at carrying the discussions. He knows the members well and he can get them to speak to their opinions and views."

Every facet of the conversation is confidential; selection committee members are forbidden from discussing voting or even disclosing the name of a nominee.

Voters will be provided with an election manual that contains all relevant information for each candidate. Individual selection committee members may nominate a maximum of one candidate for each category, including one player, one builder and/or one referee/linesman.

Denomme said some selectors prepare a presentation for their own nominees and the committee will have those presentation slides in-hand as well.

Then it's time to vote.

Elections will be held in order, starting with male players, then female players, followed by referee/linesman and the builder category last.

"Our bylaws call for secret balloting and we will continue that process virtually in our secure portal," Denomme said. "Each selector will have a unique User ID and no one, including our staff, will know who is who."

If the virtual portal is a success, Denomme said the Hall plans to make electronic voting a permanent fixture moving forward, with the committee hopefully meeting face-to-face for debate next year, followed by voting in the room on handheld tablets.

The reason is speed and efficiency.

With a maximum of four male players, two female players, plus two builders – or one builder and one referee/linesman – that can be inducted

in any one class, there often needs to be a series of three or four run-offs to determine the honourees.

Any candidate who receives 75 per cent affirmation – or at least 14 of the 18 votes – will be considered elected. Two-time Rocket Richard winner and Golden Goal playmaker Jarome Iginla heads the list of first-time eligible candidates.

"We could have five, six, seven, or eight times through voting in one category, it all depends," Denomme said. "As opposed to doing it on paper, it doesn't take that long, but we will be able to tabulate it quite quickly with technology and produce the next ballot."

Once the Class of 2020 is decided, Denomme said the next big question will be whether the Hall of Fame will need to delay the induction ceremony. It is tentatively scheduled for Nov. 16.

Given the personal nature of the event and the camaraderie of the entire weekend's events – from the ring ceremony to the Legends Classic Hall of Fame game to the induction itself – Denomme said this isn't an event that can be conducted virtually.

Denomme said the Hall of Fame has until the end of July or early August to make a determination on November.

"It's in question, no doubt. I hope we don't have to consider an alternative, but the worst-case scenario is we have to induct the Class of 2020 together in Nov. 2021," Denomme said. "That's a reality we may have to face."

Until then, Denomme is just hoping deliberation and voting goes off without a glitch.

"It will be interesting. We've never done it before," Denomme said. "I guess we'll learn."

The Athletic / LeBrun: NHL's return still on track for summer amid CBA and hub city questions

By Pierre LeBrun

Jun 18, 2020

The person at the other end of the phone took a second to catch his breath.

"Man, it's nuts right now," he said.

The source is involved in the negotiations and all the phone calls right now happening between the NHL and NHL Players' Association, and the many calls going on internally within each respective side.

Why is it nuts?

Oh, I don't know, maybe because the NHL and NHLPA are attempting to hammer out the complicated layers to the Phase 3 and Phase 4 Return to Play agreement while at the same time negotiating a CBA extension in their free time.

Holy mama.

And here's the catch, that CBA extension, or at least the Memo of Understanding, has become so intertwined with Return to Play that one source suggested Thursday it's probably all going to be presented as one package to the players at some point before the end of the month.

There's certainly urgency with the announced July 10 start of training camps to get things done as soon as possible within the next 10 days or so. Especially with some players' contracts technically expiring June 30 (but more on that below).



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • June 22, 2020

In the interim, it means endless calls on both sides, which is expected to continue throughout the weekend and into next week. No off days for anyone involved until this all gets done one way or another.

But does it get done? Do we actually have a hockey tournament in August?

"Yeah I think so," one player with knowledge of the talks said Thursday. "I don't see too many things getting in the way at this point. Both sides want to make it happen. But you know how this works: always goes down until the last minute before a deal can get done."

Let's take a look at some key items:

Players call

The NHLPA's Executive Board (31 player reps) had another call on Tuesday night, one which also included other players (any player in the membership can join these calls if they wish). There were some questions from players that the NHLPA leadership simply can't answer yet. Not until the hub cities are selected and/or the Phase 3/4 agreement finalized. But some players, according to sources, piped up on the call Tuesday because they want to know some things. They have health concerns and they want to know when to go back to their NHL markets in time for camp if they don't know yet if there's actually going to be hockey? There were more questions on protocols and life inside the bubble. But there were also players who want to know where the CBA extension is headed. More and more, there are players who feel they won't commit to playing until they know what the economic landscape (escrow) will look like over the next couple of years.

All of which is to say this: While I think the majority of players still intend to play this summer, there is a group of players, though seemingly smaller in size yet not insignificant, who are vocal about their reluctance to come back and play and until they get more firm answers to their questions they may not change their mind.

To that end ...

With that in mind, it's my understanding that the NHLPA intends to negotiate in the Phase 3/4 agreement language that protects those players who feel uncomfortable with playing this summer, the idea being they could 'opt out' if they so choose. There would likely be some financial repercussion, like not getting a share of their team's playoff pool, for example. But I think it's clear that the NHLPA wants to ensure if players aren't comfortable playing, then the option of sitting out is there for them. But once players commit to life in the bubble, they're committed to the rules and protocols that are expected to be pretty tight.

CBA looms large

Players, and frankly owners and GMs, too, want to know what the CBA extension will look like and how it's going to impact the next few years.

My understanding is that one idea being broached as part of the CBA discussions is capping players' escrow at 20 percent this season and next — so two years in total — and simply carrying the overage, the money still owed, past those two years until the debt is eventually paid up. The hope is with a new U.S. TV deal and the pandemic situation eventually easing over the next few years, revenues will grow again and players can pay off their tab under better economic conditions. Of course, there's no guarantee of any of that.

But the idea a few sources have explained to me is for the NHL to freeze the salary cap, cap the escrow at 20 percent, and perhaps defer in and around 10 percent of the players' salaries, too, to make the whole financial puzzle work over the next two years.

