



CAROLINA HURRICANES

NEWS CLIPPINGS • July 16, 2019

THE NEWS & OBSERVER

Canes sign Clark Bishop to one-year contract

By Chip Alexander

Clark Bishop, a forward who made his NHL debut and played 20 regular-season games for the Carolina Hurricanes last season, has been signed to a one-year, two-way contract, the team announced Monday.

Bishop, 23, will receive \$700,000 at the NHL level and \$65,000 at the AHL level, with an \$80,000 guarantee.

"Clark is a reliable, two-way center," Canes general manager Don Waddell said in a statement. "He filled in nicely at the NHL level when we had some injuries last season, and we look forward to his continued development."

Bishop, who was a restricted free agent, made his NHL debut Oct. 20 against Colorado and notched first career NHL points with a goal and assist in the Nov. 30 game against Anaheim. He finished with three points in the regular season but gave the Canes solid two-way play as a fourth-line center, and played in the first two games of the Stanley Cup playoff series against the New York Islanders.

Bishop had three goals and three assists in 38 regular-season games with the Charlotte Checkers in the AHL and played 16 games in the Checkers' Calder Cup run.



Carolina Hurricanes re-sign Bishop to 2-way contract

RALEIGH, N.C. (AP) — The Carolina Hurricanes have re-signed forward Clark Bishop to a two-way contract for the 2019-20 season.

The team announced the deal Monday. It will pay the 23-year-old \$700,000 at the NHL level and \$65,000 at the American Hockey League level, with an \$80,000 guarantee.

Bishop had a goal and two assists in 20 regular-season NHL games last season with the Hurricanes. He also skated in the first two games of the Eastern Conference second-round playoff sweep of the New York Islanders.

Carolina drafted Bishop in the fifth round of the 2014 draft.



Clark Bishop signs one-year, two-way contract with Carolina Hurricanes

The forward will be back in the fold for another season.

By Jake Lerch

Clark Bishop will again be suiting up for the Carolina Hurricanes and Charlotte Checkers next season. The 23-year-old center has signed a one-year extension with the Hurricanes organization. It is a two-way contract; he will be paid \$700,000 at the NHL level and \$65,000 at the AHL level, with an \$80,000 guarantee. Bishop will require clearing waivers to be assigned to Charlotte next season.

Bishop had three points (1g, 2a) while playing 20 games with the Hurricanes last season, the final year of his entry-level contract signed in 2016. He spent most of the year with the Checkers, where he recorded six points (3g, 3a) in 38 AHL regular season games. He went on to record three points (2g, 1a) in 16 playoff games, helping the Checkers to their first Calder Cup Championship.

In all likelihood, Bishop will play the majority of next season in Charlotte, barring injuries to the Canes' top centers. Sebastian Aho and Jordan Staal are locked in as the top two centers, while newcomer Erik Haula seems a solid bet as the 3rd line center. Lucas Wallmark, who at times played top-six minutes, now appears likely to center the 4th line with the departure of Greg McKeeg. This is to say nothing of how former first-rounder Martin Necas fits into the depth chart.

In case you missed it, check out Canes Country's season recap of Bishop here. The release from the team is below.

CANES RE-SIGN CLARK BISHOP TO ONE-YEAR DEAL
Forward played 20 NHL games for Carolina in 2018-19

Don Waddell, President and General Manager of the National Hockey League's Carolina Hurricanes, today announced that the team has re-signed forward Clark Bishop to a one-year, two-way contract for the 2019-20 season. The deal will pay



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Bishop \$700,000 at the NHL level and \$65,000 at the AHL level with an \$80,000 guarantee.

“Clark is a reliable, two-way center,” said Waddell. “He filled in nicely at the NHL level when we had some injuries last season, and we look forward to his continued development.”

Bishop, 23, recorded three points (1g, 2a) in 20 NHL regular-season games with the Hurricanes last season. He made his NHL debut on Oct. 20 vs. Colorado and registered his first career NHL points with a goal and an assist on Nov. 30 vs. Anaheim. The 6'1", 199-pound forward also made his NHL postseason debut in 2019, skating in Games 1 and 2 of

Carolina's Eastern Conference Second Round series against the Islanders.

The St. John's, N.L., native posted six points (3g, 3a) in 38 AHL regular-season games with the Charlotte Checkers in 2018-19. He added three points (2g, 1a) in 16 AHL playoff games in 2019 as the Checkers captured their first-ever Calder Cup Championship. At the AHL level, Bishop has tallied 40 points (12g, 28a) in 148 career regular-season games and five points (4g, 1a) in 24 career playoff games. He was drafted by the Hurricanes in the fifth round, 127th overall, of the 2014 NHL Draft.



Hurricanes re-sign Clark Bishop

by Paul Branecky

Restricted free agent Clark Bishop and the Carolina Hurricanes agreed to a new contract on Monday – one that will see Bishop play a fourth professional season for the organization that drafted him.

Bishop, who signed a one-year, two-way contract with Carolina, played his first 20 NHL games for the Hurricanes last season plus two more in the Stanley Cup playoffs. With the Checkers, the two-way center recorded six points (3g,

3a) and 56 penalty minutes in 38 regular-season contests before chipping in three more points in the playoffs, including a shorthanded goal in the decisive Game 6 of the Eastern Conference Final series against the Toronto Marlies.

Bishop joins Alex Nedeljkovic as restricted free agents from the Checkers' Calder Cup champion team that have agree to new deals with the Hurricanes. Meanwhile, defensemen Trevor Carrick, Haydn Fleury and Roland McKeown still await new deals.

TODAY'S LINKS

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<https://www.canescountry.com/2019/7/15/20695260/carolina-hurricanes-clark-bishop-charlotte-checkers-one-year-contract-nhl-free-agency>

<http://gocheckers.com/articles/transactions/hurricanes-re-sign-clark-bishop>



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SportScan

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

1149741 Carolina Hurricanes

Canes sign Clark Bishop to one-year contract

BY CHIP ALEXANDER

JULY 15, 2019 04:24 PM

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1149785 Websites

The Athletic / Q&A: Rikard Grönberg on coaching in the NHL, Swedish hockey and his 'different perspective'

By Scott Wheeler Jul 15, 2019

Rikard Grönberg is busy these days.

After guiding the Swedish Ice Hockey Association to success at every level, he has become a leading candidate for NHL head coaching positions, which would make him the first European to hold

an NHL team's top post since Alpo Suhonen with Chicago (2000-01) and Ivan Hlinka with Pittsburgh (2000-02).

In that pursuit, he recently left his role as the longtime head coach of Sweden's men's team to join the Swiss league's ZSC Lions on a two-year contract as their new head coach.

At the end of July, he will also join NHL coaches Peter DeBoer (San Jose Sharks), Paul McFarland (Toronto Maple Leafs) and Todd Woodcroft (Winnipeg Jets), among others, as a keynote speaker at Toronto's annual TeamSnap Hockey Coaches Conference.

And in the midst of his move to Switzerland, Grönberg took some time to speak to The Athletic about what makes him different, why could be the NHL's next European head coach and his unique role in Swedish hockey's transformation, which followed time spent in North America where he played, studied and coached in the NCAA, AWHL and WHL.

Allow me to flatter you a bit here. You've got six world juniors medals, seven world championship medals, two world under-18 medals and an Olympic silver. That's 16 medals in 12 years of Team Sweden involvement.

What do you think Team Sweden has done so well — or differently — in the last decade?

At the beginning of the 2000s, Swedish hockey weren't producing as many players as we are right now, we weren't having success internationally, especially when it came to the juniors, and we thought that we needed to fix something when it comes to player development.

So based on a meeting we had with old hockey minds in the country, I'm talking about everything from coaches to managers to agents to scouts, several hundred people got together and broke up into groups to discuss all of the things we needed to get better at. And one of the things that we came up with was a 100-point program but one of the main points was No. 1: our education of our coaches needed to get a lot better and we needed educational material for those coaches to help them out. They also started hiring district managers all over Sweden for the 12 different districts and they helped out with small local clubs all over the country, and especially when it comes to development those coaches needed it at those smaller clubs because a lot of our players are coming from smaller clubs in Sweden.