Whatever the case, a CBA extension will require a full NHLPA membership vote, all 800-plus players. It's not clear yet whether the Phase 3/4 Return to Play agreement would be a full membership vote or simply an Executive Board (31 player reps) vote.

Critical dates

Through all this, the NHL and NHLPA continue to negotiate the critical date calendar. In fact, one source said both sides had another call on it Wednesday. This much we think we know: If there's no delay in return to play and the 24-team tournament is played without a hiccup, the Stanley Cup Final could bleed into early October and the NHL draft and the opening of free agency would also be held before the end of October. So Free Agent Frenzy on TSN around Halloween? (It beats having it on July 1, Canada Day, I can tell you that.)

So yeah, the fall could be nutty.

As part of that critical dates negotiation, both sides have to sign off on what it means for July 1 in a few weeks, when some players become free agents, obviously they won't actually become free agents until October if everything is agreed upon.

Hub cities

There's still work being done on hub cities with some markets resubmitting more details on their bids to the league. I'm told Toronto and Edmonton did that this week, for example.

While the COVID-19 cases are spiking in Nevada, a source suggested Thursday that Vegas remained a strong frontrunner to be a hub city.

Then it gets interesting. Despite all the speculation that Toronto is a frontrunner in Canada, I've had NHL and NHLPA sources tell me this week that in fact Toronto is not considered a frontrunner. It doesn't mean Toronto won't end up as a hub city, but the clear message was to put Edmonton and Vancouver right there with Toronto. All with an equal chance. The low number of cases in Edmonton alone should put that market in a decent position.

To which I asked one source involved in the process, could the NHL end up with both hub cities in the West? Vegas and Edmonton or Vegas and Vancouver? The answer was yes. If that's what everyone feels is safest from a COVID-19 perspective and makes the most sense, it's possible.

The league would rather have one in the East or Central and one in the West, but the point is, it will do whatever it feels is safest and makes the most sense. As one source said Thursday, what matters most is not having the whole tournament shut down one week in because a hub city has become a hot spot with COVID-19.

The hope is that the NHL and NHLPA will have their two hub cities selected sometime next week.

Hub hosts?

One other little item of interest: There are some who believe the hub city hosts shouldn't be able to actually play in their own town. So under this scenario some feel is possible, the Golden Knights would have to leave town and play their games in the other hub along with the rest of the Western Conference.

So let's say just it's Toronto and Vegas as hub cities; you'd have the West play in Toronto and the East play in Vegas.

But what if both hub cities end up based in the Western Conference? It would mean one hub city team will get to stay home while the other will need to travel because the Eastern Conference needs to have its tournament in either hub.

Or, in the end, both hub city hosts could stay put if one East market and one West market are chosen.

Either way, sources told me Thursday that all of that remains undecided.

The next 7-10 days will be critical in figuring out everything with Return to Play and the CBA.

The Athletic / By the numbers: Why the value of signing free agents is much lower than expected



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • June 22, 2020

By Dom Luszczyszyn

Jun 18, 2020

After years of overhyped excitement, perception surrounding the NHL's free-agent frenzy has started to change course over the past few years as many observers have begun to see it for what it is: a day of inevitable regret.

No day on the hockey calendar comes with more future headaches thanks to costly errors on contracts that are far too pricey and far too long for a player's value during the deal. It's a day where many mistakes are made, some of which are obvious from the onset. It's a topic I've written extensively on in the past, but even that may have vastly undersold just how bad things are.

Over the past couple of days, we've gone over the best and worst free-agent contracts of the decade, two vastly different lists that underscore the difficulties of navigating the open market. From those lists, it becomes clear just how difficult it is to get great value out of a free agent and just how easy it is for it all to blow up in a team's face. In collecting research for the best and worst rankings, it became clear that the state of free agency is significantly worse than imagined.

In crafting both lists, I went through every free-agent deal from 2010 onwards and measured an expected win valuation based on their cap hit percentage. In 2010, a five-year deal at \$5 million for a forward carries an expected win value of 8.5 wins, or 1.7 per season. That's close to top-line player money. In 2019, that same deal carries an expected value of 5.8 wins, or roughly 1.2 wins per season. That's borderline top-six money. Essentially, that number is what the team paid for.

What the team paid for can be compared to two things: What the team should've paid based on the player's projected value at the time and what the team actually received.

In the first case, it's checking to see whether a team is overpaying for a player's services by comparing their expected value from what they paid to their projected value based on an age curve. It's something teams do a majority of the time. Of the 468 skater contracts signed over the last decade, 285 of them (61 percent) could be seen as an overpay to varying degrees on the very first day of the deal.

More staggering though is the total. Teams have spent closer to \$4 billion on free agents over the last decade with an expectation of 1,122 wins in total. The projected value of those contracts however, was closer to 707 wins, a collective overpayment of about 59 percent across the board. In other terms, teams can expect to get about 63 cents for every dollar they spend. That's not a number that's become better or worse over time as teams start embracing analytics either. In fact, the last three seasons have been below that 63-cents on the dollar average.

It's truly staggering, but that's not the worst part. Not even close. That's just comparing team expectation based on the money doled out to what a model thinks is the likeliest scenario – what's several magnitudes worse is what actually happened.

In order to put everything on the same terms though, seasons that haven't happened yet need to be excluded. That means the expected value drops to 844 wins while the projected value drops to 593 wins. That distinction should greatly benefit teams as it excludes what should be the worst parts of bad contracts that haven't finished yet – like Milan Lucic's, Loui Eriksson's and Jack Johnson's. And yet it doesn't matter because what actually happens is so bad that nothing can make it look good.

I'm talking unfathomably worse. Please brace yourself because even my pessimistic forecasts apparently weren't pessimistic enough.

Since 2010, teams have paid for 844 wins at free agency. What they actually received was 217 wins. Two hundred and seventeen. That's a little more than one-quarter of what was expected of them. A chart feels necessary to visualize just how bad that is.