Right.

And then they got me involved and came to visit me in Spokane and they loved the video and everything else that we were doing. And then they started recruiting me to come back to Sweden and help out coaching and coach the development program and I also began writing for the coaching material.

To make a long story short, what attracted me back there was my North American experience and playing college hockey as well as coaching at that point in time for almost 10 years in North America.



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A young man from Sweden going to Texas and Montana and Washington (for school and/or hockey as a player and then a coach) must have been a bit of a whirlwind. What was that experience like in terms of seeing how they do things in North America?

I was exposed to it for the first time when I came over here to play and the first thing I noticed was the difference when it comes to game management. Back in those days we had what were known as 'trainers', so they trained the players on the ice and then when the game starts they kind of just rotated the lines and hopefully you trained hard enough to win versus now when coaching is more apparent.

So I learned that part of it, the game management, preparing the players, have a playbook to play off of it and everything else, plus the academic side of it as well because I went to school at the same time.

The combination of the Swedish player development and working in a very flat organization where we involved the players and a lot of people in the decision-making process, hopefully you can then give the players and the coaches around the head coach a lot more ownership in the whole process, versus when I started in North America and I was a young coach, as soon as I brought the whistle to my head I thought I had the answers to everything.

The older I get, the more I understand that that's not necessarily true. You need to ask questions. Don't be afraid to ask questions. Now, the North American side is somewhere along the lines you can't have a long decision process sometimes. Decisions need to be made and sometimes very quickly. But I think that's kind of the North American side of myself. I have no problems making decisions when a decision needs to be made.

Having a good balance of that, I think, and having a closer relationship with everyone I'm working with and giving them ownership of the process and at the same time being supportive of the players has worked out pretty well for us.

How has your background in communications (a B.A. from St. Cloud State) and leadership (an M.A. from the University of Wisconsin-Stout) influenced that style? What was your English even like when you first came over to begin your schooling?

It was a little bit of a culture shock. It was before the internet and cell phones, everything. I'd never used the English language before I came over. But I'm not afraid to ask questions or ask for help in that situation, which at 18 or 19 years old when you're coming over is a tough deal. But at the same time, I had something in common with the people and that was a love of hockey, which was a great common denominator for everything. So in that sense it was probably easier for myself that I had friends and support around the team to make me feel pretty welcome.

But absolutely I'm using my degrees really in everything that I do. I have a master's in communications degree so I taught myself how to read and write and express myself in front of people and then to add the degree in management and leadership to that I have an understanding of how people work and work in groups. I think that's very, very important when you're trying to do something special and you have a team sport. You need everyone to pull the same direction and if you can do that with a strong group of athletes — and work together — then you can accomplish some amazing things.

You've had to lead two different groups of people that I would imagine are different. What's it like coaching U18s and U20s versus Erik Karlsson and the men on the senior teams? Do you change the way you coach based on the age of the players?

I look at the group of players and where they're at in their development and I believe that everyone, it doesn't matter if it's Erik Karlsson or an under-18 guy coming into our program, they still need structure and that's what I'm in charge of. I want to build a structured environment out there and one where they can excel.

Working with younger players, you're not looking at tomorrow or the day after you're looking at a year or two down the road versus when you're coaching NHL players at the World Cup or the world championships or the Olympics, you're looking at the next shift and trying to win the game. So there's more management of winning games versus looking at the longer perspective of things. And since I've been in the program, I've had pretty good timing with the players born in the '90s where I've coached pretty much every NHL player from Sweden one way or another. It has been an amazing job for me to do.

Players talk about the difference in ice size all the time but it's almost always in cliché terms. You've coached on both. If you were to make the jump to the NHL in the next couple of years, how would your approach change?

It changes tactically but you're still leading people and leading a group and you're in charge of the process of creating an environment for players. When it comes to playing on smaller ice, absolutely there's always tactical changes you need to make. But at the same time you can probably have the same playbook with some adjustments. I know you can. I coached in the World Cup and the junior world championships in North America.

But you also have to look at what kind of team you have when you're looking at the playbook. You assess the team's strengths and then you try to coach players and the games to our strengths. It's a lot of different variables when it comes to the tactical part of it and strategy and everything else but it has nothing to do with leading people. Top athletes are a little bit of a treat to be around because they're so dedicated, they're so in line with what they need to do, they know their bodies so well, and they train so well. And then they're highly motivated. And highly motivated people are great to be around because it really motivates me to be more prepared and build an environment for those guys to excel.

What specifically changes in terms of tactical adjustments and style of play?

On the smaller ice you have different forechecks. I think you need to work harder on the forecheck with F2 especially and you can probably play a little more straight. You have more time with the puck on the larger ice when it comes to breakouts, more time to make a decision.

But also I feel there's a tendency in some places in North America when you're playing on big ice and it feels like you're so far away from the net to get the puck to the net. So I think it's more of a challenge for North American players to come over and play on big sheets than it is for us.

Our players in Sweden have been exposed to a smaller ice area for a long time now. Some players, depending on their skills, are better on smaller ice. And some are better on the larger ice. That's just the way that hockey is.

There's definitely a technical change. I think the main thing is defensively, you're a little further away from the net in the offensive end so you need to learn to play more of a zone defence.

I was flipping through your stat page and the first thing I noticed is that you racked up 272 penalty minutes in 68 games in your last two seasons of pro hockey (Grönborg played briefly in Sweden's Division



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1 while on loan from the SHL's Rögle BK). How is Rikard the coach different from Rikard the player?

Uhm. (Laughs)

I'm still very passionate. I was a passionate player and I'm also very passionate as a coach. I always stick up for my players. It's in my nature to stick up for those who work around me, too. It doesn't matter if I'm a coach or a player.

So that hasn't changed.

Now ... there's a time and a place for everything. But at the same time, if I don't have passion for what I'm doing, I don't know what I'm doing around hockey.

Was it hard to say goodbye to Team Sweden, given that passion and that connection, to join ZSC?

I wouldn't say it was hard, I just felt like it was time for me to move and I think it was good for the federation to get some new blood in there and maybe a new way of thinking, as well as myself for what's around the corner.

One of the biggest pushbacks I got from NHL teams wasn't my track record. They know I can win with NHL players. The issue was how do you do that over the course of a season. So when Zurich approached me about this opportunity, there are maybe three or four teams in Europe that are the top jobs and Zurich is definitely one of those. It was too good of an opportunity to not jump on. It's going to be nice to coach the players over the course of the season and if I do a good job there I think you can see more of an impact. I'm really looking forward to it.

What makes you feel that you're ready to make that jump to the NHL in the near future?

Well, when it comes to hockey or any sport, you need to produce and make sure that everyone around you is making smart decisions. I think they can see that this is a guy who isn't afraid to make decisions and can take a team and win and make them better. Any position in professional sports, you need to keep producing. I have done that at the international level. I don't know how much more I can do of that. And now is the next step to coach a professional team, which I'm looking forward to winning with too.

Where do you stand on analytics in hockey and how might you adopt that over the larger sample size that a full season provides?

I like statistics and analytics because it's cold. It's black and white. This is actually what happened. The sport is passionate and you get emotional and can be swayed by winning and losing. What I like about analytics is it's "this is what happened within this game" and "this is what that player is doing."

I like the informational flow. I think the biggest thing nowadays for coaches is how we package that and how we present it for players because it can be overwhelming and there's so much analytics out there that the players might drown a little bit. And it's the same thing for us. The decision-making needs to be very specific about what we're looking for over the course of a season or a period. What's working and what's not working? I like it because I'm a bit of a nerd, I'm a big nerd when it comes to that stuff to be honest, but at the same time you need to be able to decide what information you need. That's not just analytics, it's video and everything else in terms of presentation, because you can only retain so much, especially as a player. You need to free those guys up so they're not just thinking about analytics or video all the time and they can just go out and play. That's very important.

It's been almost 20 years since we've had a European head coach in the NHL. What would that call mean to you?

Personally, it would be a great honour and opportunity. But at the same time I see myself as more of a hybrid than anything else after being in North America for that long. My wife is from the U.S.