Imagine going to a store and instead of a 25 percent off sale, the clerk tells you "Welcome to Free Agent Frenzy! Today you'll be paying four-times market value for our goods and services. Enjoy!" That's basically the NHL every summer. Out of the 468 deals signed, just 96 (21 percent) have seen a positive surplus value to date, a truly horrible success rate that likely only goes down further as current deals age.

Sometimes the deal going off the rails is out of a team's control though, where a model would've agreed with the contract being handed out. Best laid plans often go awry and as you can see from the projected value being much higher than the actual value, there should be a big emphasis on "often." It's not just market price that's inflated, the projections have been way off base too, but I think there's a reason to explain some of that and it starts on Day 1 — how much was the player overpaid.

As you'll recall, 285 of the 468 deals were deemed overpayments as soon as the ink on the deal was dry, which leaves 183 deals that were either fair value, "steals" or anywhere in between. Of those 183, only 65 actually became good deals, a poor 36 percent success rate, but that also accounts for 68 percent of all good free-agent pacts. That leaves 31 good deals out of 285 overpays, or 11 percent. Those contracts that looked any degree of bad on Day 1 are much more destined to fail than the others who looked passable, doing so 90 percent of the time

Part of the reason for that is the initial projection expects a signed player to play out 100 percent of the deal and it is extremely rare for that to actually happen. Injuries play a much larger role for the older players that make up the free agent base, but more importantly is that teams have a low tolerance for underachievement, and that bar is reflective of what a player is being paid. A replacement-level player making \$6 million is obviously a much larger liability than one making \$1 million and when it's time for salary cuts, those players are the first ones on the chopping block.

In rare cases, players begin flaming out of their contract as early as the second year and the trend only gets worse with each passing season. Just over a quarter of players with deals that are longer than four years are out by year four, and by year five, it trends dangerously close to half. It's a small sample size afterward, but those with six-or-seven year deals (excluding players who haven't had a chance to finish their deals yet) don't make it to the end over two-thirds of the time. And it's worth noting players signing those contracts are usually the best players available too.

A player's salary always plays a role in his perception and when his services don't meet his price tag – as is often the case for players signed via free agency – teams will do whatever they can to get out of the contract.

But it's not just players failing to live up to their contracts over time due to aging – it starts on the day the deal is signed. This isn't just about Year 6 and Year 7. In the very first year of contracts, teams expect 315 wins and are projected to get 271. They receive 87, about 28 percent of their expected value which is right in line with the contract average. Year 1 is where the most total wins are lost.

That's mostly because of the sheer volume of deals which decreases the longer a contract is (every deal has a first year, but not every deal has a second, third or seventh year). That adds up to a large win deficit and showcases that the problem with free agency begins right away with players collectively underperforming from the get-go.

Looking at the above chart as an average rather than a total adds a bit more context and shows what most of us already know: deals get worse as they age. In Year 1, the average player underperforms their contract by half a win. By Year 4 and up, that jumps to one win and over on average. What's interesting though is that most of that difference is simply from teams paying more in deals that are longer. Expected wins (and projected as well) rise as the years go up, but average wins stagnate until Year 7 (where there are only two players, Zach Parise and Ryan Suter).

This is where it's necessary to go a bit beyond the numbers because some of these effects might come down to the human condition. Every



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • June 22, 2020

player is different, but there are two natural yet opposing feelings that can create a self-destructive environment: security and insecurity. Not every free agent fits into either bucket, there are exceptions to the rule, but both feelings can help explain why free agents fail to live up to expectations a large majority of the time.

Security means a player got their money, they've got it for a long time and now they're comfortable. The drive to succeed may be diminished as a result and that can lead to complacency, especially with all of the money being guaranteed (not that teams should take that away from the players). Insecurity means recognizing the magnitude of money being offered and the anxiety that comes with trying to live up to it year after year. It's players trying to do too much, and when that happens they become detriments more often than not especially as their play inevitably declines. It's difficult just doing what you've always done as if nothing has changed when the perception of a player's worth has completely changed due to the new monetary value attached to it. There's a lot of pressure attached to that and getting a proper valuation can help alleviate that. On top of that, there are likely other mental factors too that can contribute to a player's unexpected decline.

The last thing to consider is the act of projecting into the future is a very inexact science, especially in hockey where data isn't as strong as it could be. When it comes to crafting terms for a contract, teams are faced with guessing what a player will look like in three, five, seven years and that's a very difficult thing to do with the aging process being different for every player. It's especially trying as those player's circumstances change. The most important question to answer for incoming players is how they'll fit on their new team and one of the biggest hurdles in hockey still is separating a player's true individual impact outside the players he plays with and faces. Analytics have made significant strides in that regard over the past few years, but it's still far from perfect, and mistakes will be made along the way as a result of it.

As evidenced above, analytics can certainly provide an improvement over team's current frivolous spending habits in identifying a player's current worth and whether a contract is an overpayment, but there will still be plenty of times where the numbers will be wrong. Less wrong, sure, but still wrong.

Less wrong is still better than the current way of doing things where teams are getting a quarter on the dollar, an abhorrent return on investment. It's not as simple as saying no to all free agents – rosters have holes and players need jobs – but teams need to be significantly more vigilant in what they spend, who they spend it on and how long they're spending it. The worst deals aren't worth it almost 90 percent of the time and even the best deals don't live up to expectations even half the time.

There's a risk/reward to every hockey decision and right now, when it comes to free agency, there's far too much risk for not nearly enough reward. Part of that also comes from market pressure because, on top of estimating what a player will be, teams also have to worry about bidding wars from other teams coveting that same player's services. The open market drives the price up to dangerous levels creating contracts that are very difficult for a player to live up to. In those situations – which is a majority – teams need to learn to walk away and let it be another team's problem.

It's troubling just how often free agency deals fail, often to a spectacular degree, and the last decade should be a lesson for the next one: what you're paying for on July 1 probably won't be even close to what you're going to get.

Sportsnet.ca / 31 Thoughts: Breaking down major NHL Awards races

Elliotte Friedman | @FriedgeHNIC

June 18, 2020, 5:29 PM

- Four-player Hart race too close to call
- What happened in Buffalo?
- Will other NHL teams slim operations?