It's just a matter of time. We've got some great coaches over here: Finnish, Czech, Russian. We provide a different perspective. The biggest thing with coaching internationally is you see so many different tactics and team strategies that aren't in the NHL because the NHL is a lot of the same, really. Everyone is putting their spins on things but most of those guys are coming from the same backgrounds. It's not that way in international hockey. That's something that I think is going to be attractive with me for NHL GMs in the future, is to bring something that's outside of the box.

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1149786 Websites

The Athletic / How long does the Stanley Cup window stay open for the top contenders?

By Craig Custance Jul 15, 2019

The New York Rangers signing of Artemi Panarin announced the beginning of the end of that rebuild. They're ramping up to contend again. The Sharks contract extension for Erik Karlsson was an indication San Jose is trying to extend a Stanley Cup contention window that's been going on for an impressively long time. The dramatic moves by the Nashville Predators — trading P.K. Subban and signing Matt Duchene — were done in part to jumpstart a franchise that should be very much in the middle of its Stanley Cup window. The Penguins made one of the more fascinating trades in swapping Phil Kessel for Alex Galchenyuk. These major offseason moves by contenders are always a hint at where these franchises believe they are in the Stanley Cup window.

And then there were the Bruins and Blues, two franchises playing for a Stanley Cup this spring that had been knocking on the door for a long time. When we break down the numbers, as we will below, it's really impressive, and there were key decisions that allowed it to happen.

It was with this backdrop that I read a fascinating story about the length of the NBA's championship window by Jared Dubin at Fansided. The NBA offseason is an entirely different animal, and the seismic star-shifting that goes on in the summer in that league isn't anything close to how the NHL operates. Sadly. But Dubin did a 20-year analysis to determine the average championship window in the NBA. The conclusion? It doesn't last long.

It was a fun exercise. It also was done with a strict criteria to identify a team in a given year as a championship contender. It also raised the question: What would a similar exercise look like for the NHL?

Turns out, it's just as fun and produces some fascinating results. Let's dive in:

To identify a team in a given year as a legitimate championship contender, a similar criteria to the NBA example was used but tweaked for NHL differences. With some consultation with our analytics genius Dom Luszczyzyn and Max Bultman, who has a



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great mind for this type of analysis, here was the criteria to be labeled a Stanley Cup contender for that particular season:

Advance to the conference finals

OR

Check four of the six boxes in these categories:

1. Finish the regular season with 100 or more points (or the equivalent in a lockout year)
2. Finish in the top 10 in both the penalty kill and power play
3. Finish in the top five in the league in xGF%
4. Finish in the top five in the league in GF%
5. Finish in the top five in the league in SRS (a metric from hockey-reference that factors in goal differential and strength of schedule)
6. Advance to the second round of the playoffs the previous year

Because the advanced stats on naturalstatstrick.com go back only to the 2007-08 season, that's as far back as this study goes, which is fine because it gives us a majority of the salary cap era.

The high bar to be labeled a Stanley Cup contender made it tough to qualify. In some years, there were as few as five teams and other years as many as nine. And that felt about right. Yes, there's a ton of parity in the NHL, and any team can go on a miracle run. But going into the season, there's usually a block of teams in that range you can confidently say are legitimate Cup contenders.

So what did it look like in chart form on a year-to-year basis?

A few takeaways:

1. What San Jose has done in this span is REALLY impressive, besides, of course, not winning a Stanley Cup. They were legit Cup contenders in the first four seasons of this exercise and in two of the past four. Joe Thornton is the common thread, but San Jose's ability to work in young talent while also acquiring elite talent via trade is remarkable. Just think back to how different that 2008 playoff team was from the one we just saw: The 2008 version had Ron Wilson behind the bench, Evgeni Nabokov in goal and featured a defense with Brian Campbell and Christian Ehrhoff doing the heavy lifting. Now, it's Brent Burns, Erik Karlsson, Logan Couture and the rest. During this 12-year span, the Sharks were Cup contenders 50 percent of the time. This is a well-run program.
2. It's worth noting some of the moves that allowed the Sharks to remain competitive in this span. One is: They aren't afraid to make tough decisions. Letting Joe Pavelski walk is the latest example. Patrick Marleau before that. But even moves several years back, such as trading Douglas Murray, Ryane Clowe and other important but not necessarily core players, kept things going. In that four-year gap where the Sharks weren't labeled Cup contenders, they kept their first-round picks and restocked. It was in this window where they picked up Tomas Hertl and Timo Meier. Once they restocked and were ready to win a championship, moving a first-round pick was no issue, especially if it meant adding a high-end player for the long run.
3. The Bruins are even more impressive. They were identified as Cup contenders in seven of the 12 years, the most of any team. And they've done it over the span of the entire 12 years. Like the Sharks, they've had to make tough decisions, and there's a three-year window in the middle of it where they restocked talent. In that three year downtime (2015-17), they added Jake DeBrusk, Brandon Carlo and Charlie McAvoy into the equation. Now, they're back at it.