Prior obligations mean I won't be doing a full 31 Thoughts this week. Instead of the usual format, we'll talk awards debates, and then get to a few longer thoughts, including a breakdown of the situation in Buffalo.

Without further delay:

Wednesday night was supposed to be NHL Awards night. Instead, ballots were due this week.

The NHL asks that we don't reveal all of our selections, thereby ruining the suspense. So I will reveal just one pick and give a general outline of the rest. (The professional hockey writers select the Hart, Norris, Calder, Selke and Byng. Also, the Masterton, but on a separate ballot. GMS choose the Vezina, broadcasters the Adams.)

Remember: If I don't pick your favourite player — yes, it's because I hate them, your team and, most importantly, you.

HART TROPHY

Under consideration: Patrice Bergeron, Jack Eichel, Roman Josi, Brad Marchand, David Pastrnak. Yeah, I'm not crazy about Pastrnak being off the ballot.

On the ballot: Connor Hellebuyck. Monster season that saved the Jets.

It came down to: Leon Draisaitl, Nathan MacKinnon, Connor McDavid, Artemi Panarin. What an absolutely brutal choice. For me, never a more difficult awards decision.

Can we talk about McDavid? I'd like to talk about McDavid.

Every year, it gnaws at me more and more — I don't think he gets enough consideration for this award. Edmonton made the playoffs in one of McDavid's first four seasons, 2017–18. He won the Hart Trophy. Since then, he's finished fifth and third. Both times, he was named on slightly less than 50 per cent of the ballots.

I accept my share of the blame as I try to be consistent, and, historically, non-playoff performers do not sniff the Pine-Sol that cleans this award. But my feelings changed last year, because we are looking at a historically great player. When his career is over, are we going to look back at how he was treated in the voting and ask, "Were we collectively drunk?"

McDavid's determined recovery from a gruesome knee injury suffered in Game 82 of 2018–19 set a tone for the Oilers. That, to me, is a consideration. A big one.

I heard some rationale that you can't have two MVP candidates on the same team. Sorry, not buying that. It's not unprecedented (most recent: Pittsburgh's Jaromir Jagr and Mario Lemieux, finalists in 2001). Draisaitl and McDavid, should it happen, deserve their spots for being cornerstones of a team on pace for a 17-point improvement and the league's best power play since the NHL-WHA merger.

That said, I do think Draisaitl is going to sap votes from McDavid. He led all forwards in minutes per game, had a penalty-kill role and took 232 more defensive-zone draws. He had 12 points in six games when McDavid was hurt in February, and he was the first star in all three wins. Voters noticed.

Panarin was brilliant. The Rangers were a completely different team with him on the ice. On the whole, New York outscored opponents 150–143 five-on-five (51 per cent), but that tally was 75–38 when he was out there (66 per cent). As they surged, his candidacy grew. The Rangers weren't supposed to be anywhere near the playoffs, and Panarin led them to the



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • June 22, 2020

culp. I'm a big believer in recency bias, even in this gong show of a season. No candidate benefits more than he does.

In a couple of broadcast appearances, I said that if the Rangers made the playoffs, Panarin might run away with the Hart. As we conducted the voting, a couple of people I talked to mentioned our history with non-playoff performers. Since we're basing it on the regular season, the Rangers finished 11th in the East. Should he be penalized like McDavid was?

Meanwhile, the Avalanche were two points back of West-leading St. Louis with a game in hand, despite being ravaged by injuries. MacKinnon was their constant, a ridiculous 43 points ahead of Cale Makar, second on the team in scoring. He had points in 48 of his team's first 59 games, with back-to-back scoreless games just once in that span.

Also dominant at five-on-five (Colorado outscored opponents 69–45 with him on the ice in those situations), MacKinnon had a huge effect on two other excellent players. Away from the star centre, Gabriel Landeskog and Mikko Rantanen's five-on-five production dropped.

Four deserving candidates. Too close to call.

NORRIS TROPHY

Under consideration: Ryan Ellis, Mark Giordano, Victor Hedman, Seth Jones, Jaccob Slavin, Jared Spurgeon. Prediction: Slavin wins one in the next few years.

On the ballot: Dougie Hamilton, Charlie McAvoy, Alex Pietrangelo.

It came down to: John Carlson and Roman Josi.

This was a two-horse race, although Pietrangelo was excellent. Carlson came out of the gate like Secretariat in the 1973 Belmont Stakes. His 1.09 points per game was the best of any defenceman in the past 25 years. Yes, he gets a ton of power-play time, but he's also a regular second-pair defender on the NHL's sixth-best penalty kill.

Josi charged into the race by putting Nashville on his back after the Predators slept through the start of the season. At the Winter Classic on New Year's Day, he played 33:02 in Dallas. From that point until Feb. 10, a 16-game stretch, he played fewer than 25 minutes only twice, with a low of 24:22. John Hynes eased up on the reins afterwards, but there were times during that stretch it seemed like he singlehandedly saved their playoff chances.

CALDER TROPHY

Under consideration: MacKenzie Blackwood, Denis Gurianov, John Marino, Elvis Merzlikins, Ilya Samsonov, Nick Suzuki.

On the ballot: Adam Fox, Dominik Kubalik, Victor Olofsson.

It came down to: Quinn Hughes and Cale Makar.

It's close, but I voted for Hughes. One of the recent criticisms of my voting — which I agree with and try to address — is that I have a confirmation bias for those who play on Canadian teams. It's not that I favour these players, but I watch them much more so it can skew my perspective for better or worse.

On my ballot, Makar is not being punished for playing on a better team. As mentioned with MacKinnon, the Avalanche were walking wounded all season. He's their second-leading scorer, he's a terrific player, and he played a big role there.