4. The Blues have been in Cup contention in five of the past eight years, again, fueled by a GM unafraid to make tough decisions. In this span, GM Doug Armstrong let David Backes, Troy Brouwer and Brian Elliott walk. He traded Kevin Shattenkirk. He was decisive: When the team was good, he added. When it wasn't quite good enough, he subtracted. There's a lot to learn here.

5. The Penguins are in a fascinating pattern. They appear for a couple years, then disappear for a couple years. Unlike the aforementioned teams, they haven't necessarily taken time to restock the system during those down years. It's been more tweaking than restocking, and the tweaking continued this summer. This has been a franchise that has consistently tried to win during the Sidney Crosby era, and it will be fascinating to see how it plays out next. The pattern suggests this group is due to emerge again this year as a Cup contender, but it seems just as likely that years of full-throttle contention will catch up to the Penguins.

6. The Penguins also are an interesting study because you could argue the general consensus is they've been in a Stanley Cup window the entire 12 years we're examining. And yet, they show up only in those two-year bursts. The same goes for a team like Chicago in the 2011-12 range. Nobody believed they were outside their Stanley Cup window. And yet, those teams didn't qualify by this fairly strict definition. Was coaching off in those years? Were there injuries? Is there a mental fatigue that goes with trying to win a Stanley Cup year in and year out? You could argue the categories are flawed or too restrictive, but it's worth diving in further to see if there's any commonality when a team takes a dip during what should be a wide-open window.

7. Teams labeled Stanley Cup contenders as often as the Tampa Bay Lightning typically win one. In four of the past five seasons, they were identified as Cup contenders, and the Sharks are the only team to have the same kind of success and not win it all. Despite the Lightning's first-round disaster this spring, I'd have a real hard time picking against Tampa this coming season.

8. You can't help but feel bad for Anaheim, Vancouver, Montreal and the Rangers — teams that put themselves very much in position to win a championship during three-to-four year stretches since 2008 and fell short. It's fair to conclude that teams typically get about three or four years before having to reload, and those franchises are in different phases of that reloading. This could be a crucial season for Nashville, a team that has been knocking on the door the past few years and is still looking for a breakthrough.

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1149787 Websites

TSN.CA / Defensive issues could cost Oilers the playoffs in 2020

Travis Yost

In Edmonton, new general manager Ken Holland was given quite the inaugural test – improve the Oilers' lineup in order to return to the post-season, but to do so with extremely limited cap space.

With limited financial flexibility, Holland has spent his first summer tinkering at the fringes of the lineup. The Oilers brought in Markus Granlund and Tomas Jurco to solidify their forward depth, extended Alex Chiasson and Jujhar Khaira on two-year deals, and landed a



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back-up goaltender in the form of 37-year-old Mike Smith. The team also notably made the decision to buy out defenceman Andrej Sekera, who will now carry \$8 million in cap penalties over the next four seasons.

You could argue that the buyout of Sekera was the most impactful move the team made for two reasons. One, Sekera provided the Oilers with a little bit of cap flexibility to make a move (though that money was then re-allocated to extending the aforementioned Chiasson). Two, Sekera definitely felt like an important – if limited – piece on an otherwise shaky blueline. Sekera's best years are surely behind him, and his injury history over the last two years didn't leave the Oilers with many options.