But Hughes elevated the Canucks. Jacob Markstrom was their MVP, but Hughes drove the bus on the ice. Every Canucks game I watched next to Kelly Hrudey saw the ex-goalie hypnotized by two things: the arrival of late-night pizza and Hughes' passing ability. The eight Canucks who played more than 200 five-on-five minutes with him saw their shot attempts drop when he wasn't on the ice, while six of them had a higher goals-for percentage with Hughes than without him.

He had a huge impact on that team.

SELKE TROPHY

Under consideration: Blake Coleman, Phillip Danault, Tomas Hertl.

On the ballot: Gabriel Landeskog. Does not kill penalties, but, geez, is he a good defender.

It came down to: Patrice Bergeron, Anthony Cirelli, Sean Couturier and Ryan O'Reilly.

Big move by Cirelli to crack this top group. Of all the NHLers who played 900 five-on-five minutes, none were on ice for fewer goals against (23) than him. He wades into a class of long-time Selke stalwarts.

O'Reilly had a ridiculous even-strength year. Bergeron remains a major force on the NHL's best team. Couturier was the NHL's best faceoff man. One exec sent me some numbers (on the condition I not publish them) indicating how several Flyers who were struggling revived alongside Couturier. He thought it was interesting, because it made Philly a better team.

LADY BYNG TROPHY

Under consideration: Mitch Marner, Auston Matthews, Teuvo Teravainen, Zach Werenski, Mika Zibanejad.

On the ballot: Nathan MacKinnon, Ryan O'Reilly, Miro Heiskanen.

It came down to: Alex Pietrangelo and Jaccob Slavin.

It's time. One defenceman's won this award in 64 years (Brian Campbell, 2012). In a league that's made it harder to check, it's time to recognize guys that play more minutes and are under siege. Pietrangelo's 20 penalty minutes are a little high, as only 14 winners would have more. But, as Lou Reed once sang, let's walk on the wild side.

Slavin had just 10 minutes, and is developing into a true number one.

Greatest excitement: Brian Burke voted on this award. Can only imagine how much it annoyed him to pick the most gentlemanly player.

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

1. There's a lot to unpack with the Buffalo situation.

Let's start with what I didn't like about this. During the post-firing media availability, Terry and Kim Pegula indicated that Jason Botterill's three-week old vote of confidence expired when the draft was moved.

"Too many differences of opinion," Kim Pegula said.

"We felt we weren't being heard," Terry added.

Ignore your bosses at your own peril. But, this mass beheading (22 people, for now) affected people without security. People who breathed easier with the vote of confidence, taking it as a sign that they would be safe during an incredibly difficult time to find employment. Botterill had two years remaining on his contract. I believe the same goes for assistant GMs Randy Sexton and Steve Greeley. But, according to multiple sources, verbally agreed-to extensions for at least player development coach Krys Barch and AHL Rochester coach Chris Taylor (two years) were approved by Botterill, delayed by ownership, and will not be honoured. All of sudden, they are not employed, and if you are let go from a team, you can lose your health coverage (a bigger problem in the United States than Canada). I think that's cruel and wrong.

One bit of good news: Buffalo's head of hockey department IT, Kyle Kiebzak, was re-hired after initially being fired. His termination apparently was a mistake.

Why did this happen? When The Athletic's Tim Graham did an in-depth piece on the Pegulas in April, someone sent me one of Kim's quotes: "We fully admit we put trust in some of the wrong people and made decisions based on information that was given to us by them," she told Graham. "It's our fault. We put too much faith in certain people."



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • June 22, 2020

The person who sent me that quote said that was a bad omen for her hockey staff — that word around the league was the Pegulas were disillusioned by the advice the NHL had given them on hiring, thought they were poor choices, and would go insular. The fact they did no search before giving the job to Kevyn Adams should not be a surprise with that context. When he went on a road trip late in the season, people started to wonder where this was going. He's worked with them for years — they know him and trust him. Head coach Ralph Krueger has a huge hockey pedigree, but mainly outside of the NHL.

As an owner, you're entitled to do as you wish. But they have to accept a good chunk of blame for the reason the Sabres have gone sideways. You can't constantly be changing direction. Much of the amateur staff that was fired was hired in July 2017. I don't see how two drafts — especially the most recent ones — truly give you a fair picture. A third-rounder from 2019, Erik Portillo, was just named USHL Goalie of the Year. Maybe I'm missing something, but I don't see why you need to blow up that group.

Going back to their first GM, Darcy Regier, there's been disagreement about influence over decision-making. Botterill, for example, is not crazy about term. Even before he took over there, he'd indicated that he thought term was more dangerous than salary. He wasn't crazy about the Jack Eichel extension (which will turn out fine) or the Jeff Skinner one, but was overruled by ownership. In fact, I've heard from several sources that he pursued other free-agent forwards, offering high annual salaries but shorter terms. He lost those races, but felt they wouldn't regret onerous ends to those contracts.

The other thing that happened in Buffalo was the Pegulas did a top-to-bottom review of their organization. It was, from what I understand, very in-depth. They went over everyone's schedule. How many games did you see? Where did you go? There is word they considered some of those schedules "light."

When the Pegulas/Adams talk about "efficiency," this is one of the things they thought could be done a lot better. During their budget meetings, department heads were told to prepare multiple scenarios with different bottom lines. Botterill knew he was going to be asked to make painful decisions, and fought them.

Initially, I wondered if there was some roster/personnel issue that came up over the last three weeks, but now I don't think so. I think it was this. I thought he'd get one more year, but stood in the way of these moves — and that was it.

Another exec said an agent told him he was having a conversation with Botterill about a Buffalo free agent minutes before the Sabres announced the firing.

From a hockey perspective, word is that Krueger's been very positive about his group — backing the young core. The Sabres need a second-line centre and will continue their search to fill that hole. That can be easier said than done, but have cap flexibility pending free-agent decisions they need to make (Sam Reinhart would be the biggest). Other than that, word is they are looking for "experience with a positive mindset" to continue to push their young players in the proper direction.

That brings us to Eichel.

When the Pegulas say this is not a rebuild, I believe them, primarily because you can't sell that to your captain at this time. Last summer, people were asking, "How long until Connor McDavid wants out of Edmonton?" Now that they're winning, it's not a concern, so it shows how things can change.

He and Krueger have an excellent relationship. But the Sabres have to be worried about that question: How long will Eichel's patience last?

Over the next few weeks, I'd expect Adams to begin the process of rebuilding his department. It won't be one for one, obviously, but they will need help. Two names that were immediately mentioned to me were Rick Dudley (Carolina) and Scott Luce (Vegas), both with lengthy Buffalo

ties. No idea if they'd be interested, but the connections might appeal to everyone.

I wonder if Adam Mair, one of their development staff, will be asked about the Rochester job. He went behind the bench when Taylor went to Buffalo for a few weeks. I could also see Adams discussing development jobs with two ex-Sabres who've invested time locally — Matt Ellis and Brian Gionta.

Another source brought up 21-year-old forward Brett Murray. Drafted in 2016, Murray just played his first professional season at Rochester, notching 24 points in 55 games. The people who worked with him most are now gone. He's a free agent, and you have to make a call. It sounds like a small thing, but these are the kinds of decisions where there's got to be a proper process.

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

2. The Pegulas are getting hammered because of their finances. Let's be honest — no one's getting out of this unscathed, but there's something deeper at play here. I've heard from multiple people that other teams are considering "slimming down" their operations. There are legit worries about what could happen by June 30, because that's the day of the year that NHL contracts "end."

We'll see if these worries are unfounded, but I've also heard that there could be change to contract language. (Not for players, but for team employees.) There is talk about shorter terms and greater "force majeure" language, which allows for the breaking of a contract due to an "Act of God," or, say, a pandemic. There's also been discussion in the U.S. of making more employees "at will" — meaning they can be terminated at any time without explanation, as long as it is not an illegal firing. (This also allows employees to quit more easily, too.)

"They're the first, but won't be the last," one agent said this week.

3. Broadcast compatriot Kevin Bieksa caused a stir when he went on Sportsnet 650 Vancouver and said, "A lot of friends that I have and a lot of people that I've talked to that are going to be playing, they still don't have their equipment, they still haven't skated, they're still very skeptical.

"They haven't been told anything by their team, so I'm skeptical. I obviously want hockey back. I'd love to cover some games and watch it on TV and get everything back to normal, but I wouldn't jump the gun if I were the fans. I wouldn't get your hopes up too much yet.... There's so much to figure out."

I think we're going to learn a lot over the next two weeks. The NHL and NHLPA continue grinding away towards an agreement on safety protocol for Phase III (training camp) and Phase IV (games), in addition to the CBA. With camps scheduled for July 10, the players' vote on this is targeted for the end of June. I don't know if there will be two separate decisions (one for protocols and one for CBA) or one big, all-encompassing ballot, but it's expected each player will get an individual vote. So we're going to get the answers to Kevin's questions.

According to sources, the NHLPA has named its 12 negotiation committee members: Justin Abdelkader (Detroit); Ian Cole (Colorado); JT Compher (Colorado); Andrew Copp (Winnipeg); Lars Eller (Washington); Justin Faulk (St. Louis); Nick Foligno (Columbus); Ron Hainsey (Ottawa); Zach Hyman (Toronto); Anders Lee (Islanders); Darnell Nurse (Edmonton) and Yannick Weber (Nashville). Any other player who wishes to participate in these conversations can do so.

This comes at a time when the University of Texas announced 13 football players tested positive for COVID-19, the University of Houston halted workouts after six of their did, and we are seeing spikes in places like Arizona and Florida — where many NHLers live.

The NHL and NHLPA are working on opt-out language for anyone who may feel uncomfortable about playing. But part of their pitch might be that



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • June 22, 2020

the bubble will be safer than parts of North America. In some places, it looks like social distancing no longer exists.

The NBA released its return-to-play protocol this week, and it is pretty strict. NHLers shouldn't expect much different. National Basketball Players' Association Executive Director Michele Roberts told the Boston Globe it isn't a matter of if a player will test positive in the bubble, but when.

"That's the only realistic mindset you can have going into this," she said. "It's not any more of this 'if' — it's 'when' and what can I do to mitigate against the 'when.' When it happens, if I'm not successful, what treatment is available to me, what are my chances of being really, really sick, and how are you detecting the presence of an infection? Honestly, I don't think this is any different than what any American has to come to grips with."

Nowhere in the NBA's document was there an answer to the question: "How many tests shuts everything down?"

If you're looking for more info about what to expect, listen to Zachary Binney on 31 Thoughts: The Podcast this week. Binney is an epidemiologist who I came across on Twitter because of his interest in sports injuries. He's really good on the issue.

In addition, the NHL will now handle announcements of any positive COVID-19 tests. Previously, the teams handled that.

The Athletic / Kevin Weekes has a powerful voice and platform, and he's not afraid to use them

By Mark Lazerus

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Try to find someone in the hockey world who has a bad thing to say about Kevin Weekes. You can't. The man is aggressively nice. Whether he's met you before or not, he probably knows your name. He asks how your family is and genuinely wants to know. He's curious about your background, your heritage, your story. He has a knack for instantly making you feel comfortable around him.

It's a natural talent and innate character trait.

It's also a finely honed defensive mechanism.

"Over the years, I've had to know how to navigate a locker room," Weekes says. "If I didn't know how to navigate it, I wouldn't be allowed in it. It didn't matter how good you played. I know very well that hockey is primarily a white sport right now, and it has been historically. So you have to know how to relate to people."

Weekes spent 14 seasons as a professional goaltender, 11 of them in the NHL, reaching the Stanley Cup Final with the Hurricanes in 2002. He's now one of the most prominent voices in hockey, an analyst for the NHL Network and a multi-platform broadcaster who's called the last 10 Stanley Cup finals. He's universally respected for his on-air talent, his work ethic, his encyclopedic knowledge of the game and the people in it, as well as his charitable work in North America and his parents' native Barbados.