Still, you wonder if the Sekera buyout was the best decision for the team. It didn't provide the Oilers with a material amount of cap flexibility, but did ensure that an Edmonton blueline already low on talent would be even more handcuffed entering a critical 2019-20 season. The pressure within Edmonton to deliver a serious contender in the Connor McDavid era – now entering year five – has never been higher, and yet the Oilers appear ready to "run it back" with mostly last year's roster turned over.

I bring up the Sekera buyout because for all of Edmonton's limitations right now, I'm not sure there is one greater than the talent deficiencies on the blueline. The team has not developed or procured defensive talent in the same way it has forward talent over the years, and the two big moves they have made to bring in defenders – the ill-fated Griffin Reinhart and Adam Larsson trades – have failed. The Oilers are hopeful that young defenders like Evan Bouchard, Philip Broberg, and Caleb Jones can add value going forward. But developing each of those players will take time, and even for a player like Bouchard, who appears ready for full-time NHL action, insulation does matter.

Let's add some more statistical context to the Oilers' defensive issues. If we look at each team's Goals Above Replacement contributions from their 2018-19 defensive corps, we see that Edmonton finished 28th in the National Hockey League:

All three teams the Oilers finished above when it comes to blueline contributions were either explicitly rebuilding (New York, Detroit) or in an obvious rebuild (Anaheim). The average NHL team gets about 24 goals above replacement from its blueline, which is roughly equivalent to four wins in the standings. In the Oilers' case, they were just over seven goals better than comparable replacement level players, or a little over one win added to the standings.

Because goals above replacement models are blind to goaltender effects, we get a much better understanding as to how skaters are truly affecting performance at both ends of the ice. And with the Oilers, the story is relatively straightforward. The Oilers had one ultra-productive line last season (McDavid and Leon Draisaitl both finished in the top-20 in Goals Above Replacement last year), and little else behind it. Defensively, the Oilers really had nothing.

The Oilers have had a defence issue for some time now but it's actually become worse over time. If we look at how players have individually contributed to performance for the Oilers over the years, we can see that there are far too many negative or neutral contributions from guys getting significant ice time. Before reading this table, a little bit of context: the average NHL defender last year was about 2.4 goals above replacement level across all situations, and a 75th percentile defender was double that.

During the 2016-17 season when everything was clicking for the Oilers, Edmonton received an incredible season from Oscar Klefbom and strong support seasons from both Larsson and Matt Benning. Klefbom's season was so good, in fact, he ranked as the 13th most

impactful contributor league-wide, sandwiched between guys like Brent Burns and Erik Karlsson. Klefbom hasn't been nearly as big of a difference maker for the Oilers since, but he is still a very reliable top-four option for Edmonton (and for any other team in the league, for that matter). Injuries certainly haven't helped his cause recently, either.

While we are being complementary, I'll also bring up Benning. Whereas Klefbom has had the most impactful season to date, Benning has been the most consistent. He's a versatile second and third-pairing puck mover who had been a perfect match for frequent partners in Klefbom and Sekera. His skating and passing abilities have more than offset any defensive reservations one might have had upon him entering the league three years ago.

Once you get past Klefbom and Benning – well, that's where it goes sideways quickly. You don't need a superstar-driven first pairing to be successful in today's NHL, but if you don't have that, you need to ensure you have quality depth across all three pairs. That simply hasn't happened. Klefbom's disappointing 2018-19 season didn't do them any favours, but Larsson was one of the league's worst contributors, primarily because the Oilers were absolutely wacked with him on the ice at even strength. Recent acquisitions – names like Alex Petrovic and Brandon Manning – have been worse than what you would probably find from a high-end AHL call-up option, and Manning is still with the team for one more season. Combine that with your other regular options – players like Darnell Nurse and Kris Russell, neither of whom have shown to be much more than run-of-the-mill NHL defenders – and you have a serious talent problem.

What the Oilers really need, at least for 2019-20, is for Klefbom to find what was working so well during that 2016-18 stretch, or for 19-year old Bouchard to have an explosive rookie season. Absent that (or some move that opens up cap space to bring in another weapon), the trends from these Oilers defenders will likely manifest again in 2019-20.

And if that's the case, the Oilers will likely be on the outside looking in come April.

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