He's also been pulled over by police for no reason other than he's black and driving a nice car. His senior-citizen parents have been harassed at the airport within the last year. He's had racial epithets hurled at him as a young player in Philadelphia. He even had to endure reporters whose names he won't "dignify" intentionally calling him by the wrong name after games, just to be jerks.

"They'd come into the dressing room like, 'Steve! So Steve, what happened on that? Steve, come on, Steve, that looked like it was a stoppable shot, Steve,'" Weekes recalls. "Who does that?"

Just this past weekend, Weekes — getting a little stir-crazy, like all of us — took a quick day trip from his home in North Jersey to Philadelphia for some barbecue. It's about an 80-minute drive each way. Weekes was on high alert for every one of those minutes, making sure he was doing everything right, signaling before every lane change and keeping an eye out for state troopers.

"All it takes is one knucklehead to pull me over and try to be an idiot, and life changes in an instant," he says. "My parents always told me that. I'm a 45-year-old man that's been a good citizen and pays a lot of money in taxes. I've been philanthropic, an advocate for a sport, one of the faces of a \$5-billion league and its network. All that's earned. I played in the league for 11 years; that was earned, too. Even still, it can all change in an instant. From the mild cases to the extreme in the case of George Floyd. It's an unwinnable race, and it's a race you shouldn't be running.

"There are some things that are simply so appalling that they are indefensible. You can't defend needless police brutality. You can't! It doesn't matter who the officer is. Systemic racism is not normal. Yet it is normal. And that's the problem."

Weekes knows he can't change the world. He's just a cable-television hockey analyst, after all. But as a uniquely positioned voice with the platform, the intellect and the courage of his convictions, he might just be able to change hockey.

And he's damn sure going to try.

Next time you're watching NHL Tonight on NHL Network, look at the table in front of Weekes. There's no stack of papers, usually no notes of any kind. He's got a pen to fiddle with, and that's it. That's all he needs.

"It's all in his head," said NHL Tonight host Jamison Coyle, who has worked with Weekes for the last five years. "Because he's done all the legwork ahead of time. He's prepared. His thing is, 'Just hit the red light, I'm ready to go.' Television doesn't work that way, but for him, it's true. He's always ready to go."

Coyle said he's never seen Weekes walk into the Secaucus, N.J., headquarters without his AirPods in his ears. The man is always on the phone. Over the course of a nearly hour-long conversation this week, Weekes casually drops that he's spoken with "Patty" Kane, Jonathan Toews, Sidney Crosby, Mark Messier and Auston Matthews in the past few days, just to say hi. He's just been texting with Scott Foster, the Blackhawks' now-legendary emergency backup goaltender, just to see how he's doing. He calls Foster — a man who fiercely protected his privacy in the wake of his big moment two years ago — "Fozzy," and rattles off his college hockey background, and the fact that he's from Sarnia, and that his wife's American, and a few other tidbits off the top of his head.

That's Weekes. He knows everyone and he knows everything about them. He even tailors his conversations to your worldview. In our lengthy talk about race issues in hockey, Weekes repeatedly framed them in a Chicago context for my benefit. Imagine if people wrote off Kane simply because he was from Western New York, he says. "We would have lost the kid who's going to go down as the best American-born player in NHL history." What if people decided they didn't like Michael Jordan because he was born in Brooklyn and raised in the South, he wonders? "That's stupid, that's ignorant. It's no different than rooting against someone because they're black." He brings up the Devante Smith-Pelly incident at the United Center two years ago. "It's like, bro, you live in Chicago, one of the great melting pots. Did you not want Johnny Oduya to make a nice defensive play because he's a black Swede?" Then he mentions his recent talk with Matthews, a Latino American with a Mexican American mother.

"What happens if there was a coach that weaponized micro-aggressions or flat-out called him a Latino epithet?" Weekes says. "Next thing you know, Auston Matthews or his mom or his dad are like, 'We're good. You love baseball? You're going to play baseball instead.' Then we would have lost out on the best young player the Leafs have ever had in their history. That could have happened if he didn't have access to hockey in Arizona."

Weekes even adds a personal touch, saying hockey needs to become a safe space "where your daughters can play and not be chastised for being female Jewish hockey players, know what I'm saying? They can go



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • June 22, 2020

there and feel proud of being Jewish and feel proud of having your last name and go there and melt in and mix in and love the game on their own terms with their teammates."

It's worth noting that Weekes and I have met in passing a few times. We sat next to each other in the Amalie Arena press box during the 2015 Stanley Cup Final in Tampa Bay. We follow each other on Twitter. That's it. Yet he still manages to make that kind of personal connection. It's why he's uniquely situated to be a force for change in the insular world of hockey, which has historically lurched into the future at a snail's pace. He knows everyone. And he knows everything about them. So he can make those connections like few can.

He's been like that as long as he could remember. When he picked up a hockey card as a kid, he didn't just look at the stats. He wanted the story. He can still see Jeremy Roenick — all 155 pounds of him — holding his Easton stick and his Easton gloves. "Hyper-detailed" is how Weekes describes himself.

And growing up in the melting pot of Toronto, by the time he was 8 or 9, he had been to an Italian friend's house and made marinara sauce with his nonna. He had been to a Greek friend's house and tried souvlaki. He had been to a Russian-Jew friend's house and eaten matzo-ball soup and borscht. And in his own home, he had West Indian parents and family from England. He has a francophone aunt who lives just outside of Montreal in Corey Crawford's hometown of Chateaugay.

Weekes was always drawn to different, not repelled by it. Still is.

"It's People 101," he says. "At the heartbeat of the game are people. So the more you know in this role as a broadcaster — and even when I was playing — the easier you can relate to people. There's less barriers. And it allows me to humanize these guys on TV."

Weekes has never been shy about using his platform as a bully pulpit, and he's been particularly vocal during the recent social unrest following the killing of George Floyd by a former Minneapolis police officer. Last week, he had a 40-minute Instagram live chat with Jonathan Toews about his support of the Black Lives Matter movement. He's fought back against the "stick to sports" crowd on Twitter.

He notes that commissioner Gary Bettman and deputy commissioner Bill Daly have supported his efforts for inclusivity in hockey. He singles out Joel Quenneville, Stan Bowman, Jim Rutherford, Rod Brind'Amour, Lou Lamoriello, Glen Sather and the entire Edmonton Oilers organization as agents for positive change in the sport.

"But not everybody thinks like them," he said. "We need more people like that. The bottom line is, we haven't done enough as a league. I've been in a lot of discussions over the years. I've been to the White House on behalf of the league. I've done the congressional hockey caucus in D.C. on Capitol Hill. I've spoken to congresswomen and congressmen, all those different things, all the grassroots efforts and initiatives. But our numbers aren't where they need to be. It almost feels like $\pi = 3.14$, where we're around 20 players of color every year."

It's a long road to inclusivity, to equality in a sport with historic racial and socioeconomic factors working against it. But Weekes walks it with determination.

In the summer of 2014, Weekes was on the phone — of course — with his old Tampa Bay Lightning teammate, Brad Richards. Richards was a free agent in the twilight of his career, and was looking to make one last run at a Stanley Cup.

"Richie, Chicago would be the spot for you, bro," Weekes told him. "You'd be a great fit there."

Richards bristled at the idea at first, wondering about the salary-cap concerns and a roster already laden with high-end skill players. But Weekes persisted. He also texted Toews about it. And "people above" Toews about it.

"And I'm not saying anything, but Brad Richards played in Chicago," Weekes says with a laugh. "And he assisted on the (eventual) Stanley Cup-winning goal."

Weekes talks about "relationships" a lot when it comes to hockey — to playing, to broadcasting, and yes, to general managing. Weekes' name occasionally pops up as an outside-the-box candidate when front-office

jobs open up, and why not? What is being a GM if not building relationships with players, with agents, with scouts, with coaches, with the entire hockey world?

Weekes is quick to emphasize that he loves his job in broadcasting. He says he just loves to talk hockey, whether it's on TV or on his front stoop with the neighbors. But just as he has higher aspirations for the sport, he has higher aspirations for his career, too. And the two could go hand in hand.

Having a voice on TV is one thing. Having actual power is another.

"I never got a chance to experience winning the Stanley Cup as a player, to spray that champagne," he says. "To be able to experience it as a broadcaster is awesome. But to be able to be part of a group that helps put a team together, or to run a team and win one, that'd be a special feeling. I love the craft of broadcasting, I'm very passionate about it. But if a great opportunity presented itself with awesome ownership that was committed to winning? I'd be crazy not to look at that. So yeah, that is definitely a goal for me, for sure."

Weekes is careful not to openly politick for a job while he's already got one. But it's hard not to notice the Blackhawks — one of those teams with an owner who's committed to winning — have a high-profile vacancy in their front office after the firing of team president John McDonough.

Anyone who knows Weekes — and, remember, everyone knows him — wouldn't bet against him.

"He is the most connected man in hockey, and he puts in the work," Coyle says. "He's got the hockey knowledge, the business acumen and the people skills. And I think that's a recipe for success. Anything Kevin Weekes does — whether it's run a hockey team or run a tiddlywinks tournament — he's going to be successful. He has that knack. Certain people are born leaders and just have that ability. He's one of them."

Weekes was at the airport in Newark recently, waiting for his bags, when a fallen soldier was welcomed home by family and military personnel. He has friends and family who have served in the armed forces, and in the wake of all the ongoing conversation about race in America, he wondered if the soldier's sacrifice would mean any less to somebody if the soldier were black, or Latino or Jewish.

Of course, it wouldn't. Or, rather, of course, it shouldn't.

"That's an analogy that should help provide perspective for people," Weekes says. "It's a fallen soldier. Well, (George Floyd) is a fallen citizen. We're having people get murdered. It doesn't matter if you live on the South Side of Chicago or not. As a person, that shouldn't matter. 'Well, I live in Highland Park or Deerfield, so that's not for me.' What do you mean? It's just humanity 101. I don't care if you're chewing on a hayseed in Tuscaloosa. As a person, you are either part of the solution, you're at least neutral, or you're part of the problem. If you're watching George Floyd or any of these people get murdered, and it doesn't impact you, you're missing a chip. You've got a problem as a person."

Weekes will continue to speak out against racial injustice, systemic inequality and police brutality. He has the support of the league, of his network, of his colleagues and his friends. And more and more, he's got the support of the entire hockey world.

But he knows where he can have the biggest impact is on a smaller scale, on the game of hockey. Whether it's calling a game or running a team, he has a voice, and he's going to continue to use it. He wants to see heavy fines and strict bans for players, coaches and parents who cross the line. He wants more league- and team-sponsored initiatives in urban areas. He wants more equity in access to rinks and equipment. He wants the next Seth Jones, the next P.K. Subban, the next Evander Kane — hell, the next Kevin Weekes — to be seen as just another player, not some kind of novelty. He wants their road to the NHL to be smoother than his was.

And he's optimistic. He thinks the game is headed in the right direction, even if it's happening more slowly than anyone would like. He sees white players around the league standing up and speaking out as anti-racists — a remarkable sea change in a sport that has long discouraged any individuality and any potential third-rail conversations. Weekes sees more and more people in the hockey world saying the things he's been saying for years. He's not alone anymore.



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • June 22, 2020

And that's all he wants for other hockey players of color — from youth leagues in Chicago and Arizona to the Greater Toronto Hockey League to the ECHL, AHL and NHL — for them not to feel alone. Different. Other. Less than.

"It needs to be inclusive with a capital I-N," Weekes says. "Inclusive, all-in. Anyone can come in and feel welcome, feel proud of who they are. They don't need to be ashamed if they wear a hijab. They don't need to feel ashamed if they have a turban. Put your helmet on, go out and play, and be proud of who you are. Don't feel less than, don't be marginalized, don't have bananas thrown at you. That's where there's room for growth in us as a sport. That's what we're fighting for